

Community Perception of Women Occupying Leadership Position in Rural Development Projects of Osun State, Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

In the past one and half decades, agricultural development has witnessed a tremendous participation and contribution from women in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. This may be as a result of women development projects put in place and various awareness creation campaign and efforts on women empowerment. FAO (1996) states that about 70-80% of all the rural dwellers in Nigeria were employed by agriculture. Cleaver (1993) reported that in Zambia, women in farm households headed by males contributed more hours daily than men to farm work (8.5hrs Vs 7.4 hrs) as well as to non-agricultural tasks (5hrs Vs 1.1hrs). In Congo, about 70% of the farm holding are managed by women as a result of significant male migration for jobs in the cities. In view of this, many households in the rural areas of Congo were headed by women (Hutjes et al., 1991).

It therefore becomes imperative that to have any appreciable development in agricultural production, these women must be the focus of any development project. As a result of this, many rural development programmes were centered on them. For example, Better Life Programme (BLP) for rural dwellers established in 1987 has as its major objective empowerment of rural dweller particularly women through micro-economic programmes e.g. education/training of women in agriculture, health, cooperative, cottage industries, processing, marketing and provision of credit facilities. These programmes to some extent are job creatives, which encourage women to exploit their hidden potentials to the maximum capacity. Family support programmes (FSP) and Family Economics Advancement Programme (FEAP) followed BLP in succession due to change in leadership governance. These programmes target women empowerment too as their blue prints and objectives are quite the same. These Programmes have exposed Nigerian rural women and empowered them to become full-time farmers, processors, marketers and decision makers in Agricultural development in

Nigeria.

It should however be noted that many factors have placed women on the unpleasant side of development. Babalola (1995) identified these factors to be social, economic, religious, political and cultural. To overcome this, International Conference on Population Development (ICPD, 1994) and fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW, 1995) have recommended equality in participation between men and women as a condition for sustainable development. The emphasis now is that women should not only participate in programmes affecting them as contributors of cash, information and labour, they must be part of decision-making process. In other words, they have to be decision-makers in their own situations. And to be decision-makers, they must occupy leadership position. Therefore, this study investigated the perception of community towards women occupying leadership positions in rural development projects. The study provide answer to the following questions:

- (i) What are the socio-economic characteristics of women occupying leadership positions in rural development projects, and
- (ii) What is the community perception towards women occupying leadership position?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study was to investigate the perception of community people about women occupying leadership position. The specific objectives are to:

- (1) Examine the socio-economic characteristics of women local leaders;
- (2) Determine the community perception of women occupying leadership position; and
- (3) Investigate the acceptance of local women leadership position in development projects.

To be able to provide tentative answers to the research questions above, it is hypothesized that there is no significant relationship between the demographic characteristics of women local leaders and community perception of their leadership status.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research was carried out in Osun State of Nigeria. Six Local Government Areas (LGAs) in which women groups and women-based rural development projects are concentrated were selected for the study. About 18 groups (15%) of the registered groups were purposively selected for sampling. In each of the groups, leaders were identified using a combination of positional and reputational approach (Jibowo, 1992; Ekong, 2003). Six (6) respondents were chosen from each group using simple random technique. In all 108 respondents were selected for the study. Six (6) Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were held i.e. one FGD per LGA. Each FGD group consists of 10 people of both sexes. Structured interview schedule and guides were used to collect information from the women local leaders and focus group discussion, respectively. Community perception was measured from survey and FGD perspectives. Respondents were given statements of opinion on women occupying leadership positions in development projects to rate them on 5 points Likert scale based on the way the community people perceived them. The mean on each statement of opinion was computed for ranking. Likewise statements of opinion were given to the FGD members to express their opinion: strongly (++), lightly (+) and no response (-). Analysis of data was carried out using frequency count, percentages, means, and regression analysis and t- tests.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Women Leaders

Data in Table 1 show that majority of the respondents had their ages between 26 years and 55 years while the mean age is 40.5 years. About 70% were married, 13.8 percent single, 1.85 percent divorced and 0.93 percent were separated. The respondents belong to the two most popular religious i.e. Christianity (50%) and Islam (50%). Majority (91.7%) of the respondents were farmers, 8.3 percent were civil servants. The respondents had relatively larger farmland for farming purposes and about 67 percent of the respondents had higher years of farming experience. The results showed that about 93.5 percent of the respondents have one form of

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by their socio-economic characteristics

Characteristics	Women Leaders	
	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Age</i>		
Below 25 years	7	6.5
26 years – 35 years	21	9.5
36 years- 45 years	38	35.2
46 years- 55 years	27	25
Above 56 years	15	13.9
Total	108	100
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Single	15	13.8
Married	76	70.4
Widowed	14	13.0
Divorced	2	1.85
Separated	1	0.93
Total	108	100
<i>Occupation</i>		
Farming	41	38.9
Trading	57	52.8
Civil service	9	8.3
Total	108	100
<i>Size of Farm</i>		
Less than 2.5 acres	36	33.3
2.6 acres – 5.0 acres	47	43.5
5.1 acres - 7.5 acres	18	16.7
Above 7.5 acres	5	4.6
Total	108	100
<i>Years of Farming</i>		
Less than 10 years	34	31.5
11 years – 20 years	51	47.2
21 years – 30 years	15	13.9
Above 30 years	7	6.5
Total	108	100
<i>Religion</i>		
Islam	54	50
Christianity	54	50
Traditional	-	-
Total	108	100
<i>Level of Education</i>		
Illiterate	7	6.5
Primary school	6	5.6
Secondary school not completed	36	33.3
Secondary school	16	14.8
Post secondary school	43	39.8
Total	108	100
<i>External Orientation</i>		
Visit to other farms in the Village	108	100
Visit to the villages with the local Government	71	65.7
Visit to other villages in other local Government	84	77.8
Visit to other states in the country	104	96.2

education or the other while only 6.5 percent had no formal education at all. And about 66

percent of leaders had a high level of urban contact.

Community Perception of Women Leaders in the Community

Data in Table 2 show the statements of opinion on community perception of women in leadership position in order of importance. Women have role to play in the society ranked highest (4.56), followed closely by women have potential to occupy positions of authority (4.45). This is followed by men do not consider women as co-equals (3.62), women are weaker sex (3.11), there is no discrimination against women in this community (2.83). Meeting in the community should not be held with women (1.95), women cannot be trusted because of their nature (1.95), women can contribute to the development of the community (1.8). Women have no role and cannot hold any leadership position in the community (1.73).

The social indicators/ statements of community perception of rural women occupying leadership positions (Table 2) can be grouped into three i.e. (i) favourable indicators such as women have role to play in the society and women have potentials to occupy positions of authority. These indicators were ranked highest (between 4.45 – 4.56) pointing out to the fact that the community has recognized the tremendous roles and contributions of women

Table 2: Rank Order of social indicators- based on the community perception of women occupying leadership position

	<i>Perception of women</i>	<i>*GM</i>
(a)	Women have role to play in the society	4.56
(b)	Women have potentials to occupy positions of authority	4.45
(c)	Men do not consider women a co-equals	3.62
(d)	Women are weaker sex	3.11
(e)	There is no discrimination against women in this community	2.83
(f)	Women cannot be trusted because of their nature	1.95
(g)	Meetings in the community cannot be held with women	1.95
(h)	Women can contribute to the development of the community	1.87
(i)	Women have no role to play in the household expect child being	1.78
(j)	Women cannot hold any leadership position in the community	1.73

* Grand Mean

Source: Field survey 2001

to development of community and has accepted that women's roles are of significant importance to the society growth. Therefore such roles are inevitable i.e. women must continue to render such roles; and finally the performance of these roles is a reflection of the women hidden great potentials which could only be maximize if they occupy position of authority. The indicators with Grand Mean between (2.50 – 3.5) do not favour and they do not against women occupation of leadership position. They could be regarded as neutral indicators. The rest indicators with Grand Mean, less than 2.50 out rightly against women occupation of leadership position in any rural development projects. For example, women cannot occupy leadership position of authority (1.73); women cannot contribute to the development of the community (1.870); women cannot be trusted because of their nature (1.95); portrays women as good for nothing-human and social capital, which have nothing to deliver towards the development of their community. It could be deduced that those indicators vehemently established that women has no right of their own and they are tools in the hand of men. The indicators are referred to as unfavourable indicators, which to some extent explain the cultural bottle-necks/ problems that may be limiting women empowerment in the study areas.

FGD Results of Community Perception of Women Leaders in the Community

Data in Table 3 show the summary of FGD as it presents the community perception of the women within the community. The results showed that community believe that women are weaker sex hence they should be handled with care. Men do not consider them, as co- equals but that they have potentials to occupy positions of authority as well as contribute to the development of the community. They play a significant role in the development of their society. All the groups were in support of women holding leadership positions even though they have other roles to play including child bearing. Women should be trusted and meetings should be held with them in the community. In summary, the communities values the women and appreciate their worth even though they still hold some limitataions against them. It was generally felt that for any woman to be successful at all, there must be a

Table 3: Report of FGD on community perception of women occupying leadership position

Perception of Women	FGD1	FGD2	FGD3	FGD4	FGD5	FGD6
(a) Women are weaker sex	++	+	++	+	+	++
(b) Women cannot hold any leadership position in this community	-	-	-	-	-	-
(c) Women have potentials to occupy positions of authority	++	++	++	++	++	++
(d) Women can contribute to the development of the community	++	++	+	+	+	++
(e) Women have no role to play in household except childbearing	-	-	-	-	-	-
(f) Women cannot be trusted because of their nature	-	-	-	-	-	-
(g) Women have noble role to play in the society	++	++	++	++	++	++
(h) Meetings in the community should not be held wit women	-	-	-	-	-	-
(i) Men do not consider women as co – equals	++	++	++	++	++	++
(j) There is no discrimination against women in this community	+	-	-	-	-	+

Key: ++ where the opinion was strongly emphasized

+ where the opinion was lightly expressed

- where the opinion was not expressed

Source: Field survey 2001

strong backing of a man in all the groups interviewed. Below are some of the extracts:

Extract 1: Women are created from men, then how would they be equal to or stronger than men?

Extract 2: Behind a successful woman there is a strong man”

It is gratifying to note that no opinion was expressed on statement that underrate the women such as women cannot hold any leadership position; woman have no other role to play except childbearing; and woman cannot be trusted with leadership positions due to their weak nature.

The result or the facts from FGD is similar to the results or findings from the social survey. This confirmed that the great potentials in women are recognized but has cultural limitations, which can only be removed through education and campaign.

Acceptance of Women into Leadership Positions

Data in Table 4 show the acceptability of women into leadership position women as head

Table 4: Acceptance of women into leadership position

Leadership position	Grand mean
(a) Head of primary school	4.88
(b) Head of health centers	4.82
(c) Chairperson of cooperative where men are also members	4.19
(d) Heads of social club	3.48
(e) Baale (head) of community	3.26
(f) Chief of community	2.84
(g) Pastor of a church	2.51
(h) Head of household	1.10
(i) Imam of a mosque	1.04

Source: Field survey, 2001

of primary school ranked highest with a mean of 4.88, this is closely followed by women as head of Health centers (4.82), next was women as chairperson of cooperative societies where men were also members (4.19). Others were in the following order “women as head of social clubs” (3.48), “women as chief of communities” (2.84), pastors of churches” (2.51), Baale of communities (1.36), Head of household (1.10) and the least being women as imam of mosque (1.04). the results showed that leadership status of women in formal positions within the communities is highly acceptable while people frown at women occupying positions that is influenced by the belief system or tradition of the people.

FGD Results on Community Acceptance of Women into Leadership Position

The results of FGD as presented in Table 5 showed that it is accepted for women to be head of primary schools and head of Health centers. This is followed by women being head of social club, chiefs of communities and pastors of a church. But it is generally not accepted for women to be head of household, Imam of a mosque and Baale of a community. It was established that culture stipulated that women could not be head of household even when such have lost their husbands. This is why the culture allows the women to be inherited within the family or to remarry outside (Fadipe, 1970). It was generally accepted that women could occupy official positions as head of primary schools or health centers or chief in the community. For a woman to be an Imam is not accepted by the Islamic doctrine but women can be titled *Iya Adini* of a

Table 5: Community acceptance of women into leadership position

Leadership position	FGD1	FGD2	FGD3	FGD4	FGD5	FGD6
(a) Head of household						
(b) Heads of social club	-	-	-	-	-	-
(c) Chairperson of cooperative where men are also members	+	+	+	+	+	+
(d) Head of Primary School	+	+	+	+	+	+
(e) Head f Health Centres	+	-	-	-	-	-
(f) Imam of a mosque	++	++	++	+	+	+
(g) Pastor of a church	+	+	-	+	-	+
(h) Baale of community	-	-	-	-	-	-
(i) Chief of community	+	+	+	+	+	+

Key: ++ where the opinion was strongly expressed

+ where the opinion was lightly expressed

- Where the opinion was not expressed

Source: Field survey, 2001.

Muslim group e.t.c. Women are accepted in some Christian denominations as Pastors but women cannot be *Baale* (head) of any community in the study area. Below are some of the extracts from the discussion:

Extract I: “Are there no more men in such family?”

Extract II: “Are members of such communities only women?”

Extract III: “So there is no more men on the planets?”

The implication of these extracts is that women can only attain some leadership positions when and where men could not be found.

Relationships Between Community Perception and Socio-economic Characteristics of Women Leaders

Data in Table 6 show that age ($b = 6.2$), marital status ($b = 2.10$) occupation ($b = 1.43$), external orientation ($b = 5.23$) and leadership

position ($b = 5.0$) had positive regression coefficient while size of farm had negative regression coefficient ($b = -1.91$) with perception of the community on women leadership positions.

CONCLUSION

Majority of the respondents were middle-aged women basically engaged in full time farming with average farm size of 2.6 acres. Most of them were experienced farmers and majority had one form of formal education or the other. A greater proportion of them had external contacts with places outside their communities. The results showed that women have great potentials in developing their community but with some social/ cultural limitations. Women are acceptable to occupy some leadership positions, which are basically formal, while it is forbidden for women to occupy positions associated with the belief systems and traditions of the people.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Culture or traditions and or belief systems of people are very difficult to change. Changing it will amount to changing the ways of life of the people, which must be gradual through education and persuasion. The positions associated with traditions and belief systems of people must be handled with care so as not to distort the system. However, women should be encouraged and motivated to develop themselves as competent occupier of formal leadership positions in the community. Therefore women must be educated

Table 6: Regression analysis of woman leaders socio-economic characteristics with the perception of the community

Socio-economic Characteristics	Regression coefficient (b)	T
Age	6.21	1.67*
Religion	-.119	1.53**
Occupation	1.43	1.77*
Size of farm	-1.91	.231
Years of experience	.356	1.070
Level of education	-.116	-.357
External Orientation	5.23	.793
Leadership Position	5.01	.0404

• Significant at $p < 0.05$

• Significant $p < 0.01$

right from childhood. Upon all, women empowerment is a must, if they are to exploit their hidden potentials in food production, food access, food utilization and rural development for rapid economic growth.

Furthermore variable with positive regression coefficients with community attitude should be emphasized when planning training programmes for women leaders. On the other hand much care should be taken in taking advantage of such variables. These are variables limiting women empowerment and performance of their role towards rural development. Local people should be educated about the hidden potentials of women and its significance towards rural development through training and campaign by government, NGOs, International Agencies and rural development stakeholders.

KEYWORDS Community Perception. Leadership Position. Rural Development. Community Head.

ABSTRACT A social survey study was conducted on the community perception of women occupying leadership position in Osun State, Nigeria. Eighteen (18) women groups were selected purposely from 6 Local Government Areas (LGAs) based on the concentration of women group from each of the 6 administrative zones of the state. Pretested structured interview schedule was used to collect information from 108 women Local leaders selected from the 18 groups. Six (6) focus group discussions were held to generate qualitative data from communities in each of the LGAs selected. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percentages and mean were used to analyze the data. Relationship between perception and

variables investigated was determined with regression coefficient. Results showed that women occupying formal position like head of educational institutions, health institutions, social clubs cooperative, chief of a community were accepted to the community people. But the community frown at women occupying social position associated with traditions e.g head (Baale) of a community and belief systems of people e.g. Imam of a mosque. It is highly scored that women have greater role to play in the community and that women have potentials to occupy positions of authority.

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