

Rural Livelihood Activities/Services Performed by Community Based Women Organization (CBWOs) in Imo and Rivers States, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study was undertaken to identify rural livelihood services/activities carried out by CBWOs in Imo and Rivers States. 240 CBWOs were used for the study. The major livelihood services performed by CBWOs in Imo state were women advocacy (97.6%), weeding (97.6%), visitation to fellow members (96.8%), earth movement (erosion control) (95.2%), attendance at meeting (95.2%), sweeping (93.6%), Agro-processing (93.6%), Publicity (92.8%), loading of working materials (92.0%) and water fetching (90.4%). In Rivers state CBWOs who played active and effective roles in supporting women advocacy (100%), weeding (100%), visitation to members (100%), agro-processing (92.5%) and earth movement (96.7%). The overall performance of the livelihood services were in agricultural and rural development projects. This means that improving lives of members and others is a major thrust of CBWOs

Keywords: Livelihoods, women, community, organization

INTRODUCTION

Rural communities have been commonly identified in many works as the most neglected areas in developing nations (Oko, 2010). Over the years, the quest for accelerated improvement in the worth of life of the communities has remained an issue of great concern to the government (Oko, 2010; Nwosu, 2013). The improvement and worth of lifecycle of the community members brings change/transformation which metamorphoses to development.

The clamor for developing rural areas, and providing a cushion to improve the total well-being of the communities has encouraged agricultural development. According to Ekong (2003), Nigeria, like most developing countries, has periodic development plans or annual budget which spells out development programmes to be accomplished within a specific period where agricultural development features prominently. Nwosu (2011) has described agricultural development as one dimension of the multi-faceted complex process of development that aims at enhancing the productive capacity of the agrarian area through the change of the rural economy from being a

rustic, subsistence agricultural economy to a modern commercialized agricultural enterprise.

Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) (2003) stated that in most regions of world, women in agriculture play very important role in food security as revenue recipients, nurturers and administrators of natural resources and biodiversity. Yet, all these important roles are often mitigated by constrained access to land, labor, capital and technology. However, food, safety and domestic well-being are clear motives for protecting or enhancing women's access and control over land and other productive resources. In addition, it is generally accepted that wealth controlled by women are conscientiously used to enhance household food security, total well-being of the family and it reduces malnutrition of the children.

Sequel to the above, Adzongo (2008) also reported that in the past, women farmers were wrongly referred to as "farm laborers" or just "housewives". This signifies that their contributions were not adequately measured. But today, this perceived role is changing. Women are active in all facets of development, especially in food crop production. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO,

2003), avers that rural women are responsible for half of the world's food production and have a conspicuous role in agriculture at all levels. In developing countries such as Nigeria, women produce between 60 and 80 percent of household food and they are also the world's producers of staple crops such as rice, and wheat, maize etc. which guarantees up to 90 percent food intake of the rural poor and their communities in general.

In support of the above assertion, Anikpo (2000) added that women are more committed than men in agricultural activities in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), Nigeria inclusive. About 73% of them are involved in cash crop production, arable and vegetable gardening, 16% in post-harvest activities and 15% in agro-forestry. Also, findings from a study financed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) revealed that women make-up 60 - 80% of agricultural labor force in Nigeria, depending on the region, and they produce two-thirds of food crops.

FAO (2008) observed that women seem to have a wider social network because of their engagement in religious, cultural, agricultural and social activities which are community-based. Similarly, Ogolo (1995) affirms that community participation in development programmes could be facilitated by the use of voluntary organizations such as women organizations. These organizations have been reported by Odurukwe (2003) to be religious-based, service-based or socio-cultural based and women organizations are more effective and play very significant roles in the actualization of the community felt needs.

Women organizations are forums where women talk about their problems and concerns; communal work activities; organize for financial assistance and seek interventions in areas of need. These organizations are avenues of empowerment when effectively explored and it extends development to women in the rural areas. It also serves as enlightenment for education on issues that boost gender participation. In IFAD – assisted projects, women earned higher status, respect and decision-making power based on their participation in groups or co-operatives. The aim is not just to interact with groups as conducts for project resources, but to help them evolve into viable, self-sustaining community organizations (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2015).

Therefore, Community- Based Women Organizations (CBWOs), according to Wikipedia, are all such organization, institutions or congregation

of people, which have local area/village-based presence, maturity and structural arrangements. In the same vein, they are civil society, non-profits organization which runs on voluntary basis and are self-funded. Many are merged, with a written constitution, having Board of Directors, while others are informal. Community Development seeks to challenge the causes and effects of poverty and inequality and offer new opportunities to those lacking choice, power and resources. Community Development empowers people and involves them in making changes they identify to be important and which when put to use, develop their skills, knowledge and experience. Community Development is about collective action. All community development projects have an anti-poverty, anti-exclusion focus and promote participation of people experiencing poverty and exclusion at all levels, work from community development principles and methods, provide support and act as a catalyst for community development activity, act as a resource in the communities of which they are part, provide co-ordination and co-operation between community, voluntary and statutory groups in their areas and involve representatives of groups which experience poverty and social exclusion within their management structures.

Community-based development projects (CBDP) are designed for one major purpose of improving the lives of the members both economically and socially. Because they are community based substantial involvement of the community at all stages of project increases its performance. This is because they feel part of the team and develop more ownership (Sakala, 2004).

In Nigeria, Ogunlela and Mukhtar (2009) observed that various women groups and organizations have emerged. Such groups and organizations have contributed substantially to the gains women farmers have recorded and the voice that they now have in overall national policy on agricultural development. Example of such group is the Women Farmers Advancement Network (WOFAN), a private initiative founded in the 1990s, whose headquarters is in Kano, Nigeria. The main drive of WOFAN include: providing a forum through which members of rural Nigeria communities can express themselves, formation of community groups to bring in access to agricultural credit and insurance, facilities and introducing labor-saving technologies, including modern farm implements and the use of solar energy. In addition, WOFAN also assists women farmers in their health and agricultural

technology. It has since inevitably expanded to address other needs.

Rahman (2008) avers that the rural women played a pivotal role that is crucial to the overall success of efforts directed at agricultural and rural development. In addition, the position and capability of women meeting the challenges of agricultural and rural development cannot be overemphasized. They shoulder the primary responsibility for food security in Africa, yet development agencies have devoted minimal resources to researching the impact of their agricultural policies and new techniques on the well-being of Africa's women farmers. Similarly, much of Sub-Saharan Africa is matrilineal, with women's access to land being (through usufruct rights) through their husband's lineage group.

Thus, the major aim of this work is to identify the rural livelihood roles performed by CBWOs in Imo and Rivers States.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Imo and Rivers States. Imo has three Agricultural zones namely Owerri zone, Orlu zone and Okigwe zone. Two stage sampling technique was used in selecting CBOs. The first stage involved the random selection of four local government areas from each of the zones, to give a total of 12 local government areas. In the second stage, 10 community based women organizations were randomly selected in the following arrangement –4 Women groups, 3 – community development unions and 3 – Co-operative societies to make up the required 10 Community Based Women Organisations per local government. On the whole 120 community-based organizations were used for the study in Imo. Rivers State on the other hand is divided into 3 agricultural zones namely, zone I crop zone in Bori, zone II, fishing zone in Andoni, and zone III, crop/livestock in Omuma by the Rivers State Agricultural Development Project (RISADP). Two stage sampling technique was used in selecting CBOs. The first stage involved the random selection of four local government areas from each of the zones, to give a total of 12 from Rivers State. In the second stage, 10 community based women organizations were randomly selected in the following arrangement –4 Women groups, 3 – community development unions and 3 – Co-operative societies to make up the required 120 Community Based

Organisations per local government. On the whole 240 community-based organizations were used for the study for the two states. A total of 240 questionnaires were distributed. Data were collected by use of structured questionnaire and interview schedule and analyzed using percentages presented in frequency table an

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Livelihood Activities/Services Performed by Cbwos in the Study Area

Table 1 showed various livelihood services performed by CBWOs in both Imo and Rivers States. However, CBWOs Imo State played active roles in the following activities; supporting women advocacy (97.6%) (which assist in improving respect for and the protection of women's human rights and elimination of discrimination, which in turn, is necessary to achieve full equality between men and women), weeding (97.6%), visitation to fellow members (96.8%), earth movement (erosion control) (95.2%), attendance at meeting (95.2%). Others are sweeping (93.6%), Agro-processing (93.6%), Publicity (92.8%), loading of working materials (92.0%) and water fetching (90.4%). Furthermore, women in Imo CBWOs played a moderate role in offloading of working materials (65.6%), planting (64.8%), clearing (60%), digging drainage (69.6%) and health care support/provision to members (60%). This is contrary to Rivers State CBWOs who played active and effective roles in supporting women advocacy (100%), weeding (100%), visitation to members (100%), agro-processing (92.5%) and earth movement (96.7%).

On the overall performance of the group, 82% of their active services were in agricultural and developmental projects, indicating high performance when compared with the expected roles. The result confirms the findings of United Nations Development Programme (2000), which observed that around the world, resilient and resourceful rural women contribute in a multitude of ways through different livelihood strategies to lifting their families and communities out of poverty. In other words, the fast changing time has brought many new interests and responsibilities into women's orbit. Thus, the role played by women in agricultural development process is fundamental to rural development. Therefore, these roles are played in meeting the challenges of agricultural development which are crucial to the development of women and fulfillment of their economic potentials.

Rural Livelihood Activities/Services Performed by Community Based Women Organization (CBWOs) in Imo and Rivers States, Nigeria

Table 1. Livelihood activities/services performed by CBWOs in the study area

States Activities/services	Imo State		Rivers State	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Water fetching	108	90.4	102	85.0
Sweeping/General Cleaning	112	93.6	120	100
Offloading	78	65.0	99	82.5
Weeding	117	97.6	120	100
Planting	78	65.0	71	59.2
Clearing	72	60.0	38	31.7
Publicity	111	92.8	120	100
Marketing of farm produce	93	77.5	92	76.7
Loading of working materials	110	92.0	60	50.0
Digging drainage	83	69.2	92	76.7
Packing Sand in bags	90	75.0	83	69.2
Training of members	86	71.6	81	67.5
Agro-Processing	112	93.6	111	92.5
Health Care provision	60	50	65	54.2
Visitation to fellow members	112	96.8	120	100
Attendance at meeting	114	95.2	120	100
Supporting women advocacy	117	97.6	120	100
Harvesting	93	77.5	84	70
Fertilization	98	81.6	87	72.5
Earth movement	114	95.2	116	96.7

Source: Field Survey, 2015

CONCLUSION

CBWOs performed several livelihood services. These were weeding, visitation to fellow members, earth movement (erosion control), attendance at meeting, sweeping, agro-processing, publicity, loading of working materials, and fetching water. The essence is bringing women together to improve their socio-economic life, raise their standard of living and contribution to the development of their immediate communities.

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