

Women Participation in Farming Activities and Empowerment Among Rural Women in Benue and Niger States of Nigeria

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DOI: 10.56201/ijaes.vol.11.no3.2025.pg173.182

Abstract

This paper seeks to examine socio-economic benefits of participation in Farming practice among rural women in Benue and Niger States of Nigeria. Women empowerment through participation in farming activities which is the focus of this paper is a mechanism through which Nigerian rural women are able to increase self-reliance in order to promote their well-being. A sample of 282 women involved in farming approach from the study area were selected from a study population of 600, through sample random from six local Government Areas of Benue and Niger States of Nigeria and a schedule was designed and administered among the respondents. The results revealed that majority of women who constituted as respondents of this study have benefitted considerably as most of them have been earning certain income thereby supplementing their family income. Most of the respondents have either primary education or no formal education which directly informed their participation in the approach. The study revealed that there is high rate of involvement of rural women in farming activities in the study area, hence most of the respondents emphasized positive changes in their socio-economic well-being. The paper therefore concludes that farming approach is an instrument for rural women empowerment and poverty alleviation in Nigeria.

Keywords: Empowerment, Participation, Socio-economic.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The concept of development stands not only on the quantitative value of growth but also on the qualitative means of livelihood, which is the fulfilment of basic human necessities i.e. provision of basic infrastructure, shelter, food, health, education and good drinking water. These are the major challenges of African countries today.

Women all over the world are considered as an extremely pivotal point in the process of change in the rural areas and that is why today in most developing countries like Nigeria, more emphasis is laid on the need for the development of women and their greater volunteerism and active participation in the main stream of development process (Singh, 2009; Rajamani & Julius, 2012).

Despite the fact that Nigeria is ranked as the sixth richest Nation in the world in terms of crude oil reserve and supply, and the fact that the country ranks among the Nations that are blessed in terms of human and material endowment, her citizens especially women are wallowing in abject poverty

with little or no economic empowerment for the larger percentage of the population (Muhammad, 2004; Adetunji, 2012).

Benue and Niger States of Nigeria are basically an agrarian federating unit of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The high level of poverty in these areas has become a source of concern. What is found in these areas today is the preponderance of over 75 percent of the population in the poverty trap, with a yearly rising number among women and youth (Adepoju, 2007).

Poverty has been identified as a major obstacle to realization of women's human rights and one of the most surreptitious of violation of women's right (Charles, 2008).

In the face of the nature and magnitude of poverty situation in Nigeria, successive Nigerian regimes made several attempts to alleviate the poverty situation in the country especially among Nigerian rural women. Despite these concerted efforts by previous regimes, the poverty situation in Nigeria seems to be getting worse especially among rural women.

From the above, it is clear that The Nigerian Government poverty alleviation programmed and policies aimed at empowering Nigerian rural women do not sufficiently address the need of women empowerment in Nigeria and this has led to participation of rural women in farming activities.

The aim of this paper, is to understand to what extent does women volunteerism and participation in farming activities by Benue and Niger States rural women provides them with adequate sustainable development and empowerment.

There is the need to enquire what farming practice can do for a people in order to reshape their livelihood. Nigerian women contribute immensely to National Development and there is the need to encourage and support them to actively involve themselves in public life and governance.

1.1 Empowerment – A Theoretical Postulation

Empowerment had two interrelated aspects that can be summarized as individual empowerment and collective empowerment. Each aspect has its own components (Mann, 2006). Individual empowerment relates to the way people think about themselves as well as the knowledge, capacities, skills and mastery they actually possess (Staples, 1990). A set of four components including meaning, competence, self-determination and impact, were found in individual empowerment. The goal of individual empowerments is to achieve a state of liberation strong enough to impact one's power of life, community and society. Empowerment develops from individual and a critical consciousness to collective action (Freire, 1973). Individual empowerment develops when people attempts to develop the capabilities to overcome their psychological and intellectual obstacles and attain self-determination, self-sufficiency, self-confidence and decision making abilities (Becker, Verah, Gonseth, 2004). While collective empowerment refers to the process by which individuals join together to break their solitude and silence, help one another, learn together, and develop skills for collective action (Staples, 1990). Collective empowerment develops when people train in action to overcome obstacles and attain changes (Staples, 1990). Group become empowered through collective action, but that action is enabled or constrained by

the power structures that they encountered. The components of collective empowerment include social cohesion, collective belonging and collective understanding of power and social change, group support, and advocacy.

Empowerment process is therefore not a constant, but rather a continuing development that involves many changes and whereby individual or group is able to strengthen and exercise the ability to act to gain control and mastery over life, community and society. Empowerment thus is understood as a multi-dimensional process where people take control over their lives, gaining skills, building self-confidence and solving problems. Thus women empowerment especially through farming practice would be able to develop self-esteem and confidence to improve their wellbeing. Therefore, the involvement of rural women in farming activities can lead to empowerment where they can gain control over their lives.

1.2 Aim and Objectives of Study

The aim of this study was to examine the extent of women's empowerment through participation in farming activities by Benue and Niger States rural women of Nigeria.

The Specific Objectives are:

- i. To identify the empowerment benefits (Social and Economic) through participation in farming practice
- ii. To investigate the relationship among women's need, participation and empowerment
- iii. To investigate the mediation effect of volunteerism on the relationship between participation and empowerment among respondents.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in Benue and Niger States of Nigeria. The study is descriptive in nature as it has attempted to describe the socio-economic benefits derived through participation in farming activities among rural women in the study area. The sample size of this study came from a population of 600 rural women involved in farming activities from the study area.

The sample size of 282 was selected for this study. The research instrument for data collection for this study was through questionnaire. The suggest items in measuring socio-economic empowerment were originally developed by past researchers and reported high rating in validity and reliability (Mann, 2006; Kabeer, 2010). The volume of each response in these items as measured with four point likert scale (1. Strongly Disagree 2. Disagree 3. Strongly Agree 4. Agree). Data obtained from the respondents was coded, computed and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 20).

3.0 RESULTS

While trying to examine the dynamics of women participation in farming activities in the study area, socio-economic benefits derived from the practice as well as mediation effect of volunteerism on the relationship between participation and empowerment among respondents were identified to be very important variables as the respondents of this study are women that could explain better what they felt about farming practice. This is shown in tables 1-4.

3.1 Economic Empowerment Derived through Farming Practice

The main idea behind this section (Table 1) was to measure the level of economic benefits derived by the respondents through participation in Farming activities.

The result showed that the overall score of women economic empowerment was 2.62 and majority of the respondents are really privileged to enjoy many economic benefits. These include increased in their income, purchasing power and improved living condition. The overall frequency thus indicated that women who participated in Farming practice have moderate level of economic empowerment.

Table 1 Women's Economic Empowerment (N=282, Mean=2.62)

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Level		
				Low (1 – 2)	Mod (2.1 – 3)	High (3.1 – 4)
1	Better living condition	3.50	0.49	1.1%	29.9%	64.1%
2	Increased purchasing power	3.42	0.42	1.4%	38.1%	63.1%
3	Save some money	3.14	0.50	0.7%	49.1%	48.2%
4	Solve financial problems	3.01	0.28	1.5%	91.5%	5.1%
5	Manage resources	2.40	0.23	2.8%	95.4%	2.5%
6	Help others	2.50	0.44	8.1%	83.3%	2.1%
7	Overcome my personal needs	2.71	0.35	10.3%	88.3%	2.4%
8	Access to credit facilities	2.71	0.42	11.8%	84.0%	3.4%
9	More businesses	2.60	0.62	43.3%	51.1%	5.7%
10	Access to Assets	2.07	0.38	88.7%	12.1%	-
11	Monthly Contribution	2.05	0.54	72.0%	14.1%	0.9%

12	More skills	1.70	0.50	84.0%	5.0%	-
13	Learn new things	1.75	0.57	96.1%	2.5%	2.1%

Source: Field Work 2024

3.2 Social Empowerment Derived Through Farming Practice

This section (table 2) was used to measure respondents' level of social empowerment through their involvement in Farming activities. The results showed that the overall mean was 2.68 and that most of the respondents of this study have got a lot of social benefits. Based on the analysis in table 2 below, respondents got social benefits such as improved quality of life, and better decision making ability among others. Thus, the result showed that respondents who participated in Farming activities from this study area generally have moderate social empowerment.

Table 2 Women Social Empowerment (N=282, Mean=2.68)

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Level		
				Low (1 – 2)	Mod (2.1 – 3)	High (3.1 – 4)
1	Improved quality of life	3.42	0.50	1.1%	32.8%	64.1%
2	Happy with my family	3.32	0.40	1.1%	39.4%	57.6%
3	I learnt new things	3.04	0.33	3.2%	77.7%	7.2%
4	Have networking	3.03	0.43	7.8%	81.2%	11.1%
5	Decision making ability	3.01	0.27	2.5%	93.6%	2.9%
6	I feel better making decisions about myself	2.94	0.51	13.8%	77.0%	7.2%
7	I can act on my own now	2.80	0.51	18.4%	74.8%	5.7%
8	I have new friends now	2.72	0.51	23.8%	70.9%	5.1%
9	My children have access to good education now	2.71	0.57	26.2%	67.4%	5.4%
10	I have access to useful information now	2.50	0.69	46.5%	48.2%	4.3%
11	I know more about the society	2.41	0.60	47.5%	49.6%	2.8%
12	Better decisions now	2.14	0.30	86.2%	13.1%	0.7%

13	Perform responsibilities	social	1.71	0.46	96.1%	3.5%	1.4%
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Source: Field Work 2024

3.3 Mediation Effect of Volunteerism on Relationship between Participation and Empowerment

Analysis for mediation was conducted in accordance with the method suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). Baron and Kenny (1986) method requires that three basic conditions to be met for a variable to be regarded as a mediator. First, the predictor variable needs to be related significantly to the potential mediator. Second, the predictor variable is required to associate significantly with the dependent variable in the absence of the mediator. Third, the potential mediator must correlate significantly with the dependent variable. These conditions are assessed by performing multiple regression analysis.

Model 1

Therefore, the multiple regression analysis shown that, volunteerism is to mediate the relationship between level of participation in farming activities and economic empowerment. The direct effect of level of participation in farming activities on economic empowerment (c path) is significant ($b = 0.601$, $SE = 0.079$, $t = 7.598$, $p = 0.000$). In addition, the direct effect of level of participation in farming activities on volunteerism (a path) is significant ($b = -0.140$, $SE = 0.069$, $t = -1.845$, $p = 0.046$). Finally, the relationship between volunteerism (MV) and outcome (b path) is significant ($b = 0.603$, $SE = 0.058$, $t = 10.419$, $p = 0.000$).

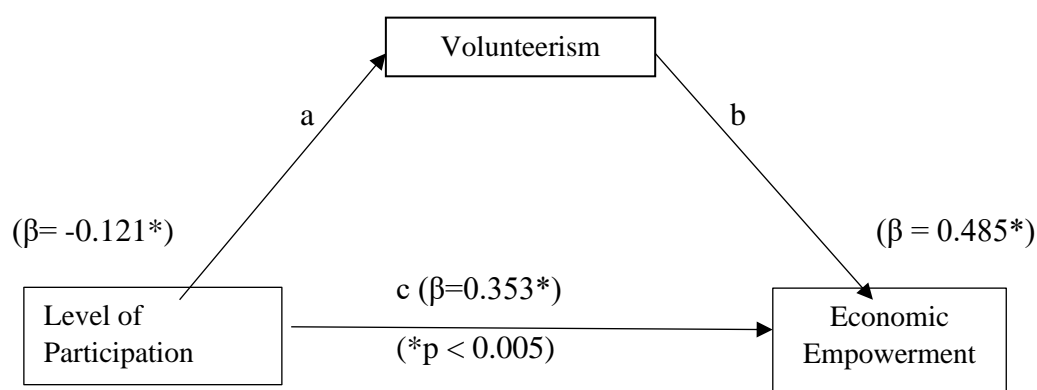


Figure 1: The indirect relationship between level of participation and economic empowerment through volunteerism

The above figure 1 illustrates that level of participation in farming activities is significantly correlated with economic empowerment $r = 0.353$, and also level of participation in farming activities is significantly correlated with volunteerism $r = -0.121$. The partial effect of volunteerism on economic empowerment, with level of participation in farming activities held constant, fall short of statistical significance ($\beta = 0.485$). Finally, the direct effect of level of participation on economic empowerment without volunteerism ($\beta = 0.353$).

Model 2

Therefore, the multiple regression analysis shown that, volunteerism is to mediate the relationship between level of participation in farming activities and social empowerment. The direct effect of level of participation in farming activities on social empowerment (c path) is significant ($b = 0.197$, $SE = 0.025$, $t = 7.915$, $p = 0.000$). In addition, the direct effect of level of participation in farming activities on volunteerism (a path) is significant ($b = 0.075$, $SE = 0.028$, $t = 2.717$, $p = 0.007$). Finally, the relationship between volunteerism (MV) and outcome (b path) is significant ($b = 0.605$, $SE = 0.047$, $t = 13.006$, $p = 0.000$).

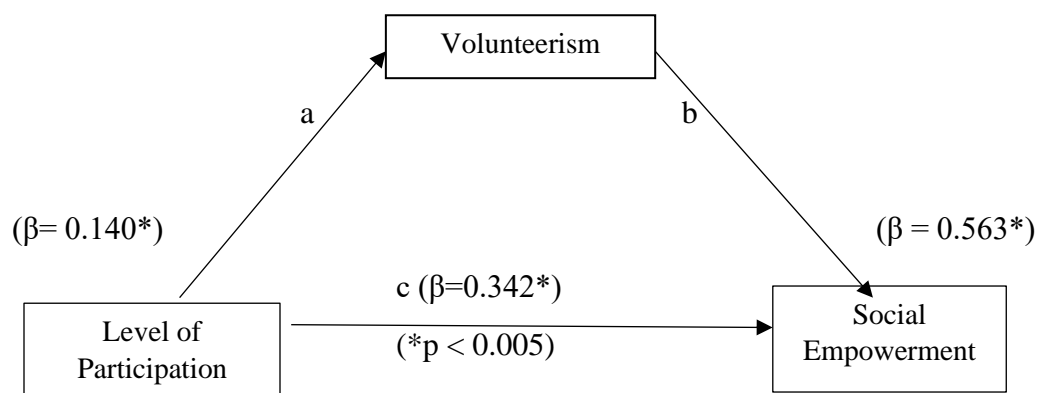


Figure 2: The indirect relationship between level of participation and social empowerment through volunteerism

The above figure 2 illustrates that level of participation in farming activities is significantly correlated with social empowerment $r = 0.342$, and also level of participation in farming activities is significantly correlated with volunteerism $r = -0.140$. The partial effect of volunteerism on social empowerment, with level of participation in farming activities held constant, fall short of statistical significance ($\beta = 0.563$). Finally, the direct effect of level of participation on social empowerment without volunteerism ($\beta = 0.342$).

4.0 DISCUSSION

The study was designed to understand the socio-economic impact of Farming activities on members. The result obtained from this study has shown the benefits and changes that respondents

of this study have experienced in their lives as a result of their Farming practice. The outcome of this study showed that most of the respondents of this study have benefitted considerably in terms of socio-economic empowerment. It is evident that economically, the respondents have opportunities through their participation in Farming activities to enjoy some economic benefits which include increased in their income and purchasing power. Most of them felt strong enough to meet unexpected financial challenges as a result of the increased in their purchasing power. Secondly, the outcome indicated that the respondents have got a lot of social benefits; most of them felt that there is improved quality of life and an increased in their income. To this end, respondents are able to make better decisions about themselves and are able to articulate own strategy for change.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous studies (Mann, H. H 2006, Rowlands J. 1997) who observed that Farming practice has the potential of establishing capacity building and self-efficiency among women in socio-economic development.

The multiple regression analysis showed that volunteerism mediate the relationship between level of participation in farming practice on socio-economic empowerment.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The outcome of this study indicated that women in the study area see Farming practice as a major means of livelihood and therefore, put high expectation of returns on the practice. And as such, have benefitted considerably in terms of socio-economic development. The practice has clearly created impact upon the life pattern of Nigerian women especially those from the study area.

6.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the following;

Issues of women participation and their empowerment are critical in the development process of any society. Stemming from the above findings, the study proposes a number of recommendations that are directed towards enhancing women empowerment strategies through framing approach. The study recommends the formulation and institution of a common policy by the federal government for farming approach which will help better coordinate their activities and promote effectiveness in the practice.

The study revealed that majority of the respondents cannot obtain credit from financial institutions as such there was inadequate fund and high interest rate from the financial institutions. The study thus proposes that government can intervene through Central Bank of Nigeria in the area of grants, credit to members with low interest rate.

It is recommended that women empowerment should be a keen interest to policy makers. Women participation in socio-economic activities in Nigeria leaves much to be desired.

Finally, education has an important role to play as far as women empowerment is concerned. Skill acquisition centres should be established in local government areas for women to learn how to use

modern agricultural tools. This if assisted by the local government councils will encourage more women to develop interest in farming practice.

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