

Utilization of Community Leadership Engagement Strategies toward Promotion of Sustainable Agriculture among Rural Women in Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

This study examined was to examine utilization of community leadership engagement strategies toward promotion of sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State. The study was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses. The research design adopted in the study was a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised 815 respondents, comprising 54 leaders and 761 members of the 18 community-based organizations (CBOs) in the seven (7) Local Government Areas of the Rivers South East senatorial district. The sample size for the study was four hundred and eight (408) respondents, comprising 54 leaders and 354 members who are registered members and leaders of the community-based organizations in the seven local government areas studied. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on Utilization of Community Leadership Engagement Strategies toward Promotion of Sustainable Agriculture among Rural Women in Rivers State (UCLESPSA)". The instrument items were structured on a modified four (4)-point Likert scale rated on Very High Extent VHE (4), High Extent, HE (3), Low Extent LE (2), and Very Low Extent VLE (1). The instrument was validated by experts and the reliability coefficient index was 0.83, which were obtained through Cronbach Alpha reliability. The data collected was analyzed using Mean Score and Standard Deviation to answer the research questions, while a z-test was used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. Based on the findings, it was concluded that using leadership engagement strategies is a real way to get rural women to work in agriculture in a way that is sustainable. Therefore, it was recommended among that community larders should use collaboration as a strategy to gain insight into talent concentration, additional resources, experience, and good governance for growth, high performance, and competitiveness.

Key Words: Leadership, Engagement Strategies, Collaboration, Consultation, Sustainable Agriculture

Introduction

Community engagement is founded on the democratic principle that everyone touched by a problem affecting their community should have a say in the decision-making process. It, moreover, holds the promise that public participation can influence decisions that affect the provision of services, future visions and sustainability of our communities. Although there is no commonly agreed to community engagement definition and the use of the term varies widely (sharing in notions of consultation, participation, collaboration and empowerment), community engagement captures its meaning in mutual decision making. People, governments and organizations work collaboratively to create and realize the visions of sustainable agriculture for their community's future. Community engagement is all about seeking for best options and alternatives to dialogue with community leadership and members with the intention to meet their expressed needs in ways that they will appreciate and identify with (Haq, Shaikh, & Tran, 2019). Community engagement (CE) is the process by which the rural women in the agricultural sector work collaboratively with their or host communities to improve community promotion of sustainable agricultural programmes to address the problem of food insecurity and economic indices in the community. Therefore, community engagement strategies are step by step plan that details how to involve a community in bringing about sustainable agriculture and social change. Contextually, this definition of a community engagement strategy centered around:

- i. Encouraging the community to believe in the vision.
- ii. Building trust with the community by showing how women' organizations can help.
- iii. Improving closer participation from the community towards each effort.

The premise behind agricultural sustainability is that we must meet the demands of the present without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Therefore, both long-term stewardship of natural and human resources and short-term economic gain are of equal importance. Future and present thought must be given to social duties such as the working and living conditions of laborers, farmers, the demands of rural communities, and the health and safety of consumers (Brodt, Six, Feenstra, Ingels, & Campbell, 2011). Land and natural resource stewardship involves preserving or enhancing the quality of these resources and employing them in a manner that allows for their regeneration in the future, and by extension, must also address concerns about crop cultivation and animal welfare in farm enterprises that include livestock in the rural agroecosystem.

The utilization of community engagement strategies brings about agroecosystems envisioned in the broadest perspective, which distribution and food consumption components, similarly span from farmer to local community to global population. This perspective allows for a comprehensive view of our agricultural production and distribution enterprises, and how they affect human communities and the natural environment. Conversely, a systems approach also gives rural women the tools to assess the benefits of the human society through its alignment with cooperative institutions gearing towards environmental sustainability (Brodt, Six, Feenstra, Ingels, & Campbell, 2011).

Rural women comprise a quarter of the world's population. Women also make up 41 per cent of the world's agricultural labour force, a ratio which rises to 49 per cent for low income countries. Empowering rural women can have a significant impact on productivity and agriculture-led sustainability.

Women play important roles in the rural economy. They work as farmers, wage earners and entrepreneurs. Rural women have an important role as custodians of traditional knowledge that is key for their communities' livelihoods, resilience and culture, and this make a unique contribution to natural resource management.

It would have been difficult to achieve coverage, acceptability, and women ownership of farm programs in high-risk areas such as hard-to-reach and conflict-affected communities if community engagement strategies hadn't been implemented in the program. These results have been achieved thanks to the implementation of community engagement strategies. (Habib, Soofi & Cousens, 2017). Community engagement has been beneficial and has encouraged the adoption of health services by individuals who have negative beliefs and attitudes. This has been accomplished by engaging individuals to discuss the basis of their beliefs and encouraging individuals to proffer solutions to issues that they have identified. According to Dalhatu, Abdul and Bozkurt (2015), one successful example of community engagement in high-risk areas involves the engagement of 11,000 female community-based mobilizers in Nigeria in 2014 to participate in rural agricultural project in northern Nigeria. This is an example of successful community engagement in high-risk locations. As a result, over than 322 000 farmers were educated for standard agricultural practices, and more than 32 000 farmers' children were referred fed (Dalhatu et al.).

Agricultural practice is an art. The art comes from the understanding, skill, and sensitivity used to apply and adapt the science in ways that fit the community of interest and the purposes of specific engagement efforts. The results of these efforts may be defined differently and can encompass a broad range of structures (e g, coalitions, partnerships, collaborations), but they all fall under the general fabric of community engagement and are discussed in this based on the individualistic perspective

Individual Perspective:

Individuals have their own sense of community membership that is beyond the definitions of community applied by researchers and engagement leaders. Moreover, they may have a sense of belonging to more than one community. In addition, their sense of membership can change over time and may affect their participation in community activities. The philosopher and psychologist William James shed light on this issue in his writings. James thought it important to consider two perspectives on identity: the "I," or how a person thinks about himself or herself, and the "me," or how others see and think about that person. Sometimes these two views agree and result in a shared sense of an identity, but other times they do not. People should not make assumptions about identity based on appearance, language, or cultural origin; nor should they make assumptions about an individual's perspective based on his or her identity (Dambo & Kayii, 2022; Nwile, Bayo & Befii-Nwile, 2022; Nwikina & Nwile, 2015). Today, the multiple communities that might be relevant for any individual-including families, workplace, and social,

religious, and political associations- suggest that individuals are thinking about themselves in more complex ways than was the norm in years past(Dalhatu, Abdul & Bozkurt, 2015).

There are different levels of community engagement, ranging from simply informing people to helping people to help themselves. It is important to recognize how each stage builds on the other, and that the form of engagement appropriate for the purpose. The levels community engagement relate to task performance, include information, consultation, involvement, collaboration, and empowerment (Akinyemi, Harris, & Kawonga, 2019). These levels of community engagement concepts which are contained in the table below.

Table 1: levels of Community Engagement Tasks

inform	One way communication providing balanced and objective information to assist understanding about something that is going to happen or has happened.
consult	Two way communications designed to obtain public feedback about ideas on rationale, alternatives and proposals to inform decision-making. Involve
involve	Participatory process designed to help identify issues and views to ensure that concerns and aspiration ns are understood and considered prior to decision-making.
collaborate	Working together to develop understanding of all issues and interests to work out alternatives and identify preferred solutions that are most beneficial to the interests of the communities.
empower	Providing opportunities and resources for communities to contribute to solutions by valuing local talents and skills and acknowledging their capacity to be decision makers in their own lives. This will help them to take the lead in installing any initiatives and practices that can enhance the quality of their health and livelihood

Information giving is the first step towards genuine community engagement and development. The emphasis is on a one-way flow of information and there is no channel for feedback. It is used to let people know what is happening in situations where decisions have already been made or no choices are available.

Consultation goes beyond information giving by actively seeking, listening to and taking account of people's views before making decisions or setting priorities. People are not however, allowed to develop their own ideas or put their own plans into action. This is an outcome associated with participation/empowerment.

Involving the community goes beyond just sharing information and consulting them; it has to do with making the community a part of the planning process of engagement through the eventual decision making and putting intervention in place to benefit them (Kayii, & Dambo, 2018).

Collaboration is all about ensuring that the community is seen as a partner in the engagement process whose voice, resources and opinions form part of all stages of engagement and eventually work with their local resources to make sure that the interventions address their peculiar initiatives. In this way, they see themselves as owner of the intervention or project and will make every effort to sustain the practice

It is believed that if these community leadership engagement strategies are properly employed by Government, development agencies, adult educators, Non-governmental organizations, and other

organizations interested in peace and sustainable agricultural development in the communities, poverty and economic crisis among rural women in communities will be reduced to a barest minimum. It is against this background that this study was designed to examine the utilization of community leadership engagement strategies toward promotion of sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State to promote sustainable agriculture among rural women.

Statement of the Problem

In rural areas, there are many barriers that prevent women from participating in economic activity. When they do work, rural women have a lower chance of participating in community leadership, and when they do, they are confined in association removed them from the main stream of community leadership than males. In rural areas, women are more likely to be concentrated and visible in positions that require low levels of education or ability, low levels of agricultural production, little or no pay, long working hours, terrible working conditions, and minimal social safety. In addition, they do a disproportionate amount of unpaid housework and caregiving, such as cooking and taking care of children, the sick, and the elderly. The majority of their labour continues to go undetected, unappreciated, and undervalued as a result of gender-based discrimination and societal conventions. Rural women continue to be underrepresented in groups representing rural workers and employers, which results in a dearth of opportunities that guarantee agricultural sustainability. It is imperative that the persistent inequities between men and women in community leadership towards the promotion of sustainable agriculture cannot be overemphasize.

However, over the years, because of self-help intensions promote sustainable agriculture, many local communities have formed local community-based groups that they work with in order to channel issues of development around their health, including agriculture, economic development, social inclusion and attract development in the communities, such local community-based groups include, Community Based Organizations (CBOs), Ward Development Committees (WDC), Community Development, Committees (CDC), Aged Group Associations, Women organizations, Village Development Committees (VDC) may have been engaged in one leadership programme or not to enhance rural sustainability. The need to bring these engagement strategies to the fore and also how to they can be used as a mechanism towards promotion of sustainable agricultural practices in Rivers State, was the problem of this study.

Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine utilization of community leadership engagement strategies toward promotion of sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State. In specific terms, the study sought to:

1. Investigate the extent to which the utilization of consultation as a strategy promotes sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State.
2. Find out the extent to which the utilization of collaboration as a strategy promotes sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. To what extent does utilization of consultation as a strategy promotes sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State?

2. To what extent does the utilization of collaboration as a strategy promotes of sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of leaders and members of community based organizations on the extent the utilization of consultation as a strategy promote sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of leaders and members of community based organizations on the extent the utilization of collaboration as a strategy promote sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is an analytic-descriptive design. This study used an analytic descriptive design because the sampled strata were compared through the use of hypotheses. According to Nwankwo in Akpomi, Kayii and Nwile (2022), posited that an analytic descriptive survey is a design in which the features or variables being studied for any sample are compared through the use of hypotheses, which in most cases are the dependent variables for the study. The population of the study comprised 815 respondents, comprising 54 leaders and 761 members of the 18 community-based organizations (CBOs) in the seven (7) Local Government Areas (Andoni, Eleme, Gokana, Khana, Opobo/Okoro, Oyigbo and Tai) of the Rivers South East senatorial district. The sample size for the study was four hundred and eight (408) respondents, comprising 54 leaders and 354 members who are registered members and leaders of the community-based organizations in the seven local government areas studied. The sample size was determined using Krjcie and Morgan's 1970 sample size table, which represents 50% of the population. However, a multi-stage sampling technique was adopted for the study.

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on Utilization of Community Leadership Engagement Strategies toward Promotion of Sustainable Agriculture among Rural Women in Rivers State" (UCLESPPSA). The questionnaire was divided into two sections. 'A' and 'B' Section 'A' dealt with the demographic information about the respondents and their knowledge of the community. Section 'B' contained relevant information about the respondents' utilization of engagement strategies. The instrument items were structured on a modified four (4)-point Likert scale rated on Very High Extent VHE (4), High Extent, HE (3), Low Extent LE (2), and Very Low Extent VLE (1) and were guided by the following rules; 1-1.49 for very low extent, 1.5-2.49 for low extent, 2.5-3.49 for high extent, 3.5-4.00 for very high extent, respectively. The instrument was validated and a reliability index of 0.83 was ascertained.

The researchers summarized the data in tables to reflect the views of the respondents. The data on the research questions was analyzed using the mean and standard deviation, and the two null hypotheses were tested using the Z-score statistic method at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent does utilization of consultation as a strategy promotes sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State?

Table 4.2: Mean response on the extent to which utilization of consultation as a strategy promotes sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State

Leaders n=54	Decision	Members n=354	Decision
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S/N	Statement	Items	Mean	Std.		Mean	Std.	
1	Professional consultancy with agencies promote sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State		2.43	0.87	Low Extent	2.81	0.84	High Extent
2	Advisory service and input support development through consultation promote sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State		2.75	0.85	High Extent	2.83	0.85	High Extent
3	Consultation for supports of the agricultural development programs		2.57	0.87	High Extent	2.56	1.11	High Extent
4	Consultancy services to increase investments in research and extension		2.71	0.80	High Extent	2.80	0.85	High Extent
5	Explicitly supporting the needs of small-scale agricultural producers, and entrepreneurs on ways to add value to on-farm		2.80	0.76	High Extent	2.39	1.04	Low Extent
	Grand total		2.65	0.84	High Extent	2.68	0.96	High Extent

Table 2 above for research question one shows the mean response of leaders and members of community-based-organizations in the south-east district of Rivers State. Item 1 has mean scores of 2.43 and 2.81, with a standard deviation of 0.87 and 0.84. Item 2 has mean scores of 2.75 and 2.83, with a standard deviation of 0.85 and 0.85. Item 3 has mean scores of 2.57 and 2.56, with a standard deviation of 0.87 and 1.11. Item 4 has mean scores of 2.71 and 2.80 and a standard deviation of 0.80 and 0.85. Item 5 has mean scores of 2.80 and 2.39 and a standard deviation of 0.76 and 1.04. The grand mean is 2.65 and 2.68, with a standard deviation of 0.84 and 0.96. This indicates that both the leaders and members agreed that, to a high extent, the utilization of consultation as a strategy promotes sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: To what extent does the utilization of collaboration as a strategy promotes of sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean responses on extent to which utilization of collaboration as a strategy promotes of sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State

S/N	Statement	Items	Leaders n=54		Decision	Members n=354		Decision
			Mean	Std.		Mean	Std.	
6	Utilization of collaboration strategy creates an environment for fresh ideas provide small scale farmers with adequate financing.		2.57	0.89	High Extent	2.83	0.83	High Extent
7	Collaborating in advancing mechanized systems to improve the quality of agricultural products.		2.73	0.93	High Extent	2.78	0.89	High Extent
8	Collaboration in providing extension service sustainable management and renewal of		2.84	0.67	High Extent	2.75	1.00	High Extent

	natural resources,							
9	New technology has been created outside the actual farming sector through public sector research organizations collaboration.	2.82	0.86	High Extent	2.64	1.01	High Extent	
10	Collaboration with different organizations to extension services	2.60	0.83	High Extent	2.68	0.96	High Extent	
	Grand total	2.71	0.84	High Extent	2.74	0.94	High Extent	

Table 4.3 above for research question two shows the mean response of leaders and members of community-based-organizations in three senatorial zones of Rivers State. Item 6 has mean scores of 2.57 and 2.83, with a standard deviation of 0.89 and 0.83. Item 7 has mean scores of 2.73 and 2.78, with a standard deviation of 0.93 and 0.89. Item 8 has mean scores of 2.84 and 2.75, with a standard deviation of 0.67 and 1.00. Item 9 has mean scores of 2.82 and 2.64 and a standard deviation of 0.86 and 1.01. Item 10 has mean scores of 2.60 and 2.68, with standard deviations of 0.83 and 0.96. The grand mean is 2.71 and 2.74, with a standard deviation of 0.84 and 0.94. This indicates that both the leaders and members agreed that the utilization of the collaboration strategy promotes sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State to a high extent.

Test of Hypotheses

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of leaders and members of community based organizations on the extent the utilization of consultation as a strategy promote sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State.

Table 4: Z-Test Statistic on difference in the mean ratings of leaders and members of community based organizations on the extent the utilization of consultation as a strategy promote sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State.

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	Z-Score	p-value	Level of Sign.	Decision
Leaders	54	2.65	0.84	406	-0.542	0.588	0.05	Accepted
Members	354	2.68	0.96					

Table 4 above, shows that z – calculated value of – 0.542 with a p-value (0.635) is greater than 0.05 level of significance and 406 degree of freedom indicating that there is no significant difference between the responses of leaders and members on the extent the utilization of consultation as a strategy promote sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State. This therefore means that the null hypothesis is upheld

2 There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of leaders and members of community based organizations on the extent the utilization of collaboration as a strategy promote sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State

Table 5: Z-Test Statistic on difference in the mean ratings of leaders and members of community based organizations on the extent the utilization of collaboration as a strategy promote sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State

Respondents	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	Z-score	p-value	Level of Sign.	Decision
Leaders	54	2.71	0.84	406	-0.474	0.635	0.05	Accepted
Members	354	2.74	0.94					

Table 5 above, shows that z – calculated value of – 0.474 with a p-value (0.635) is greater than 0.05 level of significance and 406 degree of freedom indicating that there is no significant difference between the responses of leaders and members on the extent the utilization of collaboration as a strategy promote sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State. This therefore means that the null hypothesis is upheld.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of first hypothesis revealed that utilization of consultation as a strategy promotes sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State. This finding is in agreement with Akinyemi et al. (2021) Dalhatu, Abdul, and Bozkurt (2015), whose findings revealed that a consultation strategy is an effective and efficient approach for ensuring that all relevant evidence is taken into account, including data about costs, about societal impact, and about the potential benefits of the initiative.

The finding of the second hypothesis revealed that utilization of collaboration as a strategy promotes sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State. This finding is in agreement with Brodt, et al. (2011). That is a strategy business enterprise and other elements in the supply chain communicate effectively and operate as a unit towards a common goal that they are invested in.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it is deduced that there is no significant difference between the responses of leaders and members on the extent to which the utilization of consultation and collaboration as strategies promote sustainable agriculture among rural women in Rivers State. And that the utilization of leadership engagement strategies promotes sustainable agriculture in Rivers State. It was also found that using leadership engagement strategies is a real way to get rural women to work in agriculture in a way that is sustainable.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

Community larders should use collaboration as a strategy to gain insight into talent concentration, additional resources, experience, and good governance for growth, high performance, and competitiveness. To this end, the leaders of community-based organizations, as well as their members, should include collaborative activities to promote sustainable agriculture

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