



Challenges Of Participation Of Rural Farmers In Community Development In Rivers State

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the challenges of participation of rural farmers in community development in Rivers State. Two research questions guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted. Proportionate sampling technique was adopted to select 286 respondents from the total population of 954. This formed 30% of the members of registered rural farmers' cooperative societies from the two selected LGAs (Obio/Akpor and Oyigbo) in Rivers State. An instrument tagged "Questionnaire on Challenges of Participation of Rural Farmers in Community Development (QCPRFCD) with $r = 0.73$ was used for data collection. Completed and retrieved 284 copies of questionnaire were analyzed using frequency, percentage, and mean statistics. Results showed among others that Women rural farmers' participation in some community activities is limited due to socio-cultural practices; poor flow of information, timing and duration of community development activities, type of occupation of the participants, cultural and social norms are the challenges faced by rural farmers in community development participation. The study therefore recommended that there should be proper and adequate flow of information needed by rural farmers to participate in community development.

Keywords: Challenges, Participation, Rural Farmers, Community Development

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture is an important sector in the community and economic development and poverty alleviation drive of many countries. The role agriculture has played in the industrial growth and development of most of the industrialized countries in the world cannot be over emphasized. The importance of this sector is more pronounced in the developing countries including Nigeria where it is becoming the main thrust of national survival, employment and food (Muhammad-Lawal, Omotesho & Falola, 2009). Agriculture in Nigeria especially in Rivers State is the way of life of the rural people. Despite its declining importance as a contributor to the gross domestic product (GDP), agriculture still represents an important input to the national economy and to rural livelihoods in Nigeria (Stads, 2008).

Rural farmers' participation is an important factor for sustainable agriculture which eventually leads to community development. Rural farmers' participation issues are the areas of concern at national and local level (Subedi, 2008). Without participation, there are obviously no partnerships, no developments, and no programme (Aref, 2010). Therefore, a lack of participation in the decision to implement an agricultural policy can lead to failure in the agricultural development. In this study, participation is used with the involvement of farmers in decision making with the collaboration and interaction with agricultural organizations.

The word participation has been widely used and promoted in development programmes. Participation could be defined as a direct involvement of marginalized groups in a development process, which aims to build people's capabilities to have access to and control of resources, benefits and opportunities towards self-reliance and an improved quality of life. Participation in extension is the process of communication among men, women farmers and extension workers during which the farmers take the leading role to analyze their situation, to plan, implement and evaluate development activities. It is a way of helping the disadvantaged people to gain access to and have control over resources or services such as training, farmers' tools, inputs, information etc. needed to sustain and improve their livelihood (Subedi, 2008). Farmers' participation is considered necessary to get community support for development projects (Cole, 2007). Farmers' participation refers to peoples' engagement in activities within the rural. It plays an essential and long-standing role in promoting quality of life (Putnam, 2000).

World Bank recognized the lack of participation as a reason for failure of many development attempts in developing countries (World Bank, 1993). Without rural farmers' participation, there may obviously be no partnership, no development and no programme in the communities. Meanwhile, some scholars provided a typology of participation but they did not directly deal with community development (Leksakundilok, 2006). Arnstein (1969) examined the various participation programmes operated during the 1960s and found that most of them were insufficient to actually increase the power of average citizens to change community plans and programmes. Rural farmers' participation in community development is faced with some barriers. There are a number of reasons why active participation is hard to achieve in practice.

In rural areas in Rivers State of Nigeria, farmers' participation is constrained by a number of factors, including residents' lack of knowledge, flow of information, confidence, time and interest (Cole, 2006). Frequently, a lack of ownership, capital, skills, knowledge and resources all constrain the ability of rural farmers to fully control their participation in community development (Scheyvens, 2003). Kadir (1997) considers ignorance as the greatest barrier to farmers' participation but that the ignorance is not restricted to residents but also affects the planning machinery and bureaucracy vested with implementation. Active participation is then frequently constrained by a lack of information and knowledge. Knowledge of the decision-making processes is essential if farmers are to take an active part in agriculture planning that will bring about development in the communities (Cole, 2006). Aref (2010) also indicated some of the barriers of rural farmers' participation in the development of communities. These barriers include lack of knowledge, lack of ability to participate, lack of effective and strong government institutions, inadequate focus on human resource development and dependency on government and lack of authority in communities.

The following are some substantial factors hindering the active participation of rural farmers in the development of communities. Lund & Saito (2013) find that cultural and social norms hinder the active participation of the marginalized and pre-existing social structures reproduce and reinforce relations of domination and subordination between elites and non-elites. Moreover, poor flow of information between a development agency and the community can give local elites an opportunity to shape the participatory process to appropriate benefits for themselves (Mansuri & Rao, 2004). However, elite capture is not always detrimental. Although it may be a challenge to the active participation of the marginalized people mainly in decision-making process, the participation of hereditary leaders can have positive outcomes for communities (Mansuri & Rao, 2004). Gow and Vansant (1983) highlighted the different nature and background of elites. In this regard, elites are not homogeneous but can be diverse – economic, political, religious and so on. If there are conflicts among the elites, some may seek support for their actions from the larger local population and may tend to distribute the benefits and resources of the development programme to more people. Hence, this diversity among the elites themselves can be seen as an advantage for the programme and the local population. Moreover, such elites have networks and external linkages with government agencies so they can be a crucial player in asserting the community concerns in public spheres and draw resources into their community.

Timing and duration of community development activities is another important but neglected factor affecting participation in community development activities. This is an important reason for the self-exclusion of some villagers from community development activities because they have to work long hours to meet their livelihood needs. According to Chambers (1983), timing and duration of community development activities rules out people who work, people who have small children to put to bed or fed, people who are unable to justify spending hours outside the households. This is especially the case for the marginalized households which are engaged most of their time in livelihood activities and cannot spare time for community activities.

In relation to timing and duration of development activities, the type of occupation of the participants is another factor affecting their participation. Many people may have the will and interest to participate in community development activities but their occupation may not provide adequate opportunities to participate (Thomas, 1992). A study by Thomas (1992) in Indian rural communities found that poor and landless labourers who work for daily wages find it difficult to spare sufficient time for community development activities. However, it is not just the poor and landless people who do not have time to participate. In some instances, small farmers have less time to involve themselves in community development activities as their farm work demands a significant portion of their time (Awortwi, 2013). This is typically the case for areas where people are occupied with their farm activities for cultivation in the monsoon season, so it is very difficult for them to participate in community development activities during these times. Hence, this study tends to examine the challenges of participation of rural farmers in community development in Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. What demographic characteristics of rural farmers affect their participation in community development?
2. What are the challenges faced by rural farmers in community development participation?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The design is considered appropriate, because it is useful in gathering data about the belief, opinion, attitude, behaviour and records of events that can be analysed and interpreted to measure relationship between variables without any manipulations. The population comprised 954 members of registered rural farmers' cooperative societies in Obio/Akpor and Oyigbo LGAs of Rivers State. Proportionate sampling technique was used to select 286 respondents from the total population. This formed 30% of the members of registered rural farmers' cooperative societies in Obio/Akpor and Oyigbo LGAs of Rivers State. A validated self-developed research instrument tagged "Questionnaire on Challenges of Participation of Rural Farmers in Community Development (QCPRFCD) with reliability coefficient of 0.73 was used for data collection. The research instrument was divided into Sections A and B. Section 'A' dealt with the demographic data of the respondents, while Section 'B' elicited information on variable that was captured in the research question two (2). The questionnaire was designed on modified four-point Likert rating scale. The numerical rating of responses in the questionnaire was scored thus: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. Two hundred and eighty-six (286) copies of the instrument (questionnaire) were distributed but the completed and retrieved two hundred and eighty-four (284) copies were returned and used for the analysis with frequency and percentage for demographic characteristics of the respondents and mean (\bar{x}) statistics to answer the research questions. Criterion mean for taking decision was 2.5 (4+3+2+1 divided by 4 = 2.5). All items whose values are below 2.5 were rejected while those above 2.5 were accepted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: *What demographic characteristics of rural farmers affect their participation in community development?*

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	166	58%
	Female	118	42%
	Total	284	100
Age	18yrs – 28yrs	27	9%
	29yrs – 39yrs	77	27%
	40yrs - 50yrs	121	43%
	51yrs and above	59	21 %
	Total	284	100
Educational Qualification	No Formal Education	62	22%
	First Leaving Certificate	34	12%
	Secondary School Certificate	55	19.2%
	NCE/OND	63	22.2 %
	HND/First Degree	49	17.2%
	Master/PhD	21	7.4%
	Total	284	100
Types of Farm	Crop Farming	96	34%
	Animal Farming	75	26%
	Fish Farming	113	40%
	Total	284	100

Table 1 above revealed that 166 (58%) rural farmers were male while 118 (42%) were female. This implies that in the communities of Rivers State, male dominates the rural farming. The table also revealed that 27 (9%) of the total rural farmers were 18yrs to 28yrs old, 77 (27%) were 29yrs to 39yrs old, 121 (43%) were 40yrs to 50yrs, 59 (21%) were 51yrs and above. It is also shown in the table that 62 (22%) rural farmers have no formal education, 34 (12%) have first leaving certificate, 55 (19.2%) have secondary school certificate, 63 (22.2%) have NCE/OND, 49 (17.2%) have HND/First Degree while 21 (7.4 %) have Master/PhD. This implies that majority of the rural farmers have NCE/OND. The table on a final note revealed that 96 (34%) are involved in crop farming, 75 (26%) are into animal farming while 113 (40%) are into fish farming. This supports the findings of Akpabio (2007) who reported that the socio-cultural barrier that constrained participation was attributed to the fact that the majority of the respondents were male with only a few female participants. Women rural farmers’ participation in some community activities is limited due to socio-cultural practices.

Research Question 2: *What are the challenges faced by rural farmers in community development participation?*

Table 2: Mean analysis on the challenges faced by rural farmers in community development participation

S/N	Items	RESPONSE				Total	Mean (\bar{x})	Decision
		SA	A	D	SD			
5	Poor flow of information is a challenge faced by rural farmers in community development participation	70 (280)	207 (621)	7 (14)	0 (0)	284 (915)	3.22	Agree
6	Timing and duration of community development activities hinder the participation of rural farmers in community development	104 (416)	177 (531)	3 (6)	0 (0)	284 (953)	3.36	Agree
7	Type of occupation of the participants is a hindrance to participation in community development	167 (668)	113 (339)	4 (8)	0 (0)	284 (1015)	3.57	Agree
8	Cultural norms hinder the active participation of rural farmers in the participation of community development	100 (400)	171 (513)	5 (10)	2 (2)	284 (925)	3.32	Agree
9	Social norms hinder the active participation of rural farmers in the participation of community development	116 (464)	161 (483)	7 (14)	0 (0)	284 (961)	3.38	Agree
Grand Mean							3.37	

Table 2 shows that all the items have positive response rates, since their weighted mean are greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. This result implies that for item 5 - 9 with mean 3.22, 3.36, 3.57, 3.32 and 3.38, respondents agreed that poor flow of information is a challenge faced by rural farmers in community development participation, timing and duration of community development activities hinder the participation of rural farmers in community development, type of occupation of the participants is a hindrance to participation in community development, cultural norms hinder the active participation of rural farmers in the participation of community development, social norms hinder the active participation of rural farmers in the participation of community development. Nevertheless, the grand mean 3.37 affirm that poor flow of information, timing and duration of community development activities, type of occupation of the participants, cultural and social norms are the challenges faced by rural farmers in community development participation. This is in line with Lund & Saito (2013) who found that cultural and social norms hinder the active participation of the marginalized and pre-existing social structures reproduce and reinforce relations of domination and subordination between elites and non-elites. Moreover, poor flow of information between a development agency and the community can give local elites an opportunity to shape the participatory process to appropriate benefits for themselves (Mansuri & Rao, 2004). However, elite capture is not always detrimental.

According to Chambers (1983), timing and duration of community development activities rules out people who work, people who have small children to put to bed or fed, people who are unable to justify spending hours outside the households. A study by Thomas (1992) in Indian rural communities found that

poor and landless labourers who work for daily wages find it difficult to spare sufficient time for community development activities. However, it is not just the poor and landless people who do not have time to participate. In some instances, small farmers have less time to involve themselves in community development activities as their farm work demands a significant portion of their time (Awortwi, 2013). This is typically the case for areas where people are occupied with their farm activities for cultivation in the monsoon season, so it is very difficult for them to participate in community development activities during these times.

CONCLUSION

Community development relies heavily on people who are the real agents and catalysts of social change and improvement of their communities. For rural farmers to perform very well in their expected roles in the community, active participation is of utmost necessity. Therefore, to have them participate in the development of their communities, there is need for adequate flow of information, full involvement in decision making process, adequate knowledge of timing and duration of development programmes etc. It is assumed that when they are armed with these information, the decline in their community development participation will be reversed and a desired set of conditions will set in.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Efforts should be made by Government and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to motivate women rural farmers to participate in the development of communities.
2. There should be proper and adequate flow of information needed by rural farmers to participate in community development.

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