

**LEVEL OF RURAL WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN SELECTED AGRIBUSINESS VENTURES IN
ISIUKWUATO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ABIA STATE, NIGERIA.**

* **Nwachukwu, C. N. and Ibekwe, O.**

Department of Agribusiness and Management, College of Agricultural Economics, Rural Sociology and Extension,
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike, Abia State, Nigeria.
Corresponding author's email: chibuzornwachukwuh@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The study assessed the level of rural women's participation in selected agribusiness ventures in Isiukwuato local government area of Abia State, Nigeria. Primary data used for the study were collected with well structure questionnaire using the multi stage sampling technique. Eighty (80) respondents were selected for the study. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics like frequencies, percentages and mean. The result on the types ventures engaged in by rural women shows that majority of the rural women engaged in marketing of farm produce such as cassava (90.00%), maize (100.00%), cassava processing (90.00%) cassava production (86.25%), vegetable production (96.25%) and maize production (100.00%). The rural women participated highly in marketing of cassava (\bar{X} = 4.29), maize (\bar{X} = 4.10), oil palm processing (\bar{X} = 3.61), cassava processing (\bar{X} = 4.26) cassava, vegetable and maize production (\bar{X} = 4.71, \bar{X} = 3.99 and \bar{X} = 4.21) respectively. A grand mean of 3.11 shows that the women in the study area participated reasonably in the selected agribusiness ventures evaluated. The study recommended that more women should be trained as agro dealers as this allows companies have presence in remote areas. Rural women's access to finance should also be facilitated.

Keywords; Rural women, participation, agribusiness, ventures.

INTRODUCTION

Agribusiness is a term for the different types of businesses involved in the production of food. Its scope is wide ranging from farming seed supply, agrochemicals supply, farm machinery supply, whole sale and distributional strategies, processing, storage and other marketing activities and retail sales Kumari and Reddy (2010). It can be classified into three main sectors namely; input sector, which consists of firms whose outputs are used in the production of crops, livestock, fishes and tree plants. It covers agrochemical input supply, feed, seeds and seedling supply, farm machinery and farm equipment supply etc. Farm production sector, which comprises the actual production of crops and animals, fishery and forestry products. This sector is especially important for the

growth of other sectors of agribusiness. Output sector, which is the final sector is relatively large in nature and its scope includes food processing, preservation, milling of farm sector output, the exportation of both primary and secondary agribusiness output. Kumari and Reddy (2010). As an area of practical application, agribusiness is as old as farming itself Nwachukwu (2012).

The Nigerian economy predominantly agrarian has women as the key players in the business of agriculture especially in rural communities. Damisa *et al*(2007). Nigerian women account for 75% of farming population in Nigeria, working as both farm managers and suppliers of labor FMARD (2010). These activities ranges from land clearing, tilling, planting, weeding, fertilizer/ manure application, harvesting, to food processing, threshing, winnowing, milling, transportation, marketing and livestock management (Saito and Spurling 1992: Damisa *et al* (2007). Interestingly, Agada and Ameh (2017) : World Bank (2003), agreed that about 60% of food produced in Nigeria is from the women with 60-80% labor force while, Banji and Okuade (2005) attributed 80% of food produced in Nigeria to women with 60% labor force, 10% income and 1% farm asset. Furthermore, Obasi (2005) opined that rural women farmers in Nigeria performed about 70% or more of all agricultural food processing and utilization activities and over 60% of storage and marketing operations. These show that indeed rural women are the backbone of food production in Nigeria. However, aside crop production, rural women in Nigeria venture into other aspects of agriculture like fisheries, poultry as well as sheep and goat rearing.(Dessie and Ogle 2001) added that 60% of rural families kept poultry with women being the major managers and owners but had limited control on cash income from sales. FAO(2007) reported that women were responsible for poultry and livestock as well as crop production in developing countries. Generally, women are rarely connected with agricultural export crops such as cocoa, rubber, cotton, but rather involved with the production of food crops such as maize, cowpea, melon, pepper, cassava and vegetables. In some cases women participate in small scale animal production including small ruminants, poultry and aquaculture. Despite the considerable participation, involvement and rendering of diverse activities contribution, women's role in agricultural

production has often been underestimated or, ignored (International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), 2007).

Sadly, the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics in 2007 observed that 20098 men accessed loans compared to 8550 women. In Nigeria, women farmers receive less than 10% of credit offered to small scale farmers. Women farmers are deterred from applying for formal loans because of the complexity of the administrative process, unsuitable loan sizes and credit rates. Sahel (2014) noted that women participation in farmer training was low due to lack of awareness, society barriers and transport facilities. Also, due to poor financing, women are unable to access agricultural inputs such as improved seedlings and fertilizer. British council (2012) added that Nigerian women generally own less land due to traditional authority. In the North East, 4% of land is owned by women, about 10% in the South East and South South. This lack of ownership significantly reduces the chances of women's access to financing because of the need for collateral. According to FLA (2014), small scale women farmers continue to face specific constraints that limit their contributions, including limited access to hired labor, equipments, technology, training, finance and markets. Restrictions on land ownership and tenure, sexual harassment and violence, household, community and care responsibilities which are essential to rural well being Fan *et al* (2013). Moreover, women traditionally participate in value chain nodes with lower economic returns than men. Women's participation in the production of a specific crop is often times related to the crops' assumed value and is thereby usually limited to local consumption and the local market. Men are more likely to participate in export commodities or in markets where there is greater return, Feed the Future (2014). Rural women face the barriers of being reminded that their place is in the kitchen and child bearing as well as the belief that any investment on women in education is a wasted venture (Eze, 2006). Women in the rural area were not seen as being able to make any meaningful economic contribution and as such they were denied loan facilities. This is because of some level of gender bias against women in the area of credit supply from financial institutions (Eze and Ugochukwu, 2004). Lawson (2008) reported that, generally, rural women face more difficulties than men do. They spend long hours collecting firewood and doing domestic chores. The time and labour expended this way exhaust them and limits their ability to engage in other productive and income generating activities (agriculture inclusive). The health condition of the rural women is affected due to carrying heavy load of

firewood and water and from cooking over smoky fires. It is against this background that this study sought to ascertain the agribusiness ventures involved in by rural women in Isiukwuato Local Government Area of Abia State and determine their level of participation in those selected agribusiness ventures. The hypothesis of the study was that the level of participation of rural women in Agribusiness ventures is significant.

METHODOLOGY

Area of Study

The study was conducted in Isiukwuato Local Government Area of Abia State in South-Eastern Nigeria. The Local Government is made up of several communities such as Ohaise, Ogudu-Asa, Imenyi, Ezere, Uturu, Umunnekwu, Mbagwu, Isu- Amawu, and Ndiagidi, with their headquarters in Mbalano Imenyi. The coordinates of Isiukwuato are Latitude: 5 degrees 32' N and 5 degrees 53' N, longitude: 7 degrees 29' E and 7 degrees 48' E of the Greenwich Meridian and it has a land Area of 144.000 square kilometres. Isiukwuato is characterized by heavy rainfall of about seven (7) months in the year (April to October with two weeks' dry spell in August (Break). The harmattan winds blows across the area between November and February. The LGA falls within the forest belt region of Nigeria while the daily temperature ranges between 27°C and 36°C (Abia State Planning Commission, 2006). The major crops grown are palm oil, cashew, yam, cassava, vegetables etc. including rearing of livestock. The Local Government Area was purposively chosen because it is one of the major food producing areas in Abia State and majority of its agribusiness ventures such as rearing of animals, processing of cassava, palm oil etc are actively done by women. Multi – stage sampling technique was used in the selection of respondents for the study. In the first stage five (5) autonomous communities were randomly selected from the Local Government Area. In the second stage, two (2) villages were randomly selected from each of the five (5) autonomous communities. Finally in the last stage, eight (8) rural women were randomly selected, this gave a total sample size of eighty (80) respondents. Primary data were used for the study. These data were collected via the administration of well-structured questionnaire. These questionnaire were pre-tested to ensure it captured the pieces of information needed. Data were analyzed using statistical tools like frequencies, percentages and mean.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**Selected Agribusiness Ventures Engaged in by the Rural Women in Isuikwuato LGA of Abia State****Table 1: Distribution of rural women according to the type of selected agribusiness Venture engaged in**

Agri-Business Venture Involved By Rural Women	Frequency	Percentages (%)
FARM INPUTS		
Fertilizer, Agro-Chemicals and Improved Seeds	13	16.25
Farm tools	17	21.25
Poultry Feeds and Accessories	39	48.75
MARKETING OF FARM PRODUCE		
Cassava	72	90.00
Maize	80	100.00
Yam	45	56.25
Poultry products	43	53.75
FOOD PROCESSING		
Oil palm	29	36.25
Cassava	72	90.00
Maize	36	45.00
Beans	24	30.00
Rice	12	15.00
FOODCROP/LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION		
Cassava	69	86.25
Vegetables	77	96.25
Maize	80	100.00
Rice	12	15.00
Poultry	39	48.75

Source: Field Survey, 2019

*Multiple responses recorded

The distribution of the rural women according to types of selected agribusiness ventures engaged in, in the study area is presented in Table 1. The Table shows that in the area of farm inputs majority of the rural women engaged in marketing of poultry feeds and accessories (48.75%), farm tools (21.25%), fertilizers and agrochemicals (16.25%). Enabling women as agro dealers and agents can increase the availability of products ,improve women' s access to inputs and the connection of farmers with output markets (IFC,2016). Majority of the rural women were involved in the marketing of maize (100.00%), cassava (90.00%) and a good proportion (56.25%) and(53.75%) of the rural women engaged in marketing of yam and poultry products .This is evident by the number of women trading in our local markets on a daily basis. This corroborates the findings of Sahel (2014) that women are more active on the retail side and very visible in open air markets. The table also shows that majority of the rural women in the study area are engaged in cassava production (86.25%), vegetable production (96.25%) maize (100.00%)and rice production (15.00%) This implies the rural women in the study area engaged themselves mainly in the production of food crops. This agrees with the findings of Agada and Ameh (2017) that rural women in Nigeria grew mainly subsistence food crops. Sahel(2014) also observed that

rural women in Nigeria are more involved in the production of food crops such as maize, cowpea, melon, pepper, cassava and vegetables. The women (48.75%) also reared birds/ poultry. In the area of processing of farm products, the rural women in the study area also involved in oil palm (36.25%), cassava (90.00%),maize (45.00%), beans (30.00%), and rice processing (15.00%). IFC(2016) stated that women's role are highly varied but often play crucial roles in processing, determining the quality of final output.

Participation in Various Agribusiness Ventures by Rural Women**Table 2: Level of participation in agribusiness ventures by rural women**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	Total	Mean
FARM INPUTS							
Fertilizer, Agro-Chemicals and Improved Seeds	23(23)	20(40)	16(48)	14 (56)	7(35)	202	2.53
Farm tools	35(35)	23(26)	7(21)	9(36)	6(30)	148	1.85
Poultry Feeds and Accessories	27(27)	25(50)	1(3)	14(56)	1(5)	138	1.73
MARKETING OF FARM PRODUCE							
Cassava	-	7(14)	-	36(144)	37(185)	343	4.29
Maize	-	7(14)	11(33)	29(116)	33 (165)	328	4.10
Yam	37(37)	3(6)	7(21)	15(60)	18(90)	214	2.68
Poultry products (egg)	14(14)	17(34)	19(57)	12 (36)	18(90)	231	2.89
FOOD PROCESSING							
Oil palm	3(3)	10(20)	25(75)	19(76)	23(115)	289	3.61
Cassava	-	3(6)	12(36)	26(104)	39(195)	341	4.26
Maize	35(35)	5 (10)	13(39)	14(56)	13(65)	205	2.56
Beans	14(14)	29(58)	13(39)	13 (52)	11 (55)	218	2.73
Rice	28(28)	33(66)	11(33)	5 (20)	2(10)	157	1.96
FOOD PRODUCTION							
Cassava	0(0)	7 (14)	11(33)	30(120)	42(210)	377	4.71
Vegetables	2(2)	7(14)	7(21)	38 (152)	26 (130)	319	3.99
Maize	2 (2)	4(8)	8(24)	27(108)	39(195)	337	4.21
Rice	30 (30)	33(66)	9(27)	8 (32)	-	155	1.94
Poultry	19(19)	20(40)	8(24)	15(60)	18(90)	233	2.91
Grand mean							3.11

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Figures in parenthesis = Likert nominal score

Decision Rule: mean score ≥ 3.0 = participated while < 3.0 = not participated

The participation level of rural women in the selected agribusiness ventures is presented in Table 2. The Table shows that rural women participated highly in marketing of cassava ($\bar{X} = 4.29$) and maize ($\bar{X} = 4.10$). The Table also revealed that rural women are involved in oil palm processing ($\bar{X} = 3.61$) and cassava processing ($\bar{X} = 4.26$). The Table further shows that rural women are highly involved in cassava, vegetable and maize production ($\bar{X} = 4.71$, $\bar{X} = 3.99$ and $\bar{X} = 4.21$). This conformed with the findings of Job and Mary (2017) which indicated that women were about twice sufficiently involved in cassava production and on farm processing activities. IFC (2016) observed that women play significant roles in production and post-harvest processing that are often key determinants of

the size and quality of the final commodity produced. Obasi (2005) reported that 70% or more of all agricultural food processing was performed by rural women. A grand mean of 3.11 shows that rural women in the study area participated to a reasonable extent in the selected agribusiness ventures which is in line with *a priori* expectation. However, the result shows that there were still gaps in participation of rural women in farm input supply as the rural women in the study area did not actively participate in such ventures, this could be due to huge capital required to set up such businesses and also the technical know how needed in running them.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Having assessed the level of participation of rural women in selected agribusiness ventures in Isiukwuato Local Government area of Abia State, Nigeria, there is need to encourage rural women farmers to achieve self sufficiency as a state and nation at large. As shown by the results women in the study area involved themselves in all the agribusiness ventures selected, but their level of participation was obviously high in cassava, vegetables and maize production, cassava and maize marketing, oil palm and cassava processing. Women should be trained as agro dealers and supported financially to open agro dealerships. This will allow companies have presence in rural areas and likely increase brand loyalty due to correct usage, creating product demand and increased income for the women. The community – based agriculture and rural development project of the federal government should reach out to women in all states of the federation to empower them through improved farming practices in order to increase yield and family income. This will invariably increase participation in other agribusiness ventures.

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