

Training Needs of Rural Women in Agriculture for Increased Crop Production in Ebonyi State

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ABSTRACT: *The study focused on the Training needs of Rural Women in Agriculture for increased Crop Production in Ebonyi State. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. Survey research design was adopted. The population for the study was 240 which comprised 150 registered female farmers and 90 extension agents in the three Agricultural Zones in the State. There was no sampling due to the manageable size of the population. Structured questionnaire containing a total of 21 items was the instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was validated by three experts, two in Agricultural Education and one in Measurement and Evaluation all in Faculty of Education Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient method. A correlation of 0.76 was obtained. A total of 240 copies of the questionnaire were distributed by the researcher and three research assistants. All the 240 copies of the questionnaire distributed were properly filled and used for data analysis. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the data collected while t- test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance at the appropriate degree of freedom. Findings among others was that women have difficulties in accessing farmland, improved seeds, chemicals for weed, pests and diseases control, Low level of basic education, lack of female extension agents to train them and it was recommended among others that land allocation should be reviewed to enable women have land for farming. They should be an organized training programme for women farmers by Ebonyi State Agricultural Development project.*

KEYWORDS: training needs, rural women, agriculture, crop production, Ebonyi State

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture plays a significant role in the process of providing populations with food, fibre and raw materials for local and other industries. When agricultural products are properly harnessed it

will generate or increase food security. The avenue through which the potential of agriculture is unleashed to become beneficial to the wellbeing of the people is through food production (Bhargava, 2008) in (Ojo & Adeboye, 2012). However, the primary aim of agriculture is to produce food. Food is the most important factor influencing the standard of living of a nation, and the attempt to produce enough food to feed the growing population has led to gigantic strides being made in the scientific development of agriculture. Thus, leading to increased food production and better processing and storage of food by the use of machinery and chemical (Mgbada, 2017).

Agricultural science is the art and science or management that deals with the cultivation of crops and rearing of animals for man's use. In other words, it is a deliberate effort made by man to till the soil, cultivate crops and rear animals for food and other purposes. It also involves the sales of produce from agriculture, because production is not complete until the produce gets to the final consumers (Iwena, 2015). Agricultural processes include the production, processing, packaging, storing, marketing and transportation of crops and animals and their products (Aneke, 2014).

In developing country like Nigeria, the importance of agriculture cannot be over emphasized as it creates employment opportunities for about 60-70% of the population directly or indirectly through agro-based industries, especially women thereby reducing unemployment, poverty etc. and agriculture speeds up development and boost economic growth of any country. Arguably, the most important aspect of agriculture is that, it is the reliable source of food supply and therefore should not be neglected. Countries of the world that neglect agriculture suffer malnutrition and severe food insecurity. On this note, agricultural production needs to be boosted especially in Nigeria. Boosting agricultural production involves the entire circle of agriculture from pre-planting, planting, post-planting, harvesting activities, storage, processing, packaging and serving it on individuals (Sahu & Das, 2015). Hence, boosting agricultural production is seen as one of the powerful tools against poverty. Meanwhile, food production cannot be completed without the involvement of rural women who constitute large number of farming population in Nigeria (Food and Agricultural Organization, 2012).

Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 2012) stated that men have left the bulk of agricultural work to women, leaving to the cities for more lucrative jobs. Women produce more than 50 percent of the food grown worldwide (FAO 2022). In developing countries, women in rural areas face serious discrimination. For instance, in Bangladesh and elsewhere the number of women appear to be on the increase. Since growing poverty in rural areas has undermined traditional, social, bond, women are usually left entirely to their own devices, with little or no access to land, they depend on casual labour and earn very little. Often, rural women farm on fragmented plots of non-arable or infertile land (Ja Zairy 1992 in Mgbada, 2010). Mgbada further noted that their access to inputs, extension training and credit is poor and this limit their ability to take advantage of the commercialization of Agriculture. Lombin (1994) reported that the rural women are indispensable to the survival of the society and are at the forefront of agricultural activities in the rural areas.

Women generally constitute a substantial part of the work force in many developing countries and also 43% of the global agricultural labour force, (Creswell, (2003) in Udemezue & Odia (2021). The roles of rural women in agriculture vary from region to region, country to country. For instance, women in Africa in particular play a major role in sorting, weeding, fertilizer application, harvesting, food processing, transportation and marketing FAO (1998) in Okoli (2011). Men are mainly responsible for clearing and preparing the field and ploughing as well as participating to a greater or lesser degree in other agricultural tasks along with women. Women are almost entirely responsible for virtually all the activities like ridging, planting, weeding, harvesting, transportation, sorting, processing, marketing and domestic chores which provides them with additional income earning opportunity to enhance their ability to contribute to household food security (Mgbako, 2018).

Unfortunately, women generally own less land due to traditional authority in Africa. Their access to land is dependent on their husbands or fathers. According to the 2012 gender report in Nigeria by the British council, women own 4% of land in the North East and over 10% of land in the South East. South South has less than 10% of land allocated to women (Karl, 2015). Rural women face lots of discrimination both in seeking education, land for cropping and training. They face similar challenges at home within the household, yet women are mostly responsible for preparing meals and taking care of the children. However, they are often deprived access to agricultural assets, inputs and services when compared to men. Analysts, have suggested that if women were to have equal access as men to productive resources such as land, yield would increase by 20% to 50%, boosting the total agricultural output by 2.5% to 4% in developing countries. Despite the women's important contributions to the agricultural sector, women are mainly involved in arduous manual labour in farming and food processing using low levels of technology, with low yields, productivity and high wastage rates, they lack access to land and have limited access to agricultural services.

Furthermore, rural women tend to be disadvantaged when compared to men because they have less capital to invest, cannot obtain credit and seldom engage in production and marketing of lucrative cash crops such as cocoa which tend to be male preserve. These factors underscore the importance of assisting women gain access to capital, land, training as well as services and improved skills to enhance their productivity and income (Hudges, 2012). According to (Abalu, 2018) the access of women to agricultural training, inputs and technologies is constrained by their lack of access to credits, lack of entrepreneurial skills, membership in rural organizations, co-operative societies as well as development programmes. Others include lack of attention to the needs of the rural women farmers in terms of crops and livestock, lack of awareness to the different gender roles and needs in regarding the curricula and training of extension agents who could relate to the farmers which resulted in women exclusion from training and extension services. There is need for increased number of women extension workers to carry out training of rural women and identify the specific needs of women farmers using different means such as individual, group and

mass media methods to disseminate new innovations. The exclusion of women from training affects their acquisition of skills for improved agricultural productivity.

Training equips women farmers with the necessary skills so that they can perform better in their agricultural roles successfully. Blumbery (1986) in Okoli, (2011) revealed that some of the reasons why extension information bypass women farmers include, cultural, traditional and religious values, which viewed close interaction of men and women very negatively and prevents male agents from working with female farmers. It is known that most of the women farmers in the rural areas are illiterate and this gap could be bridged by organizing seminar, workshops, group meeting, office/home visits among others (Mgbada 2017).

They need finance, however, most of the women farmers in Ebonyi State are not literate enough to the extent of sensitizing government agencies for financial assistance and majority of them have less exposure to agricultural training and would be difficult for women farmers to change their trend of production beyond its present peasantry level (Obika 2000 in Okolie 2011). The effects of little or no training and extension agent involvement in educating and creating awareness in new innovations in agricultural production and consequent lack of skills in modern agriculture will continue to widen the food insecurity in the state which increase the rate of food shortages.

Since women are directly involved in different farm operations, and that they have major contributions in increased food production which led to agricultural development of any nation, better training opportunity need to be made available to rural women in order to improve their knowledge on improved agricultural practices and strengthen their leadership skills and abilities.

Against this background, the study tends to determine the training needs of rural women in agriculture for increased crop production in Ebonyi State.

Statement of the problem

Rural women face lots of discrimination both in seeking education and land for cropping and training. They generally own less land due to traditional authority (Karl, 2015). Their access to land is dependent on their husbands and father. Yet, women are the major food producers in Africa but development policies and programmes have not given sufficient attention to their needs to improve their food productivity without placing disproportionate burden on them. They are involved in ensuring adequate land use, as well as food production, animal husbandry, processing, distribution and marketing of agricultural products. Despite the dominant and important roles women play in farming activities in Nigeria. They are not given attention in the area of training and visitation by extension agents with improved technologies. Women need better access to technical information and assistance on improving the quality and safety of products as well as skills to improve their production. The denial to the training of rural women will make them to use manual and poor method to farm, hence reducing the quality and quantity of food they would have

been producing, hence, inadequate food for the fast growing population of Nigeria. This then calls for the relevance of addressing the training needs of rural women in agricultural development for increased food production in Ebonyi State.

Purpose of Study

The main purpose of the study was to determine the training needs of rural women in Agriculture for increased crop production in Ebonyi State.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the training needs required by rural women farmers for increased crop production in Ebonyi State.
2. Identify ways to improve in training needs of rural women farmers for increased crop production in Ebonyi State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the training needs required by rural women farmers for increased crop production in Ebonyi State.
2. What are the ways to improve in training needs of rural women farmers for increased crop production in Ebonyi State.

Hypotheses

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

- Ho₁: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of rural women farmers and extension agents on the training needs required by rural women farmers for increased crop production in Ebonyi State.
- Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the mean rating of rural women farmers and extension agents on the ways to improve in training needs of rural women farmers for increased crop production in Ebonyi State.

METHOD

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. This design according to Alio (2008) and Nworgu (2015) is one in which a group of people or items are studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group. The design was used in order to collect the opinion of the respondents on the training needs of rural women in Agriculture for increased crop production in Ebonyi State. The population of the study was 150 rural women farmers and 90 Extension Agents in Ebonyi State. There was no sampling due to the manageable size of the population. Source; Agricultural Development Project Ebonyi State (2023).

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher based on the reviewed literature. The instrument contained 21 items grouped into two sections according to the two research questions that guided the study. The items of the questionnaire were structured in four points response options of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with weighted numerical values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instrument was face validated by three experts, two in Agricultural Education, Department of Technology and Vocational Education and one in Measurement and Evaluation, Department of Science and Computer Education, all from Enugu State University of Science and Technology. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha which yielded 0.76 indicating that the instrument was reliable for data collection.

The questionnaire was distributed by the researcher with the help of two trained research assistants. The copies of the distributed questionnaire were collected on the spot to avoid bias and possible losses. The entire 240 copies were properly filled and was collected for data analysis, thus representing 100 percent return rate. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions and t-test statistics was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The decision of the mean was based on the principle of upper and lower limit of the mean: -

Strongly Agree	3.50 – 4.00
Agree	2.50 – 3.49
Disagree	1.50 – 2.49
Strongly Disagree	1.00 – 1.49

The standard deviation was used to ascertain the deviation from the mean of the responses obtained from the respondents. The t-test result was based on the t-table value and t-calculated values. When the t-calculated value is more than the critical value, the null hypothesis was significant and when the t-calculated is less than the t-table value, the null hypothesis was not significant, and therefore, should not be rejected.

RESULTS

The results obtained from data analysis were presented in Table one to six below based on the research questions that guided the study, and the null hypotheses tested for the study as follows;

Research Question 1

What are the training needs required by rural women farmers for increased crop production in Ebonyi State?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation ratings on the training needs required by rural women farmers for increased crop production in Ebonyi State.

S/N	Training Needs Required by Rural Women Farmers in Crop Production Includes;	Women Farmers N = 150		Extension Agents N =90		Overall		Decision
		\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	X	SD	
1	Sourcing for improved seeds or varieties of seeds.	2.75	0.96	2.83	0.83	2.79	0.99	Agreed
2	Proper tillage practices.	2.81	1.01	3.17	0.81	2.99	0.92	Agreed
3	utilization of cultural practices.	2.57	1.04	2.96	0.94	2.76	0.99	Agreed
4	Maintaining plant population with appropriate spacing.	2.85	1.04	3.01	0.90	2.93	0.97	Agreed
5	Better intercrop method with cover crops.	2.77	0.99	2.83	0.87	2.80	0.93	Agreed
6	Using appropriate fertilizers for different crops.	2.56	1.01	2.92	0.97	2.74	0.99	Agreed
7	Developing skills on the use of machines and other equipment.	2.65	1.08	3.11	0.78	2.88	0.93	Agreed
8	Educating farmers on crop protection.	2.85	0.97	2.99	0.95	2.92	0.96	Agreed
9	Training farmers on crop processing and storage.	2.61	1.08	2.72	1.10	2.66	1.09	Agreed
10	Training farmers on timely harvesting of crops.	2.81	1.02	3.21	0.72	3.01	0.87	Agreed
11	Training farmers on marketing and crop distribution channels.	3.06	1.02	2.98	0.87	3.02	0.95	Agreed
Grand Mean/Standard Deviation		2.75	1.02	2.98	0.89	2.86	0.95	Agreed

The data analysis presented in Table one above shows that the mean rating of the respondents to the items ranges from 2.66 to 3.02 indicating that respondents agree to the statements in the items as training needs required by rural women farmers. The Table show that the respondents agreed on all the 11 items with respect to training needs required by rural women farmers for increased crop production in Ebonyi State. The low standard deviation showed that the respondents have consensus opinion as the mean deviation is not wide.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of rural women farmers and extension agents on the training needs required by rural women farmers for increased crop production in Ebonyi State.

Table 2: Summary of t-test analysis in the mean ratings of rural women farmers and extension agents on training needs required by rural women farmers for increased crop production.

	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Equal variances assumed	-.230	.130	-1.772	238.000	.078	Not Significant
Equal variances not assumed	-.230	.125	-1.833	207.556	.068	

The result of the t test analysis shows that the t value at 0.05 level of significance is -1.772 which was not significant at 0.078. Since the significant value of 0.078 is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis was not rejected. Hence, there was no significant difference between the mean response of rural women farmers and extension agents with respect to training needs of rural women farmers for increased crop production in Ebonyi State.

Research Question 2

What are the ways to improve in training needs of rural women farmers for increased crop production in Ebonyi State?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation ratings on the ways to improve in training needs of rural women farmers for increased crop production in Ebonyi State.

S/N	The ways to improve in Training needs of Rural Women Farmers in Crop Production;	Women Farmers N = 150		Extension Agents N 90		Overall		Decision
		\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	\bar{X}	SD	
12	Training/Promoting the cultivation of high valuable and cash crops to women farmers	2.93	0.97	3.10	0.87	3.01	0.92	Agreed
13	Strengthen women's land right	2.87	1.00	3.30	0.71	3.08	0.86	Agreed
14	Improve the education levels of rural women farmers by extension workers	2.81	0.94	2.91	1.05	2.86	1.00	Agreed
15	Training of exercises of farm bookkeeping and record keeping	2.96	1.08	2.99	0.91	2.97	0.99	Agreed
16	Eresourcesnsure equitable access to productive	2.71	1.15	3.09	1.04	2.90	1.10	Agreed
17		2.97	0.99	2.69	0.96	2.83	0.97	Agreed

18	Women don't have access to farm inputs such as improved seed, fertilizer and chemicals.	2.57	1.05	2.77	0.92	2.68	0.98	Agreed
19	Illiteracy of some rural women farmers.	3.03	0.73	2.86	1.10	2.94	1.06	Agreed
20	Training on access to labour saving equipment.	2.94	0.91	2.76	1.20	2.85	0.97	Agreed
21	Training on technology/skills for processing and storage of farm produce	3.08	0.77	2.59	1.16	2.83		Agreed
Grand Mean/Standard Deviation		2.89	0.10	2.90	0.99	2.90	0.98	Agreed

The result presented in Table 3 shows that the mean rating of the respondents ranges from 2.68 to 3.08 indicating agreed. This shows that the respondents agree on the ten items as the constraints to training needs of rural women in crop production for increased food production in Ebonyi State. The grand mean of 2.90 further shows agreed. The low standard deviation of 0.98 indicates that the opinion of the respondents did not differ remarkably on the mean deviations.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of women farmers and extension agents on the constraints of training of rural women farmers on crop production for increased crop production in Ebonyi State.

Table 4: Summary of t-test analysis in the mean ratings of women farmers and extension agents on the constraints on training of rural women farmers in crop production for increased food production.

	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	T	df		Sig. (2-tailed)	Decision
Equal variances assumed	-.010	.081	-.123	238.000		.902	Not Significant
Equal variances not assumed	-.010	.105	-.096	90.091		.924	

The result of the t test analysis shows that the t value at 0.05 level of significance is -0.123 which was not significant at 0.902. Since that the significant value of 0.902 is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis was accepted. Hence, there was no significant difference between the mean response of rural women farmers and extension agents with respect to constraints to training of rural women farmers on crop production for increased food production in Ebonyi State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of the study in respect to the training required by rural women farmers in crop production for increased food production in Ebonyi State showed that all the items regarding training needs of women in crop production are needed. Some of the identified training needs in crop production for increased food production are; training on sourcing improved seeds or varieties, proper tillage practices, use of better cultural practices, maintaining plant population with appropriate spacing, ability to intercrop with cover crops, using appropriate fertilizers for different crops, developing skill on the use of machines and other equipment, educating farmers on crop protection, processing crops appropriately and appropriate storage techniques, skills in timely harvesting of crops and identifying of marketing/distribution channels.

The finding of the study is in line with Obika, (2011) who stated that women farmers have been observed to have less exposure to agricultural training of any kind in crop production and agricultural financing which contributed to their limited involvement in agriculture. He further stated that the effects of little or no training of women in agricultural production and lack of skill in modern agriculture will continue to widen the food insecurity in the nation and increase importation. The result of the study showed no significant difference in the mean rating of women farmers and extension agents on the training needs of rural women farmers on crop production for increased food production.

The findings of the study in respect to research question two showed that all the ten items on constraints on training of rural women farmers on crop production for increased food production in Ebonyi State. Among the constraints identified in the study were, difficulty in accessing land, poor access to agricultural information related to their needs, inadequate provision of training on the relevant skills needed by rural women, absence of female extension agents, poor institutional support eg N.G.O's, poor access to credit facilities, women don't have access to farm inputs like seeds/fertilizers, illiteracy of some women farmers, poor access to labour saving equipment, inadequate processing and storage facilities. The findings of the study showed that there is need for increase in number of women extension agents as they have major role in training of rural women farmers in Ebonyi State. The finding of the study is supported by The Plan of Action for Women in Development (1996-2001) which showed that women received only 5% of all agricultural extension services including training worldwide. He further stated that such lack of access to information and training weakens their abilities to maintain the sustainable use of resources.

The result of the study showed that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of women farmers and extension agents on the constraints on training of rural women farmers on crop production for increased food production.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concludes that women farmers experience lots of challenges ranging from difficulty in accessing land, lack of training, low level of basic education and absence of female extension agents etc. These factors affect the acquisition of skills and adoption of agricultural innovations by rural women for effective crop production. Therefore, women farmers need training on the innovations area of agriculture such as use of improved seed utilization, use of machines to reduce drudgery, use of chemicals in controlling weeds, pests and diseases. Further, women farmers need access to training via different extension agents especially mass media that can reach many women farmers at a time. This will give them more opportunities to be involved in crop production like their male counterparts. Agricultural Development Project (ADP) and Non-governmental organization (NGOs) have great role to play in ensuring that women farmers are properly trained in all aspect including skill acquisition and access to financial assistance for increased food production in Ebonyi State.

Recommendations

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

1. Government should determine on means of acquiring farmland by rural women so as to give equal opportunities to both male and female farmers in Ebonyi State.
2. Women should be trained to obtain information about sourcing and accessing loan, grant and subsidy from financial institutions or government.
3. Education programme where the extension agents would reach rural women farmers by Ebonyi State Agricultural Development Project (EBADEP) should be put in place.
4. Female extension agents should be employed to train women farmers on identified areas of needs, advice and encourage them to adopt improved agricultural innovations.

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