

Women Farmers' Attitudes Towards Agricultural Extension Services in Southwestern Nigeria

Adesiji. G. B., Kehinde. F. B. and Omotesho, K. F.

Department of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development, University of Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria
E-mail: drgbolaadesiji@yahoo.com

Abstract

Women farmers play a vital role in food production and food security despite their normal engagement in domestic chores. However, their access to extension services has not been given adequate recognition by many interventions. The study examined the women farmers' attitudes towards agricultural extension services in southwestern Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling design was used to select 120 women farmers from Osun and Ondo states while Pearson correlation and Chi-square were used for data analysis. Results indicate that majority (62.5%) of the women farmers were within active age 36-50 years of age, married (72.5%) and received information from friends and neighbors (88.3%) and almost half (40.8%) had 11 to 15 years of farming experience. The result shows that women farmers were provided with less extension services as 49.2% had contact with extension agents once in a year. The majority (92.2%) of the respondents ranked bad road network as the major constraints facing extension services in the study area followed by male extension worker preference for male farmers (83.3%). Almost half of the respondent (45.0%) ranked lack of transportation as third most critical constraint while a minority (5.0%) ranked irregular service delivery. There was a significant relationship between the women farmers' attitude towards extension services rendered and their assessment of effectiveness of services ($r = 0.214$). It is recommended that government should improve on rural infrastructures like road and provide incentives for extension agencies and agents to increase the effectiveness of the extension services delivery in improving the livelihood of the poor farmers.

Keywords: Women farmers, attitudes, Extension services

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Rural women face serious challenges across the globe especially in the developing economies. The situation has been worse in developing countries generally, despite the existence of plans and policies for integrating women into the developing process (Rousan, 2007). This is the case for women farmers in Nigeria. In every region in Nigeria, women work as farmers and farm workers and about 70% of the population derive their means of livelihood from agriculture (NEEDS, 2004). Therefore, rural women farmers play a vital role in food production and food security. They account for 70% of agricultural workers, 80% of food producers, and 100% of those who process basic foodstuffs; and undertake from 60% to 90% of the marketing (Fabiya et al., 2007). However, in Nigeria and other developing countries, extension services had focused on men and their production needs. Extension education services is supposed to disseminate useful

information necessary for change, counsel farmers on how to make wise decision in farm management, and be responsible in disseminating agricultural technologies to farmers; linked research and farmers, interpreting research findings to farmers in order to bring about changes in knowledge, attitude and skills which multiplier effect is improvement in agricultural production (Oladele, 2004).

Sustainable food production is the first pillar of food security, with large percentage of rural women involved. It is often stated that women play a significant role in many agricultural activities and are responsible for more than half the world's food production (Damisa et al., 2007). Overall, they produce up to 60-80% of basic foodstuff and account for 50% of the total labour force engaged in agriculture (Otieno, 2001). Yet, despite this high percentage, widespread assumptions that men and not women make the key farm management decision have prevailed. As a result of this, agricultural extension service

in Nigeria have traditionally been focused on men and their farm production needs, while neglecting the female half of the production force. However, despite women's major role in the economy of many developing countries such as Nigeria, women farmers have been by and large neglected by existing extension system, receiving about 5%-7% of extension services, due to their limited control over assets and decisions and systemic biases that are evident in agricultural institution throughout Africa and much of the world (Rousan, 2005).

Information and innovation which are intended to improve agricultural production should be disseminated to farmers (male and female) and ultimately meet their needs, however, variations in information needs of women farmers and lack of adequate access to extension service in Nigeria exist and have been demonstrated for southwestern states in Nigeria (Banmeke and Olowu, 2005; Sabo, 2007). Also, studies have confirmed that women farmers in southwestern Nigeria have low knowledge and skills in performing various farm operations to increase agriculture production due to lack of access to extension services and available technologies (Ajayi et al., 2003; Adesoji et al., 2006). Although women have prominent role in agriculture, they do not receive adequate agricultural advice; have little access to modern technology that could benefit them in their activities. The foregoing necessitated the need to assess the women farmers' attitude towards agricultural extension services in Southwestern Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study was to examine the women farmers' attitudes towards agricultural extension services in South Western Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

1. identify the personal characteristics of rural women farmers in South Western Nigeria
2. access the source of information available to the women farmers
3. examine the constraints facing extension services delivery in the study area
4. determine the attitude of farmers towards the extension services rendered by extension agents in south western Nigeria

METHODOLOGY

Southwestern Nigeria comprises of six states which are Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Oyo, Ekiti and Ondo states. Out of these states, Ondo and Osun states were randomly selected through simple

random sampling technique. From these two states, four were randomly selected. Three villages were thereafter selected from each of the two local governments from each state. From each village, ten women farmers were randomly selected giving a total of 120 respondents. Data was collected through interview schedule involving meeting the respondent one after the other to obtain information on extension services rendered to women farmers. Variables measured include farmers' attitude towards the extension services provided, frequency of contact/access to extension services, method of extension services delivery and sources of information available to women. Respondents' attitudes towards extension services was measured using five- point scale with strongly disagreed, disagreed undecided, agreed and strongly agreed and were scored as 1, 2,3,4 and 5 respectively for all negative statements and in reverse order for all positive statements. Mean scores for each statement were calculated to categorise respondents to favorable and unfavourable attitudinal dispositions. . Data collected were subjected to statistical analyses using frequency, percentage, Pearson correlation and Chi-Square.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women farmers' personal and socio-economic characteristics

Table 1 shows data on the personal characteristics of women farmers. Results indicate that majority of women farmers (72.5%) were married with 62.5% falling within age range of 36-50 years. More than half (51.7%) were Christian while almost half (45.8%) had primary education. More than one-third of the respondents (40.8%) had 11- 15 years of practical farming experience. Almost half of the respondent (49.2%) had contacts with extension agents once in a year. This implies that women farmers have limited contact with extension agents. Regular access to extension agent can effectively change their impression and attitudes to the extension services and subsequently innovation being promoted. Of all the 120 women farmers' interview only 6.7% of them obtained information from extension agents, 88.3% depended on their husband/ friends and neighbor. This confirms the findings of and Rezvanfa *et al.*, 2007, Yahaya (2002), Tologbonse *et al.* (2006) that rural households depend on friends and neighbors for information.

Table 1: Personal characteristics of women farmers

	Freq	Percent
Marital status		
Single	2	1.7
Married	87	72.5
Widowed	28	23.3
Divorced	1	0.8
Separated	2	1.7
Age(year)		
Below 35	22	18.4
36-50	75	62.5
51-65	23	19.1
Religion		
Christianity	62	51.7
Islam	58	48.3
Traditional	-	-
Educational level		
No formal education	3	2.5
Adult education	1	0.8
Primary education	55	45.8
Secondary education	45	37.5
No response	16	13.3
Source of information		
Radio	6	5.0
Husband/friends and neighbor	106	88.3
Extension agent	8	6.7
Farming Experience (years)		
Under 5	-	-
6-10	39	32.5
11-15	49	40.8
16-20	31	25.9
Above 20	1	0.8
Frequency of contact		
Once in two years	31	2.8
Once in two years	59	49.2
Thrice in a year	15	12.5
Four times in a year	14	11.7
More than four times in a year	1	0.8
More than four times in a year	120	100

Constraints facing extension service delivery among women farmers

Extension delivery in Nigeria has gone through many challenges. Of the 120 women farmers interviewed, the majority (92.2%) ranked bad access road as the major constraints followed by the preference the male extension workers have for male farmers (83.3%). Almost half of the respondent (45.0%) ranked lack of transportation as third most critical constraint they face while a minority (5.0%) ranked irregular extension

service delivery. With the rapidly expanding population in Nigeria, the entire agricultural extension services delivery system to the farmers especially female farmers should be overhauled. This result implies that government should provide more female extension agents that will be attending to female farmers; this is likely to bridge the gap between the extension agents and the extension service providers thus limiting constraints. This has been achieved in Ghana, Ethiopia and India where more female extension agents were deployed to train female workers. Female farmers claimed they were more relaxed and secured in dealing with same sex with their challenges better addressed (World Bank, 2010).

Women farmers' attitude towards extension services

Farmers' attitude refers to the disposition they have towards services rendered to them by extension agents. Majority of the farmers agreed to the fact that knowledge gained from extension services had helped to improve their production capacity with a mean score value of 4.0 (Table 3). This implies that information gained improved farmers knowledge on farming systems thereby increasing their production. The mean score value of 2.4 indicate that most of the respondents disagreed that extension agents do not have respect for their indigenous knowledge of farming systems. This implies that farmers may resist adoption of technology which differs greatly to their indigenous knowledge. The mean score value of 3.9 showed that most of the respondents agreed that extension services rendered always meet their needs. This may be because services provided improved farmers productivity in the study area. The mean score value 1.9 indicated that most of the respondents disagreed that extension services is gender biased. This implies that both male and female respondents are involved in farming; hence, they need extension services that will improve their production. Farmers get more reliable information when they have more frequent contact with extension workers, as well as extension workers also become more credible with the farmers through regular reciprocal communication. However, this happened to be the case with male farmers in the study areas. Therefore, extension agents should give more priority to training the rural women farmers as they represent the backbone and majority in agricultural production.

Table 2: Constraints facing extension service delivery as indicated by respondents

Constraint	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Bad access road	119	92.2	1
Lack of transportation	54	45	3
Irregular extension service delivery	6	5.0	4
Male extension worker preference for male farmers	100	83.3	2

Table 3: Women farmers' attitude towards extension services (n=120)

Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD	Mean score value
Knowledge gained has extension services helped me to improve my production capacity	2.5	95.8	1.7	-	-	4.0
Some extension services rendered are always tailored to my needs	-	6.7	69.2	24.2	-	2.8
Yield got from the use of information of extension agents is usually encouraging	31.7	49.2	17.5	1.7	-	4.1
Extension agents do not have respect for our indigenous knowledge of farming system	1.7	0.8	30.8	65.8	-	2.4
Services rendered is satisfactory	6.7	39.2	41.7	12.5	-	3.4
It appears that extension agent do not have adequate control of their subject considering their productivity	-	1.7	49.2	49.2	-	2.5
Extension agents are usually friendly in disseminating information	37.5	56.7	0.8	5.0	-	4.3
Extension agents do all the talking without listening to our problems	-	-	0.8	81.7	17.5	1.8
Information got from extension agents are always very clear	5.8	61.7	25.0	6.7	-	3.6
Extension services rendered are not always reliable	0.8	16.7	38.3	41.7	2.5	2.7
I always like to utilize information obtained from extension agents	0.8	39.2	52.5	5.8	-	3.3
Extension agents are very democratic in making decision on the farm with us	-	3.3	58.3	3.0	1.7	2.6
Extension agents do not usually give timely information on production	-	3.3	55.8	34.2	1.7	2.5
Extension agents do not care about our problems on the farm	-	0.8	1.7	87.5	9.2	1.9
Extension services rendered always meet our needs	3.3	90.0	3.3	3.3	-	3.9
Extension agents do not have good human relations	-	2.5	90.0	6.7	-	2.9
Extension agents are always ready to proffer solution to our problems	4.2	75.8	5.8	13.3	-	3.7
Extension agents always like to treat us as inferior	-	0.8	3.3	90.8	4.2	2.9
Extension agents always motivate or encourage our desire to learn	3.3	94.2	-	1.7	-	4.0

*Percentages are in parenthesis

Farmers' characteristics and their attitudes towards extension services

Data on the inferential statistical analysis of some characteristics of women farmers and their attitude towards extension services are as presented in Table 4. It reveals that whereas there was a significant relationship between women farmers' farm size ($r=0.183$; $p < 0.05$) and their attitudes towards extension services, there were no significant relationship between farmers' age ($r = 0.034$; $p < 0.05$), farming experience ($r=0.109$; $p < 0.05$). Also, there were no also no significant relationship between respondents' marital status ($X^2 = 6.464$; $p < 0.05$), religion ($X^2 = 0.006$; $p < 0.05$)

and level of education ($X^2 = 1.641$; $p=0.05$) and their attitudes towards extension services. This implies that farmers' age, farming experience, religion, marital status and education do not have impact on their attitudes towards extension service, their farm size dictate what their disposition is to the extension service. The plausible explanation for this might be that, perhaps, some relatively large farm size holders have benefited from extension services and may have some favourable disposition compared to small scale farm size holders who may not have benefited much from the extension services

Table 4: Test of relationship between selected personal characteristics of women farmers and their attitudes towards extension services

Characteristics	r value	P value	Inference
Age	0.034	0.709	Not significant
Farming experience(yrs)	0.109	0.267	Not significant
Farm size (Ha)	0.183*	0.048	Significant
	χ^2 value	P value	Inference
Marital status	6.464	0.091	Not significant
Religion	0.006	0.941	Not significant
Level of Education	1.641	0.650	Not significant

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The study provided information about women farmers' attitudes towards extension services, the source of information available to them, and the constraints facing extension service delivery to women in southwestern Nigeria. The findings of this study, based on women farmers' attitude towards agricultural extension services revealed that extension services rendered are not effective due to limited access to extension services, though such services were available in their community but majority of them agreed that such services are not tailored to their needs. Also, the sources of information available to women farmers in the study area are their husbands, friends and neighbours while the information from extension personnel and mass media were reported to be very low or inexistent.

The major constraints facings extension services in order of severity includes bad access road, male extension workers preference for male farmers, lack of transportation and irregular extension services delivery. In conclusion therefore, extension agents are to consider women as equally important in agricultural production; having high or intermediate knowledge of agricultural practice. The study recommends provision of good road network, provision of women extension agents and constant enlightenment of extension agents on gender issues so as to eliminate gender bias in the discharge of their duties.

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