INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF AGRICULTURE & BIOLOGY
1560–8530/2003/05–4–645–649
http://www.ijab.org

Taking Farm Decisions and Socio-economic Characteristics of Rural Women Farmers in Southern Ebonyi State, Nigeria

A.O. ANI
Department of Agric. Economics and Extension, University of Maiduguri, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

This paper analysed the relationship between taking farm decisions and socio-economic characteristics of rural women farmers in Southern Ebonyi State of Nigeria. Four hundred (400) rural women farmers served as respondents to this study. A structured interview schedule validated by experts in extension and rural sociology was used in collecting data from the respondents. The main tool of analysis was percentage and regression analysis. The major findings were that respondents were not significantly involved in taking various farm decision; respondents of the age categories of 31-40 year and 41-50 years, respectively participated more in taking farm decisions than other age categories and that the windowed respondents took more part in farm decisions than either the married or single. It is suggested among others that government and policy makers should be more sensitive in formulation of policies that would favour women farmers in taking farm decisions.

Key Words: Farm decisions; Socio-economic; Rural women; Farmers

INTRODUCTION

Taking adequate farm decision by any farmer or group of farmers could be a good farm management practice necessary for increased food production. This will ensure that the right things are done in the farm at the right time. Women have being the major food producers in many rural communities especially in the African region (African Farmer, 1994). Consequently, they (women) are required to be at forefront in taking various farm decisions in their domains. Despite women's key role in agriculture and development, pressure must still be mounted to ensure that government, economic planners and donor institutions place a high priority on bolstering women farmers.

Agricultural policies and programmes continue to overlook the central role of women in agriculture and reinforce inequality in women's access to productive resources including land, labour inputs and technology and support services such as credit, extension and research (FAO, 1995). Moreover, the failure to acknowledge women's agricultural knowledge and experience would make gender divisions over decision making even more pronounced.

Over the past two decades the questions related to the recognition of women's roles in economic and social development and of equality between men and women have fostered increasing interest among policy-makers and development practitioners (Akello & Sarr, 1999). In spite of a noticeable improvement in gender awareness world wide, data on women's work and economic contribution seem to have remained for from comprehensive. A study by Sarr (1999) carried out in 16 African countries on the socio-cultural norms and customs underlying the social and political inequalities in rural areas, shows that these norms are not root causes hindering rural women from frequently relegated to the status of second class citizens, dependent in terms of their right upon their husbands or other male relatives. Thus, they often have limited access to and control of productive resources (FAO, 1999).

It would seem logical that with the labour inputs of the rural women to the family farms and with their complete responsibility for their personal farms, they would also have a significant role in making decisions regarding farms (Olawoye, 1989). The competence of women with regards to decision making has been often questioned.

It is in the light of the above that this study attempts to determine the relationship existing between taking farm decisions and socio economic characteristics of rural women farmers in Southern Ebonyi State, the objectives of the study are to determine the level of involvement of respondents in taking farm decisions and to ascertain the association of the respondents socio-economic status with taking various farm decision.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in Southern Ebonyi State of Nigeria. Ebonyi State is one of the states that make up South Eastern Nigeria. The State has three Agricultural Zones namely, North (four LGAs), Central (four LGAs) and South (five LGAs). Virtually, all the zones have similar physical features in terms of geography, vegetation, soil type as well as the type and nature of agricultural activities carried out. The state is also homogeneous in terms of culture, religion, social and economic activities performed.

This study purposely covered the southern agricultural zones comprising five LGAs namely, Afikpo North, Afikpo South, Ivo, Ohaozara and Onicha. In this study, certain basic procedures were used in selecting the respondents (women farmers). From the agricultural zonal headquarters of

Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), a list comprising all the villages in these LGAs was obtained. From this list, four villages were selected from each LGA, thereby bringing the total villages chosen to twenty (20). In selecting these villages, effort was made to ensure that every part of each LGA was adequately represented.

Subsequently, in order to get the respondents, village extension agents (VEAs) working in respective locations of the selected villages were requested to provide list of rural women farmers. Based on this list, twenty rural women farmers were finally selected from each chosen village using simple random sampling technique.

The data were collected by means of interview schedules which were developed and validated by extension experts and rural sociologists. Data were analysed by the use of percentages. The socio economic characteristics of the respondents considered in this study are; age, marital status, educational qualification and farming experience. Similarly, areas of farm decisions studied are selected of crops for planting, selection of livestock, allocation of lands for crop production, purchase of fertilizers, selection of credit agency, selection of markets for sale of produce, purchase of pesticides and purchase of land.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Level of involvement of respondents in taking farm decisions. The level of involvement of the respondents in taking various farm decisions was studied. This level was categorized into always, sometimes, rarely and never, for all the selected items of farm decisions as shown in Table I.

An observation of the table would reveal that in all the items of the various farm decisions, the respondents did not have an absolute decision in any of these items. The respondents could be said to have significantly been involved in the decisions that concern selection of crops for planting (48.4%) and selection of markets for sale of produce (41.6%). The reason that could be adduced to their significant involvement in the decision of selection of crop for planting is that planting in most rural communities in Nigeria has been observed to be an exclusive responsibility of women. More so, the reason that could be given for their much involvement in the decision of selection of market for sale of produce, could be because a close observation of activities in most rural communities in Nigeria would equally reveal that the marketing of agricultural produce is mainly carried out by rural women.

However, the respondents non significant involvement in most other farm decisions could be as a result of certain endemic socio cultural conditions that limit women's involvement in taking decisions. These areas of non significant involvement include allocation of lands (23.3%), purchase of fertilizer (13.5%), selection of credit agency (11.2%), purchase of pesticides (11.5%) and purchase of land (17.0%). This could be because these areas of farm decisions are peculiar in nature and would be areas where women were not required to actively participate in decision concerning them owing to socio cultural dictates of the locality. It is usually said that low women involvement in decision making is natural because women cannot be good wives and mother and at the same time be good farmers. Hamalai (1997) reported that "the culturally determined structure of hierarchy within the family cultivates attitudinal traits of male dominance and female subservience, which,

Table I. Percentage distribution of respondents according to level of involvement in various farms decisions

Items	Always	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Selection of crops for planting	48.4	9.5	1.5	40.6
Selection of livestock	26.8	30.3	1.8	41.1
Allocation of lands	23.3	34.8	1.0	40.9
Purchase of fertilizers	13.5	42.4	1.2	42.9
Selection of credit agency	11.2	44.1	1.8	42.9
Selection of markets for sale of produce	41.6	13.8	1.8	42.8
Purchase of pesticides	11.5	42.6	2.3	43.6
Purchase of land	17.0	40.9	1.0	41.1

Sources: Field Survey data, 2001.

Table II. Percentage of distribution of respondents by age according to farm decisions taken

Items of Decisions	Age of respondents (Years)					
	16-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51^{+}	Total
Selection of crops for planting	0.0	2.5	40.0	15.5	1.4	59.4
Selection of livestock	1.4	16.8	20.4	20.1	0.2	58.9
Allocation of lands	1.0	13.0	30.0	13.0	1.8	59.1
Purchase of fertilizers	1.2	8.5	31.4	5.0	11.0	57.1
Selection of credit agency	0.0	4.7	31.3	13.4	8.0	57.1
Selection of markets for sale of produce	1.6	1.8	40.0	8.0	5.8	57.2
Purchase of pesticides	0.0	10.0	30.6	12.0	3.8	56.4
Purchase of land	0.0	5.0	40.0	12.9	1.0	58.9
Total	5.2	62.3	263.7	99.9	32.0	-

Source: Field Survey data, 2001

are transposed into the formal sectors". Culture and religion could be used to shape attitude, dictate practice and at times maintain inequality as the norm. Profound and rapid policy changes are very much required not only for reasons of equality but because it makes economic sense to empower women in decision making as it concerns farming activities.

Association of the respondents' socio economic status with taking farm decisions. The association between some selected socio-economic variables with taking various farm decisions among the respondents was considered in this study. Table II presents data on percentage distribution of respondents by age according to farm decisions taken. The table shows that respondents of age categories of 31-40 and 41-50 years, respectively did not significantly participate in taking various farm decisions. This therefore, implies that relatively younger farmers actively got involved in taking farm decisions. This age categories (31-4- and 41-50 years) fall within the range defined by FAO (1992) as economically productive and who would participate in all farming activities. The non significant involvement of the respondents of the age category of 16-20 years in taking farm decisions could be because they are new into farming business and may not be required to take major decisions as far as farming activities are concerned.

Table III shows information on percentage distribution of respondents by marital status according to farm decisions taken. The table reveals that most of the various farm decisions were taken by women farmers that were widowed. This could be because this category of farmers has no person they would consult in taking farm decisions or that no person could oppose their decisions as it were, since their husbands are no longer alive. The married women farmers

Table III. Percentage distribution of respondents by marital status according to farm decisions taken

Items of Decisions	Marital status of respondents				
	Married	Single	Widowed	Divorced/ Separation	Total
Selection of crops for planting	2.5	15.0	45.5	1.4	59.4
Selection of livestock	2.2	16.0	40.5	0.2	58.9
Allocation of lands	2.8	13.0	43.3	0.0	59.1
Purchase of fertilizers	10.7	11.0	30.0	6.4	57.1
Selection of credit agency	1.8	7.0	44.0	4.3	57.1
Selection of markets for sale of produce	3.4	8.0	40.8	5.0	57.2
Purchase of pesticides	30.0	0.0	20.6	5.8	56.4
Purchase of land	12.9	0.0	41.0	5.0	58.9
Total	75.3	70.0	305.7	28.1	-

Table IV. Percentage distribution of respondents by level of education according to farm decisions taken

Items of Decisions	Level of education of respondents					
	None	Adult	Primary	Secondary or Teacher Education	Post- Sec	Total
Selection of crops for planting	8.5	2.5	20.4	28.0	0.0	59.4
Selection of livestock	1.8	10.8	16.3	30.0	0.0	58.9
Allocation of lands	1.3	4.8	30.0	23.0	0.0	59.1
Purchase of fertilizers	1.7	13.0	20.4	22.0	0.0	57.1
Selection of credit agency	2.0	10.0	25.0	20.1	0.0	57.1
Selection of markets for sale of produce	20.8	21.0	13.8	1.6	0.0	57.2
Purchase of pesticides	0.0	1.3	25.6	29.3	0.0	56.4
Purchase of land	10.0	8.0	19.9	21.0	0.0	58.9
Total	46.1	71.4	171.4	185.0	0.0	-

Table V. Percentage distribution of respondents by farming experience according to farm decisions taken

Items of Decisions	Farming experience of respondents					
	<5	5-10	11-15	6-20	20^{+}	Total
Selection of crops for planting	1.0	7.0	8.4	23.0	20.0	59.4
Selection of livestock	0.8	7.8	20.0	20.0	10.3	58.9
Allocation of lands	1.0	3.3	20.0	14.8	20.0	59.1
Purchase of fertilizers	22.4	20.0	13.5	1.2	0.0	57.1
Selection of credit agency	2.0	10.0	24.1	21.0	0.0	57.1
Selection of markets for sale of produce	3.4	13.0	22.0	18.0	0.8	57.2
Purchase of pesticides	21.0	21.6	10.0	2.3	1.5	56.4
Purchase of land	0.0	8.0	20.9	30.0	0.0	58.99
Total	51.6	162.7	138.9	159.3	52.6	-

Source: Field Survey data, 2001

did not significantly, participate in taking various farm decisions, apart from decisions concerning purchase of pesticides (30.0%), purchase of land (12.9%) and purchase of fertilizers (10.7%). Their non-significant involvement in other areas of farm decisions could be because the types of agricultural activities performed by these rural women farmers would be largely influenced by their husbands. This is mainly due to culturally determined structure of hierarchy within the family which cultivates attitudinal traits of male dominance and female subservience.

Data in Table IV is on percentage distribution of respondents by level of education according to farm decisions taken. Observation of the table would show that rural women farmers who had primary and secondary/teacher education respectively significantly participated in various farm decisions. The educational background of a farmer could be an important determinant of his decision behaviour and managerial ability. It helps him to understand government policies and agricultural programmes. For instance, the more educated the farmers are the more receptive they will be with regards to adoption of new technologies (Okoye, 1988; Ani, 1999). This could equally apply in taking various farm decisions. It is only in decisions concerning selection of markets for sale of produce (20.8%) and selection of crops for planting (8.5%) that education seemed not to be a determinant factor. It could be that these areas of farm decisions don't require education for it to be effected. However, rural women farmers that had adult education could be adjudged (going by the data in Table IV) to have reasonably participated in taking various farm decisions.

Information in Table V contains data on the percentage distribution of respondents by farming experience according to farm decisions taken. The table indicates that farmers who had being in farming for 5-10, 11-15 and 16-20 years, respectively were more involved in taking various farm decisions than those of them who had being in farming business for less than 5 years and above 20 years, respectively. The reason to be given for the non-significant involvement to these categories of farmers (less than 5 years and more than 20 years farming experience) could be that their relatively inexperience in farming activities may not enable them to reasonably get involved in taking farm decisions, and for those who had farmed for more than 20 years their conservative attitude towards some farming activities could be a hindrance to taking various farm decisions. It could be ascertained that the farming experience of farmers to a large extent affects their managerial know-how and decision making. Besides, it influences the farmer's understanding of climatic and weather and factors affecting farming (Iheanacho, 2000) which in the main could help in taking various farm decisions.

Table VI. Summary of regression analysis of taking farm decisions with selected variables

Variables	Coefficient	Standard Error	F -Ratio
Age (X_1)	0.04000261	0.029116	1.8899^{NS}
Marital Status (X_2)	-0.0282380	0.020709	1.8594^{NS}
Education (X_3)	-0.0230336	0.019330	1.4200^{NS}
Farming Experience (X_4)	-0.0361216	0.023946	2.2755*

KEY: * = Significant at 5% level NS = Not significant at the specified level

Data in Table VI present information on the summary of regression analysis of taking farm decisions with selected socio-economic variables considered in this study. Analysis of the result shows that age (X_1), marital status (X_2), and educational level (X_3) of the respondents were not important factors significantly influencing their decision making behaviour. This means that these variables (age, marital status and level of education) individually or acting collectively are not factors that would determine the decision making power of women farmers in the study area when considered on a general scale.

However, farming experience (X_4) shows significant relationship with taking farm decisions of the respondents. This result is according to prior expectation that the more experienced the farmers are, more they would be involved in taking farm decisions. This could be as a result of the fact that as a farmer gets more experienced in farming the more he would be willing to face risks associated with new farming methods, a consequence of taking farm decisions.

CONCLUSION

This research was on the relationship between socio-economic characteristics and taking farm decisions among rural women farmers in Ebonyi State of Nigeria. The study was meant to reveal empirically and realistically the extent of involvement of rural women farmers in taking farm decisions and the contributions of their socio-economic characteristics in doing this. The important findings show that respondents of the age categories of 31-40 years and 41-50 years, respectively participated more in taking farm decisions than other age categories; widowed respondents took more part in farm decision than the married of single; farmers with some level of education and those of them with more farming experience respectively participated more in farm decision. The findings also show that out of the variables studies it is only farming experience that indicated significant relationship with taking decisions. It was intended from this study to draw the attention of government and policy makers to be more sensitive in the formulation of policies that would favour women farmers in taking farm decisions. As a matter of necessity, rural women farmers should be given full opportunity to participate in various farm decisions, since they are the key players in agricultural production.

REFERENCES

African Farmer, 1994. Give women a place at the policy table, *The Hunger Project, New York, April Quarterly Publication,* 11: 2–6

Akello, G. and F. Sarr, 1999. The economic role of women in agricultural and rural development, the promotion of income generating activities. *CTA Annual Report, Special Paper*, 3

Ani, A.O., 1999. Analysis of the performance of rural farmers in the Fadama Uswers' Association (FUA) Programme in the North Zone of Bauchi State, Nigeria. *Nigerian J. Tropical Agric.*, 1: 36–40

FAO, 1992. *Agricultural Production Year Book.* Rome, Italy

FAO, 1995. *Women, Agriculture and Rural Development*. P. 12. National Sectoral Report for Namibia, FAO of United Nations

FAO, 1999. *Participation and Information: The Key to Gender Responsive Agric. Policy*, FAO, Rome

Hamalai, L., 1997. Women's participation in decision-making, Educational forum. *J. Educational Studies*, 3: 110–21

Iheanacho, A.C., 2000. Economics of millet production under different cropping systems in Borno State of Nigeria. unpublished *Ph.D. Thesis*, p. 36. Ahmadu Bello Univ., Zaria, Nigeria

Okoye, A.A., 1988. Factors affecting adoption process by farmers in selected local government areas of Anambra State. *Nigerian Agric. J.*, 24: 19–20

Olawoye, J., 1989. Difficulties of rural women in securing resources for agricultural production: Two case studies from Oyo State, Nigeria. *J. Federal Department of Agric. and Rural Develop.*, 3: 82–6

Sarr, F., 1999. Les factures socioculturels etleaur impact economique sur les femmes rurales: Contraintes et potential. *In: Sem. on the Economic Role of Women in Rural and Agric. Development; the Promotion of Income Generating Activities.* Athens, Greece, 18–22 October.

(Received 04 June 2003; Accepted 12 September 2003)