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RURALWOMEN FARMERS' PERCEPTION OF COMMERCIALISATION OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The inability of public extension service system to adequately respond to the challenges of agricultural development and modernisation in Nigeria calls for alternative systems, including commercialisation of extension service. Because of their strategically significant role in national food production and farm family systems, this paper studied the perceptions of women on commercialisation of extension service in Kwara State. A four-stage systematic random sampling technique was used to select 230 respondents, while a structured questionnaire was used in data elicitation. The questionnaire also consisted of ten positively presented perceptions of commercialisation on a 5-point Likert-type scale that was used to calculate Extension Commercialisation Perception Coefficient (ECPC) for each respondent. Data analysis revealed that respondents were generally negatively disposed to commercialisation ($\bar{x}$=2.69). Furthermore, most respondents believed that farmers should be encouraged to support commercialisation ($\bar{x}$=4.35) and that charges, if at all, should be based on farming income ($\bar{x}$=4.40). Correlation analysis showed that education (r=.644, p=.002), farming income (r=.754, p.=.005), and farm size (r=.776, p=.013) were positively significant correlates of ECPC among respondents. Also significant were income and size of personal farm. It is thus imperative that any form of commercialisation of extension service be preceded by farmer empowerment and proper orientation to ensure widespread acceptability.

Introduction

Agricultural production in Nigeria is still predominantly practised by rural and peri-urban dwellers operating labour-intensive small scale farms. This low level of farm operation, accompanied by continued reliance on traditional agricultural practices, has been the bane of Nigerian agriculture. As millions of Nigerians have their livelihoods tied to peasant farming, raising agricultural productivity in order to meet the challenges of ever-increasing population and rural poverty is becoming, more and more, an urgent necessity. Agricultural extension has all along been seen, particularly by governments, as a key ingredient, not only in raising farm productivity and living standards of farm families, but also in the modernisation of Nigerian agriculture. Public agricultural extension systems (such as Nigeria's) have played crucially important roles in agricultural development of developing countries through promotion of innovation adoption (Farrington, Johnson, Killough & Scarborough, 1997). This

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is perhaps the reason why, at both federal and state levels, agricultural extension service delivery continues to attract institutional and fiscal attention.

In Nigeria, agricultural extension service delivery is essentially carried out by government-owned Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs) in all the 36 states. Before 1995 when the ADPs received significant funding from the World Bank, extension service delivery by the ADPs was carried out with relative effectiveness and devoid of 'many strains' (Ajayi & Allagenyi, 2001). Almost immediately after withdrawal of World Bank funding, some state governments began to even reduce their budgets for extension service activities (Umali, 2007). Indeed, the current situation is that federal and state governments are continually incapable of meeting financial obligations, perhaps, due to dwindling resources and increasing sectoral competitions (Chukwuone & Agwu, 2005). Ajayi and Allagenyi (2001:11) succinctly described prevailing situation in most of the ADPs by observing that '.... farm inputs support for technologies are no longer readily available and therefore, making the technologies irrelevant and unacceptable to the farmers. The available farm machines have become old and cost of maintenance is on the increase on a daily basis. Salaries and allowances of the extension agents are no longer paid regularly, while trainings have become scanty due to dwindling funding'.

This obviously unfavourable scenario, perhaps, continues to necessitate the call for alternatives to existing agricultural extension service delivery systems in Nigeria and other developing countries with similar situations. Several variants of alternative extension service delivery have been put forward, ranging from private firm extension, farmer-led extension to commercialised extension and many others (Farrington, Johnson, Killough & Scarborough, 1997; Chukwuone & Agwu, 2005; and Dimter, Knierim, & Nagel, 2008). However, the idea of farmer participation (especially in funding of extension service delivery) is emerging as a probable central issue (Maliyamkono & Ogbu, 1997; Eze, 2001; and Anderson & Feder, 2004).

Commercialisation of extension requires that farmers should pay in full or partly for extension service they receive from government-owned extension agencies. Proponents of commercialisation of extension service delivery argue that it would (among other merits), strengthen agencies financially, reduce the fiscal burden on government, and that when farmers determine and pay for the type of information that they need, extension impact would be enhanced (Linder, 1993). Among the major criticisms of commercialisation are that it would make extension less responsive to public interest, as it would be driven by the interests of the paying clients and that its applicability, especially in developing countries, could be quite limited and cumbersome (Harter, 1993; Riviera & Alex, 2004).

It is noteworthy, however, that the debate on commercialisation of extension service delivery must take cognizance of the perceptions of the ultimate users of extension service. Whether or not extension is commercialised, it is important to gauge the perspectives of the various segments of the end-users of extension service, particularly women who constitute a very critical segment of Nigeria's farming community. The role of women in food production activities in Nigeria has continued to receive more recognition. According to FAO (2007), women produce about two-thirds of the food crops and constitute between 60 and 80 per cent of agricultural labour force in Nigeria, depending on the region. Asiabaka (2008) observed that women are the 'silent majority' in food production activities and that national food security can only be achieved when women are recognised as active participants in the various phases of the agricultural development

process. Women also play crucial role in decision-making in farming families. A study of farming households by Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) reveals that, in Nigeria, both women and their husbands took part in making decisions on farming activities such as farm site and crop type selection as well as adoption of seed variety. Women, however, dominated decision-making on storage practices, what part of produce to consume, and overall management of family income (FAO, 2007).

Despite the impressive participation of women in farming and their strategic role in family farm decision-making and management, the bulk of extension services programmes in Nigeria focused on men and their farm production needs (World Bank, 2009). In order to address this lopsidedness in extension service delivery and integrate women into the mainstream of agricultural extension and development initiatives, Women in Agriculture (WIA) programmes were set up by the ADPs. However, according to Akinnagbe, Agwu, & Igbokwe (2008), there is still the need for further efforts to strengthen women farmers in Nigeria, and that women should, as a matter of fact, be consulted before any major agricultural policy is to be considered for implementation in Nigeria. This study therefore, seeks to investigate the perceptions of women farmers in Kwara State on commercialisation of extension service delivery. The specific objectives of the study are to :

1. determine the personal and occupational characteristics of respondents
2. analyse respondents' perceptions of commercialisation of extension service delivery
3. identify the socio-economic correlates of perception of commercialisation of extension service among respondents
4. Test the following hypotheses :
   i. Perceptions of commercialisation of extension among respondents do not differ significantly on the basis of membership of WIA group.
   ii. There is no significant difference in the perceptions of commercialisation of extension among respondents on the basis of major crop grown.
   iii. There is no significant difference in the perceptions of commercialisation of extension among respondents on the basis of number of alternative occupations, and
   iv. There is no significant difference in the perceptions of commercialisation of extension among respondents on the basis of marital status.

Methodology

The study area, Kwara State, Nigeria, is located in Latitude 7^0 55' and 100^0 North and longitudes 2^020^0 East. Lying in North Central Nigeria, the state has a land area of 32.500 km sq. made of Guinea Savannah vegetation to the south and Derived Savannah to the North. There is also a Fadama belt that stretches the length of the River Niger as it traverses the State. Annual rainfall (March/April to October) is between 1000-1500 mm while maximum average temperatures are between 30^0 and 35^0 Celsius (Kwara State Diary, 2007). Agriculturally, the State is significant for food production in Nigeria because of its rich soil that supports the cultivation of many crops. The State has a cultivable land area of 2,447, 250 ha (Kwara State Planning Commission, 2004).

Multi-stage cluster random sampling was used to select respondents for the research. Kwara State is divided into four agro-ecological zones (Zones A-D) by the State's ADP. From each zone one Local Government Area (LGA) was randomly selected. The selected LGAs

were Kaiama (Zone A), Patigi (Zone B), Asa (Zone C), and Oyun (Zone D). From each selected LGA, three farming communities (villages) were randomly selected using the lists supplied by respective LGAs as sample frame. The villages used were Adena, Gwaria, and Bani (Kaiama LGA); Lade, Lata, and Dakani (Patigi LGA); Budo-egba, Laduba, and Ogbondoroko (Asa LGA); Ira, Erin-Ile, and Ojoku (Oyun LGA). Each selected village was further divided into clusters, from which respondents were randomly selected. The number of clusters and respondents varied with village size. The number of respondents selected in the four LGAs were 63, 61, 47 and 59, respectively - giving a sample total of 230 respondents.

Data were collected with a set of structured questionnaire that was, in most cases, interviewer-administered. Well trained and motivated enumerators who also understood respondents' languages were used for questionnaire administration.

Measurement of Independent Variables : The independent variables measured were the personal and occupational characteristics of respondents. These included age (in years), educational level (as years of formal education), family size (as number of all persons in respondent's household), annual income (in Naira, as estimated income from respondent's farming enterprise), farm size (in hectares), and farming experience (as number of years of respondent's participation in farming activities). Other variables measured were major crops grown, marital status, and number of non-farming occupations practised by respondents.

Because there was the tendency for respondents to be members of male-headed farming households, respondents were also requested to state their own personal farm incomes, major crops grown and farm sizes (if any), as reconnaissance survey revealed that women also operated their own farms, separate from the family farms. However, data analysis employed separate uses of the two sets of data, that is : at both household and personal farm levels.

Measurement Dependent Variable : Perception of Commercialisation of Extension : The instrument of data collection consisted of a section devoted to the measurement of perception of commerciali-sation of extension service among respondents. Ten positively designed items (derived mainly from eclectic informal survey prior to data collection) were presented on 5-point Likert type scale - whereby respondents were requested to indicate their level of agreement/ disagreement from strongly agree (SA), agree (A), undecided (U), disagree (D), to strongly disagree (SD). Their responses were scored from 5 points to 1 point, respectively. The total score (maximum 50, minimum 10) by each respondent was used to compute an Extension Commercialisation Perception Coefficient (ECPC), which is expressed in percentage.

Results and Discussion

Personal and Occupational Characteristics of Respondents : Analysis of data revealed that respondents generally cut across the various age groups. There was, however, a preponderance of middle-aged farmers (31-50 years) constituting about 45 per cent (Table 1). It is noteworthy that while about 16 per cent of respondents were above 60 years of age, about 28.5 per cent of respondents were youth farmers who were less than 31 years of age. This implies, perhaps, that farming is gaining more attention among young women in the study areas probably due to increased activities of governmental and non-governmental agencies as well as the absence of little or no barriers to agricultural practice in rural communities. Table 1 also showed that illiteracy is still a common feature among women farmers as nearly 50 per cent of the respondents had no formal education. However, the fact that about 23 per cent of

respondents had more than 10 years of formal education is a welcome departure from previous findings that indicated pervasive low level of formal education among women farmers in the State (Ajayi, 1992).

The importance of cereal crops as major food items and raw materials was corroborated by the revelation in Table 1 that 65 per cent of respondents claimed to cultivate them as their major crops. This could, perhaps, imply that agricultural development efforts among women in the study area should place particular emphasis on cereal crop production.

About 50 per cent of respondents belonged to households consisting of 6-10 persons, while 23.5 per cent had more than 10 persons per household. This finding confirms the prevalence of relatively large family sizes characteristic of rural family farm systems. Also, Table 1 shows that nearly three quarters of the respondents were engaged in other occupations apart from farming activities such as trading, casual labour and civil service, perhaps to augment family income. Apart from participating in family farms, about 72 per cent of the respondents had their separate farms. While modal household farm size ranged from 1-5 hectares, most respondents (74.1 per cent) cultivated separate farms that were less than one hectare. Also, consistent with the finding of Ajayi (1995), most respondents earned relatively low incomes from their separate farms. Table 1, however, shows that even though about 75 per cent of respondents operating separate farms cultivated less than one hectare, about 43 per cent of them made more than N20000 as their annual income from their separate farm enterprises. This could lend credence to the capability for profitable farm management among respondents, especially when, as discernible from Table 1, we consider the fact that while just 20 per cent of household farms were less than one hectare, about 34 per cent of the households earned less than N20000 as annual farm income. This finding is consistent with that of Okoruwa, Akinleye, & Mafimisebi (2001) that women farmers, though having lesser access to production inputs are more efficient than male farmers. It could, however, not be unlikely that household consumption might account for a reduction in household farm income.

Table 1 : Summary of personal and occupational characteristics of respondents

Variable	Frequency	%
Age (Year)		
≤ 20	26	11.3
21-30	40	17.4
31-40	66	28.7
41-50	38	16.5
51-60	24	10.4
61-70	20	8.7
71-80	16	7.0
Years of Formal Education		
No formal education (0)	108	47.0
1-5	20	8.7
6-10	50	21.7
11-15	40	17.4
Above 15	12	5.2
Major Crops Grown		
Cereals	150	65.2
Tubers	48	20.9
Vegetables	32	13.9
Family Size		
1-5	60	26.1
6-10	116	50.4
11-15	40	17.4
16-20	14	6.1
Alternative Occupation (s)		
None	48	26.7
One	134	57.8
Two	38	16.5

(Contd.,)

Table 1 : *(Contd.,)*

Annual farm income (N)		
≤20000	70 (95)*	30.4 (57.2)*
21000-70000	114(47)	49.6(28.3)
71000-120000	34 (24)	14.8 (14.5)
Above 120000	12	5.2
Farm size (hectares)		
<1.0	46 (123)	20.0(74.1)*
1-5	158(32)	68.7(19.3)
6-10	.22(11)	9.6(6.6)
11-15	4	1.7
Farming experience (years)		
1-10-	68	29.6
11-20	84	36.5
21-30	58	25.2
31-40	20	8.7
Marital status		
Married	180	78.3
Single	30	13.0
Widowed	20	8.7

* Figures in parentheses are the associated frequencies and percentages for respondents operating their own personal farms, whether or not they were members of male-headed households (N=166). Figures not in parentheses were those for the farming households.

Table 1 as well shows the distribution of respondents according to their farming experience and marital status. About 70 per cent of respondents had more than 10 years of farming experience, which perhaps indicate that women in the study area were farmers with respectable farming experience that could be harnessed for development. The preponderance of male-headed households was reflected by the fact that 78.3 per cent of the respondents claimed to be married and living with their husbands.

Respondents' Perceptions of Commercialisation of Extension Service : Table 2 presents the summary of respondents' perceptions of commercialised extension service delivery. It is observable from the Table that respondents generally exhibited unfavourable dispositions towards commercialisation. The grand mean score was 24.25, while the level of agreement with the variables of perception of commercialisation was 2.43, implying that majority of the respondents did not agree with the perception indices. Of all the 10 positively presented perception indices, only four recorded mean scores (MS) above 3.0. These are : interested farmers should be charged according to their means (MS = 4.20); farmers should be encouraged to support commercialisation (MS - 4.15); commercialisation could enhance extension-farmer relationship (MS=3.25); and commercialisation could enhance farmers' knowledge base (MS=3.15).

Respondents were of the opinion that only farmers who show interest should be charged and such charges should be according to the farmer's means. Also, they believed that the success of commercialisation depends on the type and level of encouragement farmers receive from government. With mean score of 3.25 and 3.15 respectively, respondents were generally undecided on the last two of the four items mentioned above. This implies that they were not sure whether or not commercialisation would enhance their agricultural knowledge base and improve their relationship with extension service.

Of all the perception items, the most disagreeable among respondents was the statement that 'small scale farmers should pay for extension service' with MS = 1.05. Respondents believe that there was no reason for them to pay for extension service, perhaps because of their level of operation and income. Table 2 also shows that respondents neither believed that commercialisation would enhance farmers' management skills nor improve extension service delivery by government. They also did not agree that commercialisation could enhance farm output

and income, particularly among women farmers. With this kind of skepticism, commercialisation of extension service comes like another agricultural production innovation that farmers should be taught and programmed to adopt.

Table 2 : Perception of commercialisation of extension service among respondents

	Perception	Mean Score
1.	Commercialisation could enhance farmers' knowledge base	3.15
2.	Commercialisation would improve farmers' management skills	2.30
3.	Commercialisation would enhance extension service delivery by government	2.25
4.	Commercialisation would lead to higher farm output	1.05
5.	Commercialisation would ultimately lead to higher income	1.10
6.	Commercialisation would enhance Extension-Farmer relationship	3.25
7.	Farmers to be encouraged to support commercialisation of extension service	4.15
8.	Small scale farmers should pay for extension service	1.05
9.	Women farmers would benefit more from commercialisation of extension	1.75
10.	Interested farmers should be charged according to their means	4.20
	Grand mean Score	24.25
	Level of Agreement with perception variables	2.43

Socio-economic Correlates of Perception of Commercialisation among Respondents : An objective of this study was to determine whether or not some socio-economic variables of respondents correlated with how they perceived commercialisation of extension. Table 3 presents the summary of correlation analysis of some socio-economic characteristics of respondents with their ECPCs. Five variables, namely years of education (r=.664, p=.002), household farm size (r=.776, p=.013), household farm income (r=.754, p=.005), personal farm size (r=.701, p=.002), and personal farm income (r=.690, p=.009).

Table 3 : Results of Pearson correlations of the Extension Commercialisation Perception Coefficient (ECPC) with socio-economic variables among respondents

Variables	Correlation coefficient	p-value
Age	.129	.106
Year of education	.644	.002*
Family size	.253	.198
Farming experience	.333	.127
Household farm income	.754	.005*
Household farm size	.776	.013*
Income from personal farm	.690	.009*
Size of personal farm	.701	.002*

* Significant at 5 per cent.

The perception scores of respondents correlated with their years of formal education implied that favourable perception of commercialisation of extension increased with increasing educational level. Educated women farmers perhaps had more favourable disposition to commercialised extension service than their less educated counterparts. Also, that farm income and enterprise size at household and personal levels correlated with ECPC perhaps implied that respondents'

perception of commercialisation might be determined, to a large extent, by production and economic considerations. Results of correlation analysis showed that ECPC increased with increasing farm size and farm income at household and personal farm levels, meaning that women farmers may be favourably disposed to commercialisation of extension if their farms and those of their households are enhanced to boost their income. This could also indicate that the respondents were not engaged in farming for mere subsistence, but rather saw their participation as a means to generate optimal income to meet the demands of overall well-being.

The non-significant correlations between ECPC and the other three variables, namely age, farming experience and family size is also discernible from Table 3. This could imply that perception of commercialisation of extension service among women farmers might not be significantly related to their age and years of farming. Respondents probably gave prominence to production and economic considerations, irrespective of their age and farming experience. Also, size of respondents' households had no significant correlation with perceptions of commercialisation of extension, probably due to the fact that respondents' dependants played little or no role in farm decision-making.

Testing of Hypotheses : Table 4 summarises the results of hypotheses testing. The Analysis of Variance procedure was used to test the four hypotheses. Concerning hypothesis I, it was revealed that there was no significant difference in the mean ECPCs of the respondents on the basis of the major crop type they cultivated (F=1.07, p=0.41). The hypothesis is thus accepted. This perhaps implied that respondents' perception of

Table 4 : Results of analysis of variance of Extension Commercialisation Perception Coefficients (ECPC) with selected variables among respondents

Variable		Mean ECPC (%)	F-value	Probability
Major crops grown				
Cereals	(150)*	16.92		
Tubers	(48)	15.67	1.07	0.41
Vegetables	(32)	15.86		
Alternative occupation				
None	(48)*	9.16		
One	(134)	17.12	8.06	0.002
Two	(38)	22.22		
Marital status				
Married	(180)*	16.00		
Single	(30)	16.90	0.04	0.98
Widowed	(20)	16.60		
Membership of WIA group				
Members	(74)	24.48	1.27	0.83
Non-members	(156)	24.02		

* Figures in parentheses are the associated frequencies (i.e. number of respondents).

commercialisation of extension service might not be significantly associated with the type of crops they cultivated.

However, the results in Table 4 show that at F=8.06 and p=0.002, Hypothesis II should be rejected. This implies that respondents exhibited significant differences in their perceptions on the basis of number of alternative occupations they practised. Respondents engaged in more than one occupation tended to exhibit more favourable perception of commercialisation of extension than their counterparts whose only source of income was farming. The reason for this might be that the full-time farmers had no other source of income and were thus not favourably disposed to taking out of their meagre income to pay for extension service, perhaps unlike respondents who had alternative occupations. Table 4 also shows that respondents were not significantly differentiated in their perception of commercialised extension service on the basis of their marital statuses. This implies that Hypothesis III should be accepted. Whether or not women farmers were married might not significantly shape their perception of commercialisation of extension service in the study area. Lastly, it was also found that membership of WIA groups among respondents did not have a significant difference on their perception of commercialisation of extension service, meaning that the fourth hypothesis should be upheld. Women who were not members of WIA group had mean ECPC of 24.02 per cent which was not statistically different from 24.48 per cent for respondents that were members of WIA groups (F=1.27, p=0.83).

Conclusion and Policy Implications of Findings

The paper is a study of women farmers in Kwara State, Nigeria and presents the results of an empirical investigation of perception of commercialisation of agricultural extension service delivery and the socio-economic variables that might be associated with perception of commercialisation among respondents. Findings show that respondents were generally not favourably disposed to commercialisation of extension service delivery. This perhaps indicates that they were not yet convinced or aware of its necessity and merits. Hence, an attempt to commercialise extension service requires utmost diligence on the part of policy makers. Convincingly, farm size and income (at personal and household levels), and level of education were found to correlate with respondents' perceptions of commercialisation of extension. Thus, it is implied that favourable perception of commercialisation of extension among respondents increased with increase in these variables. Furthermore, while marital status, family size, major crops grown, and membership of Women in Agriculture (WIA) groups were not found to be significantly associated with perception of commercialisation among respondents, possession of one or more secondary occupations significantly differentiated respondents' perceptions.

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are proferred to guide policy making vis-a-vis commercialisation of extension service.

1. Before embarking on any form of commercialisation, adequate and nation-wide educational campaigns on its merits and necessity must be carried out. Since rural farmers should be persuaded to support it, local leaders, farmers' unions and other legitimisers should be involved in the campaign. Farmers should also be actively involved in the planning, coordination, implementation, and evaluation of the commercialisation process.
2. Commercialisation should also be preceded by adequate economic empowerment of farmers. Farmers should be given adequate assistance in

form of credit and production input subsidies in order to encourage them to increase their scales of operation. Also, a programme of about 50-100 per cent annual increment of farm size should be introduced to farmers through the Extension Service.

3. Women education should be given adequate attention. More women farmers should be encouraged to enroll in adult education and training centres. This could be done by establishing more adult education centres in rural communities and strengthening the existing ones.

4. To further empower women farmers, they should be supported to practise feasible secondary income generating activities in their localities. This should be done without compromising their agricultural production activities.

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