

Empowerment of Farm Families in Cross River State, Nigeria

Onu, F.M.; Ubu, I.B. & Ubu, R.L.

Department of Agricultural and Bio-Resource Education
University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

The paper examined the challenges which face the farm families in agricultural production and suggested mechanisms for empowering the farm families to improve their agricultural productivity. Many factors hinder the progress of farmers in food production which include adaptation to climate change issues like flooding, high rate of inflation, high cost of farm inputs, insecurity and corruption challenges. Unfortunately, many farmers find it difficult to grapple with the problems of food insecurity caused by some obvious challenges. The farmers therefore need to be empowered to enable them solve the problem of food production especially in Cross River state where flooding, insecurity of lives and other challenges make farmers not to do their best in food production. The paper therefore examined some factors which affect the farm families in agricultural production and ways of empowering the farmers to improve agricultural productivity in Cross River state, Nigeria. Conclusions were reached that the problem of food insecurity could be addressed if the farmers are empowered and obstacles that hinder the farmers' food production removed. Based on the conclusions, some recommendations were made; one of which is that farmers should be encouraged to form association-based co-operatives on their value chain and geographical location to enable them channel their problems collectively as a group for easy recognition by the government and her agencies.

Key words: farm families, empowerment, agricultural productivity and food security

Introduction

Agriculture is the predominant occupation of most of the rural dwellers in Nigeria. It is estimated that about 70-75% of the population of Nigerians live in rural areas and over 80% of rural dwellers are involved in agriculture and

agricultural related activities(Mama and Alkali, 2013; Osagie and Tinko, 2014 and Mgbenka, Mbah and Ezeano,2015). However, the authors noted that about 90% of the food consumed in Nigeria is produced by resource poor and illiterate farm families (households).

A farm family is one where the household head or main income earner is economically active in agriculture (Organization of Economic Community and Development OECD, 2015). Farm family therefore is viewed in this study as any family in Cross River State in which the main income generating activity is agriculture or agriculture related. Farm families are the backbone of Nigerian agriculture. They produce the food consumed in the country, provide raw materials needed in the industries and generate income for themselves and revenue for the country (Ele, Omini and Adinya, 2013). Unfortunately, agricultural production in Nigeria is characterized by low productivity (Donye, Ja'afaru and Obinne, 2013) leading to low farm income as a result of numerous production constraints (Agom, Susan, Kingsley and Nyambi, 2012).

Cross Rivers State, Nigeria is blessed with abundant natural resources that support agricultural productivity (Osagie and Tiko, 2014). Kingsley, Eucharia, Uket and Onu (2015) decried the situation where agricultural production in the state is dominated by small holder farming and still at subsistence level due to production constraints faced by farm families. It is therefore necessary to identify agricultural production constraints faced by farm families in Cross River State and find ways through which the farm families can be helped to overcome these constraints through appropriate empowerment mechanisms.

Empowerment refers to the process of giving individuals more control over their life or situation. Cheryl (1999) explained empowerment as a social process that helps people to gain control over their own lives. In the view of the Swedish International Development Association (SIDA, 2009), farmer's empowerment is the process which increases the farmer's real power over economic decisions that influence their lives and priorities in the society. Therefore, empowerment is used in this study as a process of helping farm families overcome their agricultural production constraints in Cross River State. Graeab, Jahichapell, Wittman, Kerr and Herran (2016) stated that farm families should be empowered to build innovative capacity for enhanced food production through education and training and also to improve the market condition for the farmers to enable them overcome market failure. When farm families are empowered to grow more food and earn more income, it will help to improve the living standard of the farm families and strengthen their immediate community economically. Unfortunately, farmers in Nigeria and especially those in Cross River State face several challenges that have impacted negatively on their farm productivity. Such challenges are discussed below for greater understanding of the problems at hand.

Constraints Confronting Agricultural Productivity of Farm Families in Cross River State, Nigeria

Farmers are faced with many constraints that affect their agricultural

productivity thus making them to remain in perpetual hunger, starvation and poverty. Some of challenges limiting increased and successful production of agricultural produces in Cross River state are discussed below:

Poor Information Dissemination:

Information is said to be power and therefore important for any meaningful agricultural development. Mgbanka, *et al* (2015) noted that Nigerians seldom feel the impact of agricultural innovations either because they have no access to such vital information or because it is poorly disseminated. Supporting this position, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD, 2014) pointed out that some farmers in developing countries such as Nigeria receive less than 5% extension services. IFAD observed that extension services such as supply of agro-chemicals for the control of weeds, pest and diseases, provision of improved seeds and seedlings for planting, drugs and vaccines for livestock, provision of fertilizers to farmers and modern agricultural machineries are inadequately provided. When farmers are not properly informed of improved agricultural practice and continue holding on to traditional, primitive and inefficient production systems, the farmers perpetually remain hungry and poor. The farmers therefore need to be empowered on how to access information to improve their agricultural production.

Insecurity Challenge: The emergence of insecurity such as terrorism, kidnapping, Fulani herdsmen attacks,

armed robbery among others disrupt the peace of the nation and scare away foreign investors. Blanchard and Husted (2016) stated that the slow economic growth and development of Nigeria in spite of oil wealth is majorly caused by insurgency that claims the lives of thousands of Nigerians. The above listed threats to security negatively affect agricultural productivity directly or indirectly. Many farmers are afraid to go to farms for fear of being killed or molested as a result of which they will have little or nothing to harvest. This situation exposes farm families to various forms of hardships such as hunger, starvation and poverty. The situation requires empowering the farmers on how to cope with the security challenges in their communities. The measure will enhance food production.

Limited Access to Modern Agricultural Technology:

One of the important advances that has been recorded in the field of agriculture is production of labour saving and effective technology such as machineries and equipment among others. The farmer needs information on production technology that involves cultivation, fertilizer application, weeding, harvesting, soil erosion control and prevention. Access to affordable fertilizers, herbicides and machineries used in cultivation increases efficiency and expansion of farm business and consequently raises the farmers yield and income. Unfortunately, Osagie and Tiko (2014) reported that farmers in the state have limited access to these modern agricultural technologies and as a result

barely produce for family consumption. The farmers therefore should be equipped with the ideas on how to access the modern agricultural technology for increased food production.

Inadequate and High Cost of Farm Inputs: Access to timely and appropriate inputs as well as finance enable farmers to expand production and achieve greater farm output. For example, an effective distribution system is needed to give farm households access to fertilizers and seeds at affordable prices. Mgbanka *et al* (2015) observed that the existing seed and planting material industries are under-developed and supplies are often of sub-standard quality. Planting of sub-standard seeds results in reduced productivity and by extension, affect farm income.

High Level of Unemployment: many graduates in Nigeria end up roaming the streets doing little or nothing after school. This frustrating situation drives many young people into various types of crimes and social vices. According to Africa (2016), most unemployed graduates engage themselves in online scams and other fraudulent activities in order to survive. This situation also contributes to the insecurity challenges in Nigeria and especially in Cross Rivers state where kidnapping is rampant among the inhabitants. This situation is threatening the very existence and survival of the rural farmers and scares them from going about their legitimate businesses including farm work. Empowering

them on how to engage in farm work for business is necessary.

High Rate of Inflation: The prices of every commodity in the market has increased as a result of the global economic recession. Whenever there is inflation, the poor masses and fixed income earners feel the impact more. Ewentan and Urkie (2014) stated that the country is faced with dwindling developmental challenges including endemic rural and urban poverty, unstable and deteriorating exchange rate which is accompanied by high inflation rate, inadequate physical and social infrastructure and large domestic debt. The high rate of inflation affects the farmers more because the farm inputs are above their reach. They need to be empowered to grapple with the situation of inflation related to agricultural production.

Ways of Empowering Farm Families in Cross River State to Improve Agricultural Productivity

Several approaches can be adopted towards addressing the constraints of agricultural productivity in Cross River state and invariably empower farm families. Some of these approaches that can be used are discussed as follows:

Empowering Farm Families through Research Institutes: Research institutes identify problems that affect agricultural production. The research gives the best approach and technologies to address both the current and future problems. According to Ebba, Rubby and Daita (2012), agricultural research institutes strengthen dissemination and exchange

of information, experience and research results to the farmers through extension agents and other stakeholders. They address the mismatch between the research and the farmers needs. They create platform for exchange of best practices and innovative ideas to rural farmers. Postnote (2012) noted that research institutes develop new crops and breeds of livestock, introduce new farming technologies and new farming techniques to African small holder farmers. Research efforts of the agricultural institutes enable the farmers produce crops with high yield and short period, and breed of livestock that are very prolific with most desirable qualities. When these yielding crops and prolific animals are made available to farm families, their farm productivity and income are increase and consequently empowering them. Government and other stakeholders should therefore support research programmes by investing and funding research institutes to solve farmer's problems.

Empowering Farm Families through Agricultural Extension Service: Agricultural extension services are programmes that are designed to link farmers with research institutes in order to improve their production. Donye, Jaafar and Obinne (2013) stated that extension programmes usually focus on new agricultural techniques, innovations and technologies available to farmers, and by the process instruct them on how to adopt the various innovations and services to improve their farming. Extension agents assist farmers on how to get loans from

financial institutions. According to Donye *et al* (2013), extension agents assist farmers on how to have access to improved modern farm inputs such as fertilizers, seeds, vaccines, drugs and modern equipment for their farming operations. They also assist the farmers to manage risks in their farms, such as risk associated with production, storage and marketing their produce. They provide them with information on how to secure their farms through insurance services. Agricultural services are funded, financed and run by the government under the ministry of agriculture. Ebba, Rubby and Daita (2012) pointed out that agricultural extension is provided by the government or non-governmental organization to implement extension programmes responsible for developing and monitoring activities that promote farmers capacity and by so doing empowering the farmers.

Empowering Farm Families through Government Support: The government is the major stakeholder in agricultural development of any country. Government programmes that promote agriculture are managed under federal and state ministries of agriculture. Government in collaboration with other stakeholders sponsor programmes like research institutes and agricultural extension services to provide the basic infrastructures for agricultural development. Government plays an important role in achieving food security by supporting research development and enhance agricultural infrastructure to ensure that farmers produce enough food for the country.

The government also makes policies that grant farmers access to credits, subsidies and farm inputs in order to create more income to the rural farmers. Rural farmers also need information that will enable them improve in their production and also market their produce. Imoloame and Olanrewaju (2013) called on government to create new funding services to deliver extension services to build farmers capacity and help them make informed decisions that can make farmers to improve their productivity thereby reduce hunger and poverty among the farm families. Farm families need to be provided with adequate market infrastructure and storage facilities to reduce the level of post harvest losses that farmers incur. Kareem and Akinbele (2015) observed that when government provides the farmers with market infrastructure, adequate and efficient storage facilities and accessible market information losses which farmers incur after harvest are prevented. Another strategy which government can use to enhance the productivity of farm families is by investing in rural infrastructures and assisting farm families through provision of incentives in form of subsidies. Karla (2013) stated that government can enhance food production through adequate investment in small holder agriculture and rural infrastructure and by so doing, empower the farm families.

Empowering Farm Families through Non-Governmental Organization: Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are groups of individuals or non-profit

organizations that take interest in alleviating human suffering, improve the environment and maintain peace in the society. The NGOs are interested in some of the areas of human endeavour that receive less attention from government or private sectors. Siddaraju (2011) noted that NGOs provide strong support to development issues, especially where the government and private sector show less interest. They focus on building social capital such as farmer groups, farmer organizations and network among farmers. NGOs also promote sustainable agricultural development that is based on ecological principles and practice to maintain soil fertility and the environment. NGOs confront the problems that small farm families face in their daily struggle for survival. To enable farmers increase their efficiency and realize higher produce to meet the growing consumer demand for food, NGOs need to assist the farmers in various ways to increase food production and eradicate poverty. NGOs assist farmers by implementing some of the government programmes towards sustainable agriculture, promote market facilities and enhance farmers awareness programmes. Warker (2007) pointed out that NGOs promote the interest of poor people by providing some basic social services at the community level. Some of the NGOs provide direct and indirect subsidies to improve farmer's access to market by helping the market to benefit both producers and consumers. If NGOs can be involved in performing the aforementioned assistance to the

farmers in Cross River state, it will go a long way in empowering the poor farm families for better agricultural productivity.

Conclusion

Farm families in Cross River state constitute the major food producers in the area. However the farmers are faced with a lot of constraints which limit their production capacity making them to produce barely enough for the food needs of the family with little or nothing for the market. Some of the agricultural production constraints faced by farmers in the area include limited access to credit, market and agricultural technologies. Other constraints are inadequate and high cost of farm inputs, insecurity, poor information dissemination, poor infrastructure, high rate of inflation among others. As a result of these production challenges, farm families continue to grapple with the problem of food insecurity, hunger, and poverty. If the identified farmer's production constraints are contained, it will help to empower the farmers for greater productivity. For instance, good road net work, access to improved seeds and fertilizers and other agricultural technologies will boost agricultural productivity and bring more income and food to the table of farm families and the masses in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proffered for improving the situation of farm families in Cross River state, Nigeria:

- ❖ Farmers should be encouraged to form association based co-operatives on their value chain and geographical location to enable them channel their problems collectively as a group for easy recognition and consideration by the government and other donor agencies.
- ❖ Development of rural infrastructure will serve as a means of empowering the farm families especially the youths, through provision of basic amenities like good road network, water supply and irrigation facilities.
- ❖ Farmer groups should be encouraged to get registered with the government especially those in the rural areas to enable them benefit from government assistance through empowerment schemes.

References

- Africa, W. (2016). Africa and the world; major problems facing Nigeria today. Retrieved from www.africa.com/majorproblems. Accessed 5/5/2016.
- Agom, D.I., Susan, B.O., Kingsley, O.I. & Nyambi, N.I. (2012). Analysis of technical efficiency of small holder cocoa farmers in Cross River State, Nigeria. *International journal of agricultural management and development*.
- Blanchard, P.L. & Husted, T. (2016). Nigeria current issues and U.S. policy: congregational research service. CRS report for members and committees of congress, March 11, 2016. Retrieved from www.org.gov. accessed 16/4/2016.
- Cheryl, E.C. (1999). Empowerment. What it is. *Journal of extension education*. Accessed from <https://joe/1999october/comm.1.php>. On 20th Oct. 2016.

- Donye, A.O., Ja'afar-fura, M.R. &Obinne, C.P.O. (2013). Improving small holder farming and extension in Nigeria: the sasakawa Africa fund for extension education strategy. *Agriculture and Biology Journal of North America*. 4(2):97-102.
- Ebba, A., Rubby, A. &Daita, J. (2012). Report: Women empowerment for improved research in agricultural development innovation and knowledge transfer in the west Asia and north Africa region: association of agricultural research institutions in the near and north Africa (AARINA). Retrieved from <http://www.aarinena.org>. accessed 6/4/2016.
- Ele, I.E., Omini, G.E. &Adinya, B.I. (2013). Assessing the extent of commercialization of small holder farming households in Cross River State, Nigeria. *Journal of Agriculture and Veterinary science* 4(2):49-55.
- Ewetan, O.O. &Urhie, E. (2014). Insecurity and socio-economic development in Nigeria: *Journal of sustainable development studies* 5(1):40-63.
- Graeub, B. E., Jahichapell, M., Wittman, H., Kerr, R.B. &Herran, B.G. (2016). State of family farm in the world. *Journal of world development* 20(1):30-45. Retrieved from dx.doi.org/10/016/j.worlddev.2015.05.02. accessed 15/4/2016.
- Imoloame, E.O. &Olanrewaju, A.O. (2013). Improving agricultural extension services in Moro local government area of Kwarastae, Nigeria. *Journal of agricultural extension an rural development* 6(3):1-15. Retrieved from <http://www.academicjournals.org>.
- International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD, 2014). Investing in small holder family farmers for the future: Italy, Vargas Lundias.
- Kareem, H.T.&Akinbele, L.N. (2015). Perceived contributions of agricultural transformation agenda to rice production of farm families in south west Nigeria. *Journal of agricultural extension* 19(2):25-32. Retrieved from <http://journal.aesonnigeria.org>. accessed on 6/4/16.
- Karla, D.M. (2013). Coping with the food and agriculture challenges of smallholders. Agenda preparations and outcomes of the 2012 United Nations conference on sustainable development. Natural resources management and environment department: Rome; Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Kingdom.
- Kingsley, O.I., Eucharia, A.A., Uket, I.O. &Onu, E.A. (2015). Technical efficiency analysis of small scale cassava farmers in Cross River State, Nigeria: a stochastic production frontier approach. *Applied economics and finance* 2(4):2332-7308.
- Mama, R.O. and Alkali, M. (2013). Impact of the national fadama project phase 11 (NFDP-11) on rural infrastructural provision and household farm yield in Kaduna state. *Journal of home economics research Vol. 18*. 34-43.
- Mgbenka, R.N.& Agwu, A.Z. (2011). Communication platforms existing among research, extension and farmers in Abia and Enugu states of Nigeria. A pre-PhD research seminar, Department of agricultural Extension, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Mgbenka, R.N., Mbah, E.N. &Ezeano, C.I. (2015). A review of small holder farming in Nigeria; need for transformation. *Agricultural Engineering Research Journal* 5(2):19-26.
- Organization for Economic Community and Development (2015). OECD Glossary of statistical terms. Agricultural house hold definition. From <https://stats.oecd.org/.../detail.asp>. On 21st Oct. 2016.

- Osagie, R.O. &Tiko, I. (2014). Management systems for addressing farmer's constraints in Cross River State, Nigeria. *Global journal of commerce and management perspective* 3(4):86-91.
- Post Note (2012). GM in agricultural development. house of parliament; parliamentary office of science and technology London. Retrieved from <http://www.parliament.uk>. Accessed 8/4/2016.
- Siddaraju, V.G. (2011). Role of non-governmental organizations in promoting sustainable agricultural development in Karnataka, India. *International NGO journal* 6(2):057-061. Retrieved from www.academicjournals.org/ngoj.
- Werker, E.D. (2007). What do non-governmental organizations do? *Journal of economic perspectives* 1(2):20-30.