

Improving Women Farmers Capacity in Agricultural Production in Tambuwal Local Government Area of Sokoto State through Communication and Empowerment.

¹Mairiga Juliana, ²Zaki, K. Patience, ³Momodu Halifat and ⁴Saratu, M. Dangusau.

¹⁻⁴National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison Services,
Ahmadu Bello University Zaria.
Email: wawanta4real@gmail.com

Abstract

Agriculture is the livewire of every nation and any nation that does not support the empowerment of women farmers to engage in commercialise farming is invariably short changing itself. The reason for this assertion is that from time immemorial, women folks have constituted a vast percentage of work to the sector howbeit at subsistent levels. Allowing the status quo to thrive is however considered inimical to productivity in agriculture, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa where the issue of food security is yet to be properly addressed. The realisation of the need to empower women farmers is beginning to attract attention in different quarters and has led development agencies and government to initiate measure towards impacting women especially in developing countries of which Nigeria is a part. One of the interventions is through communication. This paper examined how communication improves and empowers women farmers in Tambuwal Local Government Area of Sokoto State. Three districts were randomly chosen which included: Tambuwal district, Sanyinna district and Dogon Daji district. A total of 294 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to women farmers in the three (3) districts and 289 copies were dully filled and returned. Data was analysed using simple percentages and charts. Findings revealed that information on agriculture was acquired from radio programmes, agriculture extension officers from Sokoto state ministry of agriculture and from internal interactions amongst themselves. Sustainability and Empowerment Communication Theory was deployed. The study further revealed that information acquired from these channels of communication enable women farmers in Tambuwal local government to improve their cultural practices, which further motivates productivity and empowerment. Hence, it was recommended that priority attention should be given to communicating vital information on agriculture which would enhance the capabilities of women farmers in Tambuwal Local Government of Sokoto state, Nigeria.

Keywords: Agriculture, Capacity, Communication, Empowerment, Improving and Women farmers.

Introduction

Agriculture is very critical to thriving of the economy of a nation and women constitute about 65% of the population who participate in agricultural activities in rural areas in Nigeria (Akinwumi, 2013). This massive population of women in Nigeria are into subsistent farming, which, in actual fact limits productivity compared with commercialised farming (Monu, 1997). Agricultural activities are closer to women in the rural areas being that other job opportunities are not readily available. Vast farm lands draw their attention into farming and related task. This practice has existed long before now and is still engaging women in the rural areas across Nigeria and other African countries. In view of the forgoing, women's participation in agriculture cannot be over-emphasised. At any case, it would not be out of place to state that women are the livewire of agriculture in Nigeria. With this realisation, it is only natural that women empowerment in agriculture should have been driven along commercialised farming and not perpetual subsistent culture which leaves more to be desired.

Browne (1995) and Bridget (2013) reveal that empowerment is a practice, a set of strategies, a process, a goal, a product, a feeling, a capacity, a life force, a reflective activity, a potentially unifying approach to practice and the central task of the profession. She adds that vulnerable populations such as the poor, women, elderly, racial, ethnic and cultural minorities and individuals with mental, developmental and physical disabilities have been identified as the main target groups of empowerment practice. Thus, providing information through communication to enable women farmers to productively engage in agriculture in itself is empowerment (Karubi, 2006).

Communication in which both beneficiaries and facilitators of development programmes learn and share tangible information is vital in agricultural development. Argawal (2010) argued that the poor exposure of rural women farmers to appropriate communication content and context is one main reason for low yield recorded by rural farmers.

Onochie (2015) assert that communication and empowerment are essential ingredients needed for improving women capabilities especially in terms of passing across information about technologies that are designed to boost agricultural production. For women to improve their production, they must be informed about practices that can lead to increase, and all these must be done through communication and empowerment (Asiabaka, 2012).

Improving women farmer's capability through communication towards sustainable agriculture has become a critical area of discuss in the academia especially in the area of development communication (FAO, 2011). In recent times, sustaining agricultural productivity and addressing issues of food security and women empowerment has engendered various interventions at both governmental and non-governmental levels in Nigeria. The old trend has been patriarchal in approach; that is seeing women as playing

supportive roles to men (Akinagbe & Ajayi, 2010). In the rural areas, women support their husbands and do not own farmlands nor take crucial decisions on farming activities. To situate this statement in a clearer perspective, women farmers are seen as playing supportive roles to their husbands and not as stand-alone and this categorization tends to affect productivity and empowerment of women which adversely affected agricultural production especially in the rural areas. In view of the above, the study examined how communication has helped the improvement and empowerment of women farmers in Tambuwal Local Government Area of Sokoto state. The aim of this study is to examine how communication improves and empowers women farmers in Tambuwal Local Government Area of Sokoto state. The specific objectives were to: identify types of agricultural activities women participate in Tambuwal Local Government Area, examine communication channels through which women farmers capabilities are improved in Tambuwal Local Government Area of Sokoto State and to ascertain the role of communication towards improving women farmer's capabilities in agriculture production in the selected districts in Tambuwal Local Government Area of Sokoto State.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is meant to explain the situations surrounding a given phenomenon which further helps to elucidate the realistic application of measure to address such issues or challenges. This study deployed Sustainability and Empowerment Communication Theory. Roling, in 1994, explicitly carved out and expanded this theory out of the existing development, communication and participatory theories. This theory advocates for the education, through information dissemination using a medium that can best suit a given people. This argument was based on the realisation that development is often not construed within a general space, but rather, it is about a particular category of persons and that those persons have specific challenges of which information is pivotal.

Invariably, the above theory advances the frontier of the argument that communication brings about information exchange which should create a balance by feeling information void. This theory also went against the construct of dependency theorists who do not believe that lack of information is at the root of development problems, but rather that underdevelopment is a direct consequence of the level of development in the Western world (Servaes, 2004). The essence of this theory to this study is that of standing as a formidable basis on which it argues that regular flow of information is in itself a form of empowerment to women farmers in the rural areas of Nigeria.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Tambuwal Local Government Area of Sokoto, Sokoto State, Nigeria. Its headquarters is in the town of Tambuwal. It has an area of 1,717 km² (663 sq. mi) and a population of 4,998,100 (Nigerian Population Commission, 2006). The Local Government Area falls within latitudes 12°24'N to 12°19'N and longitude 4°40'E to 4°48'E.

The Local Government area comprises of five districts; Tambuwal district, Sanyinna District, Dogon Daji District, Jabo District and Gindi District

The methodology deployed in this study is the survey design approach whereby questionnaires were randomly administered to respondents who are female farmers in the selected local government area of the state. The specific reason for using survey design is to acquire information from a cross section of women farmers in Tambuwal Local Government Area. For the purpose of this study, three districts were randomly chosen which included: Tambuwal district, Sanyinna District and Dogon Daji District. A total of 294 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the randomly selected women farmers in the three (30) districts and 289 copies were dully filled and returned. Results were presented using frequency counts, simple percentages and charts.

Result of the Findings

Agricultural Activities Women Participate in Tambuwal LGA

The result of the findings on the agricultural activities women participate in Tambuwal LGA is presented in Table 1. The Table 1 shows that 46.0% of the respondents opted for subsistent farming, 20.0% food processing, 16.3% livestock, 14.5% transportation/marketing of farm produce and 3.1% engage in commercial/mechanised farming.

Table 1: Types of agricultural activities women participate in Tambuwal local government

S/N	Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1.	Subsistent Farming	133	46.0
2.	Food Processing	58	20.0
3.	Livestock/Animal Husbandry	47	16.3
4.	Transportation/Marketing of Food Items	42	14.5
5.	Commercial/Mechanised Farming	9	3.1
	TOTAL	289	100.0

Source: Field Survey, 2019

The indicator thus, could infer that at the subsistent level much issues about empowerment needs to be given priority attention. In the selected districts, commercial farming is more or less non-existent. Food processing comes behind subsistent farming. At this level, processing of farm produce is no doubt at the subsistent level as well.

Table 2: Communication channels through which women farmers capabilities are improved in Tambuwal Local Government Area of Sokoto State

S/N	Communication Channels	Degree of Agreement				\bar{X}	SD
		SA (%) 4	A (%) 3	D (%) 2	SD (%) 1		
1	Radio	71 (24.2)	208 (71.0)	10 (3.4)	0 (00.0)	3.21	0.48636
2	Television.	16 (5.5)	46 (15.7)	133 (45.4)	94 (32.1)	1.94	0.83980
3.	Local Communication Channels such as women meeting, songs, house to house dissemination of information, etc.	57 (19.5)	145 (49.5)	73 (24.9)	14 (4.8)	2.84	0.78903
4.	From EIC materials such as Posters, Fliers and Billboards.	29 (9.9)	133 (45.4)	114 (38.9)	13 (4.4)	2.61	0.72736
5.	From extension officers of the Sokoto Ministry of Agriculture	89 (30.4)	171 (58.4)	26 (8.9)	3 (1.0)	3.19	0.63398
6.	From among women farmers in the community	64 (21.8)	189 (64.5)	20 (6.8)	13 (4.4)	3.03	2.14888

Source: Field Survey, 2019

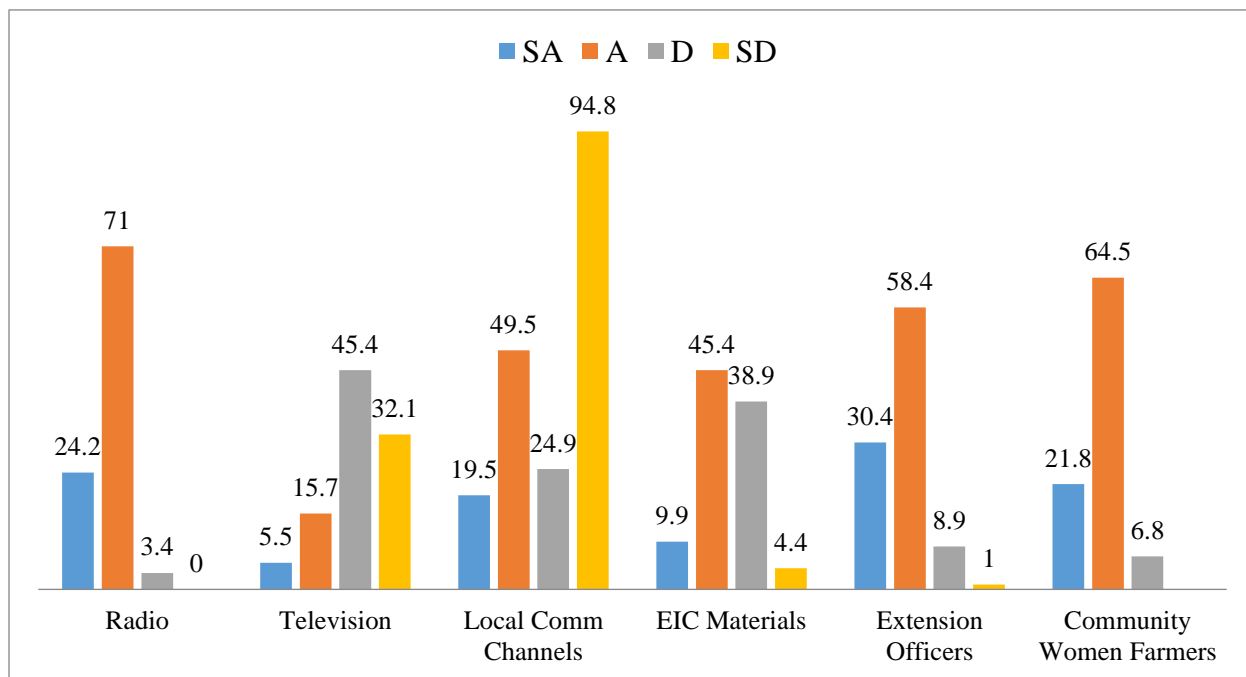


Figure1. Percentages of responses to the how various communication channels empowers local women in agriculture

From fig. 1, it could be seen that majority of the respondents strongly disagreed that local channels of communication have the greatest potential to improve women capacity through information that could empower them to perform maximally in agriculture. It could be assumed that the local channels may not have the capacity or are not properly linked with most communication channels especially the modern ones such as radio and television. Hence, it is important to state that it not surprisingly that more than 70% and 60% of the respondents agreed that the radio and the extension officers' visits constitute the greatest channels of agricultural information empowerment in the study areas respectively. This shows that radio and television continue to be some of the modern channels of communication that could empower local women with appropriate and responsive agricultural information.

Table 3 above shows that communication plays a vital role in the empowerment of farmers because through adequate and genuine information, farmers will be able to make rational and critical farming decisions. Hence the possibility of improved women capacities and their productivity as per indicated in the mean score of 2.79.

Table 3: The role of communication towards improving women farmer's capabilities in agriculture production in the selected districts in Tambuwal Local Government Area of Sokoto State.

S/n	Role of Communication/Information	Degree of Agreement				\bar{X}	SD
		SA (%) 4	A (%) 3	D (%) 2	SD (%) 1		
1	Communication indirectly enhances women productivity.	36 (12.3)	173 (59.0)	64 (21.8)	16 (5.5)	2.79	0.72539
2	Communication empower women for sustainable commercial farming	37 (12.6)	208 (71.0)	41 (14.0)	3 (1.0)	2.97	0.55794
3.	Communication improves women knowledge about agriculture.	79 (27.0)	151 (51.5)	59 (20.1)	0 (00.0)	3.06	0.68874
4.	Communication equips women with new trend in agriculture.	44 (15.0)	208 (71.0)	37 (12.6)	0 (00.0)	3.02	0.52977

Field Survey, 2019

The roles of communication/information in women knowledge, capacity building and productivity in agriculture is presented in fig. 2. From Figure 2, it could be argued that communication, via agricultural information is vital to the development and capacity building for women in agriculture. From the data, 71.0% of the respondents agreed that communication/information provide relevant and required education in relation to agricultural practices in which women can perform better. Same result, i.e. 71.0% of the respondents agreed that communication and information are capable of enhancing women

capacity and equip them with necessary knowledge for sustainable productivity in agriculture.

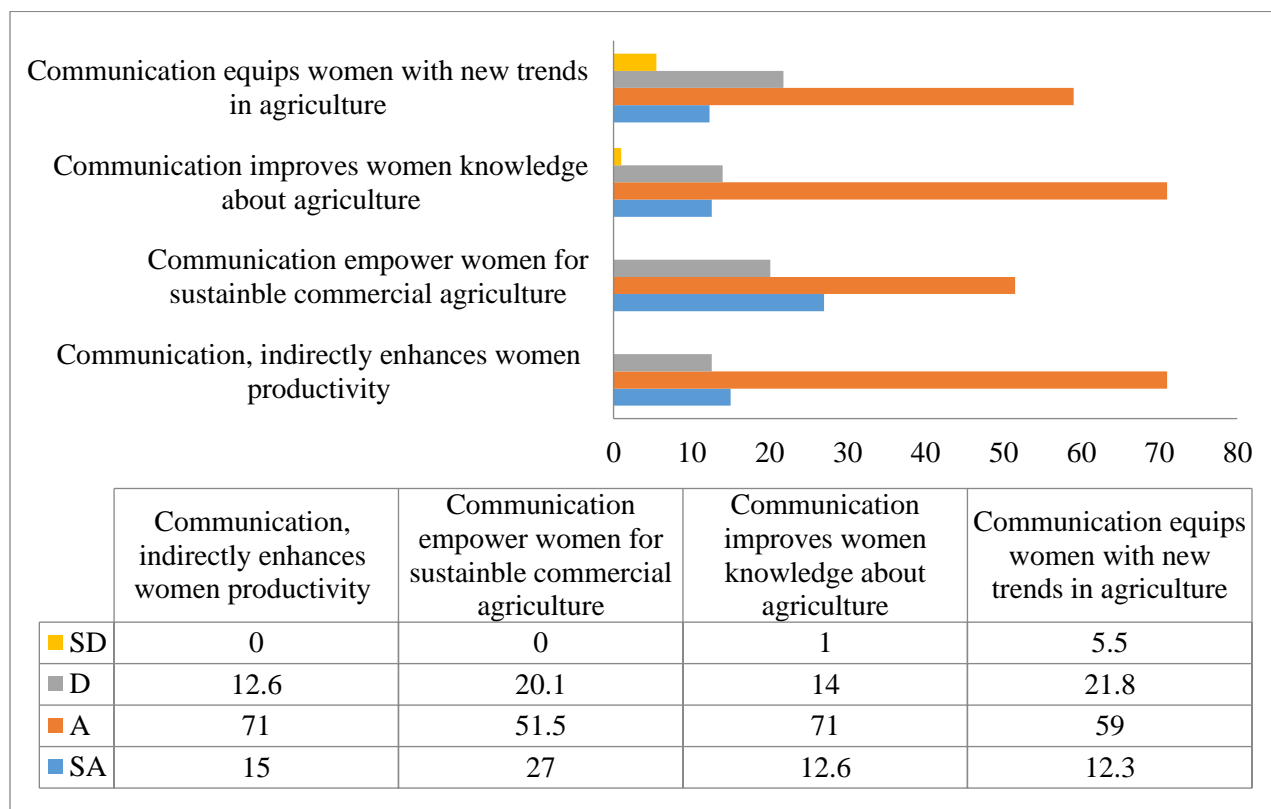


Figure 2: Roles of communication/information in women knowledge, capacity building and productivity in agriculture

Discussion of Findings

The crux of this study was to examine how communication has helped to improve and empower women farmers in Tambuwal Local Government Area of Sokoto State. Radio as a form of communication medium had a mean score of 3.21 which is above the mean criterion of 2.5. This means that women farmers in the chosen districts agree that they acquire more information on agriculture from radio programmes. Perhaps, the reason why radio becomes a viable medium of acquiring information on agriculture is perhaps because of its availability, reachability and affordability. Radio signal is found almost everywhere especially in the rural areas where women farmers can listen to agriculture related programmes in local dialect. Agriculture related programmes are often broadcasted in languages that rural dwellers can easily understand. It is important to note that simple

transistor radio is affordable and thus, rural dwellers can easily acquire and benefit from agriculture programmes on air.

Furthermore, findings of the study revealed that another medium of communication through which women farmers acquire information on agriculture was from agriculture extension officers from Sokoto state ministry of agriculture. The mean score was 3.19 which was above the mean criterion of 2.5. Extension officers are responsible for providing vital information on new farming techniques and relevant materials that could help farmers. The study findings reveal that women farmers see extension services as a medium of communication, perhaps there have been several contacts between them and the officers and information received had contributed to their improvement and possible empowerment. This finding is in line with the submission of Joseph (2016) which states that extension service is to deploy communication strategies in various ways for the purpose of training people in agriculture with the aim of boosting knowledge on their application of new farming techniques. From Table 2, it was also gathered that interactions between fellow farmers constituted a vital medium of communication through which women farmers derive information to improve their trade. The mean score of 3.03 was above the stipulated mean criterion of 2.5 which validated the statement that communication is critical to agricultural development.

These results are in consonance with the findings of Thomas *et al* (2017) where it was reported that communication is central and a capable variable that can improve and sustain agricultural productivity because it improves people's knowledge and skills. On how communication has helped in the improvement and empowerment of women farmers in Tambuwal, study findings revealed that 3.06 mean score respondents submitted that through communication women farmers are able to get information on new techniques and agricultural innovation. The mean score of 3.02 which invariably could be interpreted as higher percentage of respondents reveals that information acquired by women farmers in Tambuwal local government area enhances agricultural productivity and sustainability to a large extent. Sustainability and Empowerment Communication theory of course, vividly explains this scenario by its emphasis that information is crucial to empowerment and sustainability at all levels of development. Information leads to change of attitude, embracement of new strategies, practice and trends which culminates in absolute improvement in a particular trade or profession. Once there is improvement, then productivity becomes obvious and with constant update of vital information, productivity can be practicably sustained.

Conclusion

This study has considered improving women farmers' capacity in agricultural production in Tambuwal Local Government Area of Sokoto State through communication and empowerment. The study finding has revealed that communication is a vital venture that

informs, educate and sensitize people on various issues. In relation to agriculture, communication cannot be overemphasised. It can be considered as the sinews on which agriculture productivity thrives. Thus, establishing effective communication channel and steady exchange of information to women farmers in rural community must be seen as a serious matter of national interest. This is basically due to the fact that poor communication impairs agricultural productivity, sustainability and empowerment of women farmers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made.

- i. Agricultural communication/information should be designed with attention to characteristics and development features particular to women. This would enhance and sustain women farmers' knowledge and productivity.
- ii. Appropriate communication channels which the rural women could easily be accessed should be used to disseminate agricultural information.
- iii. Empowerment of women farmers through consistent and responsive agricultural information should be given adequate attention by government and non-governmental organizations. This could be achieved through special advocacy communication for women mobilization.
- iv. Agricultural communication should be reformed in order to incorporate participatory and inclusive information in order to build women farmers' trust.

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