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Analysis of women empowerment in cassava production and processing as a means of household poverty status in Kuje area Council, Abuja

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Abstract

In Kuje Area Council, Abuja, a research was conducted to examine women empowerment in cassava production as a means of reducing household poverty. The 100 respondents for the study were chosen using a simple random sampling procedure. The study's precise objectives were met using descriptive statistics. The average age of the responders was found to be 40.62. The majority of the respondents were married, with an average household size of 6.08 people. The majority of the respondents had a secondary education and an average of 6.12 years of experience. The respondents' average farm size was 2.47 hectares, with an annual income of N187,241.37. Demand for Cassava products is the most important factor influencing the intensity of Cassava production and processing in the research region, while the ADP is the most important source of empowerment initiative among women Cassava farmers. Access to inputs is the greatest impediment to women's empowerment in the research area. Government and even commercial extension groups should ensure that agro inputs are widely available and accessible to women Cassava farmers, particularly in the study area, it was proposed. In addition, financial institutions should ensure that agro-loans are made available to women farmers, and that gender obstacles that prevent women from accessing credit are addressed.

Keywords: women, empowerment, cassava, production, processing

Introduction

Cassava (*Manihot* spp) is the third-largest source of food carbohydrates in the tropics (Iheke, 2008) ^[6]. It is a staple food crop in most parts of Nigeria, consumed in different forms, as gari, fufu, chips, and many other forms (Uche & Aprioku, 2008) ^[11]. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2013) ^[4], Nigeria is the world's largest producer of cassava with a production of about 37.5 million metric tonnes annually. Cassava may be propagated with family labour, and primitive equipment like hoe and machete, which has made it a crop of choice among resource-poor women farmers. The crop is mostly cultivated by smallholder farmers in rural communities and is majorly consumed in the form of garri or fufu (Iheke, 2008) ^[6]. It can however be processed into several other products including cassava chips, flour, pellets, adhesives, alcohol, and even starch which is used as raw materials for livestock feed, alcohol/ethanol, textiles, confectionery, wood and food industries (Iheke, 2008) ^[6]. One of its major features is the special ability it has to bridge the gap in food security and poverty alleviation (Clair & Etukudo, 2000) ^[2].

Women empowerment has been described as the increase in the total wellbeing of the women including social, educational, spiritual or economic strength; both individuals and groups of women. Essentially, the process of uplifting women economically, socially and politically is referred to as the empowerment of women. (Shettar, 2015) ^[11]. These

women and mostly traditionally underprivileged in the society, and empowerment refers to the process of guarding them against all forms of violence, discrimination and bias. Women empowerment entails the building of a community or society, a political environment, in which women can literally breathe and express themselves without any fear of exploitation, oppression, discrimination, apprehension, or negative self-worth which is usually associated with being a woman in a traditionally male dominated structure (Shettar, 2015) ^[11].

The importance of women in confronting the problems of agricultural productivity and development cannot be overstated. To put it another way, their significance in terms of food security and economic stability cannot be overstated (Rahman, 2008) ^[9]. Female farmers, on the other hand, have little or no say in agricultural policies and decision-making. Most programs aimed at ensuring food security overlook the crucial role played by women in the food production chain (Rahman, 2008) ^[9]. The main objective of the study is to analyse women empowerment in Cassava production as a means of household poverty status in Kuje Area Council, Abuja. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- Describe the socio-economic characteristics of Cassava women farmers and processors in the study area.
- Determine the factors that influence the intensity of Cassava production among farmers and processors.
- Identify the sources of empowerment of the Cassava

farmers and processors.

- Identify the constraints militating against women empowerment in the study area

Research Methodology

Study Area

This study was carried out in Kuje Area Council of Abuja (FCT). Kuje is located at the North Central part of Abuja. The area council lies between 80 – 90 East and latitude 70 North. The area council is bordered on the Northeast part by Abuja Municipal Area Council to the west by Gwagwalada area council and to the southwest by Abuja area council. The area council covers a total land area of 1,800sq km, about 22.5% of the Federal Capital Territory. The people comprise of Gbagy, Gude, Bassa, Hausa and Fulani as long as other migrants from different parts of the country. The area council is characterized by alternate dry and wet condition with mean annual rainfall varying from 1000mm to 1500mm. The average rainfall is 1200mm and starts from late April to late October, while the dry season starts in late October to March.

Sampling Technique

The study's respondents were chosen using a simple random sampling technique. A total of twenty (20) women farmers from five communities were chosen at random for the study. Gaube, Kuchiyako, Paseli, Rubochi, and Lanto are among the communities. A total of 100 people took part in the survey.

Data Collection

Primary data was used for the study. A well-structured questionnaire was used to collect the data from the 100 respondents for the study.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage and mean was used to analysed the data used for the study.

Results and Discussion

Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents

The socioeconomic characteristics of the women farmers and processors in the research region are presented in Table 1. The age distribution of the respondents revealed that the majority (61%) of the respondents were 40 years old, with a mean age of 40.69. This indicates that the majority of the

responders are relatively young people who are actively engaged in agricultural operations. This is in line with the findings of Kimaro *et al.* (2015) ^[7], who found that the majority of farmers working in agriculture were between the ages of 30 and 35. The majority of the respondents (61%) were married, 24 percent were widowed, and 15% were single, according to the marital status of the respondents. Farmers, particularly in rural areas, have a tendency to marry young, which helps provide additional labor for farming activities (Muhammad-Lawal *et al.*, 2009) ^[8]. Table 1 also shows that the majority of respondents (53 percent) had a household size of 6-10 individuals. Only 6% of the respondents had a home size between 11 and 15 individuals, whereas 41% of the respondents had a household size between 1 and 5. The respondents' average household size was 6.08.

The result for level of education of the respondents show that most (41%) of the respondents had secondary school education while 27% of them had no formal education. About 19% of the respondents had primary education while 13% had tertiary education. Formal education affords the farmers the ability to process information and could also serve as a catalyst for adoption among the women. According to Ani (2002) ^[1], education enhances production among food crops farmers, which is a product of their efficiency in utilizing new innovations. The result further shows that the major occupation among the respondents was farming according 74% of the respondents. Table 1 shows that 27% of the respondents had a farming experience of between 3 to 4 years while 26% had a farming experience of between 1 and 2 years. About 18% of the respondents had a farming experience of at least 10 years, 16% had a farming experience of between 7 to 10 years, while 13% of the respondents had 5 to 6 years of farming experience. The average years of experience of the respondents was 6.12. Farming experience is very important and according to Galadima (2014) ^[5] the more farming experience farmers acquire, the easier it is for them to make sound decisions as regards resource allocation. The result for farm size of respondents reveals that 87% of the respondents 3 hectares of farmland or less, with an average farmland of 2.47ha. This indicates that most of the women farmers are smallholder farmers. The average annual income of the respondents was N187,241.37. This shows that most of the women farmers practice subsistence farming and this is in line with Ezra and Yahaya (2013) ^[3].

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by their Socio Economic Characteristics (N = 100)

Socio Economic Variables	Frequency	Percent (%)	Mean
Age (years)			
<30	31	31	
31-40	30	30	40.69
41-50	16	16	
51-60	9	9	
>60	14	14	
Marital Status			
Single	15	15	
Married	61	61	
Widowed	24	24	
Divorced	0	0	
Household Size			
1-5	41	41	

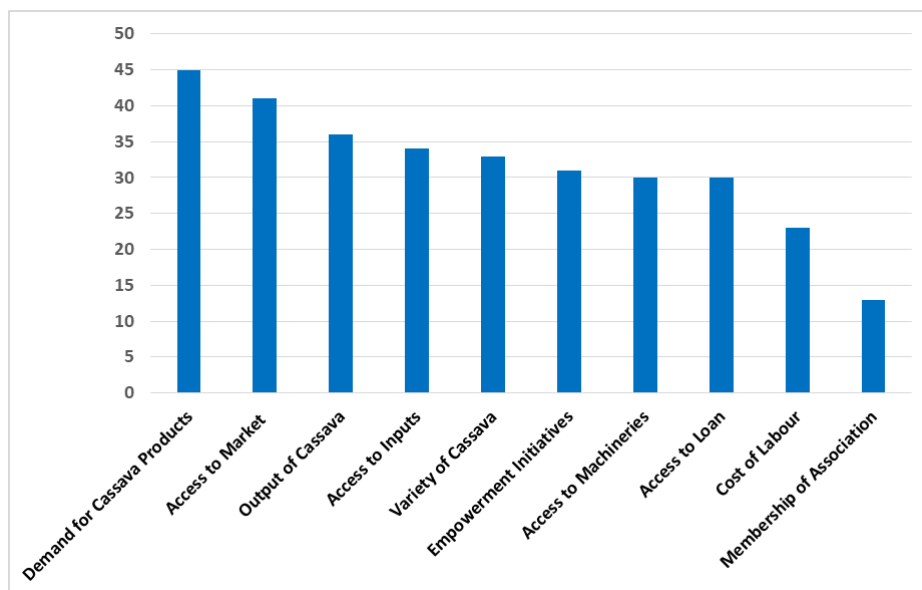
6-10	53	53	6.08
11-15	6	6	
Level of Education			
No formal education	27	27	
Primary education	19	19	
Secondary education	41	41	
Tertiary education	13	13	
Major Occupation			
Farming	74	74	
Processing	13	13	
Trading	13	13	
Years of Experience			
1-2	26	26	
3-4	27	27	
5-6	13	13	6.12
7-10	16	16	
>10	18	18	
Farm Size			
<1ha	46	46	
2-3ha	41	41	2.47
4-5ha	13	13	
Annual Income (N)			
<50,000	11	11	
60,000-100,000	26	26	
110,000-150,000	32	32	187,241.37
150,000-200,000	12	12	
>200,000	19	19	

Source: Field Data Analysis, 2021

Factors Influencing the Intensity of Cassava Production and Processing in the Study Area

The parameters determining the intensity of Cassava production and processing in the study area are depicted in Figure 1. According to the findings, demand for cassava products has the greatest impact on the intensity of cassava production and processing in the research area, with 45 percent. In addition, 41% of respondents claimed that market access has a significant impact on the intensity of Cassava cultivation and processing. Cassava output, access

to inputs, and type of Cassava all had a 36 percent, 34 percent, and 33 percent influence on the intensity of Cassava production and processing in the research area, respectively. Other factors that influence agricultural production and processing in the research area include empowerment initiatives (31%), availability to credit (30%), access to machinery (30%), and labor costs (30%). (23 percent). Meanwhile, only 13% of respondents said that membership in an association has an impact on the intensity of Cassava production and processing in the research area.



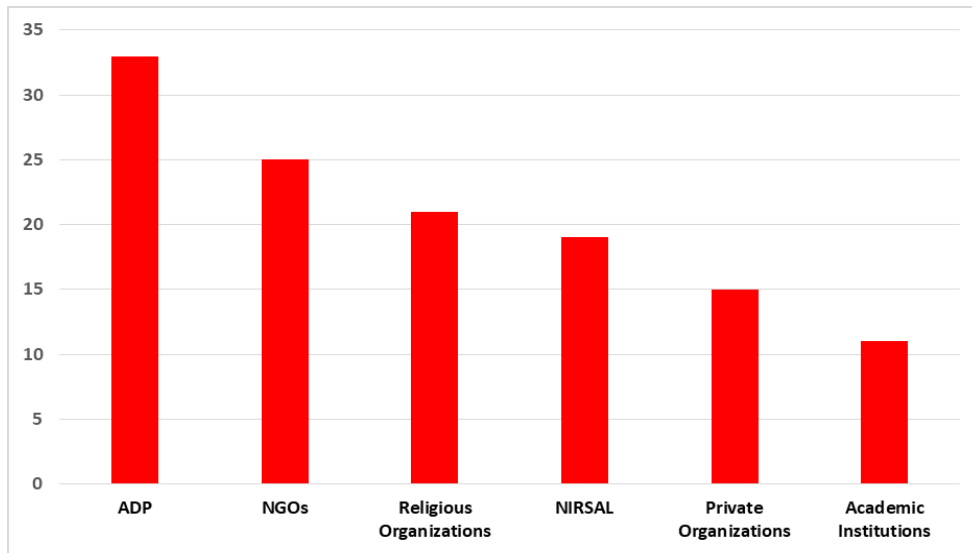
Source: Field Data Analysis (2021)

Fig 1: Factors Influencing the Intensity of Cassava Production and Processing in the Study Area

Sources of Empowerment for Women Cassava Farmers and Processor in the Study Area

The result for the sources of empowerment for women Cassava farmers and processors in the study area in Figure 2 shows that the most prominent source of empowerment for the women farmers and processors in the study area is the Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) as indicated by 33% of the respondents. Also, 25% of the respondents indicated that they have benefitted from empowerment

initiatives from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), while 21% of the have benefitted from empowerment programmes from religious organizations in the study area. Other sources of empowerment for the women Cassava farmers and processors include Nigeria Incentive-Based Risk Sharing system for Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL) (19%), private organizations (15%) and academic institutions (11%).



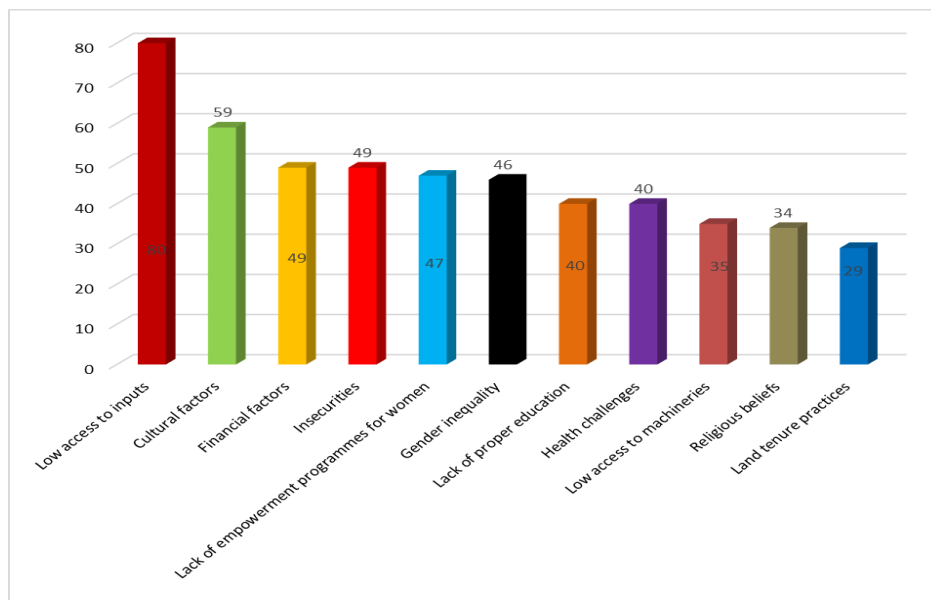
Source: Field Data Analysis (2021) *Multiple responses allowed

Fig 2: Sources of Empowerment for Cassava Farmers and Processor in the Study Area

Constraints Militating Against Women Empowerment in the Study Area

Figure 3 shows the result for the constraints militating against women empowerment in the study area. From the result, low access to farm inputs is the biggest challenge faced by the women farmers in the study area as opined by 80% of the respondents. Also, cultural factors is another major constraint that limit effective women empowerment

in the study area according to 50% of the respondents. Financial factors, insecurities, lack of empowerment programmes and gender inequalities with 49%, 49%, 47% and 46% of the responses respectively also constitute major constraints to women empowerment in the study area. Other constraints include lack of proper education, health challenges, low access to machineries, religious beliefs, and land tenure practices.



Source: Field Data Analysis (2021)

Fig 3: Constraints Militating Against Women Empowerment in the Study Area

Conclusion and Recommendation

According to the findings of this study, the majority of respondents are still in the active age group, with an average age of 40.62. The majority of the respondents were married, with an average household size of 6.08, indicating that they are likely to have family labor. The majority of female farmers and processors had completed high school and had an average of 6.12 years of experience. The respondents' average farm size was 2.47 hectares, with an annual income of N187,241.37. This shows that the majority of them are small-scale farmers. Demand for Cassava products is the most important factor influencing the intensity of Cassava production and processing in the research region, while the ADP is the most important source of empowerment initiative among women Cassava farmers. Meanwhile, access to inputs is the greatest impediment to women's empowerment in the research area.

Based on these findings, the study therefore recommends the following:

- Agro inputs should be widely available and accessible to women Cassava farmers, especially in the study area, via the government and even private extension groups.
- Financial institutions should ensure that agro-loans are made available for women farmers, and they should ensure that gender barriers which limit the ability of women to access credits are removed.
- The government should work with traditional leaders, religious leaders and opinion leaders to ensure that cultural and religious hindrance to women empowerment and effective participation in economic activities are abolished.

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