

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF SMALL HOLDER FARMERS IN MAKURDI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BENUE STATE NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Smallholder farming plays a significant role in the domestic and socio-economic life of the society such that national development is not possible without considering and developing this important and substantial segment of the society. Smallholder farmers play important roles as producers of food, employers of labour, managers of natural resources, income earners, and caretakers of household food and nutrition security. It is thus seen, that the food security status of a nation especially agrarian and developing countries like Nigeria is a consequence of its agricultural sector of which smallholder farmers constitute the majority. Benue State also known as the “food basket of the nation”, has a large percentage of its agricultural sector consisting of smallholder farmers who are responsible for the state’s agricultural performances. Yet, there tends to be little development in the state and the level of food insecurity, poverty and unemployment in the state is a matter that calls for due attention. Hence, the study on “Socio-economic Characteristics of Smallholder farmers in Makurdi Local Government Area of Benue State Nigeria” needed to be investigated. A total of one hundred and twenty (120) semi-structured questionnaires through random sampling of respondents were administered in the research. Descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency and percentage distribution were used to measure the objective. The result of the research study indicated that the age of the respondents (97.50 per cent) implied that most of the respondents were in their productive and economically active age and capable of participating in food production, which increases food security. 65.8 per cent of the smallholder farmers surveyed were found to be female, 74.20 per cent of the respondents married, 85.90 per cent of the respondents had primary to tertiary level of education. Whereas, households with family members ranging from 1-10 constitute were found 85.00 per cent of the respondents; 80 per cent of the respondents had number of dependents three or less, more than two third (69.20 per cent) of the respondents had more than 16 years farming experiences, majority of the respondents (90.80 per cent) had access to other sources of income apart from farming, more than half of the respondents (51.20 per cent) had access to land below three hectares, it meant that respondents are smallholder farmers. The majority of the respondents (91.70 per cent) had remittance of ₦20000 or less per annum with a mean remittance of ₦6,791.67. Nearly three fourth (74.20 per cent) of the respondents had no access to credit facilities. This influences the tendency of a household to be food secure because with large farm land households can produce more.

Keyword : small holder farmers, socio-economic, characteristics, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The result of agriculture and agricultural development in developing countries of Sub-Sahara Africa is rural development without which all effort in agricultural development is futile. Smallholder farming plays a significant role in the domestic and socio-economic life of the society such that national development is not possible without considering and developing this important and substantial segment of the society.

Studies have shown that smallholder agriculture is important as a means of reducing rural poverty and food insecurity. According to Rosegrant and Hazel (2000), agricultural growth that fosters improvement in productivity on small farms has proven to be highly effective in reducing rural poverty and hunger and raising rural living standard.

It is a known fact that in developing countries, large percentages of the population consist of smallholder farmers and are living in rural areas. For Nigeria, the percentage

of those living in the rural areas is up to 70% or more (Rosegrant and Hazel, 2000). Estimates from IFAD (2010) revealed Nigeria's population to be 158,423,182.0 and of this population, 79,528,437 constitute the rural population, showing that about 70% of Nigerians are involved in agriculture.

According to IFAD (2012), the agricultural sector employs approximately two-third of the country's total labour force and provides a livelihood for about 90% of the rural population. While encyclopedia (2012), estimated that about 70% of the country's labour force is engaged in agriculture and 80% of the total food consumed, are produced by small-scale farms spread over 30.7million hectares of the nation's land. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in 2012 further revealed that agriculture contributed 2.9 Billion Naira (\$18 million) to Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP) in the second quarter of 2012. The revenue thus, accounted for 41% of the nation's total GDP for the quarter.

Smallholder farmers play important roles as producers of food, employers of labour, managers of natural resources, income earners, and caretakers of household food and nutrition security. It is thus seen, that the food security status of a nation especially agrarian and developing countries like Nigeria is a consequence of its agricultural sector of which smallholder farmers constitute the majority.

Hence, over the years, several attempts have been made to combat food insecurity at the state, national and international level, such attempts have been targeted at the agricultural sector between the smallholder farmers and the commercial farmers. But Idachaba (2004), revealed that argument still persists as to whether African countries should write off the smallholder farmers as finished and focus attention on the large-scale farmers. Although, some people believe that giving smallholder farmers the same access to physical and human resources as large-scale farmers, should increase agricultural productivity.

At the state level, Benue State also known as the "food basket of the nation", has a large percentage of its agricultural sector consisting of smallholder farmers who are responsible for the state's agricultural performances. Yet, there tends to be little development in the state and the level of food insecurity, poverty and unemployment in the state is a matter that calls for due attention. As a result, the contribution of these smallholder farmers has been poorly understood and often under estimated. Thus, this research aims at exploring the extent and conditions under which smallholder farming has contributed to food security.

Although, related study by Omede, (2011) and other

researchers have studied the food security of households in Makurdi from various perspectives, studies have not specifically addressed the contribution of smallholder farming to household food security in Makurdi local government area.

OBJECTIVE

To determine the socio-economic characteristics of small holder farmers in the study area

METHODOLOGY

The Study Area

The selected area of study is Makurdi local government area of Benue state. It is geographically located in the middle belt zone of Nigeria and lies between longitude 8⁰ and 9⁰ East and latitude 7⁰ and 8⁰ North. Guma bounds the local government area to the north, to the south it is bounded by Gwer, to the west by Gwer-west and to the east by Gboko local government areas of the state respectively. It has a total land area of 835.62 square kilometers The farmers grow a wide range of crops and livestock. The major crops grown include rice, groundnut, sorghum, millet, beneseed, cowpea, sweet potatoes and cassava. Makurdi comprises of a mixture of various tribes but the predominant tribes here are the Tiv's while other substantial tribes are the Idoma, Igede, Igbo, Hausa Igala and Jukun.

Sampling procedure and sample size

The researcher administered 120 semi-structured questionnaires through random sampling of respondents in the research location. The research location comprises of eleven council wards but only the wards relevant to the research were selected they are; Agan, Bar, Central south mission, Clerk mission, Fiidi, Modern market, North bank I and North bank II. With the assistance of enumerators, the questionnaires were administered to the respondents and their responses recorded.

Method of data collection

The researcher obtained data for the study using primary source of data in the study area. The primary data were obtained by administering semi-structured questionnaires randomly to one hundred and twenty (120) smallholder farmers (respondents) chosen from relevant wards within the study area.

Descriptive statistics such as mean, frequency and percentage distribution was used to measure the objective (the distribution of some of the socio-economic characteristics like age, sex, level of education, occupation, household size, income and farm size)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**Socio-economic characteristics of smallholder farmers****Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of smallholder farmers**

(n=120)

Sr. No.	Variables	Frequency	Percent	Mean
(1)	Age			38.60
1	<=20 Years	03	02.50	
2	21-40 Years	67	55.80	
3	41-60 Years	50	41.70	
(2)	Sex			
1	Male	41	34.20	
2	Female	79	65.80	
(3)	Marital status			
1	Single	31	25.80	
2	Married	89	74.20	
(4)	Educational level			
1	Illiterate	27	22.50	
2	Primary	50	41.70	
3	Secondary	26	21.70	
4	Tertiary	17	14.20	
(5)	Family size			7.01
1	<=5 family members	54	45.00	
2	6-10 family members	48	40.00	
3	11-15 family members	14	11.70	
4	>15 family members	04	03.30	
(6)	Number of dependent			2.41
1	<=3 members	96	80.00	
2	4-6 members	18	15.00	
3	7-9 members	05	04.20	
4	10+ members	01	00.80	
(7)	Farming experience			20.95
1	<=5 Years	05	04.20	
2	6-10 Years	12	10.00	
3	11-15 Years	20	16.70	
4	16+ Years	83	69.20	
(8)	Other income			12875.00
1	<= ₹ 50,000 per year	109	90.80	
2	₹ 50,001- ₹ 10,0000 per year	11	09.20	
(9)	Farm size			2.55
1	<=1.0 hectares	15	12.50	
2	1.1-2.0 hectares	43	35.80	
3	2.1-3.0 hectares	33	27.50	
4	>3.0 hectares	29	24.20	
(10)	Remittance			6791.67
1	<= ₹ 20,000	110	91.70	
2	₹ 20,001-40,000	07	05.80	
3	₹ 40,001-60,000	02	01.70	
4	₹ 60,001+	01	00.80	
(11)	Credit			
1	No	89	74.20	
2	Yes	31	25.80	

Source: Field survey

(1) Age

The socio-economic characteristics of respondents are presented in Table 1. The result showed the minimum age of the respondents as 18 years while the maximum age was 59 years. The table showed that the age group that participated most in farming activities (21-40 years) consisted of more than half of the respondents (55.8 per cent), while those whose age ranged from 41-60 and 18-20 years comprised 41.7 per cent and 2.5 per cent, respectively. Furthermore, the mean age of respondents in the study area was 38.60 years. This implied that most of the respondents were in their productive and economically active age and capable of participating in food production, which increases food security.

(2) Sex

As high as 65.8 per cent of the smallholder farmers surveyed were found to be female and 34.80 per cent to be male, indicating that women participated more in farming activities than men in the study area. This implied that majority of the women in the study area have access to a source of income by engaging in various forms of income generating activities related to farming, therefore can influence the quality and quantity of food consumed within the household consequently contributing to household food security. This was in agreement with the findings of Akosile (2011), that more women participated in farming activities than men.

(3) Marital status

Furthermore, the result showed that 74.20 per cent of the respondents were married. The implication of this finding was that most of the farmers were married, had family responsibilities and they make use of family members as labour. This act increases their productivity and reduces labour cost. Being married determined the capability of the farm households to allocate their resources efficiently on both farm and non-farm activities to boost the household food security.

(4) Education

The result on educational status of respondents revealed that 22.50 per cent of the respondents had tertiary education; 41.70 per cent had secondary education; 21.70 per cent had primary education while 14.20 per cent had no formal education. The result implied that respondents were capable of reading and writing thus could participate in extension activities and easily adopted improved technologies, this would probably influence agricultural production and consequently contribute to food security. The result was in agreement with previous studies such as that of Quisumbing

et al., (1995), who established that increasing farmers' education was a key ingredient for their empowerment, which invariably would affect household food security.

In addition, the educational status of respondents in the study area can be attributed to the presence of different institutions of learning in and around the study area. It showed that establishing institutions of learning especially in rural areas can encourage and influence farmers' education and in the long run food security because those who lack access to basic education are not likely to accept new programmes such that will enhance food security within the households.

(5) Household size

The result indicated that households with family members ranging from 1-10 constitute 85.00 per cent of the respondents and the mean family size of respondents in the area to be 7.01. It showed that majority of the households in the study area have large household size, implying that family members can influence food security through diversified source of income to the family, division of labour and supply of labour to the farm since smallholder farming is labour intensive and family labour dependent, thus helping to save resources that would have been used to hire labour. It is in agreement with findings by Adenegan, *et al.* (2013) that household size is a determinant of the labour available for farming activities.

(6) Number of dependents

The result in Table 1 indicated that 80 per cent of the respondents had number of dependents three or less, while the mean number of dependents was 2.41, showing that respondents do not have a high number of dependents. This increases food security by improving the tendency of the resources available to go round since less people will have to be fed and catered for. Hence, the lower the number of dependents the better the likelihood of having a more food secured household.

(7) Farming experience

The result in reflected that more than two third (69.20 per cent) of the respondents had more than 16 years farming experiences, followed by 16.70 per cent, 10.00 per cent and 04.20 per cent with 11-15 Years, 6-10 Years and less than equal to 5 Years farming experiences, respectively. So, it can be concluded that majority (85.90 per cent) of the respondents were having more than 10 years of farming experiences.

(8) Off-farm income

The result revealed that vast number of the

respondents (90.80 per cent) had access to other sources of income apart from farming. The mean income from those sources was 12,875.00 per annum. With access to non-farm jobs, respondents have the ability to influence agricultural production positively through the purchase and use of farm inputs such as fertilizer, chemicals and seed, which increases farm production, thus improving household food security. It agrees with previous study by Babatunde (2012), who opined that off-farm income does not lead to decline in agricultural production rather it brings about complementarities and positive spill-over effects on the farm.

(9) Farm size

The result on farm size indicated that the mean farm size per farmer is 2.55 hectare and showed that more than half of the respondents (51.20 per cent) had access to land below three hectares, it meant that respondents are smallholder farmers. This influences the tendency of a household to be food secure because with large farm land households can produce more. It is consistent with Bogale (2009), but contrary to Sikwela (2008) that large farm size reduced food security.

(10) Remittance

The result in Table 1 showed that large number of the respondents (91.70 per cent) had remittance of ₦20000 or less per annum with a mean remittance of ₦6,791.67. The level of financial assistance that a household receives from friends and relatives contributes to food security in the sense that a high amount of remittance increases the money available for meeting household needs, while a low remittance reduces money available for meeting household needs.

(11) Credit

The result in Table 1 indicated that nearly three fourth (74.20 per cent) of the respondents had no access to credit facilities, implying that majority of the respondents operated their farms based on what they could afford and had no external assistance from the government. Access to credit empowers the farmers and expands farm production consequently increasing farm income and food security. However, lack of access to credit limits farmers' productivity and affects food security negatively.

CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the age of the respondents (97.50 per cent) implied that most of the respondents were in their productive and economically active age and capable

of participating in food production, which increases food security. 65.8 per cent of the smallholder farmers surveyed were found to be female, 74.20 per cent of the respondents married, 85.90 per cent of the respondents had primary to tertiary level of education. Whereas, households with family members ranging from 1-10 constitute were found 85.00 per cent of the respondents; 80 per cent of the respondents had number of dependents three or less, more than two third (69.20 per cent) of the respondents had more than 16 years farming experiences, majority of the respondents (90.80 per cent) had access to other sources of income apart from farming, more than half of the respondents (51.20 per cent) had access to land below three hectares, majority of the respondents (91.70 per cent) had remittance of ₦20000 or less per annum with a mean remittance of ₦6,791.67. Nearly three fourth (74.20 per cent) of the respondents had no access to credit facilities.

Majority of the women in the study area have access to a source of income by engaging in various forms of income generating activities related to farming, therefore can influence the quality and quantity of food consumed within the household consequently contributing to household food security. Respondents were capable of reading and writing thus could participate in extension activities and easily adopted improved technologies, this would probably influence agricultural production and consequently contribute to food security. With access to non-farm jobs, respondents have the ability to influence agricultural production positively through the purchase and use of farm inputs such as fertilizer, chemicals and seed, which increases farm production, thus improving household food security. The result on farm size indicated that the mean farm size per farmer is 2.55 hectare and showed that more than half of the respondents (51.2 per cent) had access to land below three hectares, it meant that respondents are smallholder farmers. This influences the tendency of a household to be food secure because with large farm land households can produce more.

RECOMMENDATION

In the light of the findings from this study, it is recommended therefore, that government should ensure that rural dwellers who constitute majority of smallholder farmers are supported with everything necessary to improve smallholder farming, which for now is the back-bone of internal food supply in the country.

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