

ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNITY LEADERS' ROLE IN ENHANCING CROP PRODUCTION ACTIVITIES IN ARDO-KOLA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, TARABA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the role of community leaders in enhancing crop production activities in farming communities of Ardo-kola local government area of Taraba State, Nigeria. The population for the study was 498 respondents comprising 39 community leaders and 459 farmers. The sample for the study was one hundred and thirty-nine (139) respondents comprising of one hundred (100) crop farmers and all the thirty-nine (39) community leaders. The sample was drawn using multi-stage sampling procedure. The instrument for data collection was a 41-item checklist and the instrument was validated by two Agricultural Education and one Crop Production experts. A total of 139 copies of the checklist were administered on the respondents with the help of two research assistants. Percentages, frequency, weighted mean and standard deviation were used to analyze and present the results. Hypotheses were tested using z-test at .05 level of significance. Findings from the study indicated that, community leaders play a vital role in enhancing the crop production capacity of their respective communities through coordinated approach to allocation of farm lands, settlement of dispute among farmers, bringing information to farmers from extension agents, organizing farmers to form cooperative societies. However, constraints such as soil degradation and poor attitude of farmers toward modern crop production practices were seriously hampering these leaders' efforts in promoting crop production. Community leaders should be better equip with adequate information and some logistics in addition to formal engagement and integration of community leaders in agricultural development programmes to enable them perform their roles optimally especially in enhancing crop production.

Keywords: Community leaders, crop, production, assessment, role

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture remains an important sector in the global economy today that has the potentials for both human and economic development. David and Somachi (2016) asserted that, the agriculture sector represents Africa's greatest opportunity to drive inclusive, sustainable growth, and the only sector with the potential to lift millions out of poverty and forever change the continent's path to development. Agriculture therefore, has the ability to eradicate poverty, create wealth and develop the economy through its series of activities and processes if leadership potentials are properly harnessed in communities.

Community leaders who are sometime called local leaders are those people who guide, direct, coordinate and exert a network of influence over the members of a given community for the purpose of facilitating the achievement of their communal goals. Mgbada

in Famakinwa, Adisa and Alabi (2019) viewed community leaders as the people who have some amount of influence in the community even though they may not hold any formal position. They are one of the major key players in Nigerian rural development programmes who influence the thoughts, ideas, actions, behaviour and feelings of other people in their communities.

These leaders in the opinion of Williams in Echeta, Ani and Onoh (2017) join voluntary organizations in order to make contacts and if they are educated, tend to read local newspapers and other printed materials which assist them in information gathering and dissemination. Donye (2017) viewed local leaders as people that can influence and direct the activities of individuals or group of people towards the achievement of their goal. In this context, community leaders are traditional rulers, religious leaders, leaders of youth and

women groups who direct and influence the activities of various groups and community members for the purpose of improving their crop production capacity.

Crop production is the act of raising crops from the planting stage to the final stage where the matured edible products are harvested and ready for consumption, processing, storage and marketing. Asogwa, Nongugwa and Ugwuoke (2014) defined crops as plants that are cultivated by man such as cereals, vegetables, fruits and all the varieties of plants grown and harvested as food for man, feeds for livestock and raw materials for industries. In this context, a crop is a cultivated plant that produces edible products in form of grains, seeds, tubers and roots for both human and animal consumption. In Nigeria, most of the agricultural communities are rural with farmers mostly involved in subsistence crop production for the purpose of feeding themselves, their families and occasionally for sale of the surplus.

Most crop farmers in Nigeria produced predominantly food crops. Oladeebo and Masuku (2013) reported that, food crops account for the bulk of the crop sub-sector of the nation's agriculture and comprise broadly of cereals, pulses, roots and tubers, plantains, oil seeds and nuts, vegetables and fruits. In order to improve crop production capacity of farmers, agricultural extension agents have over the years assisted farmers by way of providing them with the necessary agricultural information and creating links between farmers and relevant authorities so that farmers can assess the needed farm inputs and other consultancy services. To this end, Hameed and Sawicka (2017) asserted that the transfer of relevant technologies is the main job of extension personnel.

However, Okojie, (2020) observed that in Nigeria there exists a wide extension agent-to-farm family ratio. Currently, the extension worker to farm family ratio is 1:2500 depending on the state in the country. Unfortunately, Nigeria cannot boast of one tenth of this number currently. This dearth of extension workers indicate that many farmers are not reached and therefore not exposed to new innovations and technologies in agriculture. The only logical solution therefore, has being to utilize the services of local or community leaders to

compliment and accomplish the agricultural development tasks. However, the pertinent question is this; in what ways are these leaders directly or indirectly involved in crop production activities in their communities? The need for an assessment of their roles in promoting crop production activities in their respective communities cannot be over emphasized. Assessment according to Boahin and Boahin (2018) is the process of judging competence against prescribed standards of performance. In the context of this paper, assessment entails the gathering of information from community leaders and farmers on community leaders' role in enhancing crop production activities.

In Nigeria, Crop production activities are carried out mostly in rural agrarian communities. These communities have their distinct leadership styles and structures. However, in different communities, there are various challenges negating crop production and reducing the efficiency of crop farmers. These challenges ranges from the mode of crop field allocation to farmers, insecurity and criminality in various communities, dearth of information on improved crop varieties and farming practices, lack of coordination among crop farmers and poor access to basic farm inputs. Some of these challenges are purely communal and can only be addressed through effective community leadership. The major problem of crops farmers and rural farming communities has been how they can overcome these challenges so that they can improve their efficiency in crop production

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess community leaders' role in enhancing crop production in the study area. Specifically this study seeks to:

- i. identify commonly cultivated crops in Ardo-kola Local Government Area, Taraba State;
- ii. assess the roles performed by community leaders in enhancing crop production in the study area;
- iii. examine the ways in which community leaders' roles have enhanced crop production in the study area;

- iv. identify the constraints militating against community leaders' efforts in promoting crop production in the study area.

Hypotheses

- i. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of community leaders and farmers on the roles performed by community leaders in enhancing crop production in Ardo-kola Local Government Area, Taraba State
- ii. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of community leaders and farmers on the constraints militating against community leaders' efforts in promoting crop production in Ardo-kola Local Government Area, Taraba State

METHODOLOGY

Design of the Study

This study adopted the survey research design. The design was considered suitable for the study because data on variables of interest were collected from a group of respondents (both crop farmers and community leaders) for the purpose of making valid judgment.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Ardo-Kola Local Government Area of Taraba State. It is one of the sixteen (16) local government areas of Taraba State. It is located in the Northern part of the state and lies largely within the tropical zone and has a vegetation of low forest and grassland. This local government area is made up of communities that are purely agrarian in nature and has the potentials for the production of various crops.

Population and Sampling Technique

The population of the study made up of crop farmers in Ardo –Kola Local Government Area. The local government area is made up of ten cells. A multi stage sampling techniques was employed in order to pick the required number of crop farmers that served as the sample size. In the first stage, five (5) farming communities were purposively selected from the ten cells because of their prominence in crop production. In the second stage; one farming community was

randomly selected from each of the selected cell. In the third stage farmer were randomly selected in proportion to the population of crop farmers in the study area. Finally, a 5% proportion of the total population of 498 farmers in the selected farming communities were taken using Yaro Yamen formula to arrive at a total sample size of 139 respondents.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection was a checklist. The researchers developed a checklist titled "Community leaders' role in enhancing crop production checklist". The checklist had two point response options of cultivated/performed/agree (3) and not cultivated/not performed/disagree (2). The checklist was validated by three experts, two from Agricultural Education and one from Crop Production all from Taraba State University, Jalingo.

Method of Data Collection

A total of 139 copies of the checklist were administered on the respondents by the researchers and two research assistants. The data was collected from the respondents in their respective farming communities. There was a 100 percent retrieval rate since the instrument was administered and retrieved on the spot.

Method of Data Analysis

Simple percentage and frequency were used to analysed objectives 1 and 3 and were represented using a bar chart. Weighted mean and standard deviation were used to analysed objectives 2 and 4. Any item with a mean value of 2.50 and above was regarded as performed/agree whereas any item with a mean value less than 2.50 was regarded as not performed/disagree. The hypotheses were tested using z-test at .05 level of significance. The hypothesis of no significant difference was rejected where the t-calculated value exceeds the t-critical value at .05 level of significance while the hypothesis of no significant difference was accepted where the t-calculated value is less than the t-critical value at .05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

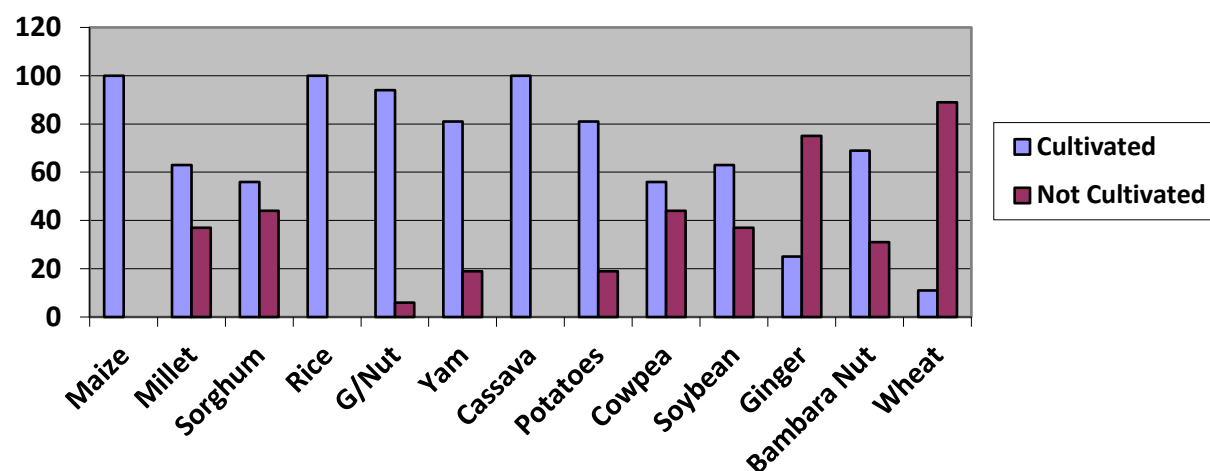


Fig.1: Bar Chart of respondents on the commonly cultivated crops in Ardo-Kola LGA

Result from Fig.1 indicates that, 100% of the respondents agreed that Maize, Rice and Cassava were commonly cultivated in Ardo-Kola LGA of Taraba State. About 81% of the respondents agreed that Yam and potatoes were commonly cultivated crops in the study area. However, only 25% and 11% of the respondents reported that Ginger and Wheat were commonly cultivated respectively. This indicates that,

ginger and wheat were not commonly cultivated in the study area. This is in line with the findings of Mahmood, Nyameh and Jauro (2014) who opined that, crops that thrive well and which can be cultivated in commercial quantity in Taraba state include cereals (Maize, Millet, Sorghum, and Rice), roots and tubers (Yam, Cassava and Sweet potatoes), and Legumes (Sesame, Groundnut).

Table 1: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Test Analysis of Responses of Respondents on the Roles Performed by Community Leaders in Enhancing Crop Production

S/No	Roles	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
1	Linking farmers with extension agents	2.50	.44	1.62	1.96	*NS
2	Providing information to crop farmers	2.61	.59	.21	1.96	*NS
3	Carrying out agricultural shows	2.42	.47	2.00	1.96	**SR
4	Educating farmers on new crop varieties	2.63	.49	1.47	1.96	*NS
5	Educating farmers on modern crop production practices	2.57	.38	1.00	1.96	*NS
6	Reporting farmers challenges to the appropriate authorities	2.60	1.02	.12	1.96	*NS
7	Aiding the formation of farmers' cooperative societies	2.51	.74	1.28	1.96	*NS
8	Assisting farmers to source for farm inputs	2.44	.69	.65	1.96	*NS
9	Promoting peaceful coexistence among farmers	2.75	.81	1.18	1.96	*NS
10	Dissemination of extension package	2.41	.62	1.21	1.96	*NS
11	Formation of local security outfit to safeguard crops	2.55	.37	1.53	1.96	*NS

X=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, t-cal = t-calculated, t-crit. = critical value, *NS=Not significant and Not rejected, **SR=Significant and Rejected.

Source: Field data 2019

Results from Table 1 indicate that, about eight (8) items had their mean values above the cut-off point of 2.50. This signifies that, these eight items are the roles performed by community leaders in enhancing crop production in the study area. However, three (3) items had their mean value below 2.50 indicating that,

these roles are not performed by community leaders. The standard deviation ranged from .37 to 1.02, which indicates that the respondents were not too far from each other in their responses. The hypothesis tested in Table 2 indicates that all the isolated items except one had their calculated values ranged from .12 to

1.62, which were less than the table value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance and 137 degree of freedom. This indicated that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the two groups on the roles performed by community leaders in enhancing crop production. The null hypothesis was not rejected for the ten items. The above findings agreed with Donye (2017) who reported the major role

of the local leaders to include acting as a liaison between communities and government, organizing fund raising, diffusing information and educating rural people, ensuring cordial relationship among people and providing information on inputs to the rural people. Furthermore, Msuya *et al.*, (2017) emphasized facilitation of linkages between research centers and farmers.

Table 2: Percentage of the Responses of Respondents on the ways in which Community Leaders' Role have Enhanced Crop Production in Ardo-Kola LGA

S/No	Items	% Agree	% Disagree
1.	Increased crop yield and output	56	44
2.	Access to basic farm inputs	43	57
3.	Better conflicts management	50	50
4.	Creation of marketing channels	56	44
5.	Management of Crop pests and diseases outbreak	31	69
6.	Development of improved crop storage strategies	50	50
7.	Enhanced security of farmers and crops	50	50

Result from Table 2 indicates that, 50% of the respondents agreed that, the involvement of community leaders in crop production activities have resulted to better conflict management, development of improved crop storage strategies as well as enhanced security of farmers and crops with another 50% disagreeing with the above position. Similarly, about 56% of the respondents reported increased crop yield and output in addition to creating marketing channels due to community leaders' involvement in crop production activities. However, about 57% and 69% submitted that, the involvement of community leaders in crop

production activities has not improved farmers' access to basic farm inputs and management of crop pests and diseases outbreak respectively. Echeta *et al.*, (2017) observed that, some roles played by local leaders in agricultural information dissemination include assisting extension agents in informing farmers about availability of farm inputs like fertilizers and improved seeds, encouraging local farmers' participation in extension demonstration activities, serving as contact farmers and assisting in settlement of disputes among farmers.

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-Test Analysis of the Responses of Respondents on the Constraints Militating against Community Leaders' efforts in Promoting Crop Production in Ardo Kola LGA

S/No	Constraints	$\bar{X}$	SD	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
1	Soil degradation	2.63	.57	.11	1.96	*NS
2	Lack of appropriate information on crop production	2.77	.61	1.31	1.96	*NS
3	Insufficient provision of agricultural inputs to farmers	2.67	.75	1.62	1.96	*NS
4	Poor access to credit facility	2.98	1.07	.08	1.96	*NS
5	Illiteracy of the crop farmers	2.84	1.01	1.24	1.96	*NS
6	Poor attitude of farmers toward modern crop production practices	2.75	.77	2.38	1.96	**SR
7	Prevalence of pests and diseases	2.57	.84	1.68	1.96	*NS
8	Incessant communal disputes among farmers	2.62	.58	3.94	1.96	**SR
9	Poor communication system	2.82	.87	.13	1.96	*NS
10	Poor transportation facilities	2.89	.45	1.12	1.96	*NS

X=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, t-cal = t-calculated, t-crit. = critical value, *NS=Not significant and Not rejected, **SR=Significant and Rejected.

Source: Field Data 2019

Results from Table 3 shows that, all the ten (10) items had their mean values above the

cut-off point of 2.50. This implies that, they are the constraints militating against community

leaders' efforts in promoting crop production in Ardo-Kola LGA. The standard deviation ranged between .45 to 1.07, which indicates that the respondents were not too far from each other in their responses. The hypothesis tested in Table 4 indicates that, eight items had their calculated values ranged from .08 to 1.68, which were less than the table value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance and 137 degree of freedom. However, two items had their calculated values of 2.38 and 3.94 which are greater than the table value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance. This implied that, there was no significant difference in the mean responses of the two groups for the eight items on the constraints militating against community leaders' efforts in promoting crop production in Ardo-Kola LGA. The null hypothesis was not rejected for the eight items but was rejected for the two items.

The above findings agree with Akpan (2010) who highlighted factors reducing agricultural production in Nigeria to include inadequate credit facilities and environmental related issues including inadequate land, continuous poor harvests, and soil degradation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Community leaders play a vital role in crop production through coordinated approach to allocation of farm lands, settlement of dispute among farmers, bringing information to farmers from extension agents, organizing farmers to form cooperative societies, involvement of farmers in agricultural practices and dissemination of extension information. However, soil degradation and poor attitude of farmers toward modern crop production practices among many others are seriously hampering these leaders' efforts in enhancing crop production in their communities. There is the need for community leaders to be equip with adequate information, communication and transportation facilities in addition to some logistics to enable them perform their roles optimally especially in the area of enhancing crop production. Furthermore, there is need for formal engagement and integration of community leaders in agricultural development

programmes just like the agricultural extension agents.

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