

Prospects and Constraints of Indigenous Agricultural Practices among Rural Farmers in Itu L.G.A. Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The study analysed the prospects and hindrances to the application of local knowledge in the development of rural agriculture in Itu local government area of Akwa Ibom state using descriptive statistics and coding methods. The results indicated provision of food (30%), income generation (24%), employment opportunities (20%) and provision of raw materials (15%) as some of the benefits of indigenous agricultural practices in the area. Lack of credit facilities, poor tools and storage facilities, absence of viable market, continuous land tenure system and old age/sickness were the major constraints of the rural farmers. The study identified some livelihood activities common in the area. Government is, therefore, advised to put in place, a sustainable programme that would improve traditional agriculture in Nigeria.

Key words: Prospects, constraints, indigenous, agriculture, rural farmers

INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, agrarian society began at the time when man planted his first seed and trained his first animal. This bond between man and the soil has increased and continued steadily till present day (Udoh, 2001). It is evident that over 60-70% of our population at present day rely on farming for livelihood (Udoh, 2001; Akpabio, 2005). Rural livelihood combines production systems based on the nature, extent and quality of means of production available. Generally, almost all rural means of livelihood are practiced with the aid of traditional agricultural knowledge (Ekong, 2010). Indigenous Knowledge (IK) is the local knowledge; knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society, IK contrasts with the international knowledge system generated by universities, research institutions and private firms. It is the basis for local, level decision making in agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural resource management and a host of other activities in rural communities. Nwosu (2010) states that promotion of indigenous agricultural activities will lead to improved agricultural productivity, higher income earnings and improved standard of living. The agricultural development strategy has been criticized for its inability to provide solutions to other rural problems such as goodroads, education, sanitation, water, health nutrition as well as institutionally based and other infrastructural needs. About 70% or more of the population of developing countries live in rural areas where indigenous agricultural development and rural farmers provide livelihood for

people. According to Akpabio (2005), rural dwellers provide bulk of the food which is consumed for good health. They also provide industrial raw materials, food crops and employment for the family (Agboola *et al.*, 2004).

Purpose of study: The purpose of this study, therefore, is to:

- Assess the various benefits of indigenous farm knowledge among rural farmers
- Identify constraints associated with indigenous agricultural practices
- Identify the agricultural and non-agricultural livelihood activities in the study areas

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Itu local government area of Akwa Ibom state. It is one of the 31 local government areas in the state and is located in the Southern part of the state. It shares common boundaries with Ikono, Uyo, Ibiono local government areas and Cross River state. A simple random sampling method was used to select respondents from 100 identified farmers from the 5 existing clans of Itu local government area. These clans include Itu clan made up of 5 villages, Ayadehe (3 villages), Mbiabo (5 villages), Itam (52 villages) and Oku clan (made up of 8 villages). A total of 90 questionnaires were retrieved from rural farmers in the study area who engaged in indigenous agricultural

practices. Information in the questionnaires were coded and analyzed using tables, percentage, charts and illustrations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that the age of the respondents range from <30 years (20%), 31-40 years (36.67%), 41-50 years (31.11%) and >51 years (12.22%). Similarly, 60% of the respondents were female and 40% were male. The indication here is that majority of the rural populace in the area who engage in indigenous agricultural production are female youths who are between 31 and 40 years of age. They are involved in various rural agricultural youth organizations (Adesope, 2007) such as the integrated farmers scheme and women agricultural entrepreneur development program. The educational level of the respondents is rather low since about 40% were not educated beyond the primary school level. Some 13.33% had attained secondary school level and few had post secondary school education. Their poor educational background may likely affect their knowledge of innovations, based on the assumption that educated people tend to embrace knowledge of modern farming practices. Therefore, they embrace their indigenous practices. The high percentage of married respondents show the high value placed on marriage by religion, tradition and culture; Ekong (2010) in Asa *et al.* (2006) says that getting married is a highly cherished value among ruralities in Nigeria not only because of the need for children and the continuation of family name but also because in some areas, the women form a vital source of unpaid family labour. Family sizes range from 1-4 persons

(16.67%), 5-7 persons (67.78%) and >8 persons (15.56%). The high number of large families is an indication of the general belief that family labour is the most affordable labour for farm work in the practice of indigenous farming. Activities of agricultural livelihood in the area occupy 74.44% while non-agricultural activities take 25.56%. This is an indication that agricultural livelihood activities are the most common livelihood activities in the rural communities. According to Ekong (2010), rural dwellers are principally occupied in farming, animal husbandry, fishing, hunting, food processing and some cottage industries. The income of the farmers in the study shows that income ranges from <₦5,000 (38.89%) from ₦5001-15,000(33.33%), from ₦15,001-25,000(18.89%)and ₦25,001 (8.9%). This indicates that the income of rural farmers who apply indigenous knowledge in their farming business are mostly low and this category of people are classified as first generation farmers. Precisely, Udoh (2001) states that first generation farmers are those farmers with limited sizes of farm holdings of 0.3 ha; their farms tools consist of hoes and cutlasses, their storage facilities are basically pots, tins, sacks, drums and other improvised facilities.

Although, there are numerous non-farming occupations in the rural areas of Nigerian, it is observed that the level and intensity of these occupations are usually such that they are over shadowed by agricultural activities when they are compared with those of the urban areas as shown in Table 2. While, agricultural occupations employ 80% of the people in rural areas, 74.3% of the urban dwellers are engaged in non-agricultural occupations (Ekong, 2010). One of the major characteristics of rural population is that of source of labour for food production, engagement in indigenous agricultural systems and related primary production (Ben, 2009).

Table 3 shows the distribution of respondents according to involvement in indigenous agricultural

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of the rural farmers

Variables	Classifications	Frequency	Percentage
Age	<30 years	18	20.00
	31-40 years	33	36.67
	41-50 years	28	31.11
	≥51 years	11	12.22
Sex	Male	36	40.00
	Female	54	60.00
Education	No formal education	25	27.78
	Primary	36	40.00
	Secondary	12	13.33
	Tertiary	17	18.89
Marital status	Single	37	41.11
	Married	53	58.89
Family size	1-4 person(s)	15	76.67
	5-7 person(s)	61	67.78
	>8 persons	14	15.56
Livelihood activities	Agricultural	67	74.44
	Non-agricultural	23	25.56
Income level	<₦5,000	35	38.89
	₦5001-15,000	30	33.33
	₦15,001-25,000	17	18.89
	≥₦25,001	8	8.90

Field survey, 2010

Table 2: Employment status in rural and urban areas in Nigeria

Variables	Urban (%)	Rural (%)
Agriculture	25.7	80
Employers and self employed	20.3	46.4
Employees	0.6	0.8
Unpaid apprentices and household workers	4.8	32.8
Non-agriculture	74.3	20.0
Employers and self employed	47.9	17.1
Employees	21.0	1.5
Unpaid apprentices and household workers of which manufacturing	5.4 (17.1)	1.4 (8.5)
Construction	(2.2)	(0.3)
Commerce	(33.0)	(0.4)
Transport/communication	(3.7)	(9.3)
Services	(17.6)	(1.4)
Others	(0.6)	(0.1)

World Bank Country economic report: Nigeria options for long term development (Ekong, 2010)

Table 3: Indigenous agricultural livelihood activities in the study area

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Crop production (farming)	32	35.56
Food processing	14	15.56
Fishing	13	14.44
Animal husbandry	12	13.33
Hunting	3	3.33
Cottage industries	4	4.44
Saw milling	3	3.33
Timber exploitation	4	4.44
Non-timber forest products	5	5.56
Total	90	100.00

Field survey, 2010

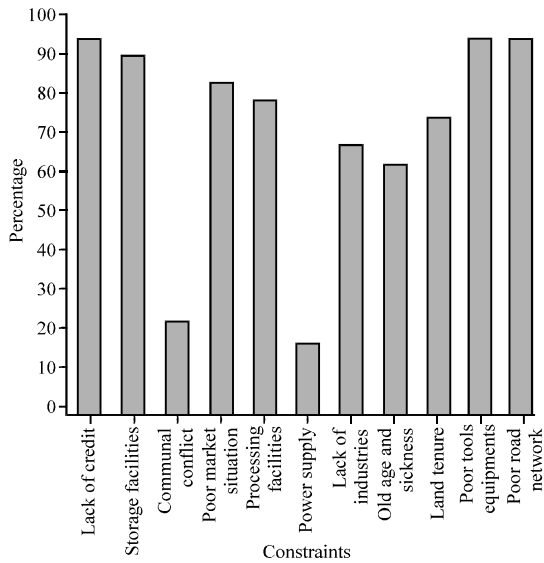


Fig. 1: Constraints to indigenous agricultural production in the study area

knowledge livelihood activities in the rural areas of Itu LGA Akwa Ibom state. Coding and percentage were employed to showcase the ranking of the indigenous livelihood activities. Crop production (farming) had the majority (35.56%), food processing (15.56%), fishing (14.44%), animal husbandry (13.33%) and the least, hunting and saw milling (with 3.33% each). These findings have confirmed the belief by Nwosu (2010) that rural dwellers are principally occupied in crop production (farming), animal husbandry, fishing, hunting and food processing.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of respondents according to the level of challenges they face in indigenous agricultural production. The respondents maintained that lack of credits (95%), poor storage facilities (90%), poor working tools (95%), lack of industries (65%), since most industries depends on agricultural raw materials, land tenure (80%), poor market situation (85%), sickness and old age (60%) are the major constraints of the traditional knowledge system of

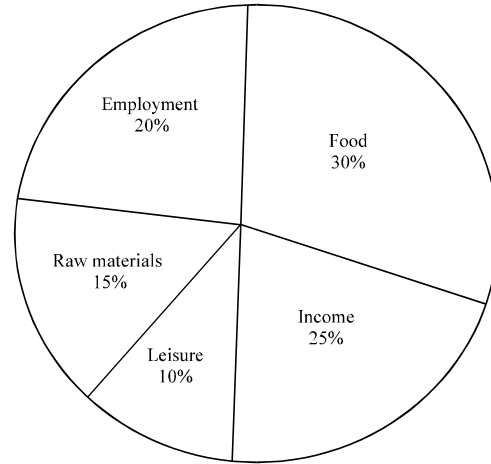


Fig. 2: Prospects of indigenous agricultural production of the respondents

agricultural development in the rural communities of Itu local government area. However, power supply is not a problem in the area, since they are connected to the national grid and the presence of 132 KVA PHCN facilities there. The problems stated above are in agreement with what Ben (2009) says that the problems bedeviling rural agriculture include lack of credits, poor storage facilities, lack of farm tools and sedentary cultivation and primitive livestock farming. According to Ben, other impediments include small farm size, capital per unit area, value of sales per unit area and low production per season. Worthy of mention is the poor road network in the area with 90% record of constraints. Nwosu (2010) however states that the agricultural development strategy has been criticized for its inability to provide solutions to rural problems including infrastructural needs of the rural populace.

Figure 2 shows the benefits derived from the indigenous knowledge system of agricultural production. It was observed that rural agriculture has at least put food on the table of the respondents at a majority rate of 30%. The practice has provided full time employment at 20%, income to the people at 25%, raw materials for the existing cottage industries at 15% while leisure takes only 10% indicating that rural farming is the main occupation of the people. This agrees with Obasi (2010) that agriculture is not only the main occupation of the rural people but it is the source of food for the people and raw materials for industrial development. Rural agriculture is, however, the main centre of rural development.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the prospects and constraints of indigenous agricultural practice in the rural communities of Itu local government area of Akwa Ibom

state. It reveals that some factors militate against indigenous knowledge system such as lack of credit (95%), storage facilities (90%), market situation (85%), land tenure system (80%) and old age/sickness (80%). However, power supply (15%) is not a constraint due to the presence of PHCN facilities in the area. Also, some prospects of the practice were identified. They include provision of sustainable income, employment opportunities, raw materials for cottage industries and food supply among others.

However, the study has shown that a proper enhancement programme for rural dwellers, especially women will help to improve indigenous agricultural practice which is known the world over as the framework for technological development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends the following:

- There should be deliberate policies by relevant development authorities to target indigenous agricultural knowledge system in the rural areas of Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria. There is need for the ADP to ensure that rural dwellers and perhaps the women farmers recognized as practitioners of rural agriculture are trained and retained for efficiency and productivity
- Rural farmers should be encouraged to form co-operative societies so that they can benefit from form government incentives
- The present individual loan facilities for Women Agricultural Development Entrepreneur Programme (WADEP) by the state government should be increased to accommodate more women farmers

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