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Dr. Anthony Ekong
UNIVERSITY OF UYO, UYO

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**13 CAUSES OF INACCESSIBILITY AGRICULTURAL
FINANCE FACILITIES TO WOMEN FARMERS FOR
IMPROVED PRODUCTION**

BY

**A. O. EKONG (Ph.D)
DEPARTMENT OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY OF UYO, UYO**

ABSTRACT

The study investigated the causes of inaccessibility of agricultural finance facilities to women farmers for improved production in Akwa Ibom State. The population comprised of 400 women farmers, 50 women cooperators, 62 Extension officers, 21 bank staff and 10 agricultural loans board staff giving a total of 543 subjects for the study. An 11-items structured questionnaire was developed for data collection. Mean and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were employed in data analysis. The results highlighted 11 causes of inaccessibility of agricultural finance facilities to women farmers. Based on the findings of the study, Organization of Women Farmers Education Programme by the Akwa Ibom Agricultural Development Project (AKADEP) was recommended, to educate women farmers on transactions for agricultural finance, management of the finance obtained, utilization of dual loans, and on the procedures for obtaining information on the operations of some sources of finance facilities.

KEYWORDS: Finance, Access, Finance facilities, Inaccessibility.

INTRODUCTION

Women in Akwa Ibom State form a very large labour force to the farming enterprises (Ekong, 2001). Their roles in agriculture perhaps could be one of the reasons that informed the government recognition of organized women farmers activities with the vision of encouraging their sustained involvement in agricultural endeavours. The accorded recognition of organized women participation in agriculture was the evolution of the group described by Ekong (2001) as the Women in Agriculture (WIA) and which constitute a programme unit in the Extension Services of Agricultural Development Projects (ADPS) in each state of the federation.

The women involved in agriculture do not have easy access to finance sources for obtaining credit facilities for improved production, despite the design of the programme toward providing broad spectrum of supports including finance to the women to boost their participation in agricultural development (Saito, Mokennen and Spurling, 1994). Adequate financial support for women farmers could assist

them in the acquisition of sufficient labour, felling of big trees predominant in Akwa Ibom State, clearing of thick forests abundant in the characteristic rain forest of the state, and expansion of farm size. Finance would also support the women in reducing the multiple cropping practices to monocropping for the economy of production; acquisition of improved planting materials, breeds of livestock and other inputs; engagement of modern technology of production, processing and storage as well as the assurance of running capital.

The women restricted access to finance facilities for agriculture had earlier been observed by Chikwendu (1980) and Onwubuya (1987). They associated the problem with certain social and cultural factors coupled with the responsibilities of the women in the families as home keepers. Also Abe (1981) and Araka (1991) similarly noted that the major limiting factor to women involvement in agricultural production is their restricted access to finance facilities and other inputs. Access according to Ekong (2001) is the ability to get to the source of agricultural finance, obtaining and utilizing it for production. It also describes having an opening to many or all the opportunities, resources or facilities that could be utilized toward productive ends. Finance in the context of this study is the money, in cash, that could assist women farmers improve their agricultural production. While the facilities describes the money that can be obtained from a source upon satisfaction of the conditionalities, to serve as a means of achieving improved agricultural production.

It is well agreed that successive government in Nigeria both at the federal and state levels, the non-governmental organizations (NGOS) as well as individuals have made efforts at making finance available at the formal and/or informal sources. Despite such efforts, women farmers have had the problem of inaccessibility to the finance facilities from some sources. Inaccessibility is the inability to get to the source of agricultural finance to obtain some facilities for agricultural production. It could mean the impossibility of having the opportunity or opening to sources of finance or resources for utilization toward productive ends.

Buttressing the problem of inaccessibility to finance facilities by women, Adeyokunu (1987) remarked that it revolves around high rate of illiteracy, low socio-economic status and almost complete absence of agricultural training of any kind among women. World Bank (1991) recorded that most commercial banks require collateral, which only few small holder farmers, if at all, could provide. Most women farmers in Akwa Ibom State are small holders and live in the rural areas with their limitation of having collaterals to offer.

The World Bank Report (1994) stressed that majority of women farmers are small holders and are therefore disadvantaged in their access to formal financial services thereby leaving them with poor financial base to support improved level

of production. The situation therefore motivated this investigation into the relevant causes of restricted access to agricultural finance facilities by women farmers in Akwa Ibom State. The study answered one research question and tested one hypothesis.

METHODOLOGY

The study was a survey and employed a survey design. The instrument was an 11-items structured questionnaire for obtaining of relevant data for answering the research question and testing of hypothesis. The instrument had a reliability coefficient of 0.96.

The study covered the 31 local government areas of Akwa Ibom State covered in the zonal administrative divisions of Akwa Agricultural Development Project (AKADEP).

The population for the study was 543 subjects which comprised 400 women farmers; 50 women cooperators; 62 extension officers; 21 bank staff and 10 agricultural loans officers of the state agricultural loans board. Five hundred and forty three (543) copies of the instrument were administered to the respondents out of which 425 were completed and returned giving a return rate of 78.26%.

Mean and Analysis of variance (ANOVA) were utilized in analyzing the data. The results computed from the responses of respondents on the causes of inaccessibility of finance facilities to women farmers are presented in Table 1 while the testing of hypothesis is in Table 2.

RESULTS

Research Question

What are the causes of inaccessibility of finance facilities to women farmers in Akwa Ibom State?

Data for answering the above research question are presented in Table 1.

Mean rating of responses on the causes of inaccessibility of finance facilities to women farmers.

N = 425			
S/No	Causes of inaccessibility of finance facilities to women farmers	X	Remark
1.	Women deprivation to land ownership makes availability of collateral difficult.	3.21	Agreed
2.	Reduction of family farm produce for sale reduces the possibility of expansion of farming practices that could attract loan facilities.	2.70	Agreed
3.	Mens influence on the socio-economic status of women.	2.78	Agreed
4.	All-men affairs of guaranteeing loan facilities from banks to women.	2.86	Agreed
5.	Low level of literacy among women complicates acquisition of agricultural loan facilities from formal sources.	3.00	Agreed
6.	Most couples do not permit female partners to source for loans independently for agricultural use.	2.89	Agreed
7.	Low level of women participation in organized agricultural training limits their exposure to sources of finance for agriculture.	3.06	Agreed
8.	Rural banks have similar constraints for agricultural loans like their commercial bases in cities.	2.89	Agreed
9.	Restricted mobility of women outside the home to attend organized agricultural cooperative meetings within their local government areas restricts their opportunities for loans.	2.88	Agreed
10.	Banks interest rates scare most of the women farmers.	3.14	Agreed
11.	The family farming nature of women agriculture i.e. some women combine with husbands on the same farm thereby restricting the women opportunities for agricultural loan facilities.	2.76	Agreed

Cut off point is $X = 2.50$ and above for Agreed.

Data in Table I indicate the respondents agreeing to the 11 items as causes of inaccessibility of finance facilities to women farmers by rating all above the cut off point of $X = 2.50$. It could be deduced that all the items were causes of inaccessibility of finance facilities to women farmers in Akwa Ibom State.

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the mean rating of the responses of women farmers, bank staff, AKADEP Staff, Agricultural loans offices and women cooperators on the causes of inaccessibility of finance facilities to women farmers.

Data for testing the hypothesis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2:

ANOVA for mean rating of responses on the causes of inaccessibility of finance facilities to women farmers.

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F.cal	F.tab	Remarks
Between group	795068.2	3	265372.25	0.70	3.24	NS
Within group	6059956	16	379372.25			
Total	6865024.2	19				

NS: Not significant at $P < 0.05$

Table 2 show that the calculated F value of 0.70 was less than the critical F value of 3.24 at 3 and 16 degrees of freedom at $P < 0.05$. The null hypothesis stated was therefore upheld. Derivation from the hypothesis tested show that the identified causes contributes to the restricted access to agricultural finance facilities to women farmers.

DISCUSSION

The finding of this study revealed that the 11 causes are associated with finance inaccessibility to women farmers in Akwa Ibom State. The finding agreed with the observations of Chukwendu (1980) and Onwubnya (1987) who noted that certain cultural and social factors contributed to the restricted access of women farmers to agricultural finance facilities. The findings also supports the recording by World Bank (1991) that the handicap of not having the required collateral by small-holder farmers, the group to which most women farmers in Akwa Ibom State belong, and have limitation of collateral.

The result also supports the World Bank Report of (1994) which documented that majority of women farmers are disadvantaged in their access to formal financial services thereby keeping them at almost perpetual poor financial base to support reasonable level of agricultural production.

The result on low literacy level and low level women participation in organized agricultural training holds true the views of Adeyokunu (1981) who noted the situation of high rate of illiteracy, low socio-economic status and almost complete absence of agricultural training of any kind among women farmers. All other findings as outlined in Table I also constitute the causes of inaccessibility of agricultural finance facilities to women farmers in Akwa Ibom State.

The hypothesis testing in Table 2 showed no significant difference in the mean rating of respondents, responses at 0.05 level of significance. It therefore means that women farmers, bank staff, AKADEP staff and others concerned with the financing of agriculture are aware of the limitations of women farmers which hinder them from having easy access to agricultural finance sources for facilities.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

The causes of finance inaccessibility to women farmers have implications for the Akwa Ibom State Agricultural Development Project (AKADEP) as the supervisory body of the women in agriculture programme. It would contribute to the easy organization of wide range of programmes periodically for the women farmers aimed at reducing the limitations that pose restrictions to the women having access to finance facilities. If this is done, it will definitely make the women to have the knowledge of the constraints, how to remove them, be aware of finance sources as well as overcoming the phobia associated with seeking for the finance, and obtaining the facilities for improved agricultural production.

The causes also have implications for cooperative societies whose women members are farmers. It will help farmers cooperative organizers and supervisory bodies of the women in agriculture to embark on some educational programmes toward making the women favourably disposed to benefiting from agricultural finance facilities from the sources for improved production.

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of the study, it is recommended as follows:

1. Women Farmers Education Programme should be organized by the Akwa Ibom State Agricultural Development Project (AKADEP) using individual contacts or group contact farmers and modular approach to train the women on:
 - (a) transactions for agricultural finance facilities
 - (b) management of agricultural finance
 - (c) utilization of dual loans (money and material inputs)
 - (d) obtaining information and clear understanding and operations of some sources of finance facilities.
2. Traditional restrictions to land ownership by women should be reviewed by the government and the communities, to enable women have landed property for collateral when demanded by institutional Sources for granting of agricultural credits.

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