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EDUCATION IN ENHANCING THE PRODUCTIVITY OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE IN NIGERIA: CURRICULUM IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The role of women in agricultural production in Nigeria is inestimable. However, the women's roles have been frustrated by many factors such as social, cultural, and economic circumstances under which they operate. This paper examined the importance of Agriculture, strategies for increasing the agricultural productivity of women farmers, and measures to encourage young women and better prepare them to take up agricultural studies. Further, some suggestions for Improving Women to benefit from their Agricultural Education were made. Finally, the Curriculum Implications of Education in Women's Role in Agricultural Productivity in Nigeria were examined.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely expressed that education is an instrument for social, economic, and political change. No country can witness development without human resources that are educated. Osuji (2009) noted that women are light in most homes, especially when they are empowered through education. According to Ihebereme (2010), Girl-child education has unique features akin to it because of its outstanding role in national development. But most rural women do not meet up with men and their urban counterparts in education and training, despite widespread campaigns and efforts by the Governments to reduce illiteracy. Several factors according to Bamidele (2011) still affect women's education negatively. They include:

a) Religion: Some religious sects in Nigeria still believe and teach that women shall not acquire western education as seen in the Boko Haram sect in northern Nigeria.

b) Illiteracy among parents and guardians: most parents and guardians in some parts of Nigeria are illiterate and hence, do not know the importance of education let alone invest in it. Recent data released by the chairman of the national population commission, Samaila Makamma, revealed that literacy levels among parents and guardians in the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria are as follows: South-West 73.6%, South-South 71.9%, South- East74/1%, North-West 33.8%, North East33.8%, and North-Central54.9%. What this implies is that the literacy level in North West and North East combined is less than what obtains in any part of the South.

(c) Poverty: Many Nigerian families are still living in abject poverty. According to Wikipedia encyclopedia online (2011), 45% of Nigeria's population still lives below the poverty line. The last collected population data by Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics in 2012, revealed a total population of about 166.2 million people. By 2045, it is projected that the population of Nigeria will surpass that of the US and will reach 390 million by 2050 (World Population Review 2014). This implies that out of 166.2 million 79 million are still struggling to meet their basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing and cannot afford to pay for education. For instance, Okoli (2011) stated that rural women farmers' illiteracy rate is as high as 78%, yet these rural women farmers form the bulk of food producers.

Farmer education should be provided by extension workers. Agricultural extension workers as described by Aneke (2011) are personnel trained with the aim of disseminating research information on improved farming techniques, helping them to improve their farming skills and general welfare, and as well as developing leadership qualities. They also help farmers to learn how to make fewer expenses and give them other economic information and decision about farm operations. The extension workers also help the rural farmers to form a cooperative

society which helps them contribute their resources to improve their production. This means that if farmers are trained via extension workers through seminars, workshops, farm, and home visits, and field demonstrations, they will do well. Thus, the role of agricultural extension today goes beyond the transfer of technology and improvement in productivity, but also, includes improvement in farmers' managerial and technical skills through training, facilitation, and coaching, among others.

Farmers' education and training at any level will exposé the women to access loans, embrace new technologies that will boost agricultural production, stand on their right to access land for production, form and manage cooperative society and oppose most traditions that pose problems to food production by women. Women comprise half of the labour force. Women also are actively involved in agricultural production though in small scale proportions (ILO, (2015). In Nigeria, agriculture is the backbone of our economy contributing to a high total of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). To boost agricultural knowledge and skills, agriculture as a subject was introduced into the school's curriculum as early as colonial education. Nearly all the schools started offering agriculture subjects, a time the 8-4-4 system of education was introduced in Nigeria. In the primary school curriculum, agriculture was part of science but in secondary schools, it is an applied subject. The youths are taught agriculture so that they can appreciate its role in the economy since Nigeria is dependent on agriculture for its economic development. However, this subject has been included in the primary school syllabus and is an elective subject at the secondary school level. Agriculture has been taught in secondary schools for a long time and therefore evidence must be shown that some of the students who learned agriculture subject are farmers. However, the role of women is often frustrated by several problems such as social, cultural, and economic circumstances under which they operate. This paper, therefore, examined the following: strategies for increasing the agricultural productivity of women farmers, Improving Women to benefit from their Agricultural Education, Measures to encourage young women and better prepare them to take up agricultural studies, and Curriculum Implications of Education in Women's Role in Agricultural Productivity.

Strategies for Increasing the Agricultural Productivity of Women Farmers

If the domestic work of women farmers could be made lighter and easier through the provision of appropriate technology, much of her energies would be conserved for other productive ventures.

- **Technologies Needed Particularly by Female Farmers:** Labour and energy saving technologies for the task of women farmers are essential. Post-harvest machinery is equally important. Some women farmers lack technologies to relieve time-consuming agricultural tasks such as weeding, transplanting, and harvesting. Grinding, transport, and water and firewood collection are the main non-agricultural activities where appropriate technologies can reduce the time and energy used by women farmers.
- **Production Technologies:** Production technologies sustainable for women farmers must reflect their current disadvantaged access to most resources and their wide variety of productive activities. Women farmers use hand tools and equipment much more than men. About 30 to 50% of the harvest in Nigeria is estimated to be lost in the processing, drying, and storage sequence. Olawoye (2011) The processing of agricultural produce typically is carried out by women, often providing additional sources of income. However, given the primitive technology used, many agro-processing procedures consume much time and energy. Improvements in agro-processing and storage technologies together with better rural infrastructure, market information systems, and transport could substantially raise labour productivity and yields.
- **Access of Women Farmers to Basic Production Resources:** Access of women farmers to basic production resources – land, labour, and capital for investment must be facilitated – specific efforts must be made to break through the social and intra-household constraints that impede accessibility of these resources. This will require special campaign programmes for sensitizing communities to the negative effects of excluding women farmers from ownership of land and access to critical resources. Outreach programmes to overcome gender-specific constraints may require legal, administrative, or even gender quotas.
- **Market Outlets and Formation of Thrift and Credit Cooperatives:** Women farmers are known to have tremendous motivation once given the lead. They prove to be creative entrepreneurs and respond highly to market signals. It is imperative therefore to create market outlets for farm products and off-farm products and off-farm products of women farmers, most of which would develop into small scale industries with further expansion. The ability of a few women farmers to save from exceptionally meager incomes is demonstrated through thrift and credit co-operatives. To mobilize and sustain gender solidarity for improved productivity, the co-operatives must not restrict themselves to their small women organizations but participate in wider village

associations which will help promote access of women farmers to education, agricultural extension management training, and decision-making. The linkages between women farmers and the more organized professional women groups will facilitate this process.

Suggestions for Improvement

If women farmers must play their rightful role in rural development, a complete change along the following lines is suggested: -

(i) Process of Self Realization:

This process of self-realization can be brought about by education, discussions, participation in workshops, and the formation of associations and cooperative societies. This would help women farmers know specifically their duties, the changes that have affected them, and how they can adapt to these changes.

(ii) Building Viable Projects through co-operatives:

There are many advantages to forming and belonging to co-operatives. They teach how to lead or follow others. They enable members to save and accumulate scarce capital for investment. Through co-operatives, women farmers can receive loans from banks and thus make possible small-scale industries in the rural areas such as garri processing, rice milling, soap making, etc.

(iii) Greater use of Indigenous Savings Groups:

There should be greater use made of such indigenous savings groups. These groups are valuable and stable in many rural communities and can be modernized to achieve greater heights in the future.

(iv) More work for the Educated Women

The educated women should do more homework in their schedule of activities. These include:

(a) Mobilizing other women for rural development

(b) Mobilizing rural savings and other sources of funds;

(c) Finding out areas of investment;

(d) Ensuring that governments listen to the voice of women through their participation in decision-making processes;

(e) Acting as 'Think-Tank' for the interest of women and general welfare'

(f) Production of statistical information on the progress of women;

(g) Ensuring a fair deal from the government with budgets and banks with loans – so that women are not disadvantaged in any way.

Improving Women to Benefit from their Agricultural Education

Improving opportunities for women to benefit from their agricultural education is even more of a challenge than improving women's access to agricultural education. Nevertheless, the case studies suggest a number of measures that can be taken. These can be categorized as follows:

1. Measures to better prepare women students for agricultural careers at all levels. These would include increasing practical work and skills training in areas such as management, research, extension, specializations for which there is a job market in the country, and nontraditional agricultural occupations for women. There also needs to be more opportunities for women to take part in post-graduate and in-service training in skills necessary for career advancement.

2. Legislative measures to prevent discrimination in hiring and employment and to prohibit harassment on the basis of gender.

3. Measures to improve working conditions for women, taking into consideration family responsibilities. These could include flexible working hours, provision of child-care facilities, maternity and paternity leave, and flexibility in posting women with family responsibilities in the field.

4. Measures to provide financial aid and services to women to set themselves up in agricultural enterprises or to become established as farmers. These could also include assistance to women agriculturists and extension to provide their clients with inputs, credit and other services.

5. Measures to professionalize agricultural occupations to make them more attractive; improve salaries and emoluments especially for those working in rural areas; and eliminate disparities in salaries of men and women.

6. Organization of women agriculturists in professional associations that can act as pressure groups to promote women's access to agricultural education and occupational opportunities.

7. Gender sensitization at all levels of national and international governmental and non-governmental bodies dealing with agricultural development policies and planning, including research institutes.

Measures to encourage young women and better prepare them to take up agricultural studies.

- Promote and provide special science courses for girls. As well as providing girls with the science qualifications necessary for higher agricultural education, could help dispel negative assumptions about the ability of girls to master science studies.
- Giving attention to the process of education, i.e. to the treatment of girls and boys during their schooling at the primary and secondary levels, in an effort to eliminate stereotyping which may close doors to future educational opportunities.
- Career counseling at the secondary level which presents agriculture as a possible field of further study and as a profession.
- Organizing information and cultural activities for girls to disseminate information on careers in agriculture.
- Recruiting girls, particularly from rural areas and families engaged in agriculture, and giving value to their on-farm experience and agricultural knowledge in considering their qualifications for higher education.
- Establishment of agricultural secondary schools, or agricultural courses in regular secondary schools, which can feed into higher studies in agriculture.
- Reviewing and revising admissions policies that may discriminate against, or discourage, girls from entering higher agricultural schools.
- Creation of special awards for women in higher agricultural studies.

Access to higher agricultural education is a basic requirement to provide potential women agriculturists with careers at all levels from the field level to research and academia, to national and international agricultural policy-making and developmental bodies. Other conditions are also required, however, if women are to be able to make the most of their education and enjoy equal occupational opportunities with men.

Curriculum Implications of Education in Women's Role in Agricultural Productivity

Several recommendations can be implemented in the curriculum in the short- and medium-term to improve women's access to higher agricultural education, attract women to take up agriculture as a field of study, and overcome the obstacles that stand in the way of women in agricultural studies. The cumulative effect of small changes can contribute to changing the overall socio-cultural environment in a positive direction for women. Such recommendations could be in form of creating greater awareness of women's contributions to agriculture, changing long-held perceptions that undervalue women's work, and breaking down discriminatory practices and attitudes that are essential elements in the overall effort to improve women's access to higher agricultural education. A larger number of gender-sensitive women in policy and decision-making positions can make a positive impact on these goals, especially if they are working in a supportive environment both within the institutions and in the larger society. This does not mean, however, that improving women's access to higher agricultural education must wait for major changes in increasing women's literacy and basic education, attitudes, and perceptions of women's work, customs, and traditions. Effecting such changes is a long-term effort that may not produce the desired outcomes for the immediate future.

CONCLUSIONS

In Nigeria, Agricultural practices are being regarded as the work of men to the neglect of the efforts of women. Women comprise half of the labour force. These women are especially the rural women. Farmers' education and training at any level will exposé the women to access the loan. They will embrace new technologies that will boost agricultural production and also stand on their right to access land for production. This will help them to form and manage a cooperative society and oppose most traditions that pose a problem to food production by women. Access to higher agricultural education is a basic requirement to provide potential women agriculturists with careers at all levels from the field level to research and academia, to national and international agricultural policy-making and developmental bodies.

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