

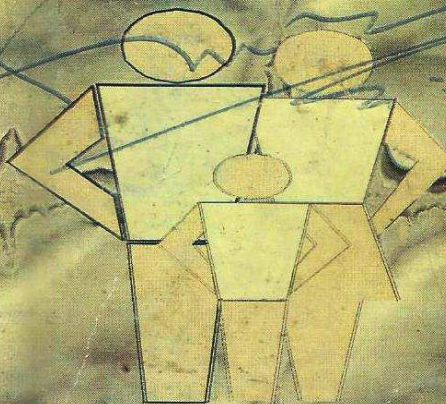
RESEARCH IMPERATIVES

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BRIDGING GENDER GAP IN AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

This paper reviews issues relating to women participation in agriculture. It focuses on gender gaps and ways of reducing these gaps in agriculture.

Introduction

Women contribute significantly to agricultural development and family living. This assertion is supported by Sigot, Thrup and Green (1995) who stressed that women provide 60-80% of family food, assisting the men in weeding the farm, harvesting and processing farm produce for the market or for storage.

It is a common experience that in Nigeria, more than 60 percent of the women most of whom are elderly and live in the rural area are engaged in one form of farming or the other. While appreciating their role in agricultural development activities, it should be borne in mind that at one time or the other, by circumstances of age which may result in physical handicap or by death, they will be leaving the scene of agricultural endeavours. The need for replacements to ensure continuity in agricultural production becomes imperative.

Women in agriculture is the current programme with the focus of mobilizing women for agricultural production. According to Okpongette (1998), the programme is focused at such activities as ensuring information dissemination on established crop technology to women; establishment of skill development centres for the training of female

extension workers linking with other governmental and non-governmental bodies with activities for female farmers and so on. The issue which therefore arise boards on whether consideration has been given for continuity into the future through replacement by the female youth generation. Olaitan (1999) noted that there is a generation gap in agriculture. He observed that youths are not sensitised enough to take up agricultural occupations of the elderly in the society. The gap in this case is the negative attitude and desire of the young female generation toward replacing the elderly women generation in continuing and sustaining the existing agricultural occupational practices. If it is doubted, how many mothers today allow and encourage their female children into agriculture? This paper therefore makes an appraisal of women in agriculture in Nigeria, the adult and young female gap problem, effects on the economy and the building bridges to constrict the gap.

Women in Agriculture: An Appraisal

The significant contributions of women to agriculture were observed in Ethiopia by Michelwait (1974); in Zimbabwe by the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in 1984 and in the Philippines by Timsina (1993). The typical African woman, irrespective of her household has been observed by Boesrup (1970) as providing about 14-18 hours of productive labour in agriculture and in domestic activities. The women make up majority of small holder farmers; provide the bulk of the labour force and manage the family farms on daily basis producing and processing of the produce compared to their male counterparts.

World Bank Report (1994) documented that women in the sub-Saharan Africa, particularly those in the rural communities grow and supply at least 50 percent of the family food needs with reference to Nigeria. Uwakah, Uwaegbute and Madukwe (1991) highlighted the significant contributions of women to agriculture as follows:

Since independence in 1960 industrialization and urbanisation have accelerated rapidly to such an extent that many working age men have been withdrawn from rural areas into the cities in search of high paying jobs thereby leaving agricultural activities to women in rural areas to mature women

The predominance of women in agricultural engagements might have been one of the fundamental reasons for governments of Nigeria conceiving, planning, developing and implementing the women in agriculture (WIA) programme as an integral unit in the Extension services of Agricultural Development Projects (ADPS) in the 1980s. The

programme cuts across all the states of the federation. The mission of the programme is to help the women learn how to use agricultural information to build better lives for themselves, their families and their communities. Specifically the programme was designed to perform such functions for the women as:

- Equipping the women in their efforts of improving agricultural productivity.
- Opening up other avenues to women to make money or accumulate wealth
- Keeping up continuity of agricultural production.
- Enabling families to produce and feed themselves and also produce some towards the economic development of their communities.
- Making women active contributors to the economic development of their nation through the agricultural sector.
- Enabling women keep up the security of the land legacy of the families through agricultural exploitation, and.
- Integrating women into the agricultural development system of Nigeria.

The lofty mission and functions of women in agriculture programme notwithstanding, their realization and sustenance is worrisome, if there is no structural arrangement for young female replacements to ensure continuity and sustainability between generations for steady agricultural production.

Inhibitors To Young Female Active Participation In Agricultural Education For Production

Agricultural education is an in-school agricultural training for youths to acquire relevant agriculture occupational skills for effective engagement in any chosen occupational area. It is meant to ginger interest, positive attitude and enthusiasm toward agriculture as an occupation. It is observed that the trend of predominance of mature women in agriculture in the field could have been similarly reflected in young females interest and enrolment in schools for agricultural training for acquisition of relevant skills, to ensure continuity and sustainability of production. But it has not been the case, thereby creating a gap of who will replace the

mature women when they vacate the scene of participation in agricultural production.

A number of inhibitors could be associated with the gender gap in agricultural education such as:

1. Mothers Attitude Towards Agricultural Occupations For Female Children

Present changes in the society has made mothers both the lettered and non-lettered to conceive visions of their female children becoming medical doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, management executives and to marry prominent persons as husbands rather than engaging in agricultural training for future occupational engagements. This negative attitude of mothers towards agriculture could be described as a negation of the prominent roles of agriculture in development initiatives as well as that of the mature women in contributing in agricultural production which are recognised and appreciated. Little thoughts are therefore given to the issue of replacements through training to ensure continuity of agricultural production which are recognised and appreciated. Little thoughts are therefore given to the issue of replacements through training to ensure continuity of agricultural production between generations.

2. Conception of Agricultural Programmes by Young Females as Being Difficult and Very Demanding

Agriculture training programmes have both indoor (class-room and laboratory) and outdoor (field (farm) laboratory) instructional setting. The manual manipulations associated with the practicals tend to scare young females away. They, as explained by Inyang (1998), prefer the verbal tutorial lectures within the four walls of the classroom just for acquisition of the cognitive knowledge. It seems ridiculous for the young females to appreciate the physical manipulations of tools and equipment on the field for production which is a component of the training programme. This attitude of young females might be attributed perhaps to lack of exposure to the initial home traditional training through hands-on experiences (practices) right from the early stages of life. The early training exposure could have been the stepping base for development of interest for further training.

3. Pseudo-Social Emancipation Trend

The present policy of rural development through the local governments development programmes in Nigeria has the focus of rural dwellers occupationally to engagements outside agriculture. Young females get involved in petty trading; operation of hair saloons, managing of restaurants, hotels and bars. Some become sales girls in provision stores and some for petroleum dealers; fashion designing, tailoring and so on. Agricultural occupations are seen as dirty and menial for the never-do-well at the community level; and for those who cannot belong to the somewhat booming social setting. This situation diverts young females from placing premium on agricultural training for future occupational engagement for sustenance hence the gap.

4. More Emphasis on Other Education of Women Than In Agriculture For Women

Currently in vogue is the empowerment of women through education but not in agriculture. Empowerment is explained by Okeke (1995) as the giving of power to; giving authority to; enabling a person or group of persons gain power. The idea of an average Nigerian young female may be that no power can be gained through training and involvement in agriculture. But relevant training better places an individual or groups on progressive pedestal. No meaningful development can ensue without progressive and sustained agriculture realizable through training acquisition of relevant skills for effectiveness. In this instance the training of young females for replacements of mature women as future agricultural producers appear to be derogated to the background due to its less emphasis.

Misconceived Family Prestige

Family prestige is often misconceived as associating mainly with the presence of legislators, academics, legal practitioners, medical practitioners and less of farmers of whatever status. Reacting against such misconception of family prestige outside agriculture, Olaitan (1999) remarked that the public do receive and consume farm produce with delight but seriously despise farming as a business. They rank farming among the least prestigious occupations. This situation seems to influence parental guidance of female children about education for agricultural engagements which could ensure future replacements for an assured steady agricultural production.

Effects of Gender Gap on the Economy

The gender gap in agriculture between the mature women farmers and young females who could become replacements for continuity of agricultural productions could be associated with such effects as:

1. Widening Food Supply Gap

Food supply for all has become a policy issue of various governments at all levels. Adequate food supply can only be realized through continuous, intensive and sustained agricultural activities through replacements by active labour provided by young females from generation to generation. The probable shortage of active labour replacements in agriculture would negatively affect the intensity of agricultural production hence the quantity of food produced and supplied to the markets. The concomitant results of the gender gap in agricultural education would be what Olayide (1982) described as hunger, famine, under-nutrition and malnutrition in the population.

2. Unemployment

Agriculture provides majority of employment opportunities either through production, processing, storage, marketing or through agro-industrially related engagements. The gender gap could constrict the many agriculture related occupational opportunities that would contribute to sustaining the economy.

Measures for Reducing the Gender Gap in Agriculture

Imminent dangers have always accompanied created gaps in the economic sectors of any nation. To forestall the dangers of gender gap in agriculture, some measures as discussed below could be put in place.

1. Establishment of Young Females Agriculture Training Schemes

Training schemes in agriculture should be evolved either as training schools, workshops schemes, vocational agriculture centres or supervised field experiences in the country with well designed and specialized curriculum in specific area of agriculture occupation. Provisions should be made by the governments at all levels for special grants for the trained young females who have decided to be fully involved in agriculture as a business. This would serve as an encouragement to others to go into the agriculture business.

2. Institution of Annual Young Farmers Competition

The annual young female farmers competition would be organised by the women in agriculture as a means of generating interest in agriculture in the younger generation of females who are active.

3. Utilisation of Supervised Agriculture Experience Approach (SAEA) In Teaching and Learning of Agriculture at The Secondary School Level

The supervised Agriculture Experience Approach will involve the home projects of students under the guidance and supervision of the agriculture teacher. Theories and principles are learnt in the school (classroom) while the student applies them to the chosen agriculture practice at home. This will enable the student independent discovery learning and would of course generate sustained interest which may not be dropped behind. Young females in school could through this approach develop interest in agricultural occupations that would influence their future decisions about agriculture.

4. Institution of Policy Supports for Agriculture Enterprises

Well-articulated policy framework should be put in place by government for supports of young females who opt for agricultural training for relevant skills for self-employment. The replacements would go a long way to reduce poverty.

Conclusion

Adult women contribute immensely to agricultural development. Their role notwithstanding, a gap seem to exist between adult and the young females in agricultural production. The situation is not unconnected with a number of factors as articulated in this paper. Gender gap in agriculture has accompanying dangers particularly on the economy of this country. To forestall the imminent dangers, some measures outlined, that could help salvage the situation to ensure future continuous and sustained agricultural production.

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