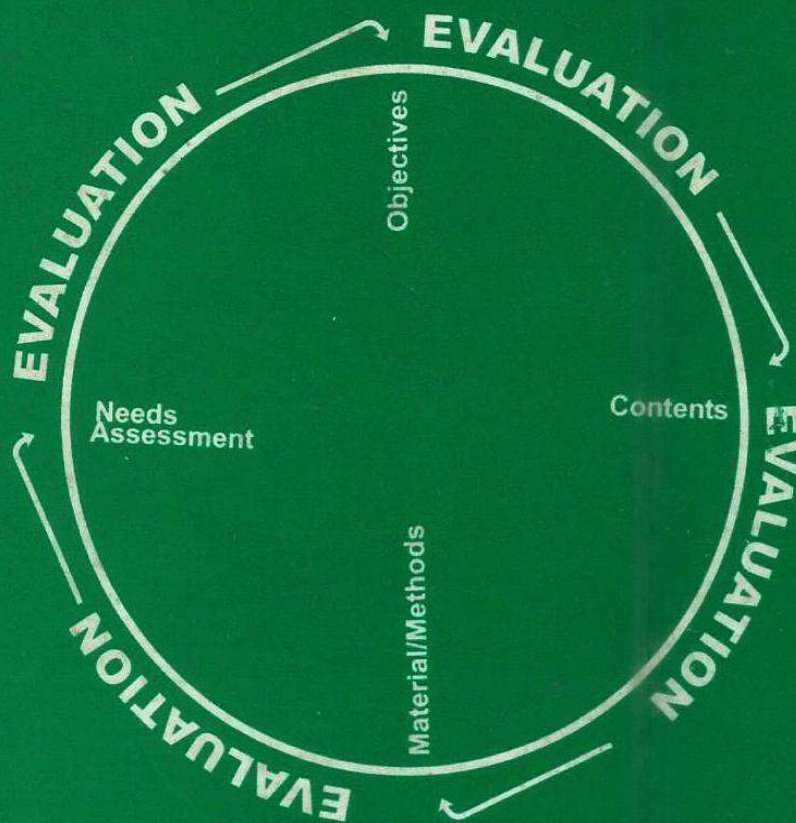


Nigerian Journal *of* Curriculum Studies

Vol. 16 No. 3

2009



Journal of Curriculum Organization of Nigeria (CON)

ISSN: 0189 - 9465

Revolutionizing Agricultural Education for Effective Women Participation in Agricultural Production in Nigeria

Antiaobong Okon Ekong
&
Patrick Sambo Williams

Abstract

There seem to be gender imbalance in the provision of agricultural education in our institutions of learning. A balanced agricultural education programme would be directed towards providing knowledge and skills to men and women to ensure increase participation in food production. Therefore, to equip women of all ages with relevant agricultural knowledge and skills, for effective participation in agricultural production, the remodeling of the existing agricultural education programme becomes imperative. This paper has therefore discussed the theoretical and conceptual framework about women and their involvement in agriculture; gender balance in agricultural education; the need for gender friendly agricultural education programme as well as the implications of revolutionizing agricultural education for effective women participation in agricultural production.

Introduction

Education for men is assumed to be clear cut and straight forward coupled with a strong desire for success in a good job. But education for the women, seems to be restrictive, greatly limited, full of social pressures and psychological barriers. Indeed, women seem to be held educational captive (Ekong & Williams 2005). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO 1996) noted that there is remarkable increase in the number of educated women, but disparities still persist due to gender imbalance. Ekong & Williams (2005) observed that there seems to exist rigid gender division, gender imbalance and inequality that places women in the disadvantaged position with regards to economic and political empowerment, accessibility to finance, social recognition opportunity to qualitative education and functional skill acquisition particularly as related to agricultural production.

Supporting the above observation, UNESCO (1996) had earlier stressed that in different areas of the poorest regions of the world, women and indeed the girl-children are locked into a circle of illiterate mothers, brought up as illiterate daughters, who are married off too early into another circle of poverty, illiteracy, high fecundity and early maternal mortality. They are engaged in very subsistent agricultural production due to non-directed agricultural practices that lacks skills acquisition. There is therefore, the need for gender balance for equitable

Drs Antiaobong O. Ekong and Patrick Sambo Williams are lecturers in the Department of Vocational Education, University of Uyo, Uyo.

provision of balance work-oriented agricultural education for facilitated and increased productivity. Gender balanced education, is the type of education that gives equal consideration to all sexes as stakeholders in the education enterprise without bias and discrimination (Ekong & Williams 2005). Sustainable occupation in agricultural production refers to the ability of individuals to have free choice and unrestrained engagement in agriculture enterprise without bias and discrimination.

Kabbeer (1990) maintained that sex denotes the male –female classification while gender is the male-female grouping with socio-cultural implications in terms of releplaying . Gender practices are within the social structures and institutions of the Nigerian society. Gender gaps occur where the grouping of individuals into gender roles brings about inequalities in treatment including educational and employment opportunities.

It has become a globally recognized issue that for any meaningful development to occur there must be gender equity. Men and women need equal opportunities to develop themselves to the fullest and to participate in making decisions that affect them in all aspects of national development. Imbalances in educational opportunities therefore constitute an obstacle to national development. Female literacy rate in Nigeria is estimated at about 39.5 percent which, when compared with 62.3 percent of male literacy, it is relatively low. The implication however, is that, 43.10 million of 70.5 million women in Nigeria do not have formal education (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2007). The girl-child enrolment in school is estimated at 44 percent. This means that 56 percent of young girls are not in school.

It is therefore noted that for various reasons, women education seem to be ignored by the society. Williams (1993) maintained that education plays dominant roles in transmitting knowledge, skills and values to the citizens. Women exposed to agricultural education would therefore transmit agricultural knowledge, skills and attitude to a large population of Nigerian society. Through their primary roles of procreation and home keeping.

Education constitute the major engine of human development as well as the fulcrum upon which every other human activities revolves. Government agency at all levels should strive to eradicate illiteracy and ensure equal and adequate educational opportunities for the citizens-men and women alike.

Balanced provision of agricultural education is aimed at equipping individuals with agricultural knowledge, skills and attitudes that will enable them to live meaningful and fulfilled lives, and contributing to the development of the society. Educating women for the agriculture enterprise would therefore enhance the equipping of women with the right skills and competencies for meaningful living and to enable them contribute effectively to the development of the Nigerian Society.

In order to ensure equal opportunity as stipulated in the National Policy of Education, efforts need be made to encourage the girl-child and women participation in formal education. There is no justifiable evidence to conclude that a person's true level of academic achievement is sex-determined. Indeed, female students seem to show higher performances in agricultural production activities when the course conditions provide cues that are relevant to their occupational interest. Therefore, curriculum content should ensure the acquisition of psychoproductive skills by all gender as a vital ingredient to national food security through conscious participation in the production processes.

Agricultural curriculum has been defined as a planned educational programme of study that indicates the philosophy and objective of such a programme. Gender education according to Ekong and Williams (2005) is a gender friendly educational programme void of gender bias and discrimination. Revolutionizing agricultural education involves reconstruction, remodeling and refashioning of the existing agriculture programmes curriculum to make it gender friendly and balanced to encourage women involvement

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework about Women and their improvement in agriculture

Sigmund Freud explained women to be creatures formed from the womb and maintained that women physiological make up have set some limits to what women can and cannot do (Nelson 1999). This theory holds that, since men and women have complete divergent nature, occupational education particularly of agriculture should be developed to suit each sex. The myth around Freud's theory is that women reproductive system would be destroyed if they try to perform jobs intended for men.

A concept also holds that women who choose non traditional occupations (occupations traditionally meant for men) would not express some of the admirable characteristics of ideal woman such as tenderness, dependence, less-aggressive, less-competitive, receptive, passive, submission, being homely and being excited in minor crisis (Brown 1995). Therefore feminine qualities should form some considerations for the development and implementation agriculture enterprise oriented programmes to ensure the attainment of benefits of engagement in a chosen agricultural enterprise for self substance.

Tomboyism concept holds that, the girl-child who prefers active outdoor activities which are usually performed by the male child is abnormal (Brown 1995). This concept is of the view that tomboys suffer from a confusion of gender identity.

The incompetency theory proposed by Weslgy (1997) holds that certain jobs are beyond the reach of good performance by women because such jobs require a lot of physical strength and endurance. The theory stresses that men

and women are biologically different and are endowed with abilities and competencies peculiar to each sex. The creation of traditional occupation for women, of course, stems from the misconception that women are generally weaker than men, emotionally unstable and incapable of working effectively under prolonged and stressful situations (Davidson 1997). The major reason therefore for women emancipation movement is to advocate for the right of women to acquire education with little or no hindrance from the society. From the theoretical and conceptual analysis of women and their roles in production, there is the need for eliminating sex stereotyping in the provision of agricultural education programme and in assisting women in enterprise choice through gender balanced mechanisms.

Gender Balance Agricultural Education

Gender balance agricultural education consideration should include giving the male and female students equal access to qualitative agricultural education for skills acquisition as a tool for economic, political and financial empowerment through enhanced capacity for production. This would encourage the involvement of all sexes in national development, self sustenance and advancement. United Nations General Assembly Universal Declaration of Human Rights as documented by Davidson (1997) state in part as follows:

every one has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in elementary and fundamental stages. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit (...p. 10)

Further explanation of the declaration indicate that appropriate measures shall be taken to ensure that the girl –child and women, (married and unmarried) have right like the men in acquiring education at all levels and in particular, equal considerations and access to studying in educational institutions of all types, such as the Universities, Vocational, Technical and others Professional schools. All should be exposed to same curricula, the same examinations, teaching staff with qualifications of the same standard, in same school premises, using the some equipment and of the same quality, whether the institutions are co-educational or not, shall be made available to all citizens (male and female). The declaration also provide for equal opportunities to benefit from scholarships and other study grants (Davidson 1997).

By United Nations declaration, education therefore becomes a vital tool for functional economic development through unbiased gender friendly vocational and technical training. Schooling and training should therefore be made accessible to students of all sexes. Gender balanced agricultural education programme should have such characteristics as:

- providing equal access to qualitative agricultural education as a tool for sustainable agricultural production through its well defined philosophy and objectives.
- making educational programmes gender friendly through unbiased and non-discriminatory instructional materials and deliveries systems.
- amenable to the selection of instructional strategies and methods that would appeal to all the sexes.
- providing farm tools and machines that are women friendly and easily utilizable by them during farm operations.
- incorporating guidance and counseling services into the curriculum content to ensure elimination of gender related misconceptions and myths.
- ensuring the acquisition of psycho-productive skills by all gender as a vital tool for increased agricultural production.
- identifying and utilizing gender friendly constructs during instructional preparation and delivery

The Need for Gender Friendly Agricultured Education in Nigeria.

In Nigeria there is significant under-representation of women in science and technology related careers as compared to their male counterparts. Women have been restricted to traditional occupations primarily due to monism where parents prefer the so-called societal prestigious occupations like medicine, law and engineering for their male children and home economics for the girl-child. There seem to exist role confusion as regards woman education. The role conflict could be said to stem from the societal perception of the woman's roles and empowerment. The perpetuation of gender disparity in education depends largely on what the society considers as woman education. The earlier woman education was tailored to make them passive, submissive, tender, dependant, home oriented, non ambitious and less aggressive. But in the present day society, women who dare to perform non-traditional occupations like medicine, engineering, automobile mechanics, banking, electrical engineering, law and commercial farming are often negatively looked upon as societal misfits; exhibiting deviant characters and branded as women liberators attempting to measure up with the men.

Agriculturally, women play dominant role in food production in Nigeria as they represent 60 percent of the labour force, 80 percent involvement in marketing of agricultural products, 70 percent in food production and 75 percent food processors and preservers (World Bank Report 1994). There is the need therefore for a gender friendly agricultural education programme to achieve the development agender as reported by the World Bank in relation to women participation in food production. This type of education would have such strengths as:

- providing school curriculum that is relevant to the agricultural needs of the girl-child, in relation to agricultural production.
- creating girl-child friendly learning environment through the utilization of gender balanced curriculum,
- encouraging the use of instructional strategies that is not gender biased,
- promoting the training of women professionals in all aspects of on- farm and off- farm agricultural enterprises.
- ensuring women acquisition of psycho-productive skills for functionality as major Stockholders in the Agricultural Industry,
- promoting increased agricultural production by providing competent women labour force,
- ensuring the fulfillment of the millennium goal that provide for equal and qualitative agricultural education for all sexes for food security.

Implications of Revolutionizing Agricultural Education for Effective women Involvement in Agricultural Production in Nigeria

There is a need for complete change in the current agricultural education programme in use in institutions of learning. This change becomes necessary because the current programme packages are yet to be effective in the provision of relevant skills to prepare the women for effective participation in the production of food and other agriculture materials

Revolutionizing Agricultural education would have implications for increasing women participation in sustainable agricultural production as it work go a long way in;

- Remodeling the current agriculture education programmes and making them gender sensitive to ensure effective women participation in agricultural production.
- Restructuring of the agriculture education curriculum content and instructional strategies to enhance women involvement in technological development in agriculture.
- Reorganizing the agriculture instructional deliveries to make them gender friendly to ensure the acquisition of technical and psycho-productive skills for effective and efficient agricultural production by women
- Carrying out fundamental reconstruction of agricultural education components in pursuance of gender balance to enhance the transformation of the agricultural sub-sector of Nigerian Economy.
- Refashioning on-farm and off-farm programme contents inline with millennium goal of free, qualitative education for all (male and female). This would of course metamorphose Nigerian economy into one of the largest economy in the world as women who are the largest participants in food and fiber production would be effectively and efficiently involved in the processes.

- Redesigning agricultural education to be girl-child friendly in content and application to facilitate the transmission of agriculture technological skills to women thereby promoting self – employment, gainful employment, self-reliance, self-sustenance and women empowerment.
- Revolutionizing the entire agriculture education programmes at all levels of education to make them gender balanced to provide greater occupational opportunities in the on-farm and off-farm agricultural production thereby ensuring economic emancipation, poverty alleviation and youth empowerment in Nigeria.

Conclusions

Providing women with the basic agricultural education knowledge and skills through gender friendly curriculum would ensure their full participation in agricultural production. Carrying out fundamental reconstruction, remodeling and refashioning of the existing agricultural education would provide the prerequisite knowledge and skills to prospective women farmers who would want to opt for the agriculture enterprise. This paper has highlighted the elements of revolutionizing agriculture education programmes with gender balance as the focus to ensure effective participation of women in agricultural production for sustained benefits.

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