

HOME ECONOMICS EXTENSION FOR ECONOMIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF RURAL WOMEN IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Home economics extension and services in the Republic of Nigeria experienced different stages of development in the concept of Agricultural Extension and Services. This happens with the services under the control of the States Agricultural Development Programmes and Women-in-Agriculture (WIA) as one of the programmes often organized for rural women in their communities. This paper began by describing the mission of home economics extension and services in Nigeria to the uplifting economic and technological development of rural households. This is the concern of home economics extension because economic and technological reforms deeply shape daily life of rural households. Following an historical overview of home economics extension in Nigeria, pre-empted with a discussion of rural women's involvement, the paper turned to a conversation about the impact WIA might have on rural women in the present economic situation of Nigeria. The paper also highlighted the prospects of WIA and discussed how far it has improved the lives of rural women's economic and technological wellbeing. The paper stated the major findings on the information on WIA at local level and made a conclusion that much effort are needed to embrace home economics extension in Nigeria so as to make meaningful impact on economic and technological development of rural women.

KEYWORDS: Extension Services, Women in Agriculture, Rural Households, Economic Development, Rural Women's Wellbeing

INTRODUCTION

Home economics extension builds its programmes around the subject matter areas of home economics and serves rural communities, with considerations given to rural women, by the printed work, exhibits, radio, television audience and women groups. It emphasizes the development of rural women who have farmers' exploratory manipulative farming experiences offered in a wide range of farming and home areas. The experiences are very useful to rural women for a period of contact for planning more realistic programmes for farm families and home careers (McGregor, 2015). Home economics extension expands its reach through judging rural areas' fair, exhibits, demonstrating baking and canning, holding short courses at farmer's institutes, and specialists, backing these programmes up with leaflets on foods – milk, fish, eggs – and conservation, textiles and recreation. Today, in most countries, home economics extension learning cycles, from food and nutrition to family finances, help families to use their resources wisely (Hutcheson, 2015).

In Nigeria, home economics extension is closely linked with agricultural extension and daily lives of rural households. It contributes to the economic and technological development of rural communities. The mission of home economics extension in Nigeria, as in other developing countries, is to:

- Introduce new knowledge, new skills, new ideas about family life and production to the peasants (especially women staying in rural areas).
- Enable rural women to fully understand and accept the new ideas.
- Change the old ways of daily lives and production styles so they can make family management production and child rearing more effective and scientific (McGregor, 2015).

In addition, Onyibe (2001) reiterated that home economics extension, as an important aspect of agricultural extension, plays an important role in modern agricultural and rural development. He further explained that the ultimate goal of home economics extension is the development of all individuals, especially rural women, helping them gain higher self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-reliance and self-importance thereby further promoting their economic and technological development. Concerning the future of extension services in developing countries, Nichterlein (2011) stated that she was convinced that communication technologies are essential tools in future extension services but that they cannot completely replace face-to-face interaction between the farmers and extension agents.

The paper therefore seeks to explore the past and present position of home economics extension and its services; and discuss WIA and its impacts to economic and technological wellbeing of rural women in Nigeria.

Historical Overview of Home Economics Extension and Services

Okwuche (2009) traced the history of home economics extension in Nigeria from how it started till the present modern extension and how it spreads through West, North and South in the country. She was able to establish that with the evolution of the Nigeria Agricultural Extension system over four centuries, extension services including home economics extension services, can be grouped into three major eras visa vice the:

- Colonial and immediate post independent era – 1893 – 1968.
- Oil-boom era – 1970 – 1979.
- State wide Agricultural Development project (ADP) era – 1980 till date.

From the conclusion of Bene (1994) and Okwuche (2009), all the three eras neglected the focus of the economic and technological wellbeing of women farmers and their households. Madukwe (1995) had earlier stated to support this conclusion that not much effort were enhanced to imbibe home economics extension in rural communities and that most of the organized programmes in home economics extension in rural communities remained weak. Okwuche (2009) suggested that consideration should be given to linking future home economics extension to the Universities which should be mandated to collaborate with governmental, non-governmental and international development agencies to improved home economics extension services that will uplift economic and technological wellbeing of rural women.

Extension in home economics as an enterprise, both in public and private organization, was financed jointly by the federal, state, local governments of Nigeria. Its main purpose is to present to rural women in their homes and on their farms information that will enhance their productivity (Hutcheson, 2015).

The extension work in home economics is supplemented by home and field demonstrations, in corporation with states, and carried out by home economics extension workers. The role of extension officers has widened to include services such as mediation in situations where there is conflict over natural resources. However, the job of home

economics extension workers falls under the broader career category of farm and home management advisors (Nichterlein, 2011).

The specific description of home economics extension worker's job is to advice, instruct, and assist individuals and families who engage in agriculture, agriculture-related processes or home management activities. His or her job also includes demonstration procedures and application of research findings to solve problems; and to give instruction and training in products development, sales and the use of machinery and equipment (labour saving) to promote general welfare of rural women (McGregor, 2015).

Prospects of WIA and its Impact on Rural Women

In Nigeria, the ADPs of the different states made important advances in incorporating gender in agricultural extension by modifying the ADP system midstream to provide for women farmers through the creation of WIA programmes in the department of Extension services of the state ADPs with agenda focus (Oyebanmiji, 1994; and Onyibe, 2001). WIA sought to improve agricultural extension services for women. Existing home economics extension agents were retrained in agriculture extension methodologies, placing special emphasis on women's activities. WIA programme ensured that extension services in every state in Nigeria have female extension workers at every level of operation from state headquarters in the capital down to the villages. The structure of the WIA programme itself is also decentralized and integrated into the extension services (Saito and Gadzame, 1996; and Odurukwe, Mathews-Njoku and Ejiogu-Okereke, 2006).

However, the WIA programme places much emphasis on off-farm activities of women and has concentrated in the transfer of the following home economics technology:

- Cassava processing and utilization – pancake flour, odorless fufu.
- Processing and storage of cassava flour, tapioca, maize flour, malted maize drink, corn meal, pap (wet and malted maize flour).
- Processing and storage of fresh tomatoes into tomato paste.
- Rabbit meat processing and utilization.
- Cocoyam processing and utilization into cocoyam flour for soup thickening and cocoyam chips.
- Dry season vegetable gardening.
- Harvesting and storage of paddy rice (Onyibe, 2001).

In a study of Odurukwe, Mathews-Njoku and Ejiogu-Okereke (2006), most of the technologies on the above listed activities recorded high responses from the women (respondents) as being very relevant to their socio-economic wellbeing and enhancement.

As important as WIA to rural women, so also the analysis of the negative impact of WIA is evident and due to the ineffectiveness of WIA, women participants were greatly affected.

Home Economics Extension Services and Rural Women

Around the world, rural women contribute in multitude of ways through different livelihood strategies to lifting

families and community needs. They work as paid and unpaid, as farm/non-farm labourers in agriculture, as entrepreneurs, traders, providers of services, carers of children and elderly (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2001; FAO, 2011). Rural women often involve time on agricultural production and household activities; have less access to public services and less control over resources. They tend to work longer hours to make more trade-offs between their activities and thus have “time poverty” (Institute of Development Studies (IDS), 2006). They also constitute a significant proportion of the labour on the family farms- whether producing for household consumption or for enterprise or both (UNIFEM, 2005; FAO, 2011).

In addition to their involvement in agricultural and household production, rural women are the principal guarantors of food safety and quality at household and community levels. They are the ones who often produce, purchase, handle, prepare and serve food for the family and in community institutions. As providers of foods, they have a fundamental role in assuming improved nutritional status. They have the primary responsibility for the care of children and for the information of the household (Quisumbing, Brown, Feldstein, Haddad and Pena, 1995). The important and central roles of rural women in reproduction and family care, production and income generating activities are increasing virtually in developing countries (FAO, 2011).

Rural women in Nigeria had been actively involved in agricultural production, processing and preparing foods, engaging in trade and marketing, involved in search of water and fuel, caring for family members aside from their competition in economic operation at the home front. In view of this fact, a study was carried out in 2013 to examine how far home economics extension had improved the lives of rural women in selected local government areas of Oyo state. The study specifically examined home economics extension programmes organized for rural women in their areas, extension activities involving rural women, the problems encountered with the existing programmes and the perception of rural women on the benefits derived in relation to economic development of their families and communities.

The summary of the findings is as follows that:

- The home economics extension and services in the selected local government areas are under the auspices of the activities of the Oyo State Agricultural Development programme (OYSADEP).
- Most of the programmes organized for rural women in the local government areas are operated by non-governmental organizations such as UNICEF, WHO, FAO, UNESCO, WIA and that WIA in particular has responsibilities for rural women farmers’ technological development.
- The services disseminate improved technologies to rural women in processing, production, preservation and harvesting. The findings are in tandem with WIA Report (2001) stating the specific objectives of WIA to include the following:
 - assisting rural women to organize themselves into viable groups and encourage them to register for easy access to produce resources (credits, far, inputs, etc)
 - Introducing new recommended technologies in sub-sectors to women groups and individual women farmers.
 - Assisting women farmers to improve their agricultural producing capacities thereby empowering them.
 - Assisting women farmers to improve on the family nutrition status through regular training and

demonstrations on Nutrition and Home Management.

- Providing assistance to rural women in post-harvest technologies and reducing the associated drudgeries and inherent wastage.
- Collaborating with units, national and international organizations and agencies who work for the improvement of the standard of living of women and their empowerment in the rural area setting.
- the home economics extension activities carried out in the local government areas are:
 - Technical production messages extended to women farmers such as proper fertilizer application to their food crops (vegetables, potatoes, maize, cowpeas, etc.) varieties of maize, cassava, tomatoes etc.
 - post-harvest technology messages extended to rural women on “lafun”, “fufu”, and “gari” processing through proper fermentation, sun drying methods, uses of labour-saving devices like maize shellers and grinding machines
 - Training on proper farm records keeping etc.
- rural women and the home economics extension agents were confronted with many challenges among which are:
 - inadequate credit facilities for farming and home activities
 - lack of storage facilities that lead to wastages
 - lack of mobility for women in agricultural stuff to facilitate effective extension services
 - inadequate qualified staff to cover all the villages listed for the programmes
 - poor roads to carry rural women’s products to the markets that tempered economy of rural
 - Women’s low level of illiteracy of rural women.
- Despite all the above listed problems, there were benefits or achievements to better the lots of rural women. These include:
 - improvement on the
 - Processing methods of cassava with ‘lafun’, ‘fufu’ and ‘gari’.
 - Fertilization application to crops
 - Mixed crop production
- pest control on cowpeas
- care of children and elderly in homes
- Management of resources – money, time, energy etc. (WIA Report, 2001).

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, historical overview of home economics extension, prospects of Women in Agriculture and its

impact on rural women were highlighted. Also, brief summary of the findings on home economics extension services in selected local government areas of Oyo state was narrated. It is concluded that the ultimate goals of home economics extension in relation to the economic and technological well-being of rural women in Nigeria is neglected.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussion made in this paper and conclusion drawn, the following recommendations are made that:

- The Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development should place incentive policies on home economics extension with recognition of the status of rural women.
- The home economics extension agents should intensify their efforts in training programme complemented with monitoring routines in improving rural women's status.
- Rural women should embrace WIA training programmes provided as ways of economic and technological development.
- The Non-governmental organization should collaborate with governmental organizations in Nigeria to promote home economics extension services to sustain rural households.

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