

Exploring the Role of Women in Attaining Food Security: A Case Study of Mitooma Local District, Uganda

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the critical role of women in achieving food security within Mitooma Local District, Uganda. Employing a correlational research design, data was gathered from a sample of 60 participants, including local council officials, politicians, civil servants, NGO staff, and members of the community. Findings revealed significant challenges, with the majority of families experiencing food scarcity and some children suffering from malnutrition. Despite engaging in agricultural activities and contributing to food production, women face limitations in accessing resources and services, hindering their effectiveness in ensuring food security. The study emphasizes the need for coordinated efforts among stakeholders, including civil society organizations, administrators, and policymakers, to address food insecurity. Recommendations include mass sensitization campaigns, enhanced scientific research, women's empowerment initiatives, and improved access to credit facilities.

Keywords: Administrators, Food production, Food security, Women, Women empowerment.

INTRODUCTION

Women play indisputable roles in animal-production endeavors in Sub-Saharan and East Africa countries, where they are inclined to have the key responsibility of rearing little animals and equally take care of large-animal systems, providing water and feeding, cleaning stalls and milking animals and herding. Similarly, women, in all kinds of animal-production, have predominantly play different roles in agricultural productions and are commonly responsible for marketing agricultural processing processes, particularly milk commodities. This shows the importance of women in the society [1].

Women, in many countries in the African region, are equally responsible for fishing in coastal lagoons and shallow waters, gathering food and firewood, producing secondary crops, storing, processing, fetching water for the family and preparing family food [1]. Pimental [2] asserted that 60% and 80% of the food produced in most developing countries are produced by women who are equally responsible in producing half of the world's food, but their critical contributions to food security of many families, and food providers and producers are not sufficiently recognized. Studies in Sub-Saharan African region have equally presented various crucial roles played by women in many dimensions

of crop production in the region. Though men are mostly seen to be responsible for burning and polishing, land clearing, women are often seen in transplanting, weeding, land preparation and in some areas, post-harvest work and all of them take active part in seeding and harvesting [3].

In Uganda, despite the roles of women as the backbones in productions of foods and provisions for the consumption of many families, Ugandan women are inhibited from accessing necessary services and resources. Though both women and men farmers lack significant access to resources in the country, women's access is more limited due to cultural, traditional and sociological factors. A lot of resources have been dedicated to promotion of food security in Uganda, most of the families still found it difficult to sufficiently feed themselves [4]. Food Agricultural Organisational studies noted that Ugandan women are having difficulties in gaining requisite access to resources such as credit, land, inputs that are productively enhancing despite their roles as the foundation providers of farm labour force, small-scale agriculture, and family sustenance, than men [5]. It is against this backdrop that this study onerously explored the roles of women in

attaining food security in Mitooma local district of Uganda.

Women and food security

The major constraint to the effective recognition of women's actual roles and responsibilities in agriculture is the scarcity of gender desegregated data available to technicians, planners, and policy-makers [6]. Walt, Shiffman, Schneider, Murray, Brugha & Gilson [7] noted "that the first step towards women's empowerment and full participation in rural development and food security strategies is the collection and analysis of gender desegregated data to understand role differences in food and cash crop production as well as men's and women's differential managerial and financial control over production, storage and marketing of agricultural products".

Women's roles are key in food security and agricultural production of every society. Women are known to engage in crop production and farming in a larger part of the world despite their work continuing to go mostly unrecognized. In fact, 43% of the women's workforce revolves around agricultural in developing countries [8]. Many voices are now defending the promotion of the rights of women and women's participations in the countryside with the argument that their promotion should be seen within the premises of sustainable development [9].

Lacey [10] noted that in the agricultural sector, inequalities in areas of control of and access to resources between men and women generate massive inefficiencies in production, which, if resolved, could improve food production on a worldwide level. An FAO study suggests that if women had the same access to productive resources as men, the production of their farms would increase by 20-30%. This, in turn, would increase agricultural production in developing countries by 2.5-4% and decrease the number of hungry people by 12%.

Capuno [5] observed that Women in rural areas have less access to financial services, production activities, technologies, and education compared to men (FAO). A focus on gender can help us reduce inequity in resource distribution, which has historically been negatively influenced by differing social roles of men and women. In Mitooma local district, in spite of the fact that women's position has barely advanced; they continue to be in charge of field work and housework in rural areas. Furthermore, due to women's limited access to training and the rapid technological changes in the sector, coupled with the devastating effects of climate change, natural disasters, or violent conflicts

pose an even greater challenge with respect to leveling the playing field for women in agriculture.

Food security in Africa

The most frequent cause of chronic hunger is poverty. In many Sub-Saharan Africa countries, there are examples of hungry people in food surplus areas - people who lack adequate income or assets to purchase or produce enough food for themselves and their families. Ironically, food insecurity is the most severe in rural Africa, where farming and herding are still the main means of livelihood. 90% of the Africans living in poverty are rural dwellers [9]. Kerbo [11] argued that although global population growth rates are slowing down, the population of Sub-Saharan Africa are still expanding by about 3% every year, enough to double the number of people in one generation. In Africa, food production continues to grow more slowly than population, and, in contrast to every other region of the world, per capita food production has declined since the 1970s. It is estimated that 40% of the total population of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) goes hungry, and that the figure will increase to 50% by the year 2000.

More so, the number of people living in poverty increased from 184 million in 1985 to 216 million in 1990 in SSA, and is projected to rise to 300 million by the year 2000. "The number of African children under five years of age that are chronically hungry which reflects the seriousness of the poverty problem. According to the 1996 Human Development Report, 22.5 million African children are malnourished" [12]. Lacey [10] noted that "there are a number of factors that contribute to African poverty. International factors such as unfavorable terms of trade and large external debt burdens have negatively affected economic performance. Domestic constraints have also played a role. Civil wars and political instability have seriously affected economic development, and have taken a direct toll on food production by driving farmers off their lands. There has also been inadequate public investment in agricultural research, training and infrastructure. The result is declining food production".

Walt, Shiffman, Schneider, Murray, Brugha and Gilson [7] observed that "Africa's agricultural productivity is very low, averaging 300 to 500 kg/ha as compared to 2.5 tons/ha in the United States, for example. To a large extent, low yields are a result of poverty. African farmers lack access to improved seeds, fertilizers and pesticides as well as the knowledge and in-formation to use them effectively and efficiently. The application of fertilizers in SSA is the lowest in the world, at 11 kg/ha compared with the world average of 62

kg/ha. Moreover, much of Africa's food is wasted. It is estimated that African farmers lose 15 to 25% of their crop in the field and another 15 to 20% after harvest to pests. Again, this can be attributed to poverty - farmers lack the means and skills to protect food crops in the fields and after harvest through proper processing and storage. Added to this is inappropriate land-use practices, which damage the natural resources on which agriculture and life itself depend".

Sasson [13] observed that food security is not just a question of availability of food, nor of the financial resources to access it. People must also have consistent access to quality, nutritious foods in order to ensure food security. Evidence shows that gender inequalities both in and outside the home endanger not only the ability to obtain food, but also the nutritional security of that food, which is so central to the health of women and children.

METHODOLOGY

Study population and sample size

The population of the study was 600, which comprises local council officials/ politicians, sub county staff/ civil servants, NGO staff and members

of the community. From this population, a sample of 60 respondents was drawn using a Krejcie and Morgan [14] table as presented in table 1 below:

Table 1: The sample selection and size

Category	Frequency	Percentages
Civil servants	20	32
Politicians	15	20
Community	20	40
NGO/CBO staffs	5	08
Total	60	100

Sampling techniques

Purposive and simple random sampling methods were used to obtain 60 respondents during the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to

solicit for respondents that were more knowledgeable about the issues under discussion.

RESULTS

Table 2: Respondents' responses on the roles of perform by women in Mitooma District

Serial no	Item	Frequency	Percentage
1	Women engage in agricultural activities	20	33
2	Women fetch water and firewood	15	25
3	Women plan for their families	05	08
4	Women take care of their children	11	18
5	Women access help from government	09	16

Source: field survey, 2024

According to table 2, 33% of the women in the district engage in agricultural activities, 25% of women in the district fetch water and firewood, 8% of women in the district plan for their families, 18%

of women in the district take care of their children, 16% of women in the district access help from government.

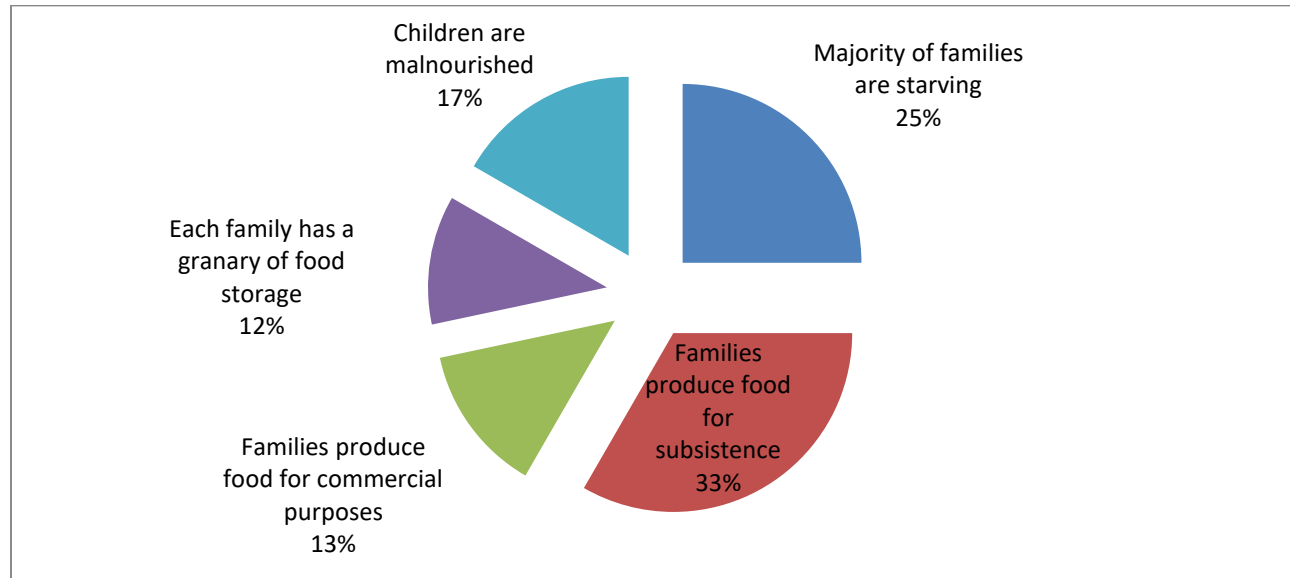


Figure 1: The level of food security in Mitooma District.

According to figure 1, 25% of the family in the district are starving, 33% of families in the district produce food for subsistence, 13% of families in the district produce food for commercial purposes, 12% of families in the district has a granary of food

storage, 17% of children in the district are malnourished. This suggested that there still a lot poverty in society since large scale farming is not yet being practiced.

Table 3: Respondents' responses on the roles played by women in attaining families' food security

Serial no	Item	Frequency	Percentage
1	Women are strong pillars in food security	18	30
2	Women cooperate with husbands	10	17
3	There is cooperation of all family members	12	19
4	Women do participate in seminars	10	17
5	Women access credit from their cooperatives	10	17

Source: Field survey, 2024

Data from table 3 revealed that 30% of the respondents believes that women are strong pillars in food security, 17% of the respondents indicated that women cooperate with their husbands in building families and attaining food sufficiency, 19% of the respondents believe that there is cooperation of all family members in attaining food sufficiency, 17% of the respondents believe that women do

participate in seminars, while 17% of the respondents believe that women access credit from their cooperatives. This implied that women can contribute a lot to the development of families if there is a lot of cooperation with the husbands. This cooperation can be a strong foundation for the development of families and food security.

DISCUSSION

Findings confirm that women in Mitooma local district engage in agricultural activities 20 (33%), Women fetch water and firewood 15 (25%), Women plan for their families 05 (08%), Women take care of their children 11(18%), women access help from

government 09 (16%). These findings are in agreement with Walt et al. [7] when they noted that "the first step towards women's empowerment and full participation in rural development and food security strategies is the collection and analysis of

gender desegregated data to understand role differences in food and cash crop production as well as men's and women's differential managerial and financial control over production, storage and marketing of agricultural products”.

Findings equally showed that the level of food security in Mitooma local district were as follows; the majority of families are starving 15 (25 %), families produce food for subsistence 20 (33%), families produce food for commercial purposes 08 (13%), each family has a granary of food storage 07 (12%), children are malnourished 10 (17%). This suggested that there still a lot poverty in society since large scale farming is not yet being practiced. The level of food security is still low because people are not yet sensitized on the importance of granaries in homes. These findings authenticated the observations of Kerbo [11] who argued that “although globally population growth rates are slowing down, the populations of Sub-Saharan Africa are still expanding by about 3% every year, enough to double the number of people in one generation. In Africa, food production continues to

From the study findings, it was generally concluded that the role of women in Mitooma local district include care of children, fetching water and firewood, engagement in agricultural practices, storage of food and food security in society. Based on these findings, the study calls for all stake holders especially the civil society at various levels, the administrators, and other policy implementers to offer their specialized skills in handling the issues of food insecurity in the local district. This can be basically through mass sensitization and awareness of people's rights, enhancing scientific research to

grow more slowly than population, and, in contrast to every other region of the world, per capita food production has declined since the 1970s. It is estimated that 40% of the total population of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) goes hungry, and that the figure will increase to 50% by the year 2000”.

Furthermore, findings show that women are strong pillars in food security 18 (30%), Women cooperate with husbands 10 (17%), There is cooperation of all family members 12 (19%), Women do participate in seminars 10 (17%), Women access credit from their cooperatives 10 (17%). This implied that women can contribute a lot to the development of families if there is a lot of cooperation with the husbands. This cooperation can be a strong foundation for the development of families and food security. These findings support the assertion of [12-14] when he noted that “improvements in household food security and nutrition are associated with women's access to income and their role in household decisions on expenditure as women tend to spend a significantly higher proportion of their income than men on food for the family”.

CONCLUSION

discover new ways of food production in society, empowerment and capacity building of the women groups, promoting accessibility to credit finances in form of loans to community members. The study equally recommends for the nongovernmental organizations in collaboration with the state should improve literacy levels; capacity building and empowerment of the women groups such that they can know their rights, easily identify the bad governance practices in their homes for the improvement of food security.

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