

A Comparative Study on the Interplay between Women and Food Security in Developing Nations

Kelvin Onoja Patrick

Department of Public Administration and Management, Kampala International University Uganda

ABSTRACT

Food security is defined as having physical and economic access to enough, safe, and nutritious food to suit all people's dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life at all times. In Sub-Saharan Africa, women produce 70% to 80% of household food, 65% in Asia, and 45% in Latin America and the Caribbean. Despite unequal access to land, inputs such as improved seeds and fertilizer, and information, they achieve this. Women farmers can attain yields that are equivalent to, or perhaps much higher than, those of men if they have equal access to resources and human capital. Thus, in order for women to realize their full potential in terms of food security, national governments and international organizations must implement policies in three key areas. They must first strengthen women's physical and human capital. Improving women's access to resources, technology, and information can help them produce more food. Literacy training for women and greater educational opportunities for females will boost production both now and in the future. Second, policymakers must improve women's earning power in order to maximize the benefits of women's earnings for household food security and nutrition. Strategies should strive to boost women's productivity in both paid job and domestic production, so that women can increase their salaries without compromising extra time, the welfare of their children, or their own health and nutrition status. Third, they must safeguard women's health and nutrition in order for them to carry out their productive and reproductive tasks.

Keywords: Women, Food Security, Relationship, Household, Developing Countries

INTRODUCTION

In many developing countries, agriculture accounts for more than 30% of GDP and employs two-thirds of the workforce. According to the World Bank, agricultural sector growth in such nations would be 3.2 times more effective than growth in any other sector in decreasing poverty by one dollar per day. Furthermore, this sector has the potential to be significantly more resilient to economic and financial crises [1, 2]. Rural areas are home to around 3.1 billion people, or 45% of the world's population. Around 2.5 billion of these people rely on agriculture as their primary source of income [3, 4]. Peasant women, specifically 500 million, make up a component of this amount and receive less than 5% of agricultural resources. Promoting investment and reorganizing the agriculture sector in developing nations is the most effective strategy to boost productivity and stimulate economic growth. Donor countries and agencies must consider both factors when developing their development policies. They should also consider that narrowing the gender gap in the rural sector would undoubtedly be one of the most effective methods to accomplish such an improvement in productivity. Rural women account for 25% of the global population and 43% of the workforce in developing countries. This proportion varies from 20% in South America to 50% in South-East Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa [5, 6, 7]. And it is precisely in such remote places that women and girls face the greatest disparities and hardships. Nonetheless, similar discrepancies exist in wealthy countries. A few figures would sufficient to demonstrate this point: more than 80% of rural women collaborate with or

support their husbands, 28.7% of agricultural employees are women, and agricultural holdings owned by women are 40% smaller than those run by men [8, 9, 10]. The rural woman is vital to the four pillars of food security: availability, accessibility, use, and stability. Women in developing countries' rural areas, on the other hand, are at a disadvantage because they do not have equal access to opportunities or resources as males due to gender stereotypes. There is a gender inequality in access to some resources such as land, electricity, technology, loans, pesticides, and fertilizers. Furthermore, women have less access to education, knowledge, public services, social protection, and markets. Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" emphasizes States' duties to abolish discrimination against women in rural regions. Nonetheless, despite such assurances, governments are not acting quickly enough to address the needs and objectives of rural women. According to the FAO, if women had equal access to productive resources (seeds, fertilizers, tools, loans, etc.) as males, they could improve yields by 20-30%. This would imply an increase in agro-food production of 2.5 to 4%, lowering the number of individuals affected by malnutrition by 12-17% [11, 12]. Such striking data highlight the importance of the gender issue in accomplishing the goals of all the sustainable development goals. Urgent steps must be done to empower rural women in all aspects and from a holistic perspective, including government implementation of sustainable rural development programs. The progress made in boosting agricultural and rural development will be critical in achieving the sustainable development goals. Small farmers, especially from Sub-Saharan Africa, and agricultural labourers from South-East Asia constitute the poorest people. And all progress in rural regions is contingent on men and women accepting their respective responsibilities. As a result, the purpose of this research is to assess the role of women in maintaining food security.

Overview of Food Security

Food security is defined as having physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life at all times. This definition incorporates access to food, food availability, biological consumption of food, and food stability. [13] defined food security as the state of having secure and sustainable access to sufficient food for an active and healthy life, observing that food security is generally defined in terms of food consumption and thus subject to biomedical definitions and considerations. Currently, a synthesis of these definitions, with a focus on availability, access, and use, serves as the working definition in international organization initiatives [14]. Developing policies and initiatives to promote food security thus necessitates an awareness of each of these elements, their interdependence, and their significance to specific groups of people [15]. Despite the fact that food insecurity is intimately linked to poverty [16], traditional income and poverty measurements do not provide clear information regarding food security [17]. As a result, assuming that a state, country, region, or municipality's poverty prevalence rate is the same as its food insecurity or hunger prevalence rate is inaccurate, because the relationship between poverty and food insecurity is inconsistent [18]. Accurate measuring and monitoring of food security conditions can aid public officials, policymakers, service providers, and the general public in determining shifting needs for assistance and the success of existing programs. While determining the food security situation of households can be an invaluable tool for assessment and planning, monitoring the food security situation of a specific population can help in comparing the local food security situation to state and national patterns, assessing the local need for food assistance, or tracking the effect of changing policies or economic conditions [17]. Focusing on food security guarantees that the basic needs of the poorest and most vulnerable populations are not overlooked in policy creation [19]. This is because food security is one of numerous criteria required for a population to be healthy and well-nourished [20]. Food availability is an important part of a country's wealth. In this regard, food security becomes a key element in any discussion about sustaining national wealth [21].

In Nigeria, the percentage of food insecure households was reported to be 18% in 1986 and more than 40% in 2005 [22]. Although figures released by the Food and Agriculture Organization in 2005 on the global state of food insecurity indicated that 9% of Nigerians were chronically undernourished between 2000 and 2002 [15], this was less than the regional average of 33% for Sub-Saharan Africa. Nationally, per capita growth in production of major food items in Nigeria has not been sufficient to meet the demand of an expanding population. Food security truly depends on whether households can afford to buy food given current prices and income, or whether they can produce enough to meet demand. Food security is actually determined by whether households can afford to buy food given current prices and income, or whether they can produce enough to meet their food demands. Access to food is ensured when residents in these families have the resources to access proper food, either through production, purchase, or as a gift for a balanced diet.

Pillars of Food Security Women and Food Production

The first pillar of food security is food production that is sustainable. Women produce 70% to 80% of household food in Sub-Saharan Africa, 65% in Asia, and 45% in Latin America and the Caribbean. They do so despite

unequal availability to land, resources such as improved seeds and fertilizer, and information [23]. Given equal access to resources and human capital, women farmers can attain yields that are comparable to, if not much higher than, those of males, according to some research. The laws that govern women's land rights differ greatly. Some religious restrictions forbid women from owning land. Even though civil law grants women the right to inherit land, local custom may dictate otherwise [24]. In Sub-Saharan Africa, where women have primary responsibility for food production, they are often limited to user rights to land, and then only with the approval of a male relative. Some resettlement and irrigation projects have actually damaged women's land rights by offering official titles primarily to men. This lack of tenure limits the probability that women will invest significant time and resources in usufruct land or adopt environmentally sustainable farming practices. Because women's land rights are weak, they cannot use land as collateral to receive credit. Women's lower educational levels relative to men, as well as their lack of acquaintance with lending procedures, may all hinder their mobility and interaction with mostly male credit officers or moneylenders.

Women and Economic Access to Food

Economic access to accessible food is the second pillar of food security. Recent research has revealed that changes in home wellbeing are dependent not only on the level of household income, but also on who earns that income. According to these studies, women spend a disproportionate amount of their money on food for the family when compared to males. Furthermore, women's earnings are more significantly connected with changes in children's health and nutrition status than men's earnings [25]. Why do men and women spend their money differently? Societal and cultural standards may assign women the task of ensuring that household members, particularly youngsters, receive an adequate portion of available food. Furthermore, because women's income tends to be lower and more frequent than men's income, it may be more readily spent on daily subsistence needs. Poverty is a big danger to household food security because income is such an important factor of a household's ability to obtain food. The combination of poverty and gender inequality poses an even larger concern due to the nutritional benefits associated with raising women's salaries. Previous research has found a link between female headship and poverty [26]. These women demand increased access to education and other resources that tend to increase income levels.

Women and Nutrition Security

The accomplishment of nutrition security – that is, appropriate protein, energy, micronutrients, and minerals for all household members – is the third pillar of food security. Nutrition security is dependent not only on a sufficient supply of food in the home, but also on aspects such as health and child care, as well as access to safe drinking water and sanitation. Providing nutrition security for the household through the use of food and other resources is virtually entirely the responsibility of women [27]. Almost all non-food nutrition inputs demand time commitment, which is typically made by women. For example, providing "care," or the time and attention spent to fulfilling the physical, emotional, and social requirements of growing children and other family members, is a critical input into optimal nutrition. Care affects nutrition security in two ways: first, via feeding habits like breastfeeding and preparing nutritious foods, and second, through health and hygiene practices like bathing children and washing hands before food preparation [28]. These loving behaviors take a lot of time. When it comes to time management, women are frequently faced with difficult decisions. Increased time spent earning revenue (translated into greater food expenditures) and accessing health and educational facilities can enhance child nutrition, but the loss of direct time spent in child care may offset this [29]. However, boosting female employment outside the home may increase women's bargaining power within the family. The development of technology that reduces women's time pressures in agricultural production and household management without jeopardizing their ability to earn independent incomes is consequently crucial. Protecting female nutrition status is critical in getting a head start for children's nutrition status. Better-nourished moms result in higher-birth-weight infants and better-nourished children as a result of improvements in pre-pregnancy nutrition status, weight increase throughout pregnancy, food during breastfeeding, and breast milk output [30]. However, women's nutrition status may be jeopardized when they function as shock absorbers for the home by depleting their own nutrition status during lean seasons. Furthermore, research from South Asia suggests that a strong pro-male and pro-adult bias in the distribution of food and other resources within households may lower women's and girls' health and nutrition status.

Remedy to Food Security

Despite their major role in agriculture, women do not receive an equitable share of agricultural extension guidance and other services. One potential solution is to expand the number of women training as agricultural extension agents. A second option is to provide agricultural training to women who work in community development or home economics [31]. A third technique involves extension agents, both men and women, meeting with farmers in groups. This method would lessen or eliminate cultural barriers to engagement between individual male

extension agents and female farmers, allowing the women in the groups to share information among themselves [32]. Agricultural research organizations must also make advantage of women's indigenous knowledge of farming systems, which has mainly gone unexplored. Women's education would boost agricultural output and revenue because better-educated farmers are more inclined to adopt new technology. According to a study conducted in Kenya, boosting the primary education of women farmers not only increases their likelihood of planting coffee, a high-value crop, but also boosts the adoption of coffee by other women farmers, who are more prone to copy women than men [33, 34].

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To enable women to contribute to food security, national governments and international organizations should focus on three key areas: increasing women's physical and human capital, improving access to resources, technology, and information, and enhancing literacy training and education. Additionally, policymakers should focus on increasing women's income generation to maximize the benefits of their incomes for household food security and nutrition. Strategies should focus on increasing women's productivity in paid work and domestic production, ensuring they can increase income without compromising time, children's welfare, or their health and nutrition status, while also protecting their health and nutrition status to fulfill their productive and reproductive roles.

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