

The Role of Women in Ensuring Food Security in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria like all other countries of the world must put in a lot of effort in ensuring food security through appropriate processing and storage. This topic looks at women involvement in food processing, and storage especially in Nigeria which is a developing world in ensuring food security.

The women have an important role to play in ensuring food security in this country. This paper reviews the role of women in ensuring food security in Nigeria, how these roles are being performed and the different ways in which they can be involved are highlighted in this paper.

Keywords: Women, food processing, food storage, food security

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Food security in any country will enhance that country's political, social and economic stability. In the 70's more than 800 million people in developing countries were undernourished with several million of others dependent on emergency food and each year, although such is falling sharply. In Nigeria today, we depend each year on produce from agriculture. Survey carried out on post harvest food losses in some communities in Nigeria revealed that as much as 20-30% of total grain production 30-50% of root and tuber and usually high percentage of fruits and vegetables are lost with a substantial amount recorded during storage. (Mijinyawa, Y. 2002).

Women produce between 60 and 80 percent of the food in most developing countries and are responsible for half of the world's food production, yet their key role as food producers and providers and their critical contribution to household food security is only now becoming recognized.

Women in Africa contribute up to an estimated 70% of labour involved in food production and nearly 100% in rural food Processing, (Kaul et al (1992).

FAO studies confirm that while women are the mainstay of small-scale agriculture, the farm labour force and day-to-day family subsistence, they have more difficulties than men in gaining access to resources such as land, credit and productivity-enhancing inputs and services.

Women, as a result of gender biases, are the cheapest source of labour and as such are multinationals' main employees (women represent 40% of the labour force in the food processing sector). The new jobs provided are low paying, require little skill and thus offer few opportunities for women to improve their economic, social and political situation. In addition to reinforcing gender inequities, this employment is also much unprotected. Globalisation of the world economy has enabled multinationals to quickly close down operations and re-locate in a different country. Not only are women unable to increase their skills and earn a fair.

In many African countries women provide:

- 33% of the workforce
- 70% of the agricultural workers
- 60-80% of the labour to produce food for household consumption and sale
- 100% of the processing for basic food stuffs
- 90% of household water and fuel wood
- 80% of food storage and transport from farm to village
- 90% of the hoeing and weeding work
- 60% of the harvesting and marketing activities.(FAO)

In view of the above, women has a vital role to play in ensuring food security in Nigeria.

1.1 Definition of Food Security, Processing and Storage

1.1.1 Food Security

Food security does not necessarily imply food self- sufficiency alone. The key elements of food security are

adequacy of food, not only in terms of quantity but also in quality, as well as stability of supply and access by all the people to food at all time. This implies that adequate and nutritionally balanced aggregate and food supply be made available to satisfy the need of all regions of the country in all seasons, an action that require efficient food storage, processing, preservation, transportation and distribution system Okunadewa F. (2002).

Food security is a concept that has evolved during the 1990s far beyond a traditional focus on the supply of food at the national level. This concept has been given general definitions in time past but in recent times, there has been divergence of ideas on what food security really means. Food security, in fact, has been defined by FAO not only in terms of access to and availability of food, but also in terms of resource distribution to produce food and purchasing power to buy food where it is not produced.

According to World Bank, food security was defined as access by all people at all times to enough food for an active and healthy life.

Reutlinger (1987) defined food security as access by all people at all time to enough food for an active healthy life aimed at ensuring that hunger and malnutrition are eradicated on sustainable basis. The essential elements are the availability of food and the ability to acquire it. Omo Ohiokpehal (2003) reported that the SADC (1997) regional conference agreed that the working definition of food security should be: Food Security = Food availability + food access and acquisition + food use.

1.1.2 Food Processing

This is the set of methods and techniques used to transform raw ingredients into food or to transform food into other forms for consumption by humans or animals either in the home or by the food processing industry. Food processing typically takes clean, harvested crops or slaughtered and butchered animals products and uses these to produce attractive, marketable and often long life food products. Food processing improves food nutritionally by removing toxic substances, extending shelf life and making it more palatable.

1.1.3 Food Storage

This is the process of treating and handling food in order to increase the shelf life of the food. Food storage has been identified, as a major aspect of increasing food security, and any effort that is aimed at increasing food security must be matched with equal if not greater effort at providing adequate and efficient storage facilities.

1.2 Overview/ Background of Food security

Food is a basic necessity of life. Its importance is seen in the fact that it is a basic means of sustenance and an adequate food make in terms of quantity and quality, is a key for healthy and productive life. (Omonona et al 2007).

Achieving food security in its totality continues to be a challenge not only for developing country like Nigeria but for the developed world. Food insecurity has the potential to influence food intake and ultimately the health and nutritional status of household.

We may distinguish between national food security and household food security. This distinction is necessary because aggregates supply of food, from domestic sources or impact or both are prerequisite but certainly not a sufficient condition for a food security situation in a country, in other words, adequate availability of food for every citizen. Food security at household level is a subset of a national level and it requires that all individual and household have access to sufficient food either by producing it themselves or by generating sufficient to demand for it.

2.0 WOMEN IN FOOD PROCESSING.

Foods are processed to improve their digestibility and to enhance their appeal to the consumer. Processing also serves to extend the availability of foods beyond the area and season of production, thus stabilizing supplies and increasing food security at national and household levels. A particularly important aspect of food processing is that it permits great diet diversity, giving consumers access to a wider choice of products and hence to a better range of vitamins and minerals than they would otherwise consume.

Food processing is considered a traditional activity and as such many women are involved in this sector as unpaid family members, home-based (or piece rate) workers and self-employed. Women's vulnerability to market liberalisation policies, structural adjustment programmes (e.g. privatisation and downsizing the public sector) and globalisation has increased the attention they have received in the past few years. Broadly speaking, women's employment opportunities are constrained by their limited resource base and society. A limited resource base refers to women's lower education levels and literacy, fewer skills and restricted access to productive resources (e.g. land, raw materials, credit). The second element refers to the gender constraints that exist in society. For example, perceptions regarding "women's work" and it are worth as well as religious practices that require women to remain in the home. These two factors are inter-related and influence one another considerably. For instance, gender biases prevent women and girls from fully benefiting from available educational opportunities and/ or developing the necessary skills to enter male dominated professions. As stated in the introduction, these constraints frequently relegate women to unskilled,

low paying jobs that offer little security and contribute to their high participation in the informal sector. (White, 1999)

On a larger scale, agro-industries convert commodities into processed foods which are usually more stable and more marketable than the raw, untreated commodity. They can thus make available certain types of food, e.g. animal protein, often at low prices, to consumers who would not otherwise have access to them. They can also ensure year-round availability of seasonal, perishable products and provide food in a more convenient form than the raw material (FAO, 1997)

Women as a result of gender biases are the cheapest source of labour and as such are multinationals' main employees (women represent 40% of the labour force in the food processing sector). The new jobs provided are low paying, require little skill and thus offer few opportunities for women to improve their economic, social and political situation. In addition to reinforcing gender inequities, this employment is also much unprotected. Globalisation of the world economy has enabled multinationals to quickly close down operations and re-locate in a different country. Not only are women unable to increase their skills and earn a fair wage, but the jobs they do obtain are liable to disappear without notice. (White, 1999)

In Africa, it is estimated that women contribute 70 percent of all time expended on food production, 100 percent on food processing, 50 percent on food storage and husbandry, 60 percent on marketing and 90 percent on beer brewing (Elias, 1990).

2.1 The role of women in food storage

According to a local Pakistan proverb the definition of a rich person is the one that has stored enough grains to last the year round. Another proverb adds that if one who has enough grains in the house then even his foolishness is taken as intelligence. Grain storage is highly important for food security both locally and nationally.

Women play an important role in grain storage everywhere and they are familiar with different stages and steps of storage processes, (Spate irrigation Network Pakistan, 2010) and their role cannot be over emphasized. Perry (1985) pointed out clearly that while agricultural planners often stereotype women as consumers rather than producers, rural women actually account for more than half of the food produced in the Third World and also play a leading role in the storage and processing of food.

In some developing countries an estimated 25 percent of all food produced is never consumed by humans. Instead it spoils or is eaten by insects, rats and other pests. Measures to correct this situation can be taken in fields, households, shops and warehouses.

3.0 Conclusion

The role of women in ensuring food security in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized; women have a greater role to play in doing these. A lot of measure has to be put in place in the processing and storage of food in order to ensure food security in Nigeria. If all the above-mentioned ways can be adhered to, food security can be achieved.

4.0 Recommendation

The following are measures to be taken in order to ensure availability of food all year round.

- Control of rats by trapping, poison, rat-proofing grain stores, etc;
- Control of insects by use of insecticides, better food stores and airtight food containers;
- Control of fungi and food rot by storage of food in as dry a state as possible and by use of better containers;
- Control of birds by destruction, especially in millet and wheat areas;
- Protective measures against monkeys, baboons, porcupines, wild pigs and other destructive animals, even elephants;
- educating people about safe and hygienic food storage at home. (FAO1997.)

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