

Women Empowerment and Food Security in Ekpeye Clan in Ahoada West Local Government Area, Rivers State

Mezewo Emerinwe Obuzor¹ & Elijah Nwabueze Emeodu²
Department of Sociology, Rivers State University, Port-Harcourt¹ & 2
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni, Port-Harcourt²

Abstract

The study investigates the effect women empowerment on food security in Ekpeye clan. . The study used structural functionalist theory as its theoretical framework. Both primary and secondary data were used in the study. The convenience sampling technique was used to select two communities from the two blocks that make up Ekpeye Clan. To determine the sample size, Taro Yamane formula was utilized. Consequently, a total of 400 respondents were used as the sample size. Data Analysis was done through simple percentage and Spearman rank order correlation methods. The findings showed that women empowerment has the capacity to reduced food insecurity in Ekpeye Clan in Rivers State. Based on these, the work recommended that women should be given unlimited access to land just as the male folks as well as educational opportunities to enable more food production and security.

Keywords: Women, Empowerment, Food Security, Ekpeye Clan, Ahoada

Introduction

Women play very important roles in traditional African societies but in spite of all that their positions have remained inferior, compared to those of men (Uzorka & Oviomaigbo, 2017). However, many women have not exceeded beyond subordination to man. Thus, Uzorka & Oviomaigbo (2017) add that the notion of the subordination of women in various aspects of cultures of different societies is the major theme in study about women development. As this unfolds, it may not affect women only, but the entire society as it involves food security situations. Thus, the United Nations in Mbumba (2012) and Ejirefe (2017) posit that through women empowerment (a strategy to community development), effort will be united between the government and the people with the desire to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of the nation, and this will lead to their effort toward national progress that can usher in food security

Food security has become an issue of global concern in the recent time. Nigeria, with her huge endowed natural and human resources is not spared. Nigerian food crisis is a product of colonial disorientation that has led to neglect of the peasant agriculture and food crops sub-sector as well as over reliance on cash crops production and the oil sector. Nigeria still has the potentials to be food-secure if effort is geared towards rural development, provision of easy access to basic farm inputs, adequate budgetary allocations to agriculture particularly to the food crop sub-sector, enunciation of appropriate policies for food crop sub-sector, political stability, reduction in rural poverty and peasant farmer's education (Attah, 2012).

However, as shelter and clothing serves as the basic necessities of life, food remains the most important because of its centrality to human existence. It is a known fact that the ruthless expedition for food has shaped human history, provoking wars, driving migration and underpinning the growth of nations. The recent escalation of food prices in Nigeria call for sober reflection, due to challenges facing the globe as a result of Covid - 19 is worsening food crises period unheard of in the last 35 years and capable of Leading Catastrophe. This important issue has taken the centre-stage among world leaders, thereby increasing the concern for the world's ability to feed its population, to avert world-wide unrest and political instability as reported in most countries (FAO, 2020). However, Women have important roles as producers of food, managers of natural resources, income earners, and care takers of household food and nutrition security. Empowering Women and giving them the same access to physical and natural resources

as Men could increase agricultural productivity (Agnes, 1995). In addition, increase in women's education and improvement in Women's status over the past quarter century have contributed to more than half of the reduction in the rate of child Malnutrition (Lisa, 2003). Saito (1994) noted that despite the efforts directed at building women capabilities, gender gaps in access to resource through available legal means continue to persist,

There are different empowerment and mobilization programmes by government and non-governmental agencies to empower women. Among them are; River Basin Development Authority (RBDA) Agricultural Development Project (ADPS), The National Accelerated Food production Programme (NAFPP), Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), The Green Revolution, etc. Despite these programmes, Women still lack access to basic education that exclude them from new opportunities, and where long-standing gender gaps, in education persist, women will be at increasing risk of falling behind men in their ability to participate in agricultural production (Omese and Ogbu, 2015). It is against this backdrop, that led to the study on women empowerment and food security in Ekpeye clan in Ahoada West local government area of Rivers State.

Conceptual Review

Theoretical Framework

The work adopted structural functionalist theory. The theory is traceable to the early years of the twentieth century in America (Radcliff-Brown, 1949; Parsons, 1951; Smelser, 1990; Kalu, 2011). It was initially popular as functionalism until the late twentieth Century when its application began to wane (Morrow 1978; Tuner, 2014). Functionalism which is a macro theory, is anchored on the premise, that order in a social system is sustained if the various parts that make up the society perform their functions (Cliffs 2014). Structuralism helped to articulate the social constituents of the organs that make up the Society (Habte- Selassie, 1975). The structural functionalist's theory is an extension of the ideas of functionalist theorists. Functionalists assert that each part of a social system has a function to perform towards the attainment of equilibrium in that society. Critically, structural functionalism has some relevance in this work. The theory helps to explain the importance of the institutions related to the proper functioning of women empowerment in Ekpeye Clan. The study location is a rural area and if the institutions perform their roles then women will be able to access agricultural inputs and therefore, be able to boost food security. The theory addresses the impact of social structures on the women empowerment and food security. The willingness of these structures will culminate in women empowerment through provision of the required assistance and infrastructure.

Concept of Women Empowerment

Women empowerment has attracted the attention of many scholars. Okpoko (2002) argues that women empowerment came into existence with the feminist movement whose demand was that women become empowered to take control of their own lives; to set their own agenda of what to do and how to do thing that affect them. According to Stromquist (1995), women empowerment is a socio-political concept that involves cognitive, psychological, economic and political dimension. The cognitive component involves women's understanding of the courses of their subordination and marginalization and appreciating the need to make choices that may go against cultural or social expectations. The psychological component refers to women's belief and confidence that they can improve their condition through persona and collective effort. The economic component refers to access to income outside home through work that provides income independence. The political component involves the ability to understand one's situation and mobilize for change. Fadeiye and Olanegan (2001) view Women empowerment as a process of enabling women to develop the capacity to actualize their potentials. That Woman should be

looked at as individuals that possess some hidden potentials for greatness and so should be encouraged to develop, such to the fullest.

Food Security

The idea of food security was presented for the first time at the world food conference in 1974 viewed solely from the perspective of having adequate availability of food on a national scale (Adebayo, 2010). Oriola (2009), food security entails producing food that will go round every citizen both in quality and quantity. Attach (2012) defines food security as when people have physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet their dietary needs for a productive healthy life at present as well as in the future. World Food Summit (2003) sees food security as a condition where all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious foods to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

Given the above literatures, it is imperative to empirically states that in the last three decades, food security has emerged to reflect the changes in policy thoughts among nations of the world (Shuaibu, 2011). However, –ensuring that all people at all times have both physical and economic access to the basic food that they need|| as well as secure access by all people at all time to enough food for a healthy, active life became the main focus of FAO (1983) and World Bank (1986). This must have compelled Abdullahi (2010), to posit that Nigeria in recent times, food security situation has become the single most critical area of concern due to its stagnation, while growth in food demand has kept pace with population explosion.

Study by Sen (1996), view the role of Women empowerment in resolving the problem of food and general security whereby he observes that hunger, food security and famine are consequences of poverty due to lack of entitlements. To him, entitlements are variables that indicate an individual's power within the economic and political system and access to resources, that is, overall command over things and relevant rights and obligations. The postulation of –entitlement|| approach is that who get to eat and who doesn't eat are ultimately questions of power, particularly economic power. However, Gender analysis has revealed the crucial roles that woman empowerment play in agricultural production. It is no longer news that women are key (major) players in the farming sector (products, processors, servers of food, etc). Conservatively, it is estimated that female farmers cultivate more than 50% of all food grown in many parts of the world, especially less developed countries (Meludu, 1999; World Bank, 2007; Dauda, 2009; IDS, 2012).

Ironically, the study of Shuaibu (2011) points that the fundamental roles of women have not only been obscured but have been unrewarded. This is due to asymmetries in land ownership, access and control of livelihood assets (like land, water, energy, credit, education and labour). Therefore, empowering women in Nigeria for sustainable economic development is a crucial key towards solving the problems of food security. This is in view of fact that fighting hunger entails a two prong approach (De Hean, 2001). Direct and immediate access to food for those who need it most (food sovereignty) i.e both women and men must have equal access to resources, including land insights –IDS, 2012) and agricultural and rural development. Similarly, Shuaibu (2011), reveals that women do not only produce 75% of the food, but they also play essential role in the survival of the entire population, because they combine both work in the fields and at home to provide for the basic needs of the family. In the area of agriculture, women's empowerment will enable them to play a key role through laws, legislations, policies and programmes that mainstream gender in the area of access to credit, agricultural extension education, and so on.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Ekpeye Clan in Ahoada Local Government Area. The survey design was used. The population of Ekpeye Clan is estimated at about 768,000 (Census Bureau Data,

2010). Taro Yamane formula was used to determine the sample size of 400. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 300 women and 100 males for the study. Using continence sampling technique, two communities such as Odokwu and Ubeta were selected to represent the entire clan. Both accidental and purposive sampling techniques were used to reach the respondents, Data were collected through primary and secondary sources. The data were analysed using statistical package social science (SPSS) Software the Spearman rank order correlation was used to test the stated hypotheses.

Data Analysis

From the sample size of 400, the researcher was able to retrieve 383 copies which are 96% of copies distributed. Spearman rank order correlation was used for the hypotheses testing. The results of the hypotheses test were interpreted accordingly.

Table 1: Administration and Retrieval of Research Instrument

Number of Questionnaire Distributed	Number of Questionnaires Retrieved	Percentage Returned (%)
400	383	96%

Source: Research Field Study (2021)

The table shows that out of 400 questionnaire distributed for the study, the researcher with the help of two research assistants were able to 383, which implies 96% retrieval.

Table 2: Women have Access to Land, the more Food Security in Ekpeye Clan.

Correlations			Women access	Food security
Spearman's rho	Women access to land	Correlation coefficient	1.000	.705
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
		N	383	383
	Food_Security_of_Ekpeye	Correlation coefficient	.705	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	383	383

Source: Author's Computation

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Our first hypothesis shows a significant relationship existing between women access to land and food security in Ekpeye Clan in Ahoada LGA with a correlation coefficient of 0.705 and a P-value of 0.000 which is less than alpha level of 0.05. Therefore, from the data analysed, it revealed that if women are giving more access to land, it can reduced food insecurity in Ekpeye Clan. It means that if women are privileged to own land like the men, they will effectively improve agricultural productivity. The findings relates to that of Amadi (2020), that revealed the various approaches that can boost food production increase and also reduce food insecurity in River State to improve the lives of the people. According to him, one of the approaches suggested provision for women access to land and funds as this will enable the poor farmers to carry out their role perfectly through the purchase and maintenance of their equipments, as well as for their upkeep. Hence, if women are empowered, by giving the rural women farmers more lands for their food cultivation and production. It will boost food production and security in Ekpeye and beyond. Also, the findings of Edewor (2014) and Fakoya, Apantaku, and Adereti (2006) in their research on the extent to which women empowerment help to improve food security in Ekpeye Clan, exposed why women in Ekpeye have not been able to defeat food insecurity. The finding

confirms that despite women's high dependence on land for the farming activities they do not have right to own land. They can only have access to land through their fathers or through a portion allotted to them by their husbands. Therefore, this implies that if more lands are given to women, not just a small portion, but having equal ownership of land like the men, they will increase their efforts in food production.

Table 3: Women have Access to Education, the more Enhancements in Food Security Correlations

			Education	Food security
Spearman's rho	Education	Correlation coefficient	1.000	.459
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	383	383
	Enhancement_in_Food_Security	Correlation coefficient	.459	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	383	383

Source: Author's Computation

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis two also shows another significant relationship existing between access to education and enhancement in food security with a correlation coefficient of 0.0459 and a p-value of 0.000 which is also less than alpha of 0.05. From the data analysed, it shows that access to education can also enhance food security in Ekpeye Clan. This result reflects the view of Enemuo (2001), which posits that an effective and process of women empowerment must necessarily include the expansion of women's access to educational opportunities, skill acquisition and positions of authority. This finding is in line with Ahmed (1992) findings which emphasized that the world is undergoing changes in arts, science and technology and the extent to which people perceived and actually are sensitized to those changes depends on a number of variables but the variable with the greatest catalytic influence on our knowledge about ourselves and our world is literacy. Again, the findings relate to Quisumbing (1996), which reveals that when women obtain the same levels of education, experience, and farm inputs that currently benefit the average male farmer, they increase their yield for maize, beans and cowpeas by 22 percent.

Reacting on what hypnotize women capacity for educational empowerment, the findings of Odey (2002), revealed that women literacy or access to education has been and still is influenced by different political, economic and socio-cultural contexts. Therefore revealing the connection between women literacy and food security as well as determine their level of access to agricultural information. Also, Onua (2019) findings revealed that our culture have comfortably given men opportunity to control the nation's wealth and continuously denied the women the opportunity to control the society in some ways. Most women feel that they belong to the kitchen and works for their husbands to be educated. As this occurs, women have little opportunity to important areas of society such as education, which equally affects their attainment of key political position, leadership roles in work organizations, and access to credit facilities. Given this justification, the study reveals that if women are given more education empowerment, they will improve their efforts towards food production and security. Such education will help them to diversify on various agricultural foods that need to be produced and that can be useful to the nations, by using the necessary equipment. Secondly, through education, they can assume political offices, which can help them, make economic policies that can improve the lives of rural farmers and at the same time ensuring increase in food production. This finding also reflects Olumakaiye and Ajayi (2006) study that investigated the association between educational status

of women and provision of food for household members for food security in Nigeria. The results showed that educational level attained by the respondents has a high degree of association with the varieties of food provided. They concluded that women with higher education are likely to provide varieties of food thereby increasing the household food security. Hence, the imperative for women education empowerment towards food security in Ekpeye cannot be overemphasized.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is pertinent to stress that there is food insecurity affecting the greater majority of indigenes of Ekpeye Clan in Ahoada LGA of Rivers state. Expansion of this situation could however, be made when one looks at the fact that the sectors of the society that are responsible for the production of food are largely being neglected. Decision as per the nature of empowerment programmes that get to them are not under their control. Based on the findings and conclusion reached in this study, the following recommendations have been proffered:

1. Women should be given unlimited access to resources (land). Access to land assets is the single most urgent need for the upliftment of women in general and farm women in particular. Rural women still do not have ownership of land and the plots are allotted in the name of their husbands. Therefore, concerted efforts are needed to promote women's access to resources.
2. Literacy programmes is very important in the process of women's empowerment. It is a base for any educational programme. If this occurs, It will enable the rural women to acquire new knowledge and technology required for improving and developing their tasks in all field. Literacy helps rural women to bring up their children and carryout the responsibility of motherhood.
3. Finally, it is beneficial to train the women on food security techniques so as to enable them to keep the progress of the projects in a manageable state even long after the withdrawal of the donor. In particular, this kind of training will instill in them the much required objectivity that is often lacking in communities when sustainability of projects is considered.

References

- Attach, A.W. (2012), Alternative approaches to food security strategies in Nigeria in the New millennium in Ogiji P. (ed) *Implications for food Security and Agricultural reforms in Nigeria*.
- De Haen, H (2001). *Speech, trends in reducing global hunger*. Des Moines
- Echebiri, R.N. (2005). Characteristics and determinants of urban youth unemployment in Umuahia, Nigeria: Implications for rural development and alternative labour market variables. A Paper Presented at the ISSER/Corneli/World Bank Conference on -Shared Growth in Africall held in Accra, Ghana, July 21-22.
- Edewor, P.A. (2014). Changes in the labour value of children in the agrarian Isoko community of Delta State. *Nigeria Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 5(8), 29-34.
- Fakoya, E.O., Apantaku, S.O. &Adereti, F.O. (2006). Gender involvement in arable crop cultivation and its contributions to household food security in Ogun State,Nigeria. *Journal of Social Science1* (1), 1-4.
- Food and Agricultural Organization (2001). *World food security a reappraisal of the concepts and approaches*. Director General Report.
- Food and Agricultural Organization (2019). *Global food security: Issues and prospects*. FAO.

- Habte-Selassie, B.A. (1975). Development lending and institution building. *Journal of African Law*, 19 (1/2), 118-133.
- Kalu, K.N. (2011). Institution building, not nation-building: a structural functional model. *International Review of Administrative Science*, 77(1), 119-137.
- Meludu, N.T. (1999). The role of women in sustainable food security in Nigeira: A case of Udu local government area of Delta State. *Journal of Sustainable Agriculture*, 15 (1): 87-97.
- Morrow, P.C. (1978). Functionalism, conflict theory and the synthesis syndrome in Sociology. *International Review of Modern Sociology*, 8 (2), 209-225.
- Nwaenyi, K.E.O. (2012). *Multi-dimensional approach to development studies*. Cape Publishers Int'l Ltd
- Okpoko, A.J. (2002). Empowering women to community development through non-formal education (NFE) Programmes. *Journal of adult education and development I* (1), 23-33.
- Olumakaiye, M.F. & Ajayi, A.O. (2006) Women empowerment for household food security: The place of education J. Ohuman. *Ecol*, 19(1): 51-55.
- Onua, A. (2019). *Women empowerment and community development: A case study of Emohua local government area of Rivers State*. A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Sociology, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rivers State.
- Oriola, E.O. (2009). Irrigation agriculture. An option for achieving the Millennium development goals (MDGs) in Nigeria. *Journal of Geography and Regional Planning*, 2(7), 176-181.
- Parsons, T. (1951). *The social system*. RKP.
- Quisumbing, A.R. (1996) _Male female Differences in Agricultural Productivity. *World Development*, 24, 1579-1595.
- Radcliffe-Brown, A.R. (1949). Functionalism: A protest. *American Anthropologies*, 51(2), 320-321.
- Saito, R. (1994). *Women empowerment and advancement manual*. League for Democratic Women (Leads).
- Sen, A.K. (1996). Economic interdependence and the world food summit: Food security and development. *The Society for International Development*. 5-10.
- Shuaibu, H. (2011). Evaluation of housing strategies adopted by women under Fadama III project in Sokoto State [A PhD Usman Danfodiyo University, Sokoto, Nigeria].
- Smelser, N.J. (1990). Sociological theory: Looking forward. *The American Sociologist*, 21 (3), 275-282.
- Stromquist, N.P. (1995). Theoretical and practical bases for empowerment. In C. Medel- Anonuevo (Ed). *Education and empowerment. Pathways towards autonomy*. UNESCO Institute for Education.
- Uzorka M. C. & Oviomaigho, J. (2014). Women and community development in South-South region of Nigeria. *Journal of Social Science*.