

PROMOTING WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN FISH CULTURE ENTERPRISES – AS A MEANS OF POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

One major aspect of the poverty status in Nigeria is the high rate of unemployment with the attendant economic incapability, which in turn is responsible for the persistent problem of malnutrition over the decades. This paper is focused on how women can be empowered for better productivity in fish culture enterprises, seeing that women have been active in different aspects of agricultural production. They also sustain more than half of the developing countries such as Nigeria. Some problems being encountered by women fish farmers and suggestions on how these can be remedied and on how women participation in fish and shellfish culture enterprises can be enhanced are proffered. The major ones being that sustainable policies by the government state ADPs and NGOs be applied to ensure adequate motivation of women for fish culture enterprises.

INTRODUCTION

The fact that women play major roles in the sustenance and development of a nation cannot be over emphasized. Many publications have indicated that women form two thirds of the agricultural labour force in most African countries like Nigeria. On the average, women work longer hours than men by as much as 13 hours each week in Asia and Africa spore 76 – 1996. In Nigeria, women produce the bulk of the food for local family consumption.

In the efforts of the government and all other interested bodies at alleviation of poverty and enhancement of food security in Nigeria, the important position of women in achieving this aim is worthy of attention. Wuraola (2001) says that they are the most salient factors in the agricultural, social, health and economic life of developing countries. Mumini and Ibrahim (2001) are also of the opinion that permanent change in a society is often best achieved through women because they are the homemakers, centres of the family and custodians of cultural and fundamental values of the society. Jibowu 1969 in affirmation of this said "full community development is not possible without the understanding, co-operation and effective participation of women". The report of the Nigeria population commission in 1991 that the population of the female was more than that of the male, further attests to the crucial role of women in alleviating poverty in Nigeria.

There has been a lot of efforts in recent times geared towards the empowerment of women in the agricultural sector. There has been some structural adjustment and associated drive towards increased cash crop productivity and exports such that more than half of the agricultural sector in developing countries of Africa one sustained by women Wuraola (2001). There is a need however to also consider increasing efforts in encouraging women to get involved in fish culture enterprises. Ayinla (1987) extolling the benefit of fish culture opined that fish are the most efficient converters of food, also utilize space more efficiently than many land animals because of their three dimensional habitants. He says further that 5,000 – 5,000 kg or

more of fish can be produced per hectare of land per year and at the current of price of N350.00 – N400.00 per kg a total sales of N1,050,000.00 – 1,750,000.00 or N1,200,000.00 – N2,000,000.00 can be made per annum. An added advantage of promoting fish culturing is that improvement of fish species raised through selection breeding is possible, catering for consumers taste and requirement. Market demand for cultured fish can therefore be expanded much easily than for captured fish. Ayinla (1987) is also of the opinion that “fish culture can be a major income generating element in integrated rural development programme”.

As at 1987, according to (Ayinla 1987) the total area of land used for aquaculture was estimated to be less than 100,000 hectares as against a total area of 2 million hectare available for such. One wonders if almost 2 decades latter if it has improved much.

Another reason why there is a need to focus on improving fish culture in Nigeria, is that there has been a gradual increase in fish culture production and improvement of technologies used in fish culture such as the re-circulating water systems, etc. which can further enhance the profitability of fish culture enterprises.

As it is, women are actively involved in fish production, mostly in processing 80% of all fish and shellfish caught by the local fisher folk are cleaned, dried and smoked and marketed by women and children and where women are involved in culture enterprises, they use traditional technologies with which yields are usually low. The experience of other countries, including fellow African countries like Uganda who exports fish suggests that existing production levels can be multiplied many times by applying improved technologies. There are however constraints which hinders expansion of fish culture enterprises in Nigeria especially for women farmers.

PROBLEMS FACED BY WOMEN FARMERS

The participation of women in agricultural production (including fish production) is generally not yet recognized in both international and national policies. Many of the agricultural programmes or policies lack strategies for reaching women. Less than 1% of the projects of the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) are meant for reaching women; the United Nations System as a whole has less than 4% of the projects being beneficial to women. Consequently, there is a clear difference in the way that men and women are motivated for increased agricultural production. “Men receive most of the agricultural extension services, new technologies and credit and women are the caretakers of the food supply”. The IFPRI, 1997 report states, it also says that “if women are given the same resources as men, developing countries would see significant increases in agricultural productivity”.

Specifically, NRC 1988 report confirmed that government fishery policies often tend to favour modern large scale, commercial fisheries that earn foreign exchange rather than local enterprises.

Coupled with the problem of women's irrelevance in the National Policies on Agricultural Production and fisheries. Access to land is another major problem, traditionally in Nigeria as in most other parts of the world it is men that have easy access to land. Adeniyi (2001) affirmed that women are usually handicapped because they have restricted access to land.

As crucial as credit is, for the purchase of land and equipment, women fish farmers often find it difficult or impossible to obtain credit. Often it is men who have access to credit at the level required for profitable enterprise added to this according to FACU 1992 report on fish farming in Kwara State is the scarcity and high cost of inputs such as fish fingerlings, fertilizer, feed etc. The international women's network reported that women farmers receive less than 10% of the total credit allocated to agriculture.

Illiteracy or lack of formal education is another major problem limiting the participation of women fish farmers in national development. Majority of women in developing countries such as Nigeria live in the rural areas and are illiterates. They are mostly unable to adequately harness

and benefit from developments in the fisheries industries and therefore limited to the traditional methods.

Invariably, most women fish farmers are rural dwellers and are mostly limited to processing marketing and distribution of fish while having great potentials for participating in fish culture enterprises. Considering that the hazards and drudgery of capture fishing are eliminated and it promises higher returns for every amount invested.

SUGGESTIONS FOR PROMOTING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN FISH CULTURE ENTERPRISES

The government should provide development programme for rural dwellers specifically under fisheries which will bring better living conditions for women farmers, provision should be made in such programmes for helping them to acquire new knowledge of starting and sustaining fish culture enterprises, improvement of yields through better culture technologies, proper use of fishing equipment, access to essential inputs, such as improved stock, feed etc. this will alleviate woman's work load and increase their productivity thereby enhancing their income and self reliance. Furthermore, government can provide working capital through organization of co-operatives, production of simple, low maintenance, cost effective, adaptable and appropriate rural technologies. Women associations, the state Agricultural development projects (ADP), NGOs and international agencies can also assist in these by tailoring their development programme along these line and financing some of such projects.

The FACU 1992 report to the Kwara Agricultural Development Project made the following recommendations for promoting fish culture enterprises in Kwara State that agricultural development project should improve fisheries extension services, stimulate private sector involvement by providing technical support and assisting in marketing, production and sale of fingerlings, establishment of hire services, consultancy services make fisheries laws to regulate fisheries enterprises and the expansion of fisheries curriculum in the higher institutions of learning.

More credit facilities should be made available to women farmers. This is adequately expressed in the United nations Agenda 21: it says that "facilitate better access to all forms of credit, particularly in the informal sector, taking measures towards ensuring women's access to property rights as well as agricultural sustaining mechanisms to promote the advancement of women".

In line with the above, the government will have to make clear-cut attempts to protect and promote women's rights in fish culture enterprises as well as in Agriculture generally Uganda's Development Network of indigenous Voluntary Associations (DENIVA) for instance emphasises the importance of strategies, which improve property rights security for women. This body explains that, in Uganda, laws about land ownership are gender blind and that nowhere in the constitution does it say that women cannot own land. In practice, the majority of rural women have access to lands but lack control or ownership of it that remains in the hands of male kin.

Finally, it is very important that Education be given to women farmers, this will help to alleviate poverty and advance economic and social development. Wurabia (2001) is of the opinion that if women are given the right education, they will be equipped with the necessary skill and knowledge that will make them compare favourably with their male counterpart in nation building and poverty alleviation. Adeniyi (2001) also opined that Educating women does not only prepare them to participate in developing the nation, it also enables them to prepare their offsprings for participation. He added that it also enables them to organise their businesses in a way that will yield better profits.

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