

Review

Food insecurity and HIV/AIDS as it affects women in Nigeria

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HIV/AIDS, poverty and agriculture all have effects on the women in the African culture, based on the fact that the activity of the women in agriculture and the yield cannot translate to food sufficiency and provide a means of lively hood for her and her children thus leading to the incidence of poverty. It is believed that the men folks, the low level of agricultural productivity, family dependence and poor implementation of government programmes have all not been fair to women thereby exposing and making them vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. This is as a result of the fact them in other to survive they engage in unwholesome activities such as prostitution. This paper examines the rate of food insecurity and HIV/AIDS in Nigeria, and its effect on the Nigerian women, focusing on the role of the government in promoting policies that will improve gender sensitivity especially in agricultural sector, which will aid the economic independence/status of the women, and effectively reduce the menace of poverty, food insecurity and HIV/AIDS.

Key words: Food Insecurity, food security, HIV/AIDS, poverty, agriculture.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty in Nigeria used to be a rural phenomenon, but lately, it has become a common rural and urban experience which correlates directly with family size and the number of earners in a particular household. The rural populace in Nigeria depends on traditional agricultural methods with limited or no improved technology to support their agricultural techniques, as a means of providing food and improving on their sources of income. With the small income and low productivity from agricultural activity one unavoidable eventuality of the farming populace in Nigeria and their dependants (Urban and Rural) is food insecurity (Oladele, 1996).

Food security connotes access by all people at all times to sufficient food for healthy and productive life while food insecurity is the corollary, which is lack of access to food. The initial definition implies that there is adequate aggregate food supply at all season for all, meaning that the production, storage, processing, transportation and distribution system of food production is adequate and effective in addition to sufficient purchasing power by households and individuals in order to acquire the food necessary to meet their consumption and nutritional needs. These include income, employment, price and pricing policies and situation dimensions.

Therefore the adequacy or inadequacy of domestic food production, storage, marketing, distribution and processing, in addition to employment, income levels and income distribution, amongst others determine food security or insecurity (Okunmadewa, 2002).

Food security represents a significant part of welfare measure while non-food consumption such as housing education, clothing etc constitutes the remaining portion, thus establishing the strong nexus between poverty, welfare status and food security or insecurity (Okunmadewa, 2001). Sen (1981) reported that poverty is a major determinant of chronic household food insecurity and that women are most hit by poverty which normally would lead to food insecurity.

In a study conducted by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), it was reported that poverty and food insecurity has rendered the female folks more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS as they continue to adopt risky strategies in order to survive. With about 68% of women in Nigeria actively involved in the agricultural sector of the economy, the problem of food availability deserves adequate study. A gender sensitive agricultural policy that would reduce women and children vulnerability to HIV/AIDS and strengthen the national response system should therefore be put in place.

It is a known fact that man is pushed into different vices in is quest for food. With low productivity in the agricultural sector leading to low income poverty

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becomes inevitable. This means that there will be no access to health care, education, accommodation and all social amenities that make life worth living. Poverty therefore predisposes women to HIV infection because they often have to engage in unhealthy and risky sexual acts in order that their children and dependants can survive.

OBJECTIVE

This paper intends to gear government and policy makers into ensuring, promoting and making policies that improves gender sensitivity in the agricultural sector in the National HIV/AIDS response in order to justify the need for women to be economically viable and to reduce the incidences of HIV/AIDS amongst women and girls.

THE PROBLEM

There are factual evidences that women have always participated actively in agricultural activities vis a viz the economy. This level of participation by women is hardly documented, acknowledged or appreciated, a situation described by Oladele et al. (1996), as the marginalization of women. The various divisions in the Ministries of Agriculture established for Women in Agriculture (WIA) specifically to cater for the needs of resources and greater output of their farms have not achieved its perceived results due to bureaucratic bottlenecks caused by the men who are normally heads over these divisions.

Investigations carried out reveals that women and children (girls) are normally paid less than men for works executed within the same time frame by and large women are overworked, and have limited benefits leaving them with no other choice than to look for alternative sources which is usually their bodies with agriculture and agricultural activities as in most cases a last resort. This is so because of the unprofitability of the agricultural sector, it is sometimes seen as a curse for women who are unfortunately married to rural farmers that are unfortunate, uneducated and even unsuccessful. This has made agricultural activities detested, despised and deserted by the women. This happens to be one of the reasons for the massive rural – urban migration of the women and girls in search of white color jobs or to engage in buying and selling or giving out their bodies at a price. Reason for this unfortunate situation is not far fetched as agricultural activities are still carried out primitively, making it generally unattractive, hopeless as one can never become rich from it and seems to hold no future for women. The agricultural industry remains unattractive to women and girls due to the very low level of mechanization.

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

The United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) has

identified food insecurity and poverty as the major factors responsible for the spread of HIV/AIDS, especially amongst women and girls. It therefore made a case for a comprehensive gender – sensitive agricultural policies by state and Federal Governments as part of the national response to HIV/AIDS. There are two bi-causal relationships which need to be understood by those involved in policy and programme development. These are:

- (i) The relationship between poverty and HIV/AIDS -- which includes the spatial and socio-economic distribution of HIV infection, and consideration of poverty-related factors which affect household and community coping capacities; and
- (ii) The relationship between HIV/AIDS and poverty -- understanding the processes through which the experience of HIV and AIDS by households and communities leads to an intensification of poverty.

To make sense of these relationships the government needs to understand the complex socio-economic processes at work, together with a conceptualization of poverty which is multi-dimensional. There is the need for the government to look into the following:

- (i) The gender dimensions of poverty -- in particular that the poorest households are often female headed;
- (ii) The intergenerational aspects of poverty -- the importance of seeing poverty as part of dynamic social, economic and political processes; and
- (iii) The ways in which the HIV epidemic alters the complex relationships between the poor and the wealthy - through changes in income and asset distributions brought about by the epidemic and through an intensification of processes of social exclusion.

The family, community and government programmes have not been fair to women. The women suffer double debilitating dependency from the inequitable world economic system and unequal social relations of power in the family. Women hardly have access to land, and where they have, it is through their brothers, husbands and/or sons. There is also limited access to credit, water, fertilizers, and modern farming/processing equipments.

Agricultural sector performance

In Nigeria today, agricultural production and processing has increased steadily from 1980 to date at an average growth rate of 3.5%, and as a result, food availability has improved considerably. Today, Nigeria produces most of her food requirements with only 3% coming from importation (CBN annual report and statement of accounts, December, 2000).

Table 1 shows the gender component of estimated marginal products. From the table it is seen that the

Table 1. Estimated marginal value products (gender component).

Factor	Marginal value product (MVP)	
Children	Labor	14.776
Women	Labor	44.9268
Men	Labor	24.3136

marginal productivity ranges from 14.776 to 44.927 in children and women respectively. Although the returns to factors of production are low, the return to woman labour is highest and this is an indication of women's contribution to agricultural production in Nigeria (Oladele et al., 1996).

Women who form a higher percentage of the producers are however, doing so with considerable constraints in terms of land availability, cost of farm inputs, processing equipments and support services as most women do not have farms of their own. According FOS (1999) report, the land ownership type or tenure which is family or government owned, and hence security dictates the type of activity to be engaged in by the women. The gross inadequacy of infrastructures such as roads, electricity, and water constitute major impediments to production, distribution, marketing and storage of food in Nigeria. In 1996 a survey carried out by Idachaba and UNDP on rural infrastructure in Nigeria conducted in six states indicated low level of infrastructural support to the agricultural sector. The implication is largely on off-farm food losses and high prices which would normally affect women and children mostly.

In order to effectively combat the spread of HIV/AIDS, it is very important that the relationship between poverty and the disease be determined, with special reference to a poor resource setting, this is essential because poverty have a multiplier effect on food security, nutrition as well as reducing new case and caring for those already infected. The need to address the issue of poverty in a poor resource setting can never be over-emphasized. This can be best understood when we appreciate the fact that poverty and HIV/AIDS have a directly proportional effect on each other, poverty leading to or causing HIV/AIDS and HIV/AIDS leading to or aggravating poverty.

HIV-AIDS is found almost everywhere, but principally in Africa. In Africa it is found everywhere, but principally in the countryside. It affects all classes, but principally the poor. HIV-AIDS is not transmitted by mosquito bite: it is a social, complex disease and the deadliest of all, medically. It is a disease for which there is no known cure - and for which existing treatments are economically and organizationally beyond the reach of most of those who suffer from it, especially in Africa where hundreds of millions of people live below the recognized "lines" of the most extreme poverty.

The social causes of the epidemic and its effects are much better understood. As a social disease it reflects

social conditions: the fragility of rural economies and the lack of social power of women. It reflects the high levels of migration of men, impelled by the crisis of agriculture and rural development. It reflects the spread of prostitution as a means of survival. And it reflects the fact that it is poor women in rural society who have the least social power to control their own sexuality.

REMEDIES

Quite a number of policies and program interventions have in the recent past been put in Nigeria to alleviate the problems of food insecurity. They have only had a little impact on food production and available. What needs to be looked into is how to achieve the sustainable development essential for an effective response to the epidemic under conditions where the epidemic is destructive of the capacities essential for the response. The next step has to be the development of policies and programmes that address the inter-relationships between poverty and development and to actually put in place those activities that can make a difference for development outcomes. Central to these activities are programmes that address poverty today so as to facilitate future socio-economic development tomorrow. Unless the intergenerational effects of HIV and poverty are addressed now, in addition to improved socio-economic standards it is unlikely that the spread of the diseases will be curtailed.

CONCLUSION

The HIV epidemic has its origins in poverty and unless and until poverty is reduced there will be little progress either with reducing transmission of the virus or an enhanced capacity to cope with its socio-economic consequences. It follows that sustained human development is essential for any effective response to the epidemic in Africa.

The poverty trap has been shown to be deeply rooted in the food and agricultural sector. It is therefore, obvious, that poor socio-economic and infrastructural support system with low human capital development situation in a predominantly agricultural economy which has turned petroleum to its predominant economy is the basis of poverty in Nigeria. It has also observed that potentials of women in relation to agricultural activities are not being fully tapped. Government concerns should focus on finding ways and means of motivating women who have taken to agricultural productivity and those yet undecided should be stimulated and encouraged to do so.

This presentation therefore suggests planning for, and correcting the already identified, and therefore a three prong strategy of macro-economic reform, educating the girl child on the importance of agriculture and processing

and income enhancing interventions such as market support systems.

Land tenure reforms, credit and rural finance programmes, research and extension services, such as producing gender friendly implements and equipments for agricultural mechanization and processing by National Centre for Agricultural Mechanization (NCAM), participation of private sector and local institutions aided by NGOs are strategies and stimulants to breaking the jinx of food insecurity and poverty in Nigeria and hence reducing/total eradicating the menace of food insecurity and poverty which has driven a lot of young women and girls into adopting risky strategies in order to survive when faced with little or no other choice.

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