



Full Length Research Article

ROLE OF WOMEN IN FOOD SECURITY IN CENTRAL DARFUR STATE – SUDAN

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ABSTRACT

Millions of people worldwide suffer from hunger and under nutrition. A major factor contributing to this international problem is food insecurity. The rainfed sub-sector accounts for 85 to 90 percent of agriculture area in Sudan. However, the major economic activities in Central Darfur State are based on traditional farming, and livestock production, since people depend mainly on rain fed agriculture. This research aims to study the role of women in food security in Central Darfur state. Results shows that (37.5%) of the respondents were male farmers, while female farmers constitute 62.5%, of the whole sample. Illiteracy is widespread among women, 64% of women are entirely illiterate (16 out of 25 woman), this percentage equals 94% of illiterates in the sample, of which only one man is found to be completely uneducated. The implication of this may be late adoption of innovation for newly introduced technologies.

Key words: Women, Consumption, Responsibilities, Under Nutrition, Technologies, Insecurity, Illiterate.

INTRODUCTION

Women produce more than 50 percent of the food grown worldwide while in sub-Saharan Africa, women contribute 60 to 80 percent of the labour in both food production for household consumption and for sale. However, so far, there is growing dominance of women in agricultural production and the concomitant decrease of men in the sector or what the phenomenon that FAO called it "feminization of agriculture" (FAO, ?). The rainfed sub-sector accounts for 85 to 90 percent of agriculture area in Sudan (Hassan and Thabit Ahmed, 2015). In Darfur in the western Sudan, women traditionally performed food production and household roles, even though; they often lack equal access to assets, economic opportunities, services and decision-making.

In addition, cultural practices and disintegration of societal roles and responsibilities have hindered gender empowerment (Helpage International, 2010). Nevertheless, Gender power relations are characterized by male dominance despite women prominence in production. (Takana, 2014). consequently, rural women remained isolated from the decision-making processes (Takana, 2014). In spite of this, In Darfur like in many protracted conflicts women more than men are adversely affected by food and livelihoods insecurity (Helpage International, 2010). It is estimated that close to ninety percent of current war victims are civilians, mostly women and children (Mary Deutsch Schneider, 2015). However, Vulnerable groups to food insecurity include victims of

conflict refugees and internally displaced people); migrant workers; marginal populations (e.g., school dropouts, unemployed people, homeless people, and orphans); dependent populations (e.g., elderly people, children under five, and disabled and ill people); women of reproductive age; ethnic minorities; and low literacy households (Buhi and Lori Keeling, 2006).

Role of women in food security

Women in developing countries are indispensable to achieving food security. Women produce more than half of the food grown worldwide. In sub-Saharan Africa, they contribute as much as 80 percent of the labor in agricultural production. not only do rural women in developing countries work in the fields-hoeing, planting, weeding, watering, harvesting, processing-but they also undertake the everyday household management tasks of gathering fuel wood, collecting water, preparing and cooking food, cleaning, caring for children and livestock, and engaging in marketing and business activities (Thaxton and Melissa, 2006).

Yet, there are differences in gender roles and impacts that result in part from unequal access by men and women to assets, economic opportunities, services, crisis aid and decision-making. For example, in many societies women tend to be less educated, less involved in the formal economy, less experienced in dealing with authorities, endowed with fewer and poorer quality productive resources, and faced with more restrictions on their mobility than men face. Men and women are often affected very differently in crisis situations. In armed conflicts, for example, men may be drafted by force into

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military groups or killed, while women are at high risk of sexual, (FAO and WFP, 2010). In the best conditions, poor women in developing countries struggle to keep their families safe, fed, and healthy. When a crisis such as Darfur hits, the burden to provide food can become overwhelming. However, improving women's access to education and health services is especially crucial for maintaining global food security. Better education and improved health contribute to women becoming better decision makers and more productive farmers. Furthermore, when women, and particularly rural women, secure property rights and access to finance, they have a better chance of ensuring their own food security (Thaxton and Melissa, 2006).

Both the number and the percentage of rural households headed by women have been increasing worldwide. But the feminization of agricultural work has become particularly prominent in sub-Saharan Africa, caused mainly by sickness, war, and the out-migration of men to urban areas, and all these causes have led to the breakdown of traditional gender-based divisions of labor. The loss of male labor and the inability of female heads of households to hire replacement labor have led to adjustments in women's cropping patterns and farming systems, resulting in a decrease in production and, in some cases, to production shifts toward less-nutritious crops, (Thaxton and Melissa, 2006). Women's participation to production process is very significant in Central Darfur State, their role in food security is crucial. Moreover, woman bear additional responsibilities in the absence of her husband, who migrates to big towns, or abroad searching for a better life for his family, and hence women act as household heads undertaking all activities the household can take.

Objective of the research

The research aims to study the role of women in food security in Central Darfur state

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Area of the study

The study was conducted in Zalingei, Central Darfur State. It is geographically located in the far western part of Sudan, in the center of Great Darfur, it shares international border with Republic of Central Africa and Republic of Tchad, and national border with West, South and North Darfur states. The population estimated at about 1123748 people, women constitute more than 50 percent of the total population. Eighty percent of them live in the rural areas, where they depend upon rain fed subsistence farming and grazing for their livelihoods. They cultivate different crops mainly cereal crops; millet and sorghum as well as other cash crops like onion, tomato, potato (Abaker and Adam Salih, 2006; and EHA, 2014).

Data collection

The random sampling technique was used; a cross-sectional data was collected by using a structured questionnaire for primary data collection, while secondary data was collected from relevant sources.

Statistical analysis

Descriptive statistics were used for socio-economic factors and population characteristics, frequency tables to summarize the data and examine the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents, depending on percentages, and means.

DISCUSSION

Results in Table (1) show that (37.5%) of the respondents were male farmers, while female farmers constitute 62.5% of the whole sample. In fact, this spotlights on the role of women as household head responsible for all household day-to-day activities and indicates the important role played by women in the study area to household food security. The share of women in the household is underestimated; it is larger than the percentage revealed by the study, especially in agricultural activities. The FAO stated this by emphasizing that women are active in both the cash and subsistence agricultural sectors and much of their work in producing food for the household and community consumption, as important as it is for food security, is not counted in statistics (FAO, ?).

Table 1. Households distribution by sex

| Sex | Frequency | Percent | Cumulative percent |
|--------|-----------|---------|--------------------|
| Female | 25 | 62.5 | 62.5 |
| Male | 15 | 37.5 | 100 |
| Total | 40 | 100 | |

Source: field survey 2014

Yet, results were in line with (Alamgir and Arora, 1991), who stated that, in Africa women's contribution to food production and food security is of paramount importance. Women are in fact often the main food producers, income earners, and guardians of family health and nutrition. When sex was examined against education level Table (2), it is obvious that illiteracy is wide spread among women, 64% of them are entirely illiterate (16 out of 25 women), this percentage equals 94% of illiterates in the sample, of which only one of men is found to be completely uneducated. The implication of this may affect adoption of innovation for newly introduced technologies, as uneducated persons are usually late adopters. In this context, there are factors constraining girls' basic education, these include poverty, displacement, civil unrest, costs of education including school fees, preference to invest in male's education, distant location of schools in rural areas, socially structured division of labour where girls are expected to help in doing domestic chores at household level and marry early and have children (Elfadil and Wafaa, 2004).

Table 2. Sex versus education level

| Sex versus education level | | education level | | | | | | | | Total | % |
|----------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----|--------|------|--------------|------|------------------|------|-------|------|
| | | Illiterate | % | Khalwa | % | Basic school | % | Secondary School | % | | |
| Sex | Male | 16 | 94 | 5 | 45.5 | 2 | 33.3 | 2 | 33.3 | 25 | 62.5 |
| | Female | 1 | 6 | 6 | 54.5 | 4 | 66.7 | 4 | 66.7 | 15 | 37.5 |
| total | | 17 | 100 | 11 | 100 | 6 | 100 | 6 | 100 | 40 | 100 |

Source: field survey 2014

Conclusion

This study is an attempt to highlight the crucial role played by women in achieving food security in Central Darfur State on household level. Results revealed that about 37.5% of the respondents were male farmers, while female farmers constitute 62.5%, of the whole sample. High illiteracy rate among women is one of major problem facing food security achievement. The gender profile of the respondents shows that women are dominant in agricultural activities, policies and plans should be directed towards providing women with appropriate knowledge, improving their access to education, extension services, training and technical support, access to health services and access to credit in order to maintain national food security as well as global food security.

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