

Review

Prospects of occupational diversification among rural women in sub-Saharan Africa: A review

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Rural women need to diversify their occupations since farming is rain-fed and therefore seasonal. This is to enable them to acquire additional income and meet up with economic responsibilities during off-season periods. The paper reviews current literature in the field in both farm and non-farm occupations and the impact of occupational diversification. Occupational diversification is of increasing importance for women empowerment. The paper asserts that contribution made by occupational diversification in empowering rural livelihoods economically is a significant one which has often been ignored by policy makers who choose to focus on agriculture. Therefore, government policy should promote the development of human capital among rural women in order to equip them with the necessary skills to work in non-farm activities.

Key words: Occupation, farm, non-farm, diversification, rural women, empowerment and sub-Saharan Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture led growth played an important role in reducing poverty and transforming the economies of rural communities in many developing countries, but the same has not yet occurred in sub-Saharan Africa. Most countries in sub-Saharan Africa are yet to meet the criteria for a successful agricultural revolution (Ibekwe et al., 2010). The authors noted that this has led to growing doubt about the relevance of agriculture to growth and poverty reduction in the region, especially in Nigeria. As a result, the promotion of non-farm activities as part way out of poverty has gained widespread support among rural women (Ibekwe et al., 2010).

The concept of occupational diversification is emerging as a survival strategy of rural households in developing countries (Bryceson, 2000; Ellis, 2000). The authors noted that rural households are occupationally flexible, spatially mobile and increasingly dependent on non-agricultural income generating activities. Rural people are looking for diverse opportunities to increase and stabilize

their incomes which are determined by their portfolio of assets - social, human, financial, natural and physical capital (Ellis, 1999). The range of non-agricultural activities varies markedly from place to place, ranging from modern to traditional, high to low-income earning, and formal to informal.

There arises the need for rural women to diversify their occupations since farming is rain-fed and therefore seasonal. This is to enable them to acquire additional income and meet up with economic responsibilities during off-season periods. This has made many rural women to engage in occupational diversification. Rural areas where these women reside are dominated by the geographical isolation, low quality physical infrastructure, poor human capital development, underdeveloped markets, resource scarcity or incidence of some natural disaster (Ranjan, 2006). Occupational diversification becomes pertinent in order for the rural women to cope with the aforementioned characteristics.

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Occupational diversification according to Lanjouw and Lanjouw (2001) involves incorporating all economic activities in rural areas, except crop and livestock production, fishing and hunting. Tacoli (2004) defined occupational diversification as non-farm income generating activities undertaken by rural residents and farming by urban residents. Saith (2002) also defined occupational diversification in rural areas as the reallocation and recombination of all economic activities which display sufficiently strong rural linkages, irrespective of whether they are located in designated rural areas or not.

According to Mukhopadhyay and Lim (2005), occupational diversification comprises of two types, namely: those ventures that are administered on an approximately steady basis with an objective of generating surplus and registering growth, hiring labour and with a certain degree of technical sophistication; and products or activities which are usually seasonal, managed exclusively with the help of unpaid family labour, relying on primal technology and catering mostly to the local market characterized primarily by petty production. Looking at the definitions of occupational diversification by different authors, the writer defines occupational diversification in this context as all economic activities which involve farm and non-farm activities in rural areas.

Recent developments in the social, economic and technological arenas have important effects on rural women across sub-Saharan African region. The relevant trends are globalization, regional economic integration and accelerated commercialization, urbanization, advances in agriculture and information technologies, political instability, civil war, HIV/AIDS, livestock epidemics and natural disasters. The multiple impacts on rural women bring significant implications for agricultural productivity, rural production and economic vitality, household food security, family health, family economic security and welfare. Few systematic studies have examined how these trends affect rural women (FAO, 2005). Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that economic integration and advances in agriculture and information technologies present both opportunities and threats for rural women's livelihoods and work, whereas political instability, natural disasters and HIV/AIDS exert considerable additional pressure on rural women's access to resources and their work as farmers and producers. The extensive and diverse responsibilities taken up by rural women in local agricultural and non-farm production systems are established in the community and household nexus in which they function, and are influenced by national and global factors beyond their control.

The pace of economic growth and the move towards a market-based economy has quickened during recent years, bringing a number of changes that have had both positive and negative influences on the lives of rural

women throughout the country. Although some rural women have benefited from emerging economic opportunities in the expanding economy, others have encountered threats to their rural livelihoods and a greater struggle in their daily lives (FAO, 2005). With an increasing rural population amidst a non-expanding land area as in sub-Saharan Africa, the following questions arise: What are the various areas of occupational diversification among rural women? What are the impacts of occupational diversification among rural women? And what are the various efforts made by the government for women empowerment? The study therefore aims to:

1. Find out various areas of occupational diversification among rural women.
2. Determine the impacts of occupational diversification among rural women.
3. Find out various programmes/efforts made by the government for women empowerment.

OCCUPATIONAL DIVERSIFICATION AMONG RURAL WOMEN

Rural women can diversify occupation in different ways. However, non-farm employment now offers the most common diversification strategy for rural women. Several classifications of activities included in rural occupation portfolios have been proposed (Hussein and Nelson, 1999; Ellis, 2000; Barrett et al., 2001), focusing on different criteria (farm vs. non-farm; on-farm vs. off-farm activities; local vs. migratory; self-employment vs. wage labour). All these classifications are useful to make sense of the nature of the choices entailed by occupational diversification processes (De Janvry, 1991).

Majority of rural women have historically diversified their productive activities to encompass a range of other productive areas. Many of the diversification activities pursued by rural women involve micro-enterprises, and the importance of micro-enterprises in generating employment and income in rural areas of Africa has become increasingly recognized. According to Liedholm et al. (1994) past empirical studies have indicated that they provide 20 to 45% of full-time employment and 30 to 50% of rural household income in Africa. Hussein and Nelson (2009) reported that in Africa, many women are engaged in the lowest levels of micro enterprise: household-based income generating activities. There are no substantial barriers to entry into this type of activity in terms of skills and capital, but they yield very low incomes.

De Janvry (1994) confirms this view, noting that non-farm rural incomes are necessary for successful income growth in sub-Saharan Africa. They are therefore critical to the achievement of sustainable livelihoods. Similarly, Bryceson (1996) stated that rural non-agricultural employment is of increasing importance in sub-Saharan

Africa. Although the employment of women is increasing in non-agricultural occupations, they form the largest sectoral share only in agriculture. She provides empirical evidence that this region is steadily becoming less agrarian (both as a long-term historical process, and as an integral part of rural households' livelihood strategies). She concludes that deagrarianisation in sub-Saharan Africa appears to be proceeding on the basis of individual activity diversification with limited intrasectoral diversification. Occupational specialization is largely missing.

Economic diversification within rural households is an increasingly important reality, even in sub-Saharan Africa where the degree of economy wide diversification is the lowest in the world, reflecting the low levels of development and structural transformation in most countries. Based upon a survey of 27 case studies from all over Africa, Reardon (1997) concludes that, though most rural households depend on agriculture and livestock activities, the average share of income from non-farm activities was about 45%. Non-farm activities mainly include wage or self-employment in rural areas or migration (and remittances). Although there is now a better understanding of both the determinants of household income diversification and its consequences for poverty and inequality, much less is known regarding the role and implications of gender-related factors. This is quite surprising, not only considering what we know about the stratification of roles by gender in African households, but also because the sporadic evidence at our disposal seems to suggest that these differences may be relevant.

Households headed by women or with a larger proportion of female members seem to be more involved in agricultural production (to be less diversified). When devoted to off-farm activities, they focus more on self employment rather than in the more remunerative activities, which are, in African contexts, non-agricultural wage employment (Davis, 2007). Not surprisingly, in households with a higher proportion of women the returns from non-farm activities are lower than in households with a higher share of adult men. The rural non-farm activities would then include activities like handicrafts, household and non-household manufacturing, processing, repairs, construction, trade, transport and communication, community and personal services in rural areas. The rural non-farm sector does not involve a homogeneous set of activities in terms of income and productivity levels. Fisher et al. (1997) and Unni (1998) emphasize heterogeneity within the rural non-farm sector, where different activities require different entry qualifications.

IMPACTS OF OCCUPATIONAL DIVERSIFICATION AMONG RURAL WOMEN

The impact of occupational diversification varies from negative effects - the withdrawal of critical labour from the

family farm to positive effects - the alleviation of credit constraints and a reduction in the risk of innovation. The contribution made by occupational diversification to rural livelihoods is a significant one which has often been ignored by policy makers who have chosen to focus their activities on agriculture (Ellis, 1998). Reardon (1997) and Turner et al. (1993) have highlighted the importance of earnings from non-farm activities.

According to Lanjouw and Murgai (2008), non-farm income increasingly plays an important role and exhibits an increasing share in agricultural household income. Thus, the non-farm employment has been generally recognized to have the potential in raising agricultural household income, thereby reducing rural poverty. Previous surveys of Ellis (1998) reports that there was an estimate of roughly 40% of African rural household's income on average being derived from non-farm sources. Bryceson and Jamal (1997) reiterated that occupational diversification activities are of increasing importance for women empowerment. The non-farm activities undertaken by women can be permanent or casual in nature. An increasing number is establishing small rural processing or handicraft enterprises (IFAD, 1995).

Haggblade (1999) reported that pursuing non-agricultural activities therefore represents a risk minimisation strategy to achieve basic household subsistence needs. Many analyses of income diversification conceive of diversification in terms of strategies employed to earn cash income in addition to primary production activities from a variety of sources. Women dominate many of the non-farm activities that will grow most rapidly during structural transformation-activities such as food processing and preparation, tailoring, trading and many services. They likewise hold a major interest in many of the declining rural non-farm occupations - basket making, mat making, ceramics and weaving. Consequently, women will be key actors in the economic transition of Africa's rural economy (Haggblade, 1999). While these are important income-generating activities, it must still be emphasized that the greater body of evidence suggests that diversification activities open to women are often less lucrative than those pursued by men. Delgado (1989) reported that rural women in Burkina Faso normally obtain 25 to 50% of their income from non-agricultural activities. The significance of such activities was shown in this study of the Department of Zabre, south-eastern Burkina Faso. Here, participation in non-agricultural activities allowed women living near to subsistence levels to acquire cash to supply their basic needs in addition to those supplied by own production. According to Delgado (1989), the activities pursued include: small-scale food processing, artisanal activities (e.g basket making), sale of prepared food in markets, carry out petty trading in cereals, sale of shea nuts and butter, sale of groundnut oil, and processed grains (such as soumbala, a flavouring for sauces made from the grains of the neem tree).

Moreover, several studies (Barrett et al., 2001; Ellis and Bahiigwa, 2001; Escobal, 2001; Ferreira and Lanjouw, 2001) indicate that in a variety of regional and local settings rural women capable of combining conventional farming activities with innovative rural enterprises enjoy higher income and safer livelihoods than rural women deriving their income from conventional farming alone or from a combination of conventional farming and wage labour.

Reardon (1998) states that one of the key areas of discussion in the literature is to understand whether individuals respond to new opportunities in the rural non-farm enterprise (RNFE)-demand-pull-or are driven to seek non-farm employment because there are no opportunities on-farm-distress-push. This distinction suggests a number of specific inferences in terms of the relationship between diversification strategies, household characteristics and the socio economic environment. Reardon (1998) suggests that when relative returns are higher in RNFEs than in farming, and returns to farming are relatively more risky, pull factors are at work. Demand-pull also includes any increase in the demand for rural products resulting from increases in income of lower and middle-income rural households and increased demand from urban areas (Islam, 1997). Conversely, distress-push diversification occurs in an environment of risk, market imperfections and of open and/or hidden agricultural unemployment. Thus, when rural populations engage in economic activities that are less productive than agricultural production and are motivated by the need to avoid further income decreases, push factors are at work (Reardon, 1998).

GOVERNMENT INITIATED PROGRAMMES FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

The true success of any comprehensive, economic and social development programme in sub-Saharan Africa is primarily dependent upon the extent to which it contributes to the well being of those living in the rural areas. This is because the bulk of the country's population, resources particularly land, natural and mineral resources are in these areas (Oyesanmi et al., 2006). Much as the problem of rural poverty has been noted, even globally, there are yet controversies among policy makers on appropriate concepts of rural development and by extension, appropriate policies and strategies for eradication of rural poverty. Various governments of Nigeria have tried several programmes, approaches and strategies aimed at improving the conditions of the rural poor especially women and while some of the efforts are still on course, many have since gone moribund. Central in the varying objectives of the programmes was the target of alleviating poverty, which was heavily biased towards agriculture and rural development.

According to Obasi and Oguiche (1995), the concern

over increasing poverty levels especially in sub-Saharan Africa and the need for its alleviation as a means of improving the standard of living of the people has led to the conceptualization and implementation of various poverty alleviation programmes worldwide. In Nigeria, the government and donor agencies have been active in their efforts to analyze and find solutions to the menace of poverty. The Federal government has also established programmes which focused on the empowerment of women involved in agricultural and non- agricultural production. Some of the programmes implemented to alleviate poverty include the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), established in 1986 with the major aims of opening up the rural areas and to improve the conditions of the vulnerable poor (Obasi and Oguiche, 1995). Continuing they noted that the Better Life Programme (BLP) which was established in 1981 was mostly gender specific; it was meant to improve the life of rural women. Harnessing the potentials of the rural women in order to boost their economic activities and improving their incomes were the goals of the programme. The programme was later replaced by Family support Programme (FSP) in 1995. FSP was almost the same with BLP especially in similarity of concept and identical objectives. The difference was that it embraced other members of the family. Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) established in 1975 is a World Bank assisted programme in conjunction with the federal government and state governments. Its principal aim was to boost the productivity of the peasant farmers through supply of farm inputs, extension services, construction and maintenance of rural roads. It also fostered the establishment of cooperatives.

Other poverty alleviation programmes established by the government include: Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) and National Special Programme on Food Security (NSPFS). Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) established in 1997 was an employment programme designed specifically for locally based producers of goods and services and potential entrepreneurs in the establishment of cottage industries (Nwachukwu and Ezeh, 2007). Its emphasis was laid on the economic development and empowerment of the rural populace particularly low income families and cooperatives through the provision of loans which rural women were among the beneficiaries. The influence of FSP on the lives of members has been minimal. Udoh (1999) reported that FSP did not provide help to most members in starting their businesses or providing training, financial management and marketing assistance. The National Special Programme on Food Security (NSPFS) established in 2001 is a targeted intervention programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria, developed with the collaborative efforts of Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO/UN). National Special programme for Food Security is a special ongoing programme to ensure food security and

poverty alleviation. Its aim is to assist farmers to increase output and income and strengthen extension delivery among others (Ayoade, 2010). The expected outcomes of NSPFS include increased employment opportunities, reduced post harvest losses, improved standard of living, improved quality of life and economic status of farmers and rural dwellers (Oyesanmi, 2006).

The government of Nigeria has never been in short supply of programmes or reforms aimed at alleviating poverty and economic empowerment of rural women, but the aims of these programmes have not been successfully met. They have failed to deliver the expected results needed to create a substantial impact on poverty and economic empowerment of rural women. Barnes (2010) reported that several factors have hindered the efforts of government towards economic empowerment of rural women. These include: poor coordination; the absence of a comprehensive policy framework, excessive political interference; ineffective targeting of the poor leading to leakage of benefits to unintended beneficiaries; the unwidely scope of programme which caused resources to be thinly spread across too many projects design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Occupational diversification is an important strategy employed by rural women in sub-Saharan Africa in order to cope with crisis and seasonal stress in both farm and non-farm activities. The spread of non-agricultural employment among rural women reflects their growing desperation for income-generating opportunities. Non-agricultural employment arises from the survival strategies of rural women unable to obtain employment or self-employment in agriculture.

Government should impart training to rural women through female extension agents with the collaboration of NGOs, and other rural development agencies. Educational level of rural women should be increased through adult and non-formal educational programmes. Various agricultural development programmes should be initiated by government for the betterment of rural women. Training programmes should also be organized on regular intervals to give targeted groups opportunities to learn and express themselves in public and improve their self-confidence. There arises the need to open up opportunities for women farmers to participate in non-farm employment, through development of rural industries for poverty reduction among rural households.

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