Abstract

Agricultural development is often thought of as the degree to which farmers adopt technology to increase production. Although the rate of technology adoption is an important aspect of agricultural development, it is no means the only factor that contributes to agricultural development. The objective of the paper is to bring to focus the actual child care needs of women in agriculture and the need to extend the scope of extension services reaching them to include both improved agricultural innovations and adequate provision of appropriate group child care for their pre-school children.

The study reveals that majority of women in agriculture have infants and pre-school children in their households. Also, the women spend long hours each day working outside their homes cultivating, processing and distributing agricultural products. The traditional child care structures normally available to these women for the care of their pre-school children while they are away from home are no longer available or have become inadequate. The extension services the women receive are the provision of improved seeds, application of fertilizer and advice on soil conservation methods.

Agricultural extension programmes especially for women in agriculture must be designed to improve the quality of life of rural women and their family. Successful agricultural development programme should be viewed in the context of the rural family, its needs, desires and expectation and not simply in terms of yields per hectare. In the case of the women farmer, the extension service reaching her, should include the necessary agricultural inputs she requires and a reliable child care assistance. This, would no doubt, enable the woman farmer to contribute her quota to the development of sustainable agriculture in Nigeria.

1.0 Introduction

The importance of rural women in agricultural production in developing countries like Nigeria has been recognized and well documented since the early 1970s (Boserup, 1970, UNECA/FAO, 1975, Patel and Anthonio, 1973). Some of the farm-related tasks these women are involved in include: planting, weeding, harvesting, transportation, processing and marketing. The responsibility for the maintenance of subsistence farms continue to fall on women who besides their normal tasks of food preparation, child and house care, contribute substantially to agricultural production. Many studies have been conducted to determine the extent of rural women’s contribution in labour and other aspects to agricultural production and distribution (Olawoye, 1985; Osuntogun, 1976).

In Boserup’s (1970) studies in different rural African communities, it was found that in almost all cases, women did almost 70% of the work. A UNECA/FAO (1975) report estimated that African women supply 70% of the workforce in production of food crops, besides 100% workforce in food processing, 50% workforce in animal husbandry and 60% in marketing. In an attempt to
address the issue of increasing food production amongst women in agriculture, emphasis had been on the introduction and adoption of various improved farm and home making practices. The type of child care assistance available to the working mother is one of the most important factors that determine her productivity. The urban working mother is able to play the dual roles of being a mother and employee successfully due to the availability of child care assistance such as housemaids, nannies, day care centres and nursery schools.

Moshner (1966) defined ten factors of agricultural development which he classified as either essentials or accelerators. In addition to improved new technology, according to him, other essentials to agricultural development include adequate markets, supplies, inputs, transport and other incentives. In the case of women farmers, another essential factor which would contribute to enhancing the productivity of women in agriculture, is the provision of adequate group care facilities for these women and their pre-school children.

The main objective of this paper, therefore, is to investigate the need to extend the scope of extension services reaching women farmers to include both the introduction of adequate farm inputs and innovations and the provision of group child care facilities for the care of their pre-school children. The paper brings to focus the actual child care needs of women in agriculture by presenting a brief report of a research study carried out in Osun State of Nigeria.

1.1 Child care needs of rural women in Osun State

The traditional Nigerian household is characterized by the extended family or kin group. The care and upbringing of children used to be the responsibility of parents and members of the extended family like aunt, uncle, cousin, grandparents and mother-in-laws (Ekong, 1986; Allen, 1976). Thus when mothers left home during the day to the farm, market or to work outside the home, extended family members or older siblings especially female children were readily available to take care of the infant and the pre-school child. There were also situations where older wives delegated the care of the home and the younger children to younger wives. This was common in polygamous homes. This traditional kin group child care practice especially among rural families, made it possible for infants and pre-school children (2-5 years) to be taken care of in the home until the child was old enough to take care of him/her self and actively participate in household chores.

Today, however, women in rural areas including those in agriculture face new challenges with regard to child care assistance. There are noticeable changes in the kin group interaction. This is brought about partly by modernization of our society as well as other factors. These changes in the interactional patterns of the traditional rural family system have, no doubt, left women in agriculture and other rural women as the sole care takers of their infants and pre-school children just like working mothers in the urban areas.

2.0 Methodology

The main objective of the study was to determine the level of awareness among mothers and local groups of the need to develop child care services in rural areas and how mothers and local groups can cooperate in promoting and sustaining day care services in their communities through self help and community development approach.

The study was carried out in 40 randomly selected villages/communities from ten local government areas of Osun State of Nigeria. A total of 346 respondents were involved in the study.
3.0 Results

The results of the study are presented in these sections.

Age: The average age of a mother is 34.75 years. Majority of mothers (76%) are between 29-39 years while 22% are between 40-49 years and the remaining 2% are 50 years and above.

Marital status: Ninety-three percent (93%) of mothers are married while 7% are either divorced or single.

Level of education: Seventy percent have primary school education or Teachers’ grade II certificates and 10% have no formal education.

Number of children: Half of the respondents have 4-6 children; 44%, 1-3; 5%, 7-9 while 1% of mothers have 10-12 children.

Occupation: Majority of mothers (71%) are involved either in farming or distribution of agricultural products.

Working hours outside the home: Fifty-one percent (51%) of respondents spend between 7-9 hours; 41%, 4-6 hours; 6%, 1-3 hours working outside the home daily.

Mother care method: Majority of mothers (93.1%) entrust the care of their pre-school children with either extended family members, older siblings when they are available, friends and neighbours. They were also left alone to play with peers or taken to mothers places of work. There was no method that was permanently utilized but any of the above were normally used depending on what was available to mothers. About 6.9% reported taking their pre-school children to day care.

Majority of mothers (80%) are not satisfied with the child care options available to them. This is due to unreliability of the options. Majority of mothers (82%) have positive attitude towards the care of their pre-schoolers in day care. Mothers in the study expect these institutions to play both custodial functions as well as provide early childhood education for their pre-schoolers. Also a rank order preference of child care methods usually available to mothers for the care of their pre-schoolers indicates that the most preferred child care method is day care/nursery school with weighted mean scores of 4.88. The least preferred methods are leaving children with neighbours/friend (2.9%) and mate (2.47). Although the respondents are quite aware of the benefits of day care services to them and their pre-schoolers but most of the communities studied lack these essential services.

There was a positive and significant ($P = .05$) relationship between mothers awareness score of the need for child care services and the following variables; years of schooling ($r = 0.421$); number of infants and preschool children ($r = 0.331$); number of hours mothers work outside the home ($r = 0.262$); membership of social organization ($r = 0.376$) and attitude of mothers towards child care in day care setting ($r = 0.594$) (Ogbimi, 1997).

4.0 Conclusion

This study reveals that most of the women in agriculture in our rural areas are in their active child bearing ages. Consequently they have infants and preschool children. Toddlers and preschoolers are the most difficult to care for by mothers in the farm. This is because the children are either too old to be carried on the back or too young to be trusted to protect themselves from danger when left alone. Also, most mothers in agriculture spend long hours of their day working
outside the home. Since the traditional structures for child care normally available to these women are fast breaking down and becoming ineffective, there is need to substitute the gap created with suitable alternative child care arrangements. Thus, the provision of adequate community based group care facilities for women farmers would not only contribute to their productivity but also to the development and early stimulation of preschool children in rural areas of Nigeria.

References


