



Research Article

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Enhancing Food Security Through Systematic African Women Empowerment in South Africa

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Abstract

This paper critically argues how the gender and development approach influences food security for women. A critical literature review analysis was conducted using peer-reviewed publications and grey literature from relevant organisations. Sources from 1993 to 2020 were manually selected from Sabinet and Google Scholar using a purposive and snowball approach and 69 articles were analysed. Findings indicated that although the Gender and Development approach is useful in understanding the issue of food security within the South African context, a post-development feminist approach can guide policy frameworks that recognise differences in women when addressing food insecurity, to enhance women empowerment. This paper recommends that gender and food security issues ought to be conceptualised and understood in a multidimensional sense, using various determinants which include consumption, income, poverty and human development.

Keywords: *Gender and development approach, gender inequality, food security, households, women*

1. Introduction

Historical evidence reveals that women have been systematically oppressed through various laws and norms in their respective societies. Globally, women are still vulnerable to food insecurity due to lack of access and control over their household's assets such as land. While women produce 70% of food grown for consumption, the asymmetries in ownership of, access to and control of livelihood assets negatively affect their role in food production (Opiyo and Agong, 2020). Although a significant number of studies have been done on food security and gender, there are limited studies within the South African context on the role of women in food security. A popular notion from these studies is that women play a central role in the provision of household food security. Regardless of the discriminatory patriarchal practices in terms of ownership of land, decision making and access to resources, they supply most of the labour needed to produce food crops and often control the use or sale of food produce grown on the plots they manage.

This paper, therefore, provides a critical analysis of causal and contributory factors to food

insecurity amongst women. Baloyi et al. (2018) argue that the majority of women are suffering from food insecurity due to limited access to arable land and other productive resources. Furthermore, women experience food insecurity because of the gendered nature of economic policies and other government processes such as budgetary spending, which do not address women's needs. This paper significantly explores new avenues on the enhancement of food security for women, more particularly those in rural areas within the South African context.

South Africa is regarded as a food secure country at a national level, irrespective of the fact that 21.3% of South African households are food insecure. Ramkisson (2018) posits that food security interventions are mainly led by females (52.8%) who practice subsistence farming as their main source of income. The gender and development approach as well as the post-development approach was used to argue women empowerment and emancipation as an effective tool that can be utilised to improve gender-based inequalities in all food security interventions. Moreover, these approaches address gender imbalances in societies that reflect men's priorities and the consequence of unequal access to and control over productive resources. Namara (2018) maintains that gender equity should prioritise women empowerment through programmes that are designed to address the needs of women. This simply means that such programmes should be focused on equal access to productive resources and decision-making processes. Menon (2018) emphasises that women and men have unique development priorities, needs and constraints, therefore they are affected differently by development interventions.

A qualitative critical review analysis was used to analyse women in enhancing food security. Search words including; "gender and food security in South Africa" OR "gender and food security" OR "agriculture" OR "women" were used for this study. To develop an in-depth understanding of the trends, gaps and limitations in the literature regarding food security and gender over the years, a purposive sampling technique was used to select articles from 1993 to 2020. Literature from Sabinet and Google Scholar search engines screen classified by title, full text and abstract, was included in the study using the inclusion and exclusion criterion of the year of publication (between 1993 to 2020) and search terms mentioned above. Grey literature, news articles and analysis of existing literature was also excluded. Data was analysed through thematic content analysis and presented in themes.

2. Gender Inequality and Food Security

Studies on food security (Duffy et al. 2017; Rao et al. 2017; Sinclair et al. 2017) show that one of the key contributing factors to food insecurity is gender inequality in communities and the society at large. These studies identify women as the most vulnerable group to food insecurity. Qureshi et al. (2015) further report that 22 national poverty assessments found that South African women are vulnerable to food insecurity (Qureshi et al., 2015). Furthermore, Moussa (2008) and Rummery (2020) argue that gender inequalities are caused by states, private sectors and individuals. They further state that the overall responsibility of the state is to promote the emancipation of women, which can be achieved by addressing gender issues, creating equal access to state resources such as employment and establishing policies that create an enabling environment for women. Chiloane-Tsoka's (2013) findings indicate that South African women are not active in economic initiatives formulated by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) – South African Women Entrepreneurship Network, which strategically provides mentorship and create more opportunities for women in business (Klasen, 2018; van Rensburg et al., 2020).

Table 1: Households that reported hunger, 2018

Geo-type and sex	N ('000)					Percent			
	Male		Female		Both		Male	Female	Both
	Suffering	Total	Suffering	Total	Suffering	Total	Suffering	Suffering	Suffering
Urban	509	7 115	474	4 373	982	11 489	7,1	10,8	8,6
Rural	284	2 480	321	2 487	605	4 967	11,4	12,9	12,2
RSA	792	9 596	795	6 860	1 587	16 456	8,3	11,6	9,6

Source: GHS 2018

Chiloane and Mayhew (2010) argue that black South African women felt oppression more than their counterparts during the era of colonialism and apartheid. In addition, women are vulnerable to hunger because they continue to face exclusion from social services, lack ownership of productive assets and have irregular income flows. The authors point that 43% of women worldwide are involved in agricultural labour, and this percentage rises as high as 60% in some African countries. Irrespective of this high percentage, reports indicate that those women are still disadvantaged in many ways, including, least access to resources, inputs and land, moreover they lack a voice in decision-making processes. Akpotor (2009) and Ferguson (2011) express concern about culture and tradition as a causal effect that relegates women as the inferior sex while exposing them to food insecurity.

Iruonagbe (2011) and Iruonagbe (2010) report on the importance of access to resources in promoting food security for both men and women. Table 1 simply acknowledges that not only women are prone to food insecurity; it affects men as well. However, women are most disadvantaged because they encounter cultural constraints which reduce their potential productivity and suppresses their participation in decision and policymaking. The findings of Olowu (2013) reveal that African women farmers lack access to the security of tenure and ownership of land, thus limiting their role in alleviating food insecurity and their participation in the market. Therefore, the majority of black South African women rely on social grants and other sources of income as a coping mechanism to save their money in stokvels to meet their basic needs. Stokvels are a recognised form of business, however African women are still facing financial barriers and banks are reluctant to provide loans to them as entrepreneurs (Ngcobo and Chisasa, 2018; Verhoef, 2001). These factors suggest that the South African government needs to formulate effective financing strategies and establish sustainable institutions that support small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMMEs) which encourage poverty alleviation and food security by ensuring access to resources such as credits and savings. The cooperation between SMMEs and agricultural co-operatives will enhance the alleviation of food insecurity by improving access to capital. However, the South African government provides limited training in assisting potential women entrepreneurs to start and grow their businesses (Chiloane and Mayhew, 2010).

3. Gender and Development Approach and Food Security

Women are the key role-players in ensuring household food security. The gender development approach helps to identify factors that hinder women from achieving food security at all levels. This approach analyses the experiences and concerns of women and men as an integral part of achieving equal food security. The Gender development approach provides some important insights into the nexus between gender and food security within the South African context. It seeks to ensure that both men and women participate and benefit equally from interventions and reforms aimed at enabling food security. In other words, it emphasizes equal benefit and control in development projects.

Butt et al. (2010) state that women are the main participants in food security projects, further highlighting that those black South African women operate under great constraints, such as inadequate institutional support in agricultural and non-agricultural activities that promote food security. However, worthy to note is that the South African government gradually strives to create a responsive system that prioritises the progress of women in all sectors (South African Department of women, youth and persons with disabilities, 2019). This paper argues that food security for women must be informed by the gender development approach, which analyses inequalities as far as access to resources (land and financial capital) are concerned, as well as access to equal opportunities for development.

Pueyo (2019) and Young (2016) maintain that the gender development approach recognises the role played by women in development and the fact that women have been previously excluded systematically from full participation in development. This approach critically engages women as untapped resources that are left out of the development process, yet they are the key actors in

promoting development (Moser, 2014). In the South African context, a range of interventions have been initiated to enable women economic empowerment and gender equality in some sectors including agriculture. Nevertheless, little success has been reported due to unstable economic growth which severely resulted in gendered barriers to participate in the formal sector. Furthermore, this is found in South Africa where black African women in rural areas and those without formal education are the main victims in the going struggle against food insecurity as compared to African males (South African Department of women, youth and persons with disabilities, 2019).

Harcourt (2018), Onditi and Odera (2017) and Sen (2000) argue that as far as development processes are concerned, classifying women as an excluded population is an extremist viewpoint. This notion is supported by Crenshaw (2018) and McKenzie et al. (2018) who argue that women are not completely excluded from development processes, rather their inclusion is granted on a peripheral basis. This simply means that the inclusion of women in development processes is flawed and insufficient to address the issue of equality. This translates that, women need to actively participate in development processes and opportunities and this can only be achieved through the creation of opportunities that encourage and allow for women participation. Gender studies have shown that gender-based food insecurity is closely linked to limited skills, inadequate investment in human capital, involvement in low productive work and inadequate access to resources (Agarwal, 2018; Callister, 2018; Cook and Frank, 2008; Kwiatkowski, 1998; Nhemachena et al., 2018; Patel, 2012).

The gendered dimension of food security can be comprehended vividly by firstly analysing the notion of capabilities and entitlements. In other words, the reduction of hunger can only be attained by differentiating between the entitlements of men and women. This can be done through focusing on increasing entitlements through increased access to resources (Beneria and Bisnath, 1996; Davaa et al., 2018; Osman, 2002). There is, however, little improvement despite the African Protocol on Women's Rights' attempts to provide renewed hope as far as women's rights to social, political and economic development (Ebeku, 2004; Friedman, 2018; Neumayer, 2005). The critical argument raised by Moser (2014) highlights the limitations of the gender development approach. This includes its focus on women in isolation and that more emphasis should be directed at gender and development. This suggests that food security could be achieved by understanding the contributory roles played by men and women, their responsibilities within society and the relationship between these factors.

However, there is a need for policy and programming frameworks that acknowledge that women across the world vary, thus problematising the generalized view of women within the food security discourse. Government interventions should use an intersectional approach which does not only consider those who are left out of food security policy programming, but further seeks understanding of why and how they are left out. Its application in the food security and gender nexus will therefore require greater attention to intergroup and intragroup differences, specific social positions (which exist at the crossing of multiple axes of inequalities), and the wider social processes and macro-level factors that shape policy intervention and programs that promote sustainable development. Interest groups such as the International Labour Organisation (2002) have identified the social welfare approach, efficiency and women empowerment as relevant and appropriate to address gender and development needs that ultimately enhance food security among women in developing countries.

4. Human Development and Women Empowerment

Human development and women empowerment are considered a meaningful strategy that assists women to meet their strategic gender needs indirectly by mobilising their practical gender needs. Empowerment includes access to control over physical, human, intellectual and financial resources as a means to alleviate food insecurity (Gladys, 2015). Human development in this context is described as the practice of enhancing people's independence and their prospects to improving their welfare, as well as to promote their quality of life. There seems to be a significant relationship between hunger and the level of education. It is for this reason that education and training are considered key factors

in increasing the potential of an individual as well as their access to development opportunities. Despite any interventions introduced by the government, table 1 shows that gender inequality in South African communities still exists. Education and training elevate the chances of an individual to access productive employment, resulting in income generation. It has been emphasised by many scholars that women as previously marginalised members of society are prone to limited access to education as compared to their male counterparts (Carnevale et al. 2018; Coleman, 2007; Dollar and Gatti, 1999; Hakim, 2006; Yadav and Lal, 2018). This translates that inequality in human development hinders social cohesion and citizen's trust in the public sector and prevents disadvantaged groups (women) from realising their political, social and economic rights. However, analysing gender inequalities in human development goes beyond income (Ntili et al., 2014).

Due to traditionally ascribed roles, women usually carry a heavier workload than males, including household chores, and this negatively affects their educational progress (Maphalala and Mpfu 2017; Thompson et al., 1999). Higher levels of education of women have a direct impact on the socio-economic status of households, the unjustified position of poor women in the global economy is partly related to high rates of illiteracy. Education is therefore considered a tool for the empowerment of women, and empowerment can also be achieved through the creation of development opportunities that promote and encourage independence and self-reliance (Kabeer, 2005; Moser, 2014). Women empowerment acknowledges and addresses inequalities in society and supports the notion that the origins of women subordination emanate within families. Moser (2014) and Salia et al. (2018) emphasise that women need to increase their power, self-reliance and internal strength through women's organisations by sharing information. Furthermore, Moser (1993) asserts that women empowerment takes into cognisance and resolves barriers, obstacles and problems experienced by women. Therefore, women empowerment as a practical step in achieving gender equality, requires education coupled with relevant to existing knowledge that addresses real needs and gives access to formal well-paid jobs. This suggests that women should not be subjected to poorly paid and unskilled jobs (Akpotor, 2009; Jayachandran, 2015).

5. Women and Welfare, Capability, Human Rights Approach

The welfare approach perceives that some national and international policies and strategies aimed at women empowerment are still not fully effective. This results from the fact that the designed interventions perceive women as passive beneficiaries of development. Furthermore, the continuous debate on development has adopted the rights-based approach which is associated with the equity approach. This approach suggests that women should not be viewed as passive beneficiaries of development policies, but rather as active participants entitled to the benefits of development (ILO, 2002). The traditional underlying assumptions are that motherhood is the key role for women, that women are passive recipients of development and that child-rearing is the primary and defining role of women. This, therefore, means that the welfare approach cannot be regarded as a sustainable approach when it comes to addressing gender and food security issues.

Drawing on Sen's (2000) work, the capability approach as a normative framework is a comprehensive framework which emphasizes the evaluation of policies based on their bearing, as far as the capabilities of people are concerned. In simpler terms, the framework calls for judging the impact of a policy on the changes and the difference it makes on the capabilities of the very same people it was designed for. It further raises questions of convenience and obtainability about the resources people require to meet their goals. Kuklys and Robeyns (2005) argue that the focus should be on people's abilities and capabilities, their productiveness and quality of life, as well as the alleviation of obstacles and challenges that might inhibit people (women) from undertaking activities and taking action to improve their well-being and gain freedom and development. Tsikata (2007) states that equality and non-discrimination as principles of a rights-based approach speak to the fact that efforts aimed at development should ensure that marginalised groups prone to discrimination of any kind are prioritised and regarded as the main focus. The principles emphasise that the

disadvantaged and marginalised groups should be regarded as key in enforcing the rights-based approach. With reference to hunger and gender, the rights-based approach principles assert that poverty exists when the basic human rights of a person are unfulfilled. This in turn manifests itself through the exclusion of women in crucial development processes and efforts, which result in powerlessness rather than just a lack of access to resources (Ljungman, 2004). Furthermore, to address issues of inequality and hunger, the non-monetary economy should be acknowledged as an important contributory factor to well-being and that socio-economic and cultural changes are needed to expand capabilities, particularly women's capabilities.

6. Income Disparities, Division of Labour and Food Security

South Africa has the highest rate of income inequality in the world, with women earning less than men for doing the same job in most cases (Modirwa and Oladele, 2012; Francis and Webster, 2019). The report indicated that gender-based discrimination in South Africa is still a persisting challenge in the labour market where women are subjected to low paid jobs with poor quality working conditions. This suggests that the South African labour market is more favourable to men than women (South African Department of women, youth and persons with disabilities, 2019). What is sad about a gendered division of labour is that although poor women work more hours than men, their work is neither valued nor recognised as contributing to the economy. These authors further point out that the socio-economic status of women plays either a negative or positive role in food security and that most women have poor expertise regarding a range of productive resources, including education, land, information and financial resources (Francis and Webster, 2019). Work performed by women in rural areas is not recognised in the market as economic activity, even though those women work longer hours than men.

The majority of the women's work does not contribute to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or add value in the market, as most of the roles are limited to the immediate household. It is further posited that in most households' women are the breadwinners; however, their roles are often underrated due to their type of work. The roles and responsibilities associated with women are often considered to be detrimental to their health due to unfavourable conditions (Sidh and Basu, 2011). Olowu (2013) points out that the role of women in food provisions for their families and sustaining the livelihoods of their households, have remained unrecognised by many policymakers. Furthermore, the social and cultural inequalities are another worrying factor as they have a major influence over household decisions about food. Wilcox et al., (2015) argue that women are responsible for many agricultural projects and activities, but they lack training, and this undermines their strength in the agricultural sector. The lack of adequate training has negative implications for agricultural development, productivity and food security.

In support of this, Menon and Dixit (2013) emphasise that article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights speaks of the right of rural women to equal access to land, water, credit and other services including social security and adequate living conditions. Irrespective of the fact that the issue of women and food security has received great attention, public and private institutions have failed to address gender inequalities in relation to access to food. Interestingly, the South African government has programmes and policies aimed at increasing women's access to land rights and ownership, which should contribute to women's economic development. However, lack of policy coherence and implementation means that women continue to struggle to produce food, provide food and manage both household and community responsibilities (Taylor, 2007). Governments seek equitable outcomes, including in gender issues, even though there are many social, institutional and political constraints that inhibit their abilities or intentions to achieve gender balance (Qureshi et al., 2015). The World Bank (2013) stipulates that women empowerment programmes such as targeted agricultural interventions and strengthening the capacity of women to enhance household food security, are the most effective ways of achieving food security, as far as rural households are concerned.

7. Conclusion

Based on the findings of this paper, food insecurity is a persisting challenge amongst women. Of the contributory factors to this phenomenon are historical interventions that were founded on the lack of knowledge and misunderstanding of the dimensions of gender relations. While gender is a pertinent variable in understanding food security/insecurity studies, using it as a sole gendered lens generalises the experiences of women. In other words, most of the studies which are available within the South African context, tend to generalise women as sharing similar experiences without considering other social determinants such as class divisions, race, ethnicity and context. This may obscure the commonalities and differences within and across population groups in the nexus of gender and food security, thereby affecting policy framework and programming that is aimed at sustainable rural development. It is conclusive that the gender development approach should not be misunderstood as an approach that advocates for exclusiveness. This paper provides strategies and engagements so that both men and women participate, influence and benefit from any food security interventions. It should be viewed and embraced as an approach that emphasises the importance of recognising the gendered differences for both men and women in any development initiative. The creation of employment opportunities aimed especially at women has to be prioritised and attended to. Such opportunities should be of acceptable quality and should possess the inherent ability to improve the socio-economic status of women in rural areas and the society as a whole.

It is therefore notable that to promote women's development, there must be a promotion of access to equal opportunities as far as decent employment is concerned. This notion has been expressed and supported by the findings of various scholars who are of the idea that the development of skills and provision of education and training to women is the only way that true women empowerment and emancipation can be achieved. Both approaches have put more emphasis on women empowerment and interventions that create an enabling environment for women to exercise their agency, their solutions and their creativity to overcome hunger as well as other poverty-related issues. This suggests that gender and hunger issues are to be conceptualised and understood in a multidimensional sense, using various determinants which include consumption, income, poverty and human development in totality. The lack of gender-informed policies creates instability in terms of promoting and building sustainable long-term capacity for women. This paper has revealed that promoting gender-equitable opportunities in the agricultural sector will eliminate the vulnerability of women to food insecurity and ensure women's participation with the commercialisation of their products. Hence, it is suggested that the formulation of a practical gender policy framework for women will serve as the best practice to address gender imbalances and the redistribution of resources.

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