

Chapter 5

The Indigenous Roles of Women in Household Food Security in Limpopo Province: Implications for Reducing Hunger and Malnutrition

Agnes Sejabaledi Rankoana
University of Limpopo, South Africa

ABSTRACT

The chapter describes women's roles in home-gardening to ensure household food security in a rural community in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Focus group discussions confirmed the women continue to produce indigenous crops as part of their cultural obligations to provide for household food security. This implies that the women are capable of maintaining the health and welfare of their households by ensuring food availability, accessibility, and utilization, which are important elements of food security. The study has implications for ending hunger and malnutrition as food is produced and preserved for future consumption. The food and preservation practices adopted by the women in the study could be incorporated into climate change mitigation and adaptation policies to address the challenge of poverty and malnutrition as per the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 2.

INTRODUCTION

The chapter describes the women's roles in home-gardening to ensure household food security in a rural community in Limpopo Province, South Africa. Focus group discussions confirmed the women's continuous production of indigenous crops as their cultural obligation to provide for household food security. This implies that the women can maintain the health and well-fare of their households by ensuring food availability, accessibility and utilization, which are important elements of food security. The study has implications for ending hunger and malnutrition as food is produced and preserved for

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future consumption. The food and preservation systems practices by the women in the study, could be incorporated into climate change mitigation and adaptation policies to address the challenge of poverty and malnutrition as per the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal2.

Sustainable Development Goals are integrated, indivisible and balance three dimensions of sustainable development namely the economic, social and environmental. A Sustainable Development Goal seeks to end hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. Its main objective is to ensure sustainable food production systems and the implementation of resilient agricultural practices that increase productivity and production that help maintain ecosystems, strengthen capacity for adaptation to climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding and other disasters and progressively improve land and soil quality by 2030. The formulation of this goal was informed by the observations that climate change is threatening the rural communities that depend on natural resources for their livelihood. Rural communities have a range of livelihoods risks because of the climate change hazards such as drought, erratic rainfall and increased temperature (Quinn, et al., 2011). The remarkable impacts of climate change overwhelmed food security systems in the African Continent (FAO, 2009). Although food supplies have increased substantially, constraints on access to food and continuing inadequacy of household and national incomes to purchase food, instability of supply and demand, as well as natural and human-made disasters prevent basic food needs from being fulfilled (Adepoju, et al., 2015). Persistent hunger in the developing world means that warranting adequate and nutritious food for the population will remain the principal challenge unless subsistence food production is improved and developed as the main practice for food security among poor communities (FAO, 2013).

Subsistence food production through home-gardening is an indigenous practice that warrants food availability, access and utilization to avert poverty and malnutrition (Schmitz, et al., 2010). For Yemisi, et al. (2009), this type of food security is dependent on the growing of indigenous crops for household consumption. It is the old system of food production characterised by strict patriarchal gender roles (FAO, 2011). Despite the reports that small-scale farming is mainly the men's work, the women are key players in subsistence crop production (Laven & Verhart, 2011). The women mostly grow and maintain subsistence crops for immediate household consumption and are therefore important agents of food security, and the eradication of poverty and hunger (FAO, 2013; Mgwali, 2013; Worknesh, 2015). The women, mostly those in the rural areas, are involved in small-scale agricultural production to secure food and improve household livelihoods (Nadasen, 2012). About 70% of people in the rural areas depend on home-gardening, which is mainly the women's work (Nethononda & Odhiambo, 2011; Huq, et al., 2015; General Household Survey- Statistics South Africa, 2019).

The focus of this chapter is on women's roles to ensure household food availability and accessibility. It is motivated by the reports that the involvement of men in small-scale farming overshadowed the cultural roles of women in food security. This is despite the obvious fact that African women's cultural roles and responsibilities in patriarchal and patrilineal kinship systems involve the provision of food to their households (FAO, 2011). The women continue to play important roles in food security in the face of economic change (Adepoju, et al., 2015). African women are key players in subsistence farming as they produce and process agricultural products to ensure household food security (FAO, 2013). Boakye-Achampong, et al. (2012), observe that the women are principally subsistence food producers and have unique knowledge to increase productivity to ensure household food security. The women's involvement in food security is informed by several factors including the need to maintain the health and welfare of households, supplement household food resources, migration of males to the cities and towns for cash employment and the prevalence of female-headed households. In spite of these observations,

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