

## **Nutrition, poverty and women empowerment**

<sup>1</sup> Iyam Mary A, <sup>2</sup> Okoi Nta Obono, <sup>3</sup> Arikpo Ikpi Abam

<sup>1</sup> Home Economics Unit, Department of Vocational Education, University of Calabar, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup> Department of Family Medicine, University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, Calabar, Nigeria

<sup>3</sup> Department of Geography, School of Environmental Science, Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola, Nigeria

### **Abstract**

This paper re-assessed nutrition, poverty and women empowerment. The paper drew attention to the vulnerability of malnutrition as regards to poverty, pointing out the need for women empowerment as a strategy for poverty reduction. The paper also considers women as good home keepers that can significantly administered managerial skills. It was also stressed that women be empowered politically, socially and economically in order to overcome the challenges of malnutrition and poverty. Finally, it was recommended that women be given access to resource allocation, enhancement of women agencies and that long-term and sustainable programme strategy be developed to promote the expansion of women access to household resources.

**Keywords:** nutrition, poverty and women empowerment

### **Introduction**

All plants and animals need food to survive, whereas, a plant requires dissolved soil nutrients and sunlight to survive, animals needs both liquid and solid foods to enhance their growth and replenish their body systems.

Nutrition in human beings is a process of intake of food for health and growth. According to an online dictionary.cambridge.com, nutrition is medically refers to as substances taken into our body as food and the manner such substances influence our health. Good nutritional intake enhances health and orderliness in the development of all body parts growth such like; tissues, veins, muscles, cells, brain, organs, etc. Poor nutrition in the other hand causes diseases and disorder in body growth.

In most developing countries, especially African countries, poverty is the remorse cause of poor nutrition. It has been observed in these developing countries although with little exceptions that, poor family households lack the necessary resources to provide for their families balance diets.

It has also been observed that, the poorer a family, the likelihood of such family being headed by a woman (World Bank, 2000)<sup>[7]</sup>. It is on this note that this paper intend to look into the nutrition, poverty and empowerment of women in our society.

### **Nutrition**

As earlier stated, human beings needs good nutrition, a balanced diet for proper health and growth of their numerous body units. But, till recently, food insecurity still pose a major challenge as one of the social problems in not only developing countries but worldwide.

Parikh (2000) opined that, about 44% of South Africans do not have access to food security. Leake, Vorster, Rensburg and Ziche (2003)<sup>[4]</sup> believed that, achieving food security within a household is dependents upon two main issues; (i) how available household resources are utilized and (ii) distribution of household resources. World Bank (2000)<sup>[7]</sup> ascertained that, good resource managing household individual's shows effective resource management even with less money as evident in many

households where children are more nourished than it is expected due to the household income levels. Maintaining that, even with good income level, some household still cannot attain food security. He welcome the fact that, poverty is actually one of the causes of malnutrition but attributed this cause to only low income level earner's household and attributed "middle and upper-class malnutrition which by definition" according to him "do not arise from poverty" but rather powerless. Powerlessness, the author further maintained occurs as a result of "loss of control over one's own circumstances and increasing vulnerability to pressures from outside".

De Haen (2001)<sup>[1]</sup> enumerated other widely held public opinion on the causes of hunger to include; conflicts, emergencies and calamities. Within agrarian societies, communal clashes which occasionally arises during cultivation of farm crops periods results into inability of such clashing communities to actually cultivate their farm lands thereby resulting into shortage of farm crops (food) – hunger within the year of such clash.

### **Poverty**

A household needs income to purchase their food and also service their services. However, not every household is exposed to adequate income to acquire their required household needs. When an individual or household do not have adequate income earnings to at least moderately take care of his/her/their goods and services, such an individual or household could be said to be poor or under poverty line.

According to an online business dictionary, poverty is a "condition where people's basic needs for food, clothing and shelter are not being met". Lipton and Maxwell (2002)<sup>[3]</sup> broadened poverty definition beyond provisions of basic needs to also include unavailability of a "secure and sustainable livelihood".

In the height of the above definitions of poverty, even when a household is exposed to an income that can provide her basic needs, if such an income is not secured and sustainable, such a household could also be said to be poor or under poverty line.

How can both poverty and malnutrition be eradicated? This can be achieved through women empowerment.

### Women empowerment

Women in our societies are adjourned to be good home keepers. It is widely believed that, the success of every home to a significant extent depends on the managerial skills of the women (wives). To this end, for the success of any home, it is important for women to be empowered educationally, politically, socially and economically to face adequately the challenges ahead of them if malnutrition and poverty must be eradicated in our homes.

Sobel, (2015) <sup>[6]</sup> opined that, malnutrition is not caused by poverty alone but also powerlessness as evidence in middle and upper class households. He asserted that, this classes of malnutrition does not “arise from poverty” but from powerlessness – “loss of control over one’s own circumstances and increasing vulnerability to pressures from outside”.

Concluding that, if malnutrition is rooted in powerlessness, then its solution lies in empowerment. In his view, he defined empowerment as an individual’s increased ability “to define, analyse and act on your own problems”.

To a great extent, women according to Hashemi, Schuler and Riley (2006) <sup>[5]</sup> socially and economically depend on men. In their study of “rural credit programs and women’s empowerment in Bangladesh”, they found out that, educating the girl child was irrelevant and girls are trained to accept deprivation which the boys enjoy at early age. They also discovered in their study that, women are confined to their homestead areas which are surrounded to avoid contacts with the outside world. Positing that, these social conditions extremely limit women, curtailing their involvement in economic activities and constraining their abilities to generate income thereby reinforcing women economic dependency on men.

For women to be economically independent on men, some cultural norms that place no relevance on the education of the girl child like the case in the “rural credit programs and women’s empowerment in Bangladesh” study of Hashemi, Schuler and Riley (2006) <sup>[5]</sup> should be modernized to allow equal educative opportunities for both girls and boys. The same authors also posited that, micro enterprise credit tool is very common in alleviating poverty in developing countries. Emphasizing that, other tools such as political and social consciousness – raising, skill acquisition and literacy development have been grossly downplayed. They argued that, for a holistic approach to be taken to alleviate poverty, non-formal education, political and social consciousness – raising among social confrontational decisions need to be taken so as to eradicate irrelevant norms militating against women social, political and economical empowerment.

In some developing countries too, some traditions forbids the girl child going to school, they are relegated to farming and domestic chores allowing the male child access to formal education. Gender equality should be encouraged and promoted in all ramifications to afford women opportunity to be empowered.

Women empowerment requires equipping them with literal, technical and economic skills for them to self-reliance, live above poverty line and avoid malnutrition. Sobel (2015) <sup>[6]</sup>, posited that, the object of empowerment does not mean the conveyance of new information or inducement of specified behaviours into individuals only but also supporting individuals

to be independent in carrying out their own analyses towards taking/making decisions that best suit their conditions.

### Conclusion

The distinction between nutrition and poverty is a good assert in the face of every nation and that for this distinction to be ascertained, women must come to play. Women are the channel of development in every nation therefore; there is need for adequate women empowerment in order to successfully eradicate malnutrition and poverty.

The above point can only be achieved through government assistance in the area of addressing or increasing women access to male dominated resources and are willing to tackle the cost of male dominance of social and economic institutions.

Adequate access to resources allocation should also be given to women. Adequate enhancement of women agencies and long-term/sustainable programme strategy should be developed to promote the expansion of women’s access to household resources.

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