

WOMEN CULTURAL ISSUES AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN DELTA STATE: A SURVEY

Agholor B. U. (Mrs.)

Abstract

The survey was carried out in Ika South and Ika North East Local Government Areas of Delta State. The purpose was to determine the extent of interaction of the women with the environment in some culturally dictated activities. The results showed that they frequently interact with the environment yet are not aware of the impact of their activities. It is concluded that it will be desirable to organize environmental education workshops for the women in their villages.

Introduction

Women all over the world are often involved in tasks and activities that usually have impact on the environment and these activities and tasks are usually dictated by culture and can vary from place to place. In our culture, women are usually expected to cater for the entire family by cleaning the house, feeding their children, preparing meals and washing their clothes. They are also involved in activities and tasks such as processing of cassava into garri, fetching firewood for sale and for cooking, fetching water for washing, cooking and for drinking and farming for sale and domestic use. These culturally assigned duties are not only true in Nigeria (UNESCO 2000; Babalola 1998, Alele-Williams, 1993), but also true in the so-called developed nations or Western (Featherman, 1993; Dine, 1993, Anyakoha 1999). There are several other tasks, which are gender based or culturally determined. For example, among the Alihagu and Alizomor people in Delta and neighbouring States, one of the major pre-occupation of women is cassava farming and processing of cassava into garri.

Both young and old women farm (usually processing of cassava for sale and also for domestic use. To these women farming and processing of cassava into garri is wealth. Thus, they continue to farm and process cassava as a way of savings or property that can be inherited by their daughters, especially women farmer's cooperatives.

These activities or tasks, whether it is processing of cassava for different cassava products or fetching of water from the stream are well known to have relevance to Environmental Education either indirectly or directly. Environmental Education is concerned with quality of life for the people because a healthy environment results in a healthy life. What affects the environment affects us human beings as well as other things in the environment. Another dimension to this linkage is the concept of Environment, population and development. These are all inter-linked as what affect one has repercussion on the other except well or properly managed by the human beings in that environment. When we consider the all-important roles of women as the first teachers of their children and their closeness to the environment, then their need for Environmental Education cannot be over-emphasized.

In traditional societies or earlier times cultures of our fore parents ensured environmental protection. For example, cultures of our forefathers did not allow destruction of natural resources or indiscriminate waste.

Problem of the Study

However, with increase in population and the concomitant development, our environment has been continually degraded by these culturally dictated activities. Development should be sustainable. Sustainable development has been defined by Brundtland Commission (1987), as a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent of interaction of the women with the environment in some culturally dictated activities.

In a sustainable society, environmental protection and economic objectives belong to a common framework. If these women are properly educated on environmental issues and the concept of sustainable development they will welcome them since they derive much and interact closely with the environment. These are issues which informed this survey which was guided by the following

research question.

Research Questions

1. What are the culturally dictated activities women engage in?
2. Considering the cultural role of women as homemakers or keepers, do these women get any assistance in their daily tasks or activities?
3. Do women take any measures to abate the negative impact of their activities on the environment in their cassava processing, gathering activities?
4. In carrying out these tasks or activities, are women conscious of the impact of their action on the environment?
5. What are the main sources of water in the villages and how near are the sources?

Methodology

Population and Sample

The population for the survey was young girls, housewives and older women at the grassroots or local level in Ika South and North East Local Government Area of Delta State. These women are predominantly Ika ethnic group and are mostly agrarian by occupation. The sample consisted of three hundred and twenty (320) women whose ages ranged from fifteen to sixty-two (15-62) years with a mean age of 30.76. With a few of them educated up to primary school level. These women were randomly selected, majority of them were married with number of children ranging from 0-12 and a mean of 2.55 in those villages Alihagu and Alizomor.

Instrument

A questionnaire developed by the researcher was the instrument used for data collection. It consisted of twenty items subdivided into four sections. Each item had a 5-point using 'rarely', 'always', 'never', 'don't know' and 'sometimes'.

The questionnaires were validated by four lecturers in Delta State University Abraka. Their suggestions were used to modify the final instrument to twenty (20) items from the initial twenty-three items. The instrument was plotted, tested for reliability with twenty-five (25) respondents using Cronbach Alpha approach to obtain a reliability index of 0.86.

Data Collection and Analysis

The instrument was administered to three hundred and twenty (320) women randomly selected in quarters in Alihagu and Alizomor in Ika South and Ika North East Local Government Areas of Delta State. The instrument was administered through the assistance of some female teachers in Agbor, who had earlier been thoroughly briefed on the modalities for completing the instrument.

Decision Rule

To determine the extent to which the respondents agreed with the statements, values of 5-1 were assigned with a mean of 3. The boundaries of the mean were given by $3+0.05$. i.e. 2.95 and 3.05. Any item with means within 2.95 and below was not taken as a factor while any item with mean ranges from 3.05 and above is assumed to be a factor. The mean and standard deviation of responses to each item were calculated.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Some culturally dictated activities women engaged in.

Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
a. Farming	3,22	1.37
b. Cleaning	4.89	0.31
c. How often do you engage in caring for the children	4.36	1.43
d. Fetching water Washing	4.68	0.94
e. of clothes Processing of	4.68	0.74
f. cassava Selling or petty trading	3.98	1.78
	3.65	1.60

Going by the decision rule of 3.05, the result above showed that the women surveyed engaged in the activities above at one time or another. In items c. e. d and b with high means agree with gender or culturally assigned role in our society, (Okeke, 1998, UNESCO, 1997). **Table 2:** Sources of assistance to the women

Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
Do you get help from		
h. " Husband	3.67	1.69
i. Children	3.62	1.72
j. Relations	3.97	0.99

Results from table 2 showed that the women get assistance/help from children and husbands and relations in carrying out these tasks. The case of the husbands gives an interesting result since men hardly help their wives in the traditional society in carrying out these tasks, However, many men will be willing to help their wives in many of the tasks such as farming, petty trading, processing of cassava (UNESCO, 1997). These result answer research question one in the affirmative, despite our cultural taboo that men should not help women in housework. The result is good for all women young and old and the nation.

Table 3: Cassava Processing and Gathering Activities

Items	Means	Standard Deviation
k. Do you burn bush to harvest cassava?	1.55	1.16
l. Do you look for any or preferred cassava?	4.64	1.08
m. Do you cut down trees to plant cassava:	3.61	0.75
n. Do you plant trees to replace cut down trees?	1.86	1.39

Table 3, showed the result of responses to cassava processing and gathering activities. Item L clearly indicated that the women surveyed look out for yielding species of cassava. They also cut down trees to plant cassava as shown in item m. These two results have implications for the environment especially if item n is considered. The very low mean showed that they do not carry out tree planting activities. On a positive note they do not burn bush to harvest cassava as indicated by item k. However, bush burning is very common in the area and certainly these women benefit from such an environmentally unfriendly activities. The result from table c also answered research question 3 and 4.

Table 4: Fetching of water

Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
o. Water sources is near	3.22	1.61
p. Water is obtained from pipe borne/lap/bore hole	3.76	1.47
q. Water is boiled before Drinking	2.24	1.54
r. Water is obtained from well	4.61	0.64
s. Water is obtained from water seller	3.05	0.98
Water is obtained from stream	2.91	1.57

Table 4, showed that the main sources of water among the women surveyed were well (item r), borehole (item p) and water sellers (item s). The result is a good representation of what is known to exist in such communities. Water is a major resource that we cannot do without. The result also showed that the sources are near. It is known that many compounds in the village have wells and there are electricity

operated boreholes and stream found in the communities.

Considering these sources of water, apart from borehole, the chances of contamination cannot be ruled out. (Eguabor 1998). Yet the women surveyed do not seem to take precautionary purification measures of boiling their water before drinking.

Conclusion

Water is natural resource that we cannot do without so is cassava processed into garri, starch and flour that most families, some confectionaries and pharmaceutical industries cannot do without. Cassava is the cheapest sources of food to most families as well as raw material to some industries in the nation. It is equally a source of revenue to the country. Water, on the other hand, can be easily polluted. There is the saying "water, everywhere, yet none to drink", partly due to water pollution and lack of good/pure water.

Women are among the initiators of the events that result into these environmental problems, which are mostly due to the ignorance of the functions and structure of the ecosystem. Yet women, according to Akubudike (2000), have been systematically discouraged from undertaking training in Environmental Education.

The result of the survey showed, that the women do not seem to be aware of the implications of their activities on the environment. This calls for Environmental Education to these communities. Such education should be non-formal, relevant to their needs with active involvement of the women as stake holders (Eguabor 2000). Such Environmental Education will obviously be welcome by these village women when made aware that in the long run they will be the ultimate beneficiaries. Efforts and resources put into such education will be well invested because it is said that "when you educate a man, you educate an individual, when you educate a woman, you educate a nation".

It is consequently recommended that the Local Government Authorities should be made aware of this research so as to carry out an Environmental Education orientation workshop and seminar should be organized for these women in their villages by the Local Government Authorities in the State.

References

- Akubudike, J. A. (2002). Strategies by Science Educators in Enhancing Female Enrolment in Science and Technology Education in the Next Millennium. *Journal of Women in Colleges of Education*, Vol. 4, pp, 3-66.
- Alicia-Williams (1993). Women in Higher Education Management. The Nigerian Context. In Miilehetjee, II and K liaincy. Mary-Louise, (Eds.). Paris, Women in Higher Education Management. UNESCO Page 135 -146.
- Anyakoha, E. U (1999). Women and Environment Awareness. *International Journal of Women Studies*. 1 (2): 28-35.
- Babalola, V. O. (19980). Women Education in Nigeria. *Journal of the World Council for Curriculum and Instruction Region*. 2; Vol. 2 pp 54 - 64.
- Brundtkand Commission (1987). *World Commission on Environment and Development, Our Common Future*. Oxford University Press, Page 34.
- Eguabor, V. O. (2000). Community Based Environmental Education Curriculum for Social Relevance. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*. 7, (1).
- Featherman, Sandra (1983). Women in Higher Education Management in United States and Canada. In Mukherjee, H and Kearney Mary-Louise, (Eds.) Women in Higher Education Management. Paris UNESCO, Pages 165 - 176.
- Ohiri-Anichi, C. (1998). Gender Issues in Education in the State of Education in Nigeria, Lagos, UNESCO. Pages 52 - 69.
- Okeke, E. A, C. (1998). Gender Awareness in Science Education Research. A Lead Paper Presented at the Conference of Nigeria Association of Science Education Research Lagos.

UNESCO (1997). Gender Sensitivity Regional Training Seminar on Guidance and Counselling.
Module 5.

UNESCO (2000). Women as Educators and Women's Education in E. 9 Countries, Paris,
UNESCO.-