

THE FOOD SECURITY PACK PROGRAMME AND FOOD SECURITY IN ZAMBIA: VIEWS FROM FEMALE HEADED-HOUSEHOLDS IN KABWE DISTRICT

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Abstract

In an attempt to reduce food insecurity, the Government of Zambia introduced various poverty reduction programmes, including the Food Security Pack (FSP) in 2001/2. FSP provides basic farming inputs to vulnerable but viable households involved in farming activities including Female Headed Households (FHH). However, literature on the experiences of FHH participating in the program is limited. This study explores the experiences of FHH participating in the FSP programme in Kabwe district of Zambia. The aim was to establish the views of FHH on the impact of the FSP programme on their food security and suggest strategies that could be put in place to enhance the performance of the (FSP) programme. The study used both exploratory and explanatory research designs with qualitative and quantitative methods to collect and analyse primary data from female-headed beneficiary households of the programme and key informants from the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services. The findings indicate that, the FSP had improved the food security situation among most FHH beneficiaries. However, some FHH reported challenges in the context of their farming activities and expressed need for specialized services. Challenges included lack of access to draught power, lack of manual labour, weak extension services, inadequate inputs and limited period of participating in the program. The study recommended that the program designers should consider providing deliberate targeted services to the FHH and any other type of household that might be experiencing particular challenges.

Key words: Empowerment, Farming, Food security.

Introduction

Food insecurity is one of the major problems the world has faced since time immemorial. In Zambia, like in other developing countries, poverty and food insecurity remains a pressing problem in many parts of the country. The literature shows that women are the majority among the vulnerable small-scale farmers. According to the Central Statistical Office (CSO) (2007c) cited in Klaveren and Tijden (2009), about 70% of FHH are characterised as poor, against 63% of the Male-headed Households (MHH). Most of the challenges experienced by women in agriculture are essentially due to a perception that most farmers are male. Additionally, fundamental gender inequalities in access to and control over agricultural productive resources may lead to women's enhanced vulnerability to food insecurity in rural areas (Kapitsa, 2008).

In Africa, factors militating against women in their participation in agricultural production are rooted in values, norms, myths, taboos, and traditions, which resulted in unequal access to and control over productive resources (such as land, capital, agricultural inputs, and income (Mitulla, 2002). This observation is corroborated by Kameri-Mbote (2006) who noted that the patriarchal social ordering of many societies in African countries makes access to resources tilted in favour of male

members of society. Horrel and Krishnan (2007) reinforces this argument. The author states that female-headed households' productivity in agriculture is hampered by their lack of assets and access to productive resources. This may perpetuate food insecurity among such type of households.

A study in Ethiopia revealed that, FHH had challenges in managing labour intensive components of the program (Atakit, 2006). These challenges may negatively affect performance of FHH in agriculture. In Malawi, Dorward et al., (2008) found out that women's labour poorness and lack of draught power forced them to get into share cropping arrangements in order to have their land ploughed. Share cropping arrangements involve the sharing of the produce from the plots of the FHH with men ploughing the land. This may affect their household food security. In Zambia, a study conducted by Tripathi, Macrae and Kent (2009) revealed that, women had less access to draught power compared with MHH. Lack of draught power does not only constrain productivity in FHH, but may also have health consequences, where women farmers carry their produce on their backs. The persisting gender inequalities in Zambia may have negative implications on women's vulnerability to food insecurity.

In an effort to reduce food insecurity among vulnerable households and the nation at large, the Zambian government put various intervention measures in place, including the Fertiliser Input Support Program (FISP), Program Against Malnutrition (PAM) and the Food Security Pack (FSP). However, the focus of the current study is on the household food security pack program. It is necessary for the studies conducted on women in agriculture to reveal the actual views of female farmers and more so FHH on the impact of the agriculture input support programs, as their views are important for the success of the programs. The study attempted to understand the experiences of

FHH participating in the FSP program in Kabwe district of Zambia.

The Food Security Pack Program

The Food Security Pack (FSP) Program is a social protection scheme which was launched in the 2000/2001 agricultural season as a Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) funded initiative covering all the country's districts. This scheme targets farmers in rural areas who are too poor to purchase fertiliser, even at subsidised prices (Kodamaya, 2011). According to Chilangwa and Cromwell (2004), the aim of the Food Security Pack strategy is to improve small scale farmer crop productivity and household food security, and reduce poverty through provision of a pack of basic agriculture inputs.

The components of this program include agriculture inputs support, crop diversification, soil conservation, alternative livelihood interventions, and market entrepreneurship and seed/cereal bank development among others. The criterion for beneficiary selection has two tiers. The primary criteria are: access to land but cultivating less than one hectare, adequate labour, and not in gainful employment. The second-tier criteria include, female-headed households, households housing orphans, child-headed households, terminally ill heads of households, households headed by unemployed youths, and order people (Ellis, Devereux and White, 2009).

However, the FSP is not a free hand out. Beneficiaries are required to pay back (in grain/ a portion of their harvest) 10-20 % of the value of the provided inputs. According to the GRZ (2009) report, the FSP is divided into two sections; farm input pack and alternative livelihoods. Under the farm input pack, beneficiaries are given input packs comprising cereal (maize) seed, legumes (beans and groundnuts), cassava/sweet potato tubers, as well as fertiliser for the cereal, and lime for areas with acid soils. On the other hand, the beneficiaries of the alternative livelihoods component are given either

goats or chickens. The aim of this study was to understand the experiences of FHH participating in the FSP program with particular focus on Kabwe district of Zambia. The objectives of this study were, to establish the views of FHH on the impact of the FSP program on their food security, and to determine strategies that could be put in place to enhance the performance of the program.

Research Methodology

The study used both exploratory and explanatory research designs that employed qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell, Clark, Gutmann, and Hanson, 2003), where priority was given to qualitative approach. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods was considered appropriate in an effort to reduce biases and strengthen the study. However, the emphasis was put on qualitative method because this method allows for the use of more flexible strategies of data collection to answer the research questions. It also provides detailed information needed to capture the personal interpretation of the FHH's experiences in the context of the FSP. In-depth individual face-to-face interviews were held with both FHH and key informants. A semi-structured interview guide was used to collect data from FHH. A separate interview guide was prepared for key informants.

The population for the study was drawn from female heads of households who were beneficiaries of the food security pack, and the key informants from the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services (MCDSS), both groups from Kabwe district. Out of 203 women beneficiaries of the FSP, only 42 were female heads of households. 35 female household heads and 5 key informants were interviewed. Key informants comprised of 1 district community development officer and 4 officers in charge of farming zones. Priority was given to those informants in charge of zones with the highest number of FHH. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data, that is, the audio taped data were transcribed and the segments of information were

coded based on the emerging themes. Data were then interpreted to draw conclusions.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, verbatim statements are used to illustrate the perceptions of the respondents.

With regard to the views of FHH on the impact of FSP program on their food security, the impacts are discussed under two sub-headings based on the emerging themes namely, effect on availability of food and effect on the quality of food.

Effects of FSP on availability of food

Findings show that the programme had improved household food security among those participating. The majority of the respondents (25) felt the program had made a positive impact on their household food security. The respondents explained that, there was a marked difference between the periods before the FHH was enrolled on the FSP and after their involvement. The remainder (10) said they had not seen any positive impact yet, and none reported any negative impact of the FSP program. Of the 25 respondents who indicated that the FSP had made a positive impact on their food security, 3 different viewpoints were explained.

The first group comprised of 15 respondents who indicated that they had achieved food security in their households. They indicated that, the FSP had increased their yields and as such they could now afford at least 3 meals per day, and that they no longer ran out of food. Some respondents noted that, they were now able to sell some maize and use the money to meet other household needs such as paying school fees for their children as well as medical fees. For instance one respondent said:

'The FSP has helped me a lot without any doubt. It has improved my yields; for example, I still have some bags of maize. I now have food for the whole year, compared to those days when my husband had just passed away when I could only afford one or two meals per day. For example, I could only prepare sump around 10 am for my children to take

them up to 5 pm when I would prepare supper. Then I could say, at least the day has passed.'

However, the 5 respondents who fell into the second group stated that, they had food throughout the year, but the food was not enough for them to categorically state that they had achieved food security. They explained that, the food they harvested in the context of the FSP was not enough to have descent meals throughout the year therefore, they had to supplement the main meals with other food stuffs like sweet potatoes, cassava with fried groundnuts and traditional beverages like munkoyo for them to get to the next harvest. One respondent in this category had this to say:

'You think the FSP can help people achieve food security on its own? No, not really unless it is supplemented by other programs. I have achieved food security but I had to join another club as well'.

A third group represented by 5 out of the 25 respondents, indicated that the program had had a positive impact in terms of food security, although they could not manage to keep stocks of food throughout the year (until the next harvest). One respondent in this category stated:

'At least I eat up to a given point, I don't manage the whole year but it takes me far up to around January, compared to the previous years before the FSP when food used to finish just after harvesting'.

All the key informants concurred that the FSP had improved food security in FHH to a certain extent.

Effects of FSP on the quality of food

In terms of the effect of FSP on the quality of food, most (20) of those respondents who had indicated positive improvements due to the FSP admitted that the program had also helped improve the quality of food in the household. Most of them associated this with availability of the legumes such as beans, groundnuts, cowpeas, and sweet potatoes given them as part of the pack. Apparently, the beneficiaries make groundnuts powder which they add to sump, porridge and vegetables, making food more palatable. However, only a few indicated that,

they had not seen any improvement in the quality of food because they had not been given any legumes.

All the key informants concurred with those who said the program had helped improve the quality of food among FHH. They reported that they had witnessed tremendous improvements in terms of food security in this area.

Overall, in the views of the respondents, the FSP had performed reasonably well. This suggests that, the FSP program had assisted FHH beneficiaries to achieve food security to some extent. It was also clear that the FSP had not only made a difference on the quantity of food, but it had also improved the quality of food to a certain level in most of the beneficiary households. This is evident from the beneficiaries' responses where more than half answered in the affirmative. The finding is consistent with those of earlier research by Atakit (2006) and Farnsworth and Munachonga (2010), which revealed that, women (FHH inclusive) beneficiaries of agriculture programs were in a better position to meet household food requirements as a result of the implementation of the programs. In the current study, this was reflected in the marked increase in the number of meals reportedly consumed each day, improvements in the length of time that the food stocks lasted, and the increased income as a result of the sale of agriculture produce and livestock. The increased income was then used to address some household problems. Moreover, this is one of the stated objectives of the FSP program, as indicated earlier.

Despite the progress made, there were a few (10) beneficiaries who felt they had not experienced any change yet from the program regarding food security. This might have been due to challenges experienced regarding farming activities. This is a source of some concern considering that the beneficiaries were expected to graduate the following year. Hence, the likelihood of such beneficiaries graduating without realising food

security is very high, and this may increase their chances of recidivism.

The findings further indicate that, some beneficiaries were not given legumes during the years they benefited from the FSP. This suggests that, the beneficiaries of the FSP were not always given full packs as per program guidelines. This may compromise one of the central goals of the FSP which is to foster crop diversification in beneficiaries' fields. It may also reduce the chances of FHH achieving the goal of food security especially where the quality of food is concerned.

Need for specialized services among FHH Regarding the Implementation of FSP Program

In Zambia, the roles that men and women traditionally play in agriculture tend to be different, where the opportunity allows. As such the FHH who participated in this study were asked whether they needed disaggregated services (i.e. separating male and female to facilitate special attention) regarding farming activities in the context of the FSP, because of the challenges they might be experiencing due to their status as women.

When asked whether FHH needed disaggregated services, more than half (28) showed interest in receiving disaggregated services; others (5) said they did not need disaggregated services, while just a few (2) were not sure. Those who indicated that they needed disaggregated services explained that, as women they could not be compared with men because men had the capacity to organise more fertiliser and seed. In addition, men have more energy and can for example, burn charcoal and raise money for fertiliser and other agriculture requirements. It was also indicated that, most men have easier access to draught power and ploughs compared to women who just depend on hoes to prepare the fields for planting.

When asked what kind of special services they needed, some of the services mentioned included access to ploughs and draught power, more

attention and frequent visits for technical advice, and more fertiliser than men. Findings revealed that, lack of access to draught power and farming implements constituted one of the most pressing problems. One of the respondents observed that:

'You can have seed and fertiliser, but if you have no one to plough for you then it is a problem because you can still fail to plant in time. We are asking if they could help us with farming implements like ploughs and cattle or they should be ploughing for us.'

The 3 key informants confirmed that, some of the FHH experienced challenges in terms of draught power and that they depended on manual labour which gave them problems, especially those who were weak and frail. One of them pointed out that:

'Women especially FHH, have challenges when it comes to manual labour because they don't have husbands and sometimes they only have small children to help them. As a result, most of them struggle when it comes to conservation farming, weeding, and even planting'

Another key informant stated: *'FHH need special attention because most of them do not have knowledge in agriculture techniques'*.

Clearly, these challenges may have a negative effect on FHH's performance in the context of the program. Dorward et al. (2008) observed that, women's lack of draught power forces them to get into 'share cropping' arrangements, which involves sharing of the produce from the plots of the FHH with men who ploughed for them. This suggests that, some FHH needed disaggregated services because of the challenges they experienced regarding farming activities in the context of the FSP. Most of the challenges identified were essentially associated with lack of access to productive resources such as draught power, lack of manual labour or energy, fertilizer and limited time. This shows that gender determines one's accessibility to productive resources. It can thus, be argued that being a woman, particularly a female

head of a household may reduce one's chances of accessing productive resources. This may increase the likelihood of vulnerability and food insecurity in FHH.

Interestingly, one of the respondents preferred to be given less input than what men get because, as a woman, she does not have the strength to manage a bigger portion.

A few respondents indicated that they did not need disaggregated services nevertheless, because they could also work just like other beneficiaries, including men. One of the respondents argued that: *'Women don't need disaggregated services because, men also have families they look after and they also go through problems just like us women, therefore it is only fair that we get the same kind of services'*.

Another respondent added *'I do not need special services because I believe men and women are equal. There is no difference, and sometimes women even think better (do better) than men. Actually, in my thinking, I can even do better than a man....'*

In reaction to the issue of disaggregated services for FHH, 2 key informants felt all beneficiaries of the FSP should be treated the same, because before enrolment, all possible beneficiaries are told to fill in a form which determines the eligibility of the applicant and only those who meet the requirements including the capacity to engage in farming are enrolled in the program. The program is meant for viable farmers. It was clarified that those who faced challenges in farming were supposed to benefit under alternative livelihoods project.

This made sense but then the question could be asked: how did FHH facing such challenges find themselves getting fertiliser and seed instead of goats or chicken?

Like many other programs in the developing world, the FSP is implemented on 'one size fits all' approach. The presented data reveal that, all

beneficiaries of the FSP were treated the same, partly as a way of promoting gender equality among the beneficiaries. The findings revealed that, although the FHH were not treated differently from male farmers in the context of the FSP, the majority reported that they would appreciate receiving specialised services. That means, FHH might not have been treated differently from male farmers in the context of the program, but they were still facing challenges as female farmers, and hence the call for special attention. The challenges faced by FHH may not necessarily come from the FSP, but these still have the potential to negatively affect the program's performance in achieving food security. Thus, denying FHH targeted services regardless of the reason may not be justified considering the fact that, the factors that affect FHH are different from those that affect other types of households. Indeed, affirmative action may be indicted since various groups of beneficiaries are not starting from the same base. As such, the FSP could meet the needs of women and FHH in particular through focused programs.

Strategies to Enhance Effectiveness of FSP program

In an attempt to determine what, in the view of the participants, strategies can be put in place to enhance the performance of the FSP program, the respondents suggested a number of strategies. These are presented in two sub-headings that are based on the emerging themes namely, suggestions pertaining to the components of the FSP, and suggestions regarding the need for specialised or targeted services among FHH.

In terms of suggestions pertaining to the components of the FSP, one of the problems identified was inadequate inputs especially fertiliser. The respondents explained that, 2 bags of fertiliser (1 basal and 1 top dressing) were not enough to cover the portion planted from the 10kg of maize seed they received as part of the pack. They explained that, 2 bags of fertiliser only managed to cover half (5kg) seed portion. As a result, those beneficiaries who could not manage to

raise money to buy additional fertiliser would just plant half the seed received or plant all of it, but apply less than the recommended fertiliser so as to cover the whole portion planted.

Asked to comment on this, the key informants explained that, the fertiliser is correctly meant to go with 5kg seed only, and the other 5kg seed is meant to encourage beneficiaries to practice conservation farming, and the use of manure. However, it turned out that, despite it being a good idea, the beneficiaries had apparently not been sensitised in this regard. It was most likely for this reason that the program had not quite achieved the intended purpose in as far as promotion of conservation farming was concerned, which in turn may affect the final outcome of the FSP program. The respondents suggested that, the government should consider increasing the number of bags of fertiliser to match the seed the FHH received.

This therefore, points to the need to educate the beneficiaries on the issue of conservation farming.

Apart from inadequate fertiliser, the respondents also complained that, the period of two years (two farming seasons as a standard period they are expected to benefit from the FSP before they graduate) is rather too short for them to be stable and start buying fertiliser on their own. A 68-year-old respondent said: *'The FSP is performing well, except that the period of benefiting is too short. Two years is too short, and this makes people go back to problems again'*. She felt that, vulnerable people like older people and the sick, should continue benefiting in order to reduce the rate of recidivism. Another (over 60 years old) respondent added *'I wouldn't want to graduate, if it is me, I don't even think of graduating. I'm old and sick...if I graduate I will be in real problems'*. This suggests that, age and health are some of the major factors contributing to the challenges that FHH experience in the context of FSP program. It may be argued that, older people and the sick are more likely to suffer from recidivism upon graduation because

farming require considerable strength which they may not have.

When asked to comment, the key informants confirmed this is the position but that they were simply following policy guidelines. The aim was to try and reach as many people as possible. The beneficiaries were advised to sell some of their harvest if they have surplus, and save the money to enable them buy fertiliser or at least join a cooperative when they graduate from the FSP program for sustainability.

Policy Issues

With regard to targeted services for FHH the findings revealed that, all the beneficiaries of the FSP were treated the same regardless of the type of the household. However, FHH were still experiencing constraints in farming due to their gender. One of the respondents said: *'But men are at an advantage compared to us women. For example, men have several ways of raising money. They have energy and time to do piece work to raise money for more fertiliser and other things'*.

Some respondents complained that, the period of two years (two farming seasons as standard period they are expected to benefit from the FSP before they graduate) is rather too short for them to adequately prepare for their graduation. One of the respondents stated that: *'I wouldn't want to graduate because if I graduate, then I will stop eating'*.

Inadequate inputs especially fertiliser is one other problem that was identified. The respondents explained that, 2 bags of fertiliser (1 basal and 1 top dressing) were not enough to help them achieve food security.

Challenges that older people face in the FSP could be minimised if due care was taken to ensure that the beneficiaries were enrolled in the correct stream, that is, either alternative livelihoods component of the FSP or under the seed/fertiliser packs program.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, this study found out that overall, the FSP is a valuable program which had made a positive difference in terms of assisting FHH to achieve food security. The findings revealed that, although not all FHH beneficiaries had achieved food security, the majority indicated some positive difference as a result of participation in the FSP program. The results also indicate that, the FSP did not only help increase the yields, it also helped improve the quality of food in beneficiary households.

Despite the benefits, it was also clear that some FHH experienced challenges in the context of their farming activities, and therefore needed disaggregated services. While some of the challenges FHH experienced may have come from the FSP, others emanate from society at large

particularly in respect of cultural dictates. As gender inequalities in agriculture continue to affect women farmers, practitioners such as community development assistants, agricultural extension workers, and also program designers need to consider innovative strategies for mainstreaming gender in this crucial sector. Thus, the FSP and other development programs designers should consider providing services that are more strategic and aligned with the challenges of the beneficiaries.

It may also be necessary for agriculture programs in Zambia to equip the beneficiaries with agriculture skills through training, to instill in them a sense of self-reliance. Training would enlighten and empower the beneficiaries and ensure proper and effective use of inputs for better yields and thus, food security.

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