

Educating rural households on post-COVID-19 behaviour: A Nigerian Home Economics advocacy

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Abstract

This paper examined the perspectives of Home Economics in educating rural households on the post-COVID-19 behavioural change in Nigeria. COVID-19 pandemic has had a great negative impact on household's especially rural households that have been suffering from poverty, food insecurity, and poor sanitary condition. The onset of this pandemic calls for the readjustment of lifestyles for survival. Educating rural households on post-COVID-19 behavioural change through Home Economics extension advocacy is one way of improving rural livelihoods. The paper outlined the likely future impacts of COVID-19 on rural households. The paper paid special attention to the different strategies that household members in rural communities can apply to daily life experiences with the easing of the lockdown after the pandemic arising from COVID-19. The paper also emphasises the situation of agriculture and food security as well as discussed the implications for rural households. It highlighted strategies for sustaining rural household livelihoods, maintaining food systems and protecting those with impaired vulnerable conditions. This paper also suggested likely household strategy for coping and adapting to the "new normal" and recommended three priorities needed to deal with rural household's lifestyles for post-COVID-19 sustenance.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, RURAL HOUSEHOLDS, PERSPECTIVES, STRATEGIES, SUSTENANCE

Introduction

Advocacy for families living in rural communities in changing times (COVID-19 era) as a result of the pandemic will require new strategies. These families often can be referred to as rural communities in Nigeria. They may be residing within the environment and possess the potentials to exercise the primary roles in conserving and protecting the land, water, and forests where they habit.

As the building blocks of rural communities, the family is the nexus for the transfer of social and economic behaviour patterns, survival skills, and environmental values across generations. The family represents one of the major ways that human populations organise and adapt to meet goals and needs and communicate values in diverse environmental circumstances (Bubolz, 1991). Significantly, women's activities involving the socialisation of children in the space of the household provide an excellent opportunity for teaching environmental values, attitudes and behaviour to children (Steady,

Mbah, P., Chidindu, K., & Azubuike, O. (2021). Educating rural households on post-COVID-19 behaviour: A Nigerian home economics advocacy. *International Journal of Home Economics*, 14(2), 77-81.

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1993). As the building block of rural communities, the family is the nexus for the transfer of social and economic behaviour patterns, survival skills, and environmental values across generations. Examples of this transfer abound. Women in Tanzania learn from their grandmothers that trees bring rain, and that cutting large blocks of trees will have a deleterious effect on rainfall. Young girls in India learn to tend livestock from their maternal relatives. In Sudan, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and other countries undergoing long-term stress, indigenous knowledge of survival strategies of various family members are passed on through the generations. In Malawi, family members plant saplings at the death of a relative or friend, preserving and protecting indigenous species on sacred lands. Agricultural skills, conservation techniques, and many other forms of indigenous technical knowledge are handed down from one generation to the next.

Rural people have extensive knowledge about their environments, and about the sustainable use of marginal areas. However, many of these people are being squeezed by a number of interacting processes. Economic and political factors, such as the privatisation of common property resources and inappropriate land-use policies, can negatively impact rural people. Broad demographic changes, such as population growth, resettlement, migration, urbanisation, and movements of refugees, can also impact rural communities. These pressures frequently change the land-person ratio in an area, and place additional pressure on the resource base. People are sometimes forced into shorter-term land-use practices that are not sustainable.

Additionally, newcomers may bring with them land-use practices from their area of origin that are not necessarily to the new environment in which they have resettled.

Rural households often face difficult trade-offs in decision-making about natural resources, as they seek to balance the conflicting demands of managing the surrounding environment with the family's economic survival. For example, privatisation of land may reduce the amount of land that is available to a family for grazing. A decision must be made whether to maintain the same number of animals in poor condition in the smaller area, or to destock the herd, which may result in a loss of household income, savings, security, and status. To support households in facing these trade-offs, innovative new technologies and investments must be generated so as to relieve pressure on the natural resource base. Under conditions of food insecurity in low-income countries, new technologies for crop and livestock management cannot be chosen exclusively for their compatibility with the environment. They must also allow for higher incomes for the rural poor (FAO, 1993).

There may also be difficult environmental trade-offs in balancing industrial and urban growth with sustaining the natural resource endowments available to households in rural areas. There may be increased demands for water, timber, minerals and other raw materials to support national economic growth as well as for rural small and cottage industries. Urbanisation and industrialisation may contribute to deforestation through increased demand for timber for construction or charcoal, to watershed degradation downstream through the deposition of urban and industrial wastes, and to pollution through the concentration of wastes and pollutants. The natural resources available to rural households may be seriously affected by economic growth. Understanding the environmental links between urban and rural areas is an important element in reorienting Home Economics curricula to meet local people's changing educational and information needs.

The National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) 2019, in collaboration with the National Reference Laboratory, Abuja, Nigeria was equipped with technical and human resources required to handle COVID-19 pandemic in order to ensure the general public stay updated about the global prevention and management strategies against the pandemic. The cosmopolitan nature of Nigeria made it prone to fast spread of COVID-19 virus, hence the high demand for public health measures and advocacy. These emphasize the need to forestall the adherence of COVID-19 protocols by having public health measures and educating rural households on possible coping strategies in Nigeria.

Objectives

The major objectives of this paper are to identify:

- Post-COVID-19 behavioural change among families in Nigeria.
- The challenges of the post-COVID-19 behavioural change among families.
- Ways of educating rural homemakers on the behavioural change on post-COVID-19,

- Examine the place of Home Economics in Nigeria on behavioural change on post-COVID-19 in families.

Home Economics perspective for advocacy

Home Economics is a field of study and a profession situated in the human sciences. It is also known as Family & Consumer Sciences or Human Ecology. It follows an integrated approach and draws from a disciplinary diversity which might include, among others: Food, Nutrition, Health, Textiles and Clothing, Shelter and Housing, Consumer Science, Household Management, Design and Technology, Food Science and Hospitality, Human Development and Family Studies, Education and Community Services. Home Economics brings the focus of households as building blocks of sustainable societies. Addressing complex, interrelated human and environmental problems,

Home Economics aims to achieve optimal and sustainable living conditions for individuals, families and their communities while acknowledging their global interdependence.

Home Economics as a course is primarily concerned with improving the life of individuals and families (Okeke et al., 2011). The family is currently facing a lot of challenges such as: economic lockdown as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic, loss of jobs, economic hardship, poverty, and hyperinflation, and religious clashes (e.g., Boko Haram, and farmer herdsmen clashes). It is, therefore, important that household members be educated on what to expect and how to live life after COVID-19 in the *new normal*.

Challenges of rural households in Nigeria in the face of the pandemic

1. Global health problems as a result of the coronavirus pandemic posit a huge challenge for households whose members are affected; it has also deprived households of economic and social resources and impeded development (WHO, 2020).
2. There has been a decrease in life expectancy and an increase in some of the common killers associated with child and maternal mortality.
3. Vulnerable groups, such as rural women and the elderly, face multi-faceted health issues. They often lack health education, sanitation and hygiene facilities and are exposed to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Strategies for educating rural households in Nigeria on life after COVID-19: A Home Economics perspective

1. Home Economics Education addresses the inter-linkages between food production and food consumption by promoting sustainable production and consumption patterns for more sustainable diets-the key content of Sustainable Development Goal 12. This includes addressing the double burden of malnutrition, as evident in the alarming prevalence of overweight and obesity in children and adults, resulting in huge public health costs.
2. There is an urgent need to teach pre-school and school children and adolescents and their parents and other caregivers about food preparation and healthy eating patterns, recognising that lifestyles are changing and that this information and advice need to be based on the everyday realities of people.
3. Home Economists are conducting research and projects around the world to reduce hunger and prevent malnutrition.
4. Home Economics professionals are educating especially women in sustainable food production and alternative ways of income generation which benefits household food and nutrition security.
5. Training is provided on healthy nutrition, efficient cooking and the need to send children to school.
6. Home Economist professionals are further working on research and education programmes for financial literacy to avoid that families become indebted.

7. They also provide counselling for families to find ways out of poverty and actively support those families that face social exclusion.
8. At a policy level, Home Economics recommends integrating the subject in curricula and making this education available to both sexes, to recognise and value unpaid work; to procure locally sourced and sustainably produced food, both in the private and institutional household.
9. Home Economics as a profession aims at overcoming gender stereotypes with regard to household-related tasks, encouraging all members to engage in food procurement and food preparation equally -promoting these as modern, positive, productive tasks that enhance everyone's wellbeing.
10. Home Economics aims to improve wellbeing and increase the quality of life for members of private and institutional households.
11. Health-related Home Economics research contributes to achieving good health from many angles.
12. Health-related research on Food Security and Nutrition sets the focus on the relation between health and malnutrition, food allergies, the influence of healthy nutrition to longevity or healthy diets.

Household Technology research contributes to the development of secure household devices and clean cook stoves; helping to reduce sickness and death through toxic smoke. Research in hygiene supports private and institutional households (e.g., hospitals, care homes) to avoid infections and improve cleaning processes and food processing with specific attention to vulnerable groups like children, elder people or hospitalised persons. Research in Textiles and Household technology includes textiles used in kitchens, bathrooms, toilets and for medical treatments and develops special textiles and washing processes, aiming to reduce infections through contaminated textiles.

Finally, research in Home Economics Education helps to improve methods for capacity building and to educate household members better and impart knowledge on hygiene behaviour. Practical Home Economics Education plays an important role in improving health and avoiding infectious diseases. Trained in basic Home Economics, heads of households can avoid health risks by respecting basic hygienic behaviour (handwashing, food processing, cleaning) and by learning about safe alternatives to hazardous pesticides or unhealthy cooking stoves. In institutional households, Home Economics professionals ensure the health and wellbeing of people who are not able to take care of themselves. Home Economists follow a balanced approach to increase wellbeing for all household members, taking into account health-related aspects and the psychological and social aspects. Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls start at home. Gender equality in education or employment can only be achieved if behaviour and values are nurtured and shared among household members and then confidently pursued beyond. From a Home Economics perspective, the relationship between household members, the division of work, allocation of resources, decision-making and roles attributed to women are essential factors to reach gender equality. This also means including men and their changing identities into research and action. The vast majority of our field's addressees are women, Home Economists; therefore, they advocate for gender equality in different areas: Unpaid and Domestic Work -Relieve Workload of Women. Home Economics research on household management shows that globally, the major part of unpaid work at home is done by women and includes care for other household members. If women participate in paid work, they are overrepresented in low paid work and receive less than men. Nigerian Home Economists demand thinking of gender roles to relieve women from household and care work, including more active involvement of men and other household members and government support structures to enable this.

Conclusion

The many challenges faced by the rural households in Nigeria due to the coronavirus pandemic have led to poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, herdsman farmer crises, and economic lockdown. This therefore posits the need for adequate advocacy by Home Economics in Nigeria whose aim is to

improve quality of everyday life of individuals that happens to be household members, in order to provide specific strategy towards; understanding the new normal which is (life after COVID-19) and easing the suffering caused by this pandemic; thereby making life easy and comfortable for the rural households in Nigeria after the pandemic.

Recommendation

This paper recommends:

- That Home Economist Extension in Nigeria be reoriented; Home Economics Extension and training programs in Nigeria should be problem-oriented and not be constrained by conventional disciplinary boundaries.
- That rural household members in Nigeria should shape their actions towards more prudent care for environmental consequences.
- That Home Economics should redefine its role concerning rural households around the world, especially Nigeria.

Author biographies

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