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## **Inculcating Home Economics Based Life Skills in Rural Women in Anambra State Nigeria as a Panacea for Poverty Alleviation**

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### **Abstract**

*Poverty among rural women in Nigeria hinders the economic and social wellbeing of families. Alleviating such poverty is therefore a major issue for national survival. This study investigated the strategies for inculcating Home Economics based life (survival) skills among rural women as a panacea for poverty alleviation. The study was a descriptive survey that was based on two research questions. From a population of 1,815 respondents, purposive sampling was used to select a sample of 253 respondents (40 home economics teachers and 213 secretaries of registered women cooperative societies in ten Local government Areas of Anambra State. A questionnaire titled "Inculcating Home Economics-Based Life Skills for Poverty Alleviation (IHELSPA)" was used for data collection. Data was analysed using mean ratings. The findings included that several Home Economics based life skills could be inculcated among the rural women using a range of networking approaches. Among the recommendations was that Government and non-governmental organizations should mobilize communities, youth groups, and other private sector organizations to network and contribute in building the capacities of rural women in Home Economics based life (survival) skills*

## **Introduction**

Poverty is a critical issue that impedes sustainable development in Nigeria. The incidence, severity, and depth of poverty in Nigeria are revealed by social indicators such as low literacy level especially among rural women; high maternal and child mortality rates; poor health and nutritional status; poor housing, water and sanitation; and poor access to credit (National Planning Commission, 2007; Nwagwu, 2008). Adepoju (2004) stated that a large number of Nigerian women languish far below what can reasonably be regarded as a decent standard of living. The poverty situation in the country has become so serious that it is regarded as one of the major challenges of the new millennium.

The concept of inculcating Home Economics Based Life skills in rural women as a panacea for poverty alleviation suggests that Home Economics skills could be used as tools for alleviating poverty. Home Economics Based Life skills have a lot to contribute towards the eradication of poverty as they empower people and provide solutions for global poverty (Maduwesi, 2005). In Home Economics, life skills could refer to that work oriented, career-oriented or occupation-oriented competencies that attempt to improve the efficiency and productivity of its recipient's attitude required as craftsmen, business men and technicians at a sub-professional level (Hanson, Wirall & Wiseman, 2006; Restrepo, 2006).

Life skills are the foundation of all global initiatives and have been acknowledged as a foundation for poverty alleviation (Akojee & Mcgrath, 2006). But in Nigeria, it appears that many approaches to inculcating life skills among rural women for poverty alleviation are yet to be optimized. Chukwu (2001) found that many rural women in Nigeria suffer serious burden of poverty and suffer several health, nutritional and social deprivations as a result of poverty. These poor women lack skills and have not acquired sufficient life skills for poverty alleviation. Agwagah (2001) added that lack of networking, neglect of emphasis on capacity building, and problems in skills acquisition are some of challenges that hamper the existing poverty situation among rural women in Nigeria. These challenges result in inability of the programmes to empower rural women with Home Economics based life skills to cope with the daily needs of life and surmount the poverty that appears to affect every profession and walk of life.

Given the problem of poverty and lack of skills among rural women in Nigeria, the thrust of this study is therefore, how could networking and skill-focused approaches be used to inculcate Home Economics based life-skills among rural women in Nigeria as a panacea for poverty alleviation?

### **Research Questions**

**The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:**

1. What are the Home Economics based life skills that could be inculcated among rural women?
2. What networking approaches could be used in inculcating Home Economics based life skills among rural women in Nigeria?

### **Methodology**

This study was a descriptive survey. This design was used in this study to collect data from secondary school Home economics teachers, and women cooperative societies in order to identify how to implement some approaches for inculcating Home Economics based life skills among rural women as a panacea for poverty alleviation.

The population for this study comprised 420 secondary school home economics teachers and 1395 registered women cooperative societies in Anambra State. Total population is 1,815.

The sample consisted of 253 respondents selected using the purposive sampling technique. Purposive sampling is used when a researcher selects a sample based on a specified purpose (Adepoju, 2004). Two purposes guided the selection of the samples. One was that only local Government Areas that are located in remote rural areas would be used for the study. The other was that only secretaries of the women cooperative societies were selected because they possess the level of literacy to enable them respond to the questionnaire. Hence, from the 21 Local Government Areas in Anambra State, ten were picked by purposive sampling. The ten local government areas were entirely rural and were miles away from urban areas. Then the entire Home Economics teachers (N=40) and secretaries of registered women cooperative societies (N=213) in the selected LGAs were chosen to participate in the study. Thus the total sample size was 253 respondents.

A questionnaire titled "Inculcating Home Economics-Based Life Skills for Poverty Alleviation" (IHELSPA) was used. The questionnaire was made up

of two parts. Part one sought information on the respondents' status (Home Economics teacher or secretary of cooperative society). Part two had two sections. Section A comprised 10 items on Home Economics based life-skills and Section B consisted of 18 items on networking approaches. The items were based on a 4-point rating scale of "strongly agree", "agree", "disagree", and "strongly disagree".

The instrument was validated by two Home economics lecturers in Micheal Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. They made some corrections, which were effected, in the final version of the instrument.

The test-re-test method for testing reliability was applied to test the reliability of the IHELSPA. The researcher administered copies of the IHELSPA on a sample of 10 Home Economics teachers and 5 secretaries of women cooperative societies in Enugu North Local Government Area of Enugu State. After an interval of two weeks, the tests were administered again on the same respondents. The responses were scored and analysed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis technique (Adepoju, 2004). A coefficient value of 0.80 was obtained for the items in the instrument, which the researcher considered satisfactory for the study.

The copies of the questionnaire were administered on the sampled respondents in their offices through the help of research assistants. All the 253 copies distributed were retrieved and used for the study.

Mean scores were used in answering the research question. Since the items were based on a 4-point scale with an average of 2.50, in interpreting the results, items with mean ratings up to 2.50 and above were regarded as agree, while items with mean ratings below 2.50 were regarded as disagree.

## **Results**

Research Question One: *What Home Economics based life skills would be inculcated among rural women as a panacea for poverty alleviation?*

In Table 1, only items 10 and 14 scored less than 2.50 indicating that the respondents did not generally accept them as the Home Economics life skills to be inculcated among rural women. The remaining 14 items scored above 2.50. Hence the respondents agree that the skills listed in these 13 items are the Home Economics life skills to be inculcated among rural women.

Research Question two: *What networking approaches could be used in inculcating Home Economics based life skills among rural women in Nigeria?*

In Table 2, the entire items scored above 2.50. Hence, the respondents agree that the networking approaches should be implemented to inculcate Home Economics-based life (survival) skills among rural women in Anambra State.

### **Discussion of Findings**

In response to research question one, a range of Home Economics based life (survival) skills were identified that could be inculcated among the rural women for poverty alleviation. These include: soap and detergent making, baking, catering, interior decoration, funeral packaging, wedding events packaging, cloth production, sewing and designing, making of models and toys (dolls, rabbits, etc), ice-cream and fruit juices, flours and meal planning. The respondents also agree that skills in home gardening, pottery, and hair dressing should be inculcated. This finding agrees with Mberengwa (2008) who noted that rural women need various home economics based life (survival) skills in food and nutrition, clothing and textile, and home management. Nwagwu (2008) advocated for a situation where Nigerian rural women would not be limited to specific skills in sewing, hair dressing and garri processing. Rather, he stressed that the women would be trained in a range of family and consumer skills to be able to cope with the challenges of contemporary times. The respondents' opinions about the Home Economics based life (survival) skills go on to confirm that the inculcation of these skills is a key element in empowerment of rural women for poverty alleviation.

In response to research question two, the Home Economics teachers and secretaries of women cooperative societies agree that networking approaches involving Home Economists, leaders of cooperative societies, industrialists, government and their agencies, youths, university students, banks, multinational companies, non-governmental organisations and representatives of women groups should be adopted to inculcate Home Economics based life (survival) skills among rural women in Anambra state as a panacea for poverty alleviation. This finding concurs with Zanna (2001) who stated that poverty alleviation should be a multi-faceted process especially in Nigeria where poverty is endemic. Olibie (2001) also stated that poverty alleviation must be a responsibility for all and that appropriate attention should be paid to skill-focused programmes with the active participation of experts, rural women and communities. Suggestions on how

the issue of poverty should be handled revealed the concern of women for improved living conditions for them and their families This is against the current practice where government and non-governmental associations introduce poverty alleviation programmes and train women in one-short workshop on how to utilize the programmes. The result is that such programmes are not sustained and poverty has persisted among the women despite the huge sums of money invested in the poverty alleviation programmes.

### **Conclusion**

Rural women in their families constitute the grassroots institutions that have the responsibility to ensure that its members are adequately nourished, clothed, sheltered, etc. Alleviating poverty among rural women through the inculcation of home economics based life (survival) skills is therefore critical. In this study, both Home Economics teachers and secretaries of women cooperative societies in Anambra state on a range of Home Economics based life (survival) skills and networking approaches for inculcating Home Economics based life (survival) skills among rural women. One is optimistic that with the implementation of the findings of this study, poverty among rural women would be reduced and rural women would become more empowered to contribute significant to the socio-economic advancement of Anambra State in particular and Nigeria in general.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

- 1) Government and non-governmental organizations should mobilize communities, youth groups, and other private sector organizations to contribute in building the capacities of rural women in Home Economics based life (survival) skills.
- 2) Government should set up committees comprising home economics teachers, community leaders and leaders of women groups to identify the needs of rural women, recommend and evaluate the adequacy of the rural poverty alleviation programmes for home economics based life skills.
- 3) Government and non-governmental organisations should network with Home Economists, leaders of cooperative societies and other stakeholders to train rural women in Home Economics based life (survival) skills.

- 4) Promoting access of women to productive assets through savings clubs, credit associations and micro financing and enhancing access to portable water, constant electricity and health services would enable women to actively and productively pursue their economic activities and exiting the poverty trap.

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Table 1: Mean ratings of the Home Economics based life skills that would be inculcated among rural women

S/N	items:	$\bar{X}$ Home economics teachers	$\bar{X}$ Secretaries of cooperative societies	Decision
1	Soap and detergent making.	<b>3.67</b>	3.16	<b>Agree</b>
2	Baking (buns, chin-chin, pies, bread etc)	<b>3.34</b>	2.80	<b>Agree</b>
3	Catering (cooking for events)	<b>3.56</b>	3.45	<b>Agree</b>
4	Interior decoration (sewing of curtains and blinds, decoration of cushions)	<b>3.56</b>	3.47	<b>Agree</b>
5	Funeral packaging (decoration of funeral beds and parlour, making of wreaths, decoration of canopies)	<b>3.77</b>	2.90	<b>Agree</b>
6	Wedding events packaging (baking and setting of cakes, buffet stands, wedding accessories, arranging of flower bouquets etc)	<b>3.18</b>	3.66	<b>Agree</b>



7	Cloth production (weaving of aso-oke, tie and dye, batik etc)	<b>3.16</b>	3.17	<b>Agree</b>
8	Sewing and designing (making dresses, under wears, embroidery, beading).	2.89	2.59	Agree
9	Making of models and toys (dolls, rabbits, etc).	3.77	3.30	Agree
10	Laundry and dry cleaning	1.45	1.66	Disagree
11	Making of ice-cream and fruit juices	3.37	3.39	
12	Making of flours (bean, maize, yam flour etc).	4.00	3.00	Agree
13	Planning of meals for various groups (e.g. vegetarian diets, diabetics, obese)	3.34	3.15	Agree
14	Home gardening.	3.00	3.42	Agree
15	Pottery (ceramics moulding)	3.16	3.18	Agree
16	Training on fitness provision (aerobics; exercises etc)	1.19	1.21	Agree
17	Hair dressing (weaving, plating, packing, accessories)	3.73	3.78	Disagree
18	Health and first aid measures, baby and child care	4.00	3.87	Agree

**Table 2: Mean ratings of the networking approaches for inculcating Home Economics based life skills among rural women**

S/N	items:	$\bar{X}$ Home economics teachers	$\bar{X}$ Secretaries of cooperative societies	Decision
1	Home Economists, leaders of cooperative societies and representatives of women groups should participate in reforming poverty alleviation policy to ensure relevance to Home economics based life skills.	3.78	3.41	Agree
2	Industrialists should sponsor home economics teachers to teach Home Economics based life skills to rural women	3.45	3.11	Agree
3	Government should involve more women in decision-making at the community and State levels to ensure adequate attention to women's interests in Home economics life based skills.	3.67	2.98	Agree
4	Youth groups should form welfare associations and teach rural women vocational skills.	3.56	3.87	Agree
5	Non-governmental associations should visit rural communities to train women on benefits of co-operative societies and income generating skills.	3.56	3.78	Agree
6	Banks and multinational companies (MTN, GLO, etc) should liase with home economists in the packaging and sponsorship of training on micro-credit skills in home economics (such as using micro-credit to set up a soap-making facility.	3.51	3.55	Agree
7	Home economic teachers should collaborate with non-governmental association to train rural women on life skills.	3.25	3.23	Agree

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8	The agency handling State poverty alleviation programmes should publish an annual “tips on Home-economics based skills for poverty alleviation” in local languages for free distribution to rural women.	4.00	3.23	Agree
9	Government and private bodies should accelerate programmes that promote women’s education and access to employment opportunities.	3.54	3.74	Agree
10	Each Local Government Area should set-up a Rural Women’s Volunteers Group to train women on productivity skills.	3.67	3.35	Agree
11	Government should sponsor leaders of cooperative societies to leadership training to equip them with leadership and income generating skills.	3.78	3.65	Agree
12	The State government should initiate a Women’s Action Against Poverty Awards, recognizing outstanding work by rural women in life skills for poverty alleviation.	3.67	3.56	Agree
13	University students should organise holiday programmes to train their community women on literacy skills and small-scale projects such as crafts, tools-making, events packaging etc.	3.98	3.71	Agree
14	Government should provide employment to the jobless women and enhance earnings of those in gainful employment.	3.56	3.33	Agree
15	Philanthropists, governments at Local, State and Federal levels should make provision for the improvement of infrastructural facilities.	3.83	3.79	Agree
16	Government and Ministry of women affairs should provide logistics supports for women’s training in vocational education.	3.88	4.00	Agree

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