MODERN GARI PRODUCTION AS PANACEA FOR UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN YEWA SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF OGUN STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study was carried out to assess the traditional method of gari production in Iwoye, Ijanna and Pahayi communities in Yewa South Local Government Area of Ogun State. It specifically examined the socio-economic characteristics of gari processors in the study areas and the profitability of the trade. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 90 respondents who were interviewed with structured interview schedule. Direct observation method was also used. The data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, frequency distribution and percentage methods. The result reveals that gari processors are all women. 90% of the respondents are illiterates and 90% of their age range falls between 45-55 years. The analysis also shows that gari processing is not quite impressive as a processor according to the respondents makes only an average of #2000 per week as profits. It concludes that drudgery and stress involved coupled with low gross margin are part of the reasons why the trade is unattractive to the younger ones. Following these, the study recommends that a well conventionalized gari programme that has the pertinent modern equipment be introduced. This will induce the unemployed youths to go into gari production thereby, ameliorating the unemployment situation, create wealth and eradicate poverty.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Improved, Poverty Alleviation.

INTRODUCTION

The methods used by the rural people in developing countries to process food crops and reduce post harvest loss employ labour intensive and low technology (Ghazala, 1994; Enaikele, 2008).

'Gari' which is obtained from processed cassava tubers remains the commonest staple food of many Nigerians. It is produced in the rural areas mainly by local women. As noted by Abiola and Omoabugan (2001), women work in rural areas as farmers, food processors and distributors.

Usually, 'gari' is produced traditionally using fire-wood as source of energy, lots of irritating smoke emit from this method. This coupled with drudgery and stress involved are common problems faced by 'gari' processors in Nigeria. Therefore, the need to embark on technology intervention that addresses the transformation of the agro-processing role of women in the rural areas cannot be over-emphasized.

Other common problems associated with cassava processing generally and 'gari' production in particular according to Apanpa (2010) include lack of machines/equipment, high transport costs for moving tubers from the farm to processing points and poor access to clean water.

Orji (2010) opines that 'gari' processing will be attractive to the young people who make up the bulk of the unemployed in Nigeria if the uses of machines are adopted in frying 'gari' as this will eliminate the stress and drudgery 'gari' fryers go through. Orji (2010) also observes that a well conventionalized 'gari' programme that has the pertinent modern equipment and spread across the cassava producing areas will make more 'gari' available and also reduce the price. According to him, rural cooperatives, local government groups and entrepreneurs can use 'gari' production as a veritable strategy for rural development, poverty alleviation, economic empowerment and job creation.

These and many more factors motivated the choice of this research topic and also the choice of the study areas as cassava producing communities.

The study aims at finding out among other things the willingness of the respondents to adopt use of modern equipment if introduced.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was carried out at Iwoye, Ijanna and Pahayi Communities in Yewa South Local Government Area of Ogun State. The choice of the Communities was borne from the fact that they are cassava producing communities and the occupation of majority of the women is 'gari' processing. They also engage in petty trading apart from 'gari' production. Ogun state has a tropical climate with all the year round high temperature and heavy rainfall during the rainy season. This type of climate supports the growing of cassava all year round in the study areas.

A simple random sampling technique was used to select 30 respondents from each of the communities making a total sample size of 90 respondents. The respondents (all women) were

interviewed using the prepared structured interview schedule. Direct observation method was also used by the researchers to see how cassava tubers were peeled, washed, milled, fermented, sieved and fried. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution and percentages were used to analyze the data obtained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic characteristics of respondents

Sex: The gender of the respondents in the study areas is shown in table 1 below:

TABLE 1: SEX OF THE RESPONDENTS

SEX	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
MALE	0	0%
FEMALE	90	100%
TOTAL	**90**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey

From table 1 above, all the respondents in the study areas are women (100%). The dominance of the female gender in the trade may be due to the fact that most activities (ranging from cassava peeling to frying) are replica of the normal household chores undertaken by women. Moreover, frying of 'gari' in the study areas is seen as women's activity while cassava planting is considered mainly as a male dominated job.

Age Distribution: Table II below shows the age distribution of the respondents in the areas.

TABLE II: AGE DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

AGE GROUP (YRS.)	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Below 30	0	0%
30 - 34	0	0%
35 - 39	3	3.33%
40 - 44	6	6.67%
45 - 55	81	90%
Above 55	0	0%
TOTAL	**90**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey

As seen in Table II, three respondents representing 3.33% fall within the age group of 35 and 39 years, six processors representing 6.67% have their ages between 40 and 44 years. Majority of 'gari' processors in the areas have their ages fall within 45 and 55 years. The most active segment of the population are not well represented (only 10% of the respondents) in the business. The implication of this is that the business is unattractive to the younger forms that form the bulk of the unemployed in Nigeria. This may be due to the crude method employed in processing gari

which is full of stress and drudgery. This has impacted negatively on the quantity of gari produced thereby, causing a rise in price.

Marital Status: Table III below shows marital status of the respondents in the study areas.

TABLE III: MARITAL STATUS

MARITAL STATUS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Married	63	70%
Divorced	18	20%
Single	0	0%
Widowed	9	10%
TOTAL	**90**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey.

Analysis reveals in Table III that 70% of the respondents are married, 20% are divorced while 10% are widowed respectively. This may have a positive effect on the availability of family labour.

Educational Qualification: Table IV below shows the educational qualifications of the respondents.

TABLE IV: EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Illiterate	81	90%
Non Formal	0	0%
Primary	9	10%
Total	**90**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey

Educational status of respondents as shown in Table IV above reveals that 90% of them received no education at all while 10% only have primary school leaving certificate. This may adversely affect the adoption of new innovations (i.e. modern equipment for frying 'gari'), since education plays a vital role in the adoption of new improved technology.

The processing of cassava into gari as found out from the study area is done traditionally. The various equipment used to undertake the tasks as observed by the researchers on their visit to the areas include knife, frying pot, frying spoon, sieve, tray, grating machine, fermentation rack, hydraulic weight, pressing jack, and so on and so forth.

A 'gari' processor (discussant) states

"The frying of gari is not an easy task; it takes more energy than what is realized from it. We are still forced to remain in it because there is no other means of livelihood. Our children are not finding it interesting either; they also prefer to look for better jobs that are not energy – sapping like their counterparts in the cities".

Another discussant adds:
"Please, tell government to help us out with modern equipment that will ameliorate our suffering. The heat generated from the frying is not friendly, we are ageing fast. The worst part of it is that we obtain from the trade does not commensurate with the efforts put in. On the average, our profit per week is #2000. The quantity of gari we produce with this local method is limited.

Following the statement of the second discussant above, the researchers tried to find out how they intend to operate the modern equipment if eventually provided since majority of them are illiterates.

Their responses:
Government can organize adult literacy center where we can be trained on the operations of the machines/equipment. We have sharp brains and we also learn fast, we were not only opportune to go to school because our parents could not support us. So, let them train us on how to use the machines and they will be surprised. Most of our jobless children can also embrace and make a living from it once they know that the process is no longer stressful, rather than migrating to the cities looking for jobs that are not in existence.

Orji (2010) agrees with the response of the discussants when he noted that gari processing would be attractive to the young people who make up the bulk of unemployed if a machine that will eliminate the stress and drudgery gari fryers go through can be adopted. He observed that a modern gari frying pot with rotating paddles and gear motor to power the paddles has been produced in the country to improve the gari quality. According to him, it is made of stainless steel and padded with fiber glass to prevent the emanating heat.

IMPROVED GARI PROCESSING AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

The research also reveals that improved gari production can stimulate and enhance economic growth and development in Nigeria generally, and Yewa South Local Government Area in particular.

Available data shows that the current production of 7 million tons of gari daily falls far below 12 million tons which is the actual demand by over 130 million people who depend on it daily for their sustenance (Orji, 2010). According to him, gari processing can be a viable tool for national development if local government councils can participate actively in it. In his words, they can use it to generate commerce in their areas, create employment and also increase their internally generated revenue.

With over 14 million Nigerians living in the Diaspora (Orji, 2010) who love to eat "eba" once in a while when they get home sick, improved gari production can serve as a source of

foreign exchange earnings. Nigerian gari as it is presently is unable to pass the test of the various customs and health authorities due to its short shelf – life because of its high moisture content, which makes it to degenerate into microbial contamination after a while. In fact, Orji (2010)

specifically puts the acceptable moisture content of gari which contains hydrocyanic acid at 9 – 10 percent, to increase its shelf – life to above six months so as to internationalize and allow its free passage into the foreign countries. Improved gari if well and thoroughly packaged to avoid infestation of insects and other items that may contaminate it can be an internationally acceptable food item, a source of foreign exchange earnings, enhance economic growth and national development.

CONCLUSION

Based on the quantitative and qualitative findings and analyses of the data, gari processing using local method is full of stress and drudgery. The quantity produced falls far below the actual demand for it under the present condition. There are lots of potentials in gari production if modern and scientific approach for processing it can be adopted. This can alleviate poverty, reduce unemployment and above all enhance food security. If produced under hygienic conditions and well packaged to meet international standards, it can boost foreign exchange earnings when exported thereby, enhancing socio - economic and national development.

Finally respondents in the study areas (i.e. Iwoye, Ijanna and Pahayi communities) showed their willingness and readiness to adopt the use of modern equipment if and when introduced.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Gari processing can ameliorate unemployment, reduce poverty and enhance food security if the method is improved. To achieve this, the following are recommended:

1. A modern gari frying pot with rotating paddles and gear motor to power the paddles has been produced in the country. More of this pot made of stainless steel and padded with fiber glass to prevent heat should be produced and its use be encouraged. This will eliminate the stress and drudgery gari fryers go through and thus, make it attractive to the young people.
2. Adequate public water should be provided at strategic points even in the remotest areas. This is required to ensure thorough washing of the tubers before and after peeling to eliminate the sand content. This is necessary to allow for its international acceptability.
3. Thorough fermentation and dewatering of the grated tubers should be done to eliminate the hydrocyanic acid which is natural in cassava tubers. High moisture content in gari makes it degenerate into microbial contamination which reduces its shelf – life.

4. The packaging should be made attractive and done in a way to avoid infestation of insects and other items that may contaminate the gari. This is essential so as to make it appealing to people from the outside world.
5. Provision and maintenance of rural feeder roads to link the farm where cassava tubers are produced to the processing points will reduce cost of transportation. This must be taken very seriously by the government especially, at the local government area level.

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