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WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

by

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INTRODUCTION

Women represent more than 50 percent of the world population, one-third of the labour force and perform for nearly two-thirds of all working hours. Much of that work is done by those living in rural areas. In the developing world, more than a third of the total population is rural and female. They produce most of the food for domestic consumption. They process, prepare and serve it, to their families. In some regions, they also market what they grow. In addition, they raise families and manage and care for the household in general. In some developing regions, a quarter to half of rural households are permanently or de facto headed by women.

The contribution of women to society is by no means reflected by their status. Women receive one-tenth of world income and own less than one percent of world property. They have little access to education. More adult women in the developing world are illiterate (68 percent as compared to men 32

percent). Planners are now becoming more aware of social and economic importance of the work done by women. Greater attention to and support for women in agriculture could improve their efficiency and productivity as well as raise standard of living and that of their families.

AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

Women in rural areas grow at least 50 percent of the world food. They work in all aspects of cultivation, including planting, thinning, weeding, applying fertilizer and harvesting. In some parts of Africa, women provide up to 90 percent of the rural food supply. In Islamic countries as well, a large number of women are involved in agriculture. In Pakistan, for example, about 50 percent of rural women cultivate and harvest wheat. Up to 85 percent thresh and 95 percent clean the grains. In Jordan, 60 percent of the women weed crops. Similarly, the participation of women in other

Islamic countries is as follows: Bangladesh (70%), Indonesia (65%), Turkey (50%), Syria (49%), Morocco (43%) and Sudan (27%). The involvement of women in agriculture in other countries such as Nepal (98%), India (85%), Tanzania (78%), Brazil (24%), Mexico (12%) and Chile (5%). It appears that the participation of women in agriculture is the lowest in the Muslim world and Latin America.

Some tasks, especially seasonal ones, such as clearing and preparing land, are mainly men's work. Even so, women may participate in these. In Kenya, 58 percent of women are involved in clearing bush or ploughing. In areas with high rates of private land ownership — Latin America, parts of South-east Asia, North Africa and the Middle East — women form up to 40 percent of the hired labour. They are usually paid less than men. Women combine agricultural activities with childcare or house work, often doing both simultaneously. A study in a Pakistani village indicates that a women spend five hours 30 minutes on care and feeding of livestock, one hour on milking and churning, four hours and 45 minutes on food processing and cooking, one hour and 30 minutes on carrying food to fields and feeding children, 45 minutes on house cleaning and making dung cakes for fuel, 30 minutes on carrying water and 30 minutes on child care.

In agriculture, periodic increases in work usually relate to

crop season. A summary of a typical working day for a Zambian woman during the planting season is as follows: Walking to the field with baby on back (1-2 km) 30 minutes; ploughing, planting hoeing: 9 hours 30 minutes; collecting firewood and carrying it to home: one hour; pounding or grinding grain or legume: one hour and 30 minutes; fetching water (1-2 km): 45 minutes; cooking food: one hour; dishing out food eatings: one hour and washing children, herself, clothes: 45 minutes. A study in the Upper Volta by ILO showed that family nutrition deteriorated during the rainy season because adult women had to divert their attention from their agricultural work to cooking.

ANIMAL PRODUCTION

The success of small-scale animal production to improve the diet of the rural poor will depend, to a large extent, on the assistance and training which women receive. For poultry, goats and rabbits, women have substantial responsibilities. Studies in Pakistan, Egypt, Chile and Swaziland show that 80 to 100 percent of village women keep poultry. In Egypt and Jordan, it has been estimated that 70 to 75 percent of the women care for goats. Rural women also collect feed and fodder for animals. They are generally expected to milk animals, process milk and market it and other animal products locally.

In Pakistan, 60 to 80 percent of the women feed and

milk cattle. In Chile, 80 percent of women in families with medium-sized holdings, 54 percent of the small holders, and 7 percent of the poorest peasants take care of cattle. In Africa, where the tradition is that men and boys care for cattle, women are assuming this responsibility because the males are engaged in off-farm employment.

FISHERIES

In practically all areas of the developing world, women in fishing communities contribute a great deal to the fishing economy, either directly by harvesting, processing and marketing, or indirectly by providing vital extra income, food crops and a host of supporting activities that ensure the well being of the family. In some developing countries such as Ghana and Philippines and in parts of the other countries including India, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Cuba and most of West Africa, there are probably as many women engaged in fisheries as men. Women do work along with men at sea in Cuba and on large modern boats in Australia, the USSR and some other countries. However, from the moment the boats land, small-scale fisherwomen tend to dominate activities. They help empty the nets and sort the catch. They gut, clean and sell the fresh fish on the beach.

Perhaps the biggest area for improvement is general education for women and training for variety of skills. The Bay of Bengal Development of Small-

scale Fisheries Project is the largest of FAO's fisheries assistance programmes in the region, and addresses women of five countries concerned by training female fisheries extension workers. Fish farming and crocodile farming in Papua New Guinea and other countries have also supported women both in high protein food production and income generation. However, a great deal remains to be done in regard to uplift the role of women in fisheries section.

One of the continuing problems is the inadequate involvement of women within extension agencies. Among the countries of Asia and Pacific region, the only countries where women's involvement in this aspect is significant is the Philippines. For instance, about 60% of the more than 4000 farm management technicians employed are female. It is also significant that about half the total number of students enrolled in the under-graduate level in the agricultural institutions are women.

Greater and more determined efforts are needed to encourage women to be trained as animal husbandry specialists and as veterinarians. In this way, they will be enabled to contribute to the planning and implementation of livestock projects. Such projects would then be more likely to meet the needs of all sections of the community.

FOOD HANDLING

Women's role in food storage is major. Data from different studies show that the proportion

of related work done by rural women ranged from 21 percent in a rural area of Columbia to 100 percent in Nepal. Other figures ranged from 50 to 65 percent. Women make decisions about how, where and when grain will be stored. Drying fruits, vegetables fish are common activities for them as well.

Women also process food, especially for family consumption. Typical work includes cleaning threshing and grinding grains, drying fish, making cheese or yoghurt. It takes hours to process grains for cooking. In Senegal, women spend four hours daily for grinding wheat for couscous. Women also process food exports and cash crops. In Rwanda, for example, they dry the coffee beans, which is one of the most important operations. Women handle the processing of fish which can be smoking, salting, drying, fermenting or a combination of these. In Sierra Leone, 75% of the village's women are directly involved in fish processing. Most women spend up to 75 hours per week on smoking activities alone. In parts of coastal Asia, women constitute bulk of the labour force which prepares and packs shrimp for export.

In most cultures, women prepare the food consumed in home. In addition to cooking, it can include gathering fuelwood and fetching water. In Africa, a woman walks six hours for a day's water supply for her family. In Nepal, a woman walks seven to eight hours for firewood

for cooking and heating. On an average in developing countries, a woman works 16 hours to each man's eight.

Such statistics show that the lot of women throughout the Third World is hard. Exhausted by hard work, weakened by poor nutrition (one in two women in developing countries is anaemic) and by virtue of their domestic functions in constant touch with water which is often polluted, women are particularly vulnerable to water-related diseases which, according to estimates of the WHO, account for 80 percent of all ailments in the Third World.

Rural women are traders almost everywhere. In West Africa, up to 80 percent of the labour force in all trades is female. In Ghana, 97 percent of fish traders are women. In some Indian markets, women conduct all trade in fish. In general, the participation of women in marketing is the highest where trade is traditional.

FOOD DISTRIBUTION

While women produce much of the food in the developing world, they are more likely to be malnourished than men. Women in many rural societies eat less than men. Girls and pregnant and lactating women suffer significantly higher rate of malnutrition. When food is scarce, just before harvest, the workload of women may increase without a corresponding increase in food. This can lead to serious weight losses in pregnant and nursing mothers.

Girls also may have significantly less access to food than boys.

As food scarcity increases, so goes the disparity in nutrition between the sexes. Studies in the East Punjab state of India have found that low caste girls were weaned sooner than boys and consumed less supplementary milk and solid food. Such discrepancies can result in infant mortality rates for girls as much as 57 percent higher than those of boys. The person who prepares and distributes food for family, gives to the head of the family and next best to boys. In many societies, men eat first and the women and children take what remains.

An important point to be considered, therefore, is how to improve and develop local food-processing technologies in a way that is appropriate for the community in question and that will serve many households at a time. It may be assumed that this is the only way by which labour saving technologies can be economically feasible to most women. Such modified local food technologies could be related to organized water supply, to more economic utilization of energy, to drying of food crops, to saving cooking time (i.e. by common supply of solar heated water or by common pre-processing of "convenience" foods) to crop cleaning and sieving operations, or to any other activity common to the households. By sharing duties and responsibilities, women's resources could gradually become better utilized,

for their own benefit and for that of their dependents and the community as a whole. Women are, however, not easily reached through research, particularly because most researchers are men. The increased recruitment of female professionals into research and planning is, therefore, of great importance.

ACTION PROGRAMMES

Many United Nations and other international agencies have recommended specific action on women's involvement, and have taken steps to reorient their work to reach women better.

The purpose of proclaiming 1975 as International Women's Year by the United Nations was to define a society in which women participate in economic and social life and to devise strategies whereby such a society could develop. In July, 1975, the World Conference on the International Women's Year, involving more than 100 nations in Mexico City, adopted a World Plan of Action. The Plan points out basic social rights and specifies, what actions are required to make these available to women, especially through Government action at the national level. The Plan recommends specific research on women and changes in the ways that the news media portray

them. Following the meeting, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 1975-1985 as U.N. Decade for Women, devoted to implementing the World Plan of Action.

The World Conference on Agrarian Reforms and Rural Development (WCARRD) focus on women and it is one of its main themes. It stated that rural development based on growth the equity will require full integration of women. It showed how to involve women in all aspects of rural development, including land ownership, access to agricultural inputs, extension training programme, equality of legal status and educational and employment opportunities. It also calls for better information and data on women in the Third World.

FAO gives priority to integrating women in development activities. This involves producing more information about women devising ways of including women in agricultural, fisheries and forestry programmes and projects and supporting governments in their efforts to involve women in development programmes. FAO is working at several levels to improve data and statistics on rural women. The organization is devising ways of helping planners integrate

women in agricultural development. To promote the full participation of women in the development, FAO has initiated the following programmes:

- *Community Action for Disadvantaged Rural Women (CADRW)
- *Programme for Better Family Living (PBFL)
- *Bay of Bengal Programme (BOBP)
- *Production of audio-visual material
- *Meetings to assist the governments to consider the role of women in food production and to develop programmes and projects to support them
- *The peace corps of the Agency for International Development (AID) is committed to developing specific programmes to benefit women in the Third World since 1975.
- *Several other development funding agencies, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) have been giving attention to women as a special priority area.