

WOMEN PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT IN AGRICULTURE AND DAIRY INDUSTRY IN PAKISTAN: A SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY

Saira Masood

Lecturer in Sociology

University of Sargodha, Women Campus, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

Anila Jamil

Lecturer

University of Sargodha, Women Campus, Faisalabad, Pakistan.

ABSTRACT: *This paper looks at improving women's participation in agriculture and dairy industry in Pakistan. The paper discusses the design, planning stages and the implementation process. The later part of the report presents the key findings of agriculture and dairy industry followed by a discussion and an overall evaluation of the project. Recommendations for improving women's participation in agriculture in Pakistan conclude this paper.*

KEYWORDS: Women Participation, Empowerment, Agriculture Pakistan,

INTRODUCTION

What is the Real Issue?

Across the world, the proportion of women in agricultural production and post-harvest activities ranges from 20 to 70%; their involvement is increasing in many developing countries (Green facts). The largest proportion of rural women worldwide continue to face poor health and work conditions, limited access to education and control over natural resources, insecure employment and low income. Rural women have long been involved in agriculture and its allied fields. Pakistan, the focus of the project, faces the specific issues in improving the situation of rural women. Pakistan, like most of Asian countries, is depending upon agriculture and is having same problems like:

- Poor technical skills among farmers and therefore poor products resulting in poor income.
- Inadequate skill, limited control and access to the means of production, land degradation, lack of credit facilities, skilled labour, technology, marketing etc. prevail in most of the region.
- High level of illiteracy especially among women is a fundamental cause of poverty in villages of Pakistan.

In rural areas of Pakistan women work with their families to support their livelihoods but there is little recognition or reward for their work. They are also busy in domestic work and they have little opportunity for education. It is very difficult for them to gain independence or empowerment in Pakistan.

The potential impact of education, particularly on women's labour force in Pakistan has not been properly studied till today. Therefore research is needed for improving women's participation in agriculture and dairy industries in Pakistan. Due to lack of importance given to women's empowerment in rural life, there is a perpetual cycle of poverty in a developing country like Pakistan.

Project Overview

Due to lack of importance given to women's empowerment in rural life they have limited role and this contributes to a perpetual cycle of poverty in a developing country like Pakistan. However, social training of the women can play a catalytic role in improving their existing status in the society. The problems encountered in imparting social trainings and technical education to the women need to be addressed in a scientific fashion. I investigated the following sub questions in my research:

- What is the current involvement of women in the mango supply chain in Punjab?
- What are the constraints in improving their participation in this supply chain?
- What is women's existing level of involvement with technical education/training?
- How this involvement might be improved by looking at other successful industry?

METHODOLOGY

While dealing with qualitative research, it is vital to collect data from a range of sources in order to enable the researcher to present a study that is coherent. The different sources of data need to come together to enable the researcher to present a logical and coherent argument (Kervin et. al., 2006).

Spradley (1979) wrote that ethnography is the work of describing a culture and its goal is to understand another way of life from the native point of view. Though this approach is usually used by anthropologists to study exotic cultures and primitive societies but Spradley suggested that it is a useful tool for understanding how other people see their experience. He emphasizes that rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people.

DISCUSSION ON ROLE OF PAKISTANI WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Women's social and economic development is not only an issue about equalizing them with men but rather an issue of Pakistan's socio-economic development (Jamali, K., 2009). According to Pakistan's population census of 1998 there were 92.9 women per 100 men and in rural area this ratio was slightly better i.e. 93.7%. Despite that women play a significant role in agricultural production, livestock and cottage industries. They often assign more time to these tasks than men do. In villages women participate in all operations related to crop production such as sowing, transplanting, weeding and harvesting, as well as in post-harvest operations such as threshing, winnowing, drying, grinding, husking and storage. Women carry out these tasks in addition to their normal domestic chores of cooking, taking care of children, elderly and disabled, fetching water and fuel, cleaning and maintaining the house as well as some of its construction particularly in rural areas of Pakistan (Saeeda, 2006).

In all calculations, rural women work longer than men do. Surveys have revealed that a woman works 12 to 15 hours a day on various economic activities and household chores (ESCAP, 1997). Women are particularly busy during the two farming seasons in sowing and harvesting. In some ethnic groups, especially in the southern regions of Pakistan, a husband may marry more than one woman to supply additional farm labour (PARC, 1988). Where agriculture is dependent upon rains there crop production is not sufficient to meet subsistence needs of the households. At such places men have traditionally sought employment in the non-farm sector due to which, women have to take over a substantial burden of the work in agricultural production in such areas. Furthermore, there is a tremendous demand for female labour due to dramatic growth rates in cotton production areas of Pakistan. Such production-labour interactions have led to the increasing feminization of agriculture (GOP, 1995).

According to Islamic laws there is equality between the sexes but women receive differential treatment due to misinterpretations of religious ideas. As a result of various social beliefs and cultural bias, women's access to property, education, employment, etc. remain significantly lower as compared to men's in Pakistan. According to Purdah norm women are supposed to cover their body and face from every man other than their immediate family and this norm is followed in most communities (ESCAP, 1997). Due to such restrictions women cannot work freely in rural environment as their participation in rural labour force was mere 1.88% (PCO, 2008). They are dependent on males from moving from one place to other. Resultantly they could not get due share of their input in agriculture sector in Pakistan.

Development of women human capital has not received adequate attention in Pakistan. According to "Human Development" report released by UNDP Pakistan ranks in 135th position. It is due to the massive gap in gender equality, especially within the education and health care sector. Due to lack of access to adequate health care and education, there is low literacy rate among women and high mortality rate during reproductive age, reflecting negatively on Human Development Indicators (HDIs) like many developing countries.

Saeeda (2006) in "Women Welfare Projects and Development" has described the deplorable conditions of rural women in Pakistan. She has tried to link economic development with women's welfare. In order to achieve development of women, she emphasizes on the need for governments to initiate women welfare projects. Women should educate themselves in agricultural sector. She emphasised the importance of education to rural female. She suggested educating women in floriculture and food preservation.

4.1: Women Roles in the Agriculture: It has been noticed that women were involved in all stages of citrus industry from processing to packing and even in marketing. Since women are mostly illiterate, they are not aware of techniques through which they can prevent pre and post-harvest losses which are very high.

4.1.1: Barriers for Women Participation: I noticed from different interviews that cultural atmosphere was not conducive for women participation in this industry. There was an unhealthy gender consciousness prevailing in rural areas which was making field work difficult for women.

4.1.2: Education and training for women: Education was the key for changing the dismal participation of women in agriculture. There has been a need to involve the electronic and print media along with exhibitions and seminars so that mass awareness campaign could be

launched for motivating the general public about women role in agriculture. Moreover, there is a need of different short term training programmes for women like fruit preservation techniques and knowledge of making jams and juices. Through such initiatives women will be able to get firsthand knowledge at grass root level

4.2: Women Roles in the Dairy Industry: According to key informants women have a role in small dairy holders. Women are involved in feeding, watering, cleaning and even milking of animals in rural areas of Pakistan but their role is limited in marketing sector.

4.2.1: Training Programs for Women: Agricultural extension services can play a very significant role in training of women in dairy industry by providing technical training to them about food, health and organizational aspects of dairy industry. Training in health issues and marketing could also play effective role in women empowerment.

4.2.2: Barriers for Women Participation: Majority of women were illiterate in rural areas due to different reasons like non availability of training, lack of support from their male counterparts or even due to overburdened routine in their daily life. These barriers need to be removed if we want to bring a change in dairy sector in Pakistan.

4.2.3: More participation of Women in the Industry: Women need education in general and technical education in particular for their effective participation in dairy industry. If there is some support from the government side in form of some sort of loan or stipend then women could generate some revenue while working in dairy industry along with getting some opportunities for learning new techniques as well.

4.3: Other Barriers in Women's Involvement in Industry:

4.3.1: Safety: Women cannot travel openly and freely due to prevailing law and order situation. Women are not safe while travelling at night or in the daytime when there were few people around. Sometime the hold-ups occur while coming back from the market. They do not have access to bank accounts and have to carry cash which makes them more vulnerable. This hampers their effective participation in education, training and even marketing of their produce.

4.3.2: Discriminative Attitudes by Males towards Women: Men have a sense of superiority and they sometimes treat women as nobody. Men get support from customs and traditions that discriminate women particularly in rural areas of Pakistan. Men often perceive the empowerment of women as a threat. Boys are given preference over girls when there is not enough money to pay school fees of all the children and such decisions are not based on the merit.

4.3.3: Domestic Violence: There is an issue of domestic violence as well though people do not talk openly about it or do anything to stop it. This is happening over the time and most of the people have accepted it.

4.3.4: Access to the training: There are limited agricultural extension services and usually farmers who are living closer to big cities were having a greater contact with service provider. Farmers who live and work long away from urban centers are disadvantaged by access issues and this phenomenon is equally applicable to women who already have limited or restricted access to such programmes.

4.3.5: Training Format: Women complained that when they participate in training activities then they find it difficult to understand the information presented to them as it is too technical.

4.3.6: Health issues: Many people do not understand basic health and hygiene as the facilities for washing and toileting are not frequently available in villages. People do not

wash their hands often and do not know to boil their drinking water. All these factors are affecting women health in rural areas and indirectly hampering their effective participation in agriculture and dairy industry.

CONCLUSION

There should be a free excess to education and training particularly some training modules for women in packing, grading and value addition activities. There is need to change the cultural taboos which discriminate women. If education and infrastructure facilities are improved in their area then it more women will work in the industry and ultimately economic independence could be achieved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this project was to make recommendations to improve women's participation particularly in the mango industry and generally in agriculture and dairy Industries in Pakistan. There are many agencies and government departments who can contribute to the improvement of women's roles in agriculture. However, as this paper is recommends following strategies to improve women participation in dairy and agriculture industry.

5.1: Support from Men: Attitudinal and behavioral change particularly in men is very important in improving the plight of the women in Pakistan. There are certain social taboos which are hampering the access to education and training. Women should get equal opportunity of education just like men. They have a right to good health and they should stand up and speak for their right. It is recommended that ways to raise awareness and provide education to address gender issues must be provided.

5.2: Education and Training for Women: In order to improve women participation in dairy and agriculture industry we have to identify their role and type of work in these industries as mango and citrus are considered heavy crops. Women are involved in picking, grading and packing activities at Mitchells Industries in Okara district and there is need to implement that style in other areas as well. Therefore, by imparting post harvest management skills such as processing, packing and quality control will help them in establishing juice, jam and pickle industries at local level. It will promote local entrepreneurships. It is recommended that agriculture training for women be offered on farms and in local villages.

5.3: Marketing Training: Rural women generally lack training, skills and opportunities in this area. There is need to involve urbanite women in this area so that they could also play an effective role in this area as well. It is recommended that developmental programmes should be launched to engage urban women with rural women in order to develop market skills in rural women so that they could get good price for their produce.

5.4: Enhanced Role of Extension Workers: They can play a positive role in improving women participation in agriculture industry in Pakistan by providing training to women at their door step. There are farm field schools for men in some areas of the Punjab so there is need to replicate this experiment for women as well. It is recommended to develop a training programme for female agriculture extension workers.

5.5: Women empowerment techniques: Women should be encouraged to have economic independence. The government should investigate opportunities for developing agricultural entrepreneurial activities with concomitant training for women.

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