

## **Agricultural Education: Key to Providing Broader Opportunities for Third World Women in Production Agriculture**

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Rural women are the most silent participants in the economic life of developing countries. Women in the lowest classes and castes are deprived by their poverty, illiteracy, and ill health of the means to escape from a short-life of drudgery and fatigue. A majority of the poor is female. Martha F. Loutfi (1980)

Women have been involved in agriculture for thousands of years despite the familial responsibilities they have for bearing children, making clothing, and preparing food (Borcelle, 1985; Fields, 1985). Recent research indicates that rural women in developing countries of the Third World are still depended upon for raising most of the food grown for household consumption (Konter, 1980; Lappe & Collins, 1986).

Why, then, is the focus of this paper on providing opportunities for Third World women in agriculture? If women currently raise most of the world's food for consumption and have done so for thousands of years, aren't they already integrated into production agriculture? A review of the body of knowledge in agricultural development and a close look at issues surrounding current world food crises raise the following points to consider in answering these questions.

1. Recent estimates place the number of undernourished people in the world at well over 750 million, most of them being women and children. Much of the problem can be traced to inadequate production of food, the growth of which depends largely upon women (Kossoudji & Mueller, 1983).

2. Although women are heavily involved in subsistence agriculture, they are being denied the resources needed to improve their efficiency and production. Also, women typically have been denied equal opportunities in export agriculture. The absence of total integration, as discussed in this article, refers to women's exclusion from involvement in development decisions affecting production agriculture, that is, both subsistence and export agriculture.

3. Increasing numbers of women are becoming heads of households (Kossoudji & Mueller, 1983). The responsibility for generating the entire family income hinders women's ability to produce food for consumption and still satisfy family needs for which they traditionally have been responsible.

4. Impoverished women are often the group that suffers most from current development policies, either because they are ignored or because they bear the major burden in providing cheap labor for developing the modern economies of Third World nations (Karlekar, 1982).

5. Research on the role of rural women in development has increased dramatically in the last decade (Beneria, 1981; Hirschmann & Vaughan, 1984; Steel, 1981), but still falls short of the expectations of many international developers who believe that reducing world hunger

will require development programs that meet the needs of women (Cohn, Wood & Haag, 1981; Nelson, 1981). Research on the integration of women into production agriculture in Latin America has been especially limited in comparison to the research conducted on the integration of rural women into African and Asian agriculture.

6. Although teacher educators in agriculture have long contributed to international development (Thuemmel & Welton, 1983), and although several teacher educators have had an active interest in equality for American women in agriculture, the integration of rural women into production agriculture in the Third World is an area that largely has been ignored by the profession.

These six points raise three additional questions in the minds of many people working in the arena of international development. First, what factors exist which limit the integration of rural women into production agriculture? Second, what can be done to increase the participation of rural women in food production without hampering their ability to perform household tasks commonly relegated to women? And third, what role should agricultural educators play in stimulating the integration of rural women into production agriculture in the Third World?

#### Barriers to Integrating Women into Agriculture

According to Schuster (1982), considerable research has been conducted on the origins of the biological and sociological barriers which contribute to the subordination of women. These origins are not reiterated in this paper. However, the barriers arising from these origins need to be considered in any study that examines the role of women in international development. This section examines those barriers that place the greatest restraints upon rural women who are potential contributors to production agriculture in developing nations.

The first barrier is the lack of education for women. Nelson (1981) has shown that education yields benefits not only in the lives of women, but also in the lives of their children. For instance, research on women in developing nations indicates that as a mother's education progresses, the health of her children also improves.

It is generally accepted that the education of women has wide ramifications for a country's economic and social progress (Scott & Carr, 1985). According to Cloud (1985), one of the major factors influencing women's productivity is the extent to which they have access to education and training. Bossen (1984) states that there is a correlation between a lack of education and inadequate employment opportunities in the Third World. Yet, according to Louf (1980) and Borcelle (1985), a comparison of literacy levels between the sexes indicates that education has not been equally available for women, especially among the rural poor. The causes of this inequality of education are many. Factors to be considered are the sex of the teachers, the need for child labor in the home, the perceived value of education for each sex, the ethnic background of the children, and legal constraints placed upon parents. In some nations in Latin America, for instance, fathers are arrested or fined if they do not send their sons to school, but penalties do not exist for fathers who keep their daughters at home.

In regions where it is available to both sexes, education is typically segregated occupationally according to sex. Educational discrimination between the sexes is even more apparent after the ninth year when a more highly specialized career preparation is undertaken (Bossen, 1984). Formal education is even more sexually biased (Bossen, 1984). Farmers, ranchers and plantation owners do not provide women with

on-the-job training needs for careers in agriculture. Education in agriculture is vital if the productivity of women is to be maintained (Monson & Kalb, 1985; Mook, 1976).

The second barrier hindering the integration of women into production agriculture is unequal access to income-generating employment in agriculture (Dixon, 1982). Deere (1982) states that women are channeled into different agricultural occupations than men and that their rates of employment are much lower. Opportunities for women in export agriculture are especially limited due to male domination in this area of employment (Dixon, 1983). When women are able to find jobs in occupations traditionally held by men, women receive lower pay than men for performing the same work (Borcelle, 1985). In households where both the husband and wife are present, underemployment can affect the availability of capital for investment in agriculture. According to Kossoudji and Mueller (1983), underemployment in households headed by women translates into an inability to meet even the most basic family needs.

The third barrier to integration is women's responsibility for family care. Responsibility for child rearing is one of women's central obligations throughout much of the world (Boulding, 1976). Children require care that may keep the mother out of the labor force, especially in rural areas where daycare is not readily available (Bossen, 1984). In nations where birthrates are high, the productivity of women is further reduced by the rigors of pregnancy and lactation. Not only do pregnancy and lactation cause constraints on time, women's health suffers in regions of the world where proper health care and adequate nutrition are unavailable.

The fourth barrier to integration is the lack of entrepreneurial opportunities for women, including access to land ownership, capital, and decision-making opportunities (Boserup, 1970). It has been shown that women who own land not only create a different productive base for themselves and their families, but also help shape communities (March & Taqqu, 1986). Research in Colombia has even shown that birthrates can be drastically lowered when resources are shifted toward women (Lappe & Collins, 1986).

Nevertheless, changes in land tenure tend to disfavor women (Wagner, Holberg, Cook & Palinkas, 1982). Men enjoy some advantage in the control of strategic resources by virtue of their preferential inheritance of land (March & Taqqu, 1986), and also because of land tenure policies which prohibit women from owning land (Bryson, 1981). Related to land tenure issues, where sex is a factor in access to ownership, is the unavailability of capital and family resources for women (Bossen, 1984). Lappe and Collins (1986) state that the shift of economic power away from women and toward men helps to explain growing hunger, especially in Africa.

The fifth barrier to integration present in much of the world is the role that various religions play in the regulation of the family, especially of women. In Latin America, the Roman Catholic church supports the family organization to the extent that women are encouraged to endure marriages in which they are mentally and physically abused, while the church's position on abortion, birth control, and large families places a heavy burden upon mothers (Bossen, 1984). Iglitzin and Ross (1986) also point out that women in Catholic countries remain very hesitant to exercise what few rights they have received.

The impact of religion on women is even more pronounced in many Hindu and Moslem nations where women are often physically excluded from participating in economic activities because of adherence to varying

degrees of Purdah, the seclusion of women from public observation (Miller, 1982). Purdah places many restrictions upon those women who are interested in becoming active participants in agricultural development.

The sixth barrier to integration is the developed world's present strategy for introducing technological advances to developing nations. Training in the use of new technology typically excludes women (Karlkar, 1982) and often forces women into jobs that are even more labor intensive (Boserup, 1970; Tinker, 1976). According to Hirschmann and Vaughan (1984) and Van Lier (1980), new technologies are often introduced into cash crop agriculture, the production of which is controlled by men (Ladipo, 1981; Presvelou, 1980). Timberlake (1985) states that cash crops may encourage men to take over women's land rights and that women almost universally oppose cash crop agriculture because it reduces the amount of land available for food. In short, many development programs that intend to reduce hunger target the majority of funds toward men involved with cash crop agriculture even though women bear the major responsibility for food production.

#### Strategies for Integrating Women into Agriculture

Prior to a discussion of potential integration strategies, it must be noted that the world's women are not homogeneous. For instance, the success of previous integration programs in Africa and Asia will not guarantee a program's success in Latin America if it is transferred in whole without allowances being made for situational differences. However, many of the barriers to integration, and the strategies for dealing with them, cannot be confined to specific regions of the world. Because of similar challenges faced by women everywhere, it is possible to derive potential integration strategies from an analysis of programs already in progress.

Agricultural education, because of the profession's involvement in international development and equity for women, has several possible roles to play in more fully integrating rural, Third World women into production agriculture. First, the profession should conduct more research to find new integration strategies and to determine which integration strategies are most effective for various cultures and regions of the world. Second, as sound integration strategies are developed, agricultural educators who volunteer for foreign assignments can then implement these strategies in the projects in which they are working. Third, the agricultural education profession can develop an awareness of the important role that women play in the development of a nation. This awareness can in turn be fostered in American students interested in a career in development, and in international students who will return home to work in agricultural education professions.

Agricultural educators, both American and others working in Third World programs, who are concerned with lowering the barriers to women for fuller participation should consider the following as key intervention strategies that could provide greater access to production agriculture:

1. Provide women with general and technical training to prepare them for work in both subsistence and cash crop agriculture. Women can then choose to raise food for their families or to engage in income-generating activities which provide them with sufficient money to purchase food. As previous studies have shown, providing education for women is one of the most important steps to take in stimulating development in the Third World.

2. Provide women with equal access to land ownership, capital, and decision-making opportunities. Granted, such changes will meet with governmental and institutional opposition in many nations where agricultural educators are presently working. However, agricultural educators, especially when they are responsible for writing and evaluating project proposals, can include project components that minimize inequitable financial practices, land tenure policies, and development strategies that exclude women.

3. Promote labor-saving technologies for the home and for subsistence agriculture. This would give women more time to devote to agricultural production by reducing the time needed to complete household tasks and by making subsistence agriculture more efficient. Implementing many of these technologies will not require large monetary investments or training of a highly technical nature, and are within the area of expertise possessed by agricultural educators, especially those with backgrounds in agricultural mechanics or home economics. Two examples of technologies which would be new to many regions of the world are plastic containers for carrying water more efficiently and improved stoves, which would reduce deforestation and improve household management.

4. Encourage development programs that are directed to the increasing numbers of women who are heads of households. These women have the fewest social restrictions placed upon them, and thus may be more easily recruited to participate in innovative programs outside of the normal scope of traditional, male-oriented development programs. Other members of society may be more willing to adopt new attitudes and practices if they see that these innovations yield encouraging results.

5. Make every effort to avoid challenging traditional cultural values too quickly. Agricultural educators should research ways to introduce integration strategies which reduce animosity toward new ideas and increase willingness to change.

6. Involve women during all phases of the planning of agricultural development programs. Women can provide valuable input in development planning if an effort is made to include them. Past planning efforts have too often overlooked the potential contributions of women.

7. Agricultural educators should conduct more research on how to more effectively provide women with benefits of agricultural development that traditionally have been received by men. Most previous studies on rural, Third World women in agriculture have been conducted by researchers outside the profession, denying international developers the benefit of the unique backgrounds, training and experiences possessed by agricultural educators. Journals and conferences utilized by agricultural educators can be used more effectively as means to discuss problems faced by women in the Third World, thereby suggesting to agricultural educators areas in need of further research.

#### Conspectus

Because women represent the majority of the world's poor (Loutfi, 1980), and because women are the world's major food producers (Konter, 1980), agricultural development programs that benefit women benefit everyone. While the barriers to the integration of rural women into production agriculture in the Third World are many, these barriers can be overcome if programs are properly planned and conducted. Integration strategies should mesh with local tradition, culture, and agriculture, while at the same time dismantle the barriers that tradition, culture, and agriculture present.

Because of its broad nature, its work with sexual equality, and its experiences in development, agricultural education is in a unique position to promote strategies for providing rural, Third World women with equal access to education, training, and technology. Only through the effective integration of women into production agriculture can women and their families enjoy that which should be every person's birthright: Freedom from hunger.

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