



Full Length Article

Role of Rural Women in Agricultural Development and Their Constraints

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ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the role of rural women in agriculture development and their constraints. A case study in Depalpur, Okara-Pakistan. In the food security the rural women over the world play a major role, agricultural production and in the development and stability of the rural areas but women face a number of constraints in approaching agricultural extension sources especially in developing countries. Rural women along with men play an important role in the agriculture sector like crop production, livestock production as well as cottage industry. But they have incomplete access resources agricultural extension education services and newest technical knowledge and information sources. The present study in 2009 focused on the role of women in agricultural development and their constraints, which were being faced by our rural women. The study was conducted in district Okara. Out of three tehsils, only one tehsil Depalpur was selected randomly as the study vicinity. The data, thus collected, were analyzed by using SPSS. Serious attention should be paid to their constraints, because women are the backbone of agricultural development and food security in Pakistan. © 2010 Friends Science Publishers

Key Words: Agriculture; Extension services; Rural women; Constraints

INTRODUCTION

In the scenario of Economic Survey of Pakistan, the total population in Pakistan is 163.76 million in 2008-09. Out of total population, an overwhelming majority of the population depends directly or indirectly on income streams generated by the agriculture sector. The agriculture sector remained the leading sector with its job absorption ability and it still absorbs 44% of the country's labour force. Agriculture and agro-based industry is the back bone of the Pakistan economy. Rural women are involved in agricultural operations to a greater extent; they need assistance from Government, private or any other agency for newest information sources related to crop production, livestock and especially poultry production. There are no specific information sources and training facilities for rural women. Rural women farmers play a vital role in food production and food security. Mijindadi (1993) predictable that women are responsible for 70% of actual farm work and constitute up to 60% of the farming population in Nigeria. The involvement of women in the family and to the national economy has been grossly under estimated and even unrecognized. According to the report of Human Development in UNDP (1995) reveals that woman's economic contributions are undervalued to the tune of US\$11 trillion a year internationally. In both rural and urban

areas of developing countries, women are important shares in the economic support of their households through intensive involvement in agricultural activities. Rural women face a number of constraints on agricultural productivity. However in many parts of the world, women in agriculture operate under greater constraints than men (Hassan, 1987; Olawoye, 1993; World Bank, 1995). Women are the majority of the world's agricultural producers, playing important roles in agriculture sector and as well as in fisheries, livestock management. FAO (1997) reported that women make a significant contribution to food production, particularly in horticulture and small livestock at Latin America. Although their contribution is very much high in all the farming activities but they face so many problems and constraints in performing these actions and access to extension services as reported by Chase (1988) that limited capital 100%, inadequate markets 94%, unavailability of inputs 91% and lack of agricultural extension services 82% were the major constraints faced by the rural women in farming activities.

Rural women play a key role in agricultural sector production by working with full passion in production of crops right from the soil preparation till post harvest and food security activities (Habib, 1996; ESCAP, 1996; Ahmed & Hussain, 2004). Poultry farming is also one of the major sources of rural economy in agriculture. The rate of rural

women in poultry farming at household level is the central in poultry industry. Even though rural women are not using modern management techniques, such as vaccination and improved feed, but their poultry enterprise is impressive. Although women participation and involvement in agriculture sector is active but they are very far from agricultural extension education services throughout the world.

In rural areas of Pakistan, 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, drying, and storage. Rural Women in Pakistan carry out these farm duties in addition to their normal domestic chores of cooking; cleaning and maintaining the house as well as some of its construction (USAID, 1999).

Agricultural extension education services in Pakistan are responsible to enhance and accelerate the process of agricultural development to meet the food needs of rapidly growing population. The aim of agricultural extension education are to provide farmers (of both male & female) with information that enables them to make good assessment/decision in farming, to transfer suitable technologies from research and other sources and ultimately to abolish poverty and hunger by improving their production and food security. Rural women faces more problems and difficulties than that of men in gaining access to credit and extension education services related to agriculture, livestock management and food security (Achameyesh, 2000).

Therefore the present study was carried out to assess the role, contribution of rural women farmers in agricultural development and their constraints in Depalpur, district Okara, Pakistan.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in district Okara, which comprises of three tehsils, namely Renala Khurd, Depalpur and Okara. Out of which one tehsil Depalpur was selected through simple random sampling system. Tehsil Depalpur consists of 55 union councils, out of which five were selected through simple random sampling system. From each selected union council, one village was selected randomly. Farm families were considered as the sampling unit of the present study therefore a list of farm families from each selected village was prepared for the random selection of study respondents. With the help of above said list, 25 farm families were selected at random from each selected village. From each selected farm family, one woman who was dynamically engaged in farming activities was selected, thereby making a sample of 125 respondents. The data were collected with the help of a pre-tested interview schedule. The data thus collected were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) for reporting results and drawing conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The researcher identified the following constraints under different categories as social-economic and technical constraints. Respondents were interviewed to find out their perceptions about agricultural extension education services in tabulated, figure and presented in tables.

Fig. 1b shows that a large majority of the respondents collectively had different level of education i.e., 24% were above matric, middle to matric and up to primary level of education, 16% were illiterate. However, only 12% of the respondents were primary to middle. More or less similar results in the age and education were also observed by Fabiyi *et al.* (2007).

Table I stated that cultural norms, male dominance, traditional belief system, less availability of time and resistance from family members were the major constraints, which are being faced by rural women in approaching agricultural extension education services as reported by >84.0% of the respondents having mean 0.84, 0.83 and 0.80, respectively. The S.D. was in the range of 0.25-0.18. After cultural norms in our society is male dominated and women are not allowed to go freely for participating in agricultural extension services activities. These results were also observed by Raju *et al.* (2001). FAO (2001) and Sadaf *et al.* (2005) also reported that less time availability, cultural norms, male dominance etc., of these constraints faced by women farmers. Shelly and Costa (2000) reported that in Bangladesh social customs/norms are also major constraints faced by women involved in fish farming.

Table IIa an overwhelming majority 98.4% of the respondents indicated lack of mobility as the major constraints in approaching agricultural extension education services with mean 0.98 and S.D. 0.27. There may be less availability of vehicles especially for rural women to access these agricultural extension services. Moreover a large majority 92.0% of the respondents indicated lack of access to credit as the core constraint in approaching agricultural extension education services for rural women having mean 0.92 and S.D. 0.17. Shelly and Costa (2000) also indicated lack of credit facility and lack of resource availability as the main constraints, which are being faced by rural women involved in the agricultural development programme in Bangladesh. More or less similar results were also observed by Raju *et al.* (2001), Sadaf *et al.* (2005) and FAO (2001).

Table IIb reveals that among technical constraints illiteracy, lack of female extension staff, lack of subject matter specialists for women, were the major constraints faced by rural women in approaching agricultural extension services having respondents' response >85% with mean 0.88, 0.98 and 0.96 and S.D. 0.25, 0.09, 0.15 and 0.18, respectively. Moreover lack of technical training, knowledge and skills was the constraint about, which the respondents' responses 96.0% with mean 1.30 and S.D. 0.424. These technical constraints were also observed in

Table I: Distribution of the respondents according to social constraints faced by them in approaching agricultural extension services (n=125)

Social Constraints	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	S.D.
Cultural norms	105	84.0	0.84	0.25
Male dominance	104	83.2	0.83	0.23
Traditional belief system	100	80.0	0.80	0.15
Less availability of time	94	75.2	0.75	0.20
Resistance from family members	90	72.0	1.72	0.18

Table II: Constraints faced by them in agricultural extension education services (n=125)

(a) Distribution of the respondents according to their Economic Constraints

Constraints	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	S.D.
Mobility	123	98.4	0.98	0.27
Access to credit	115	92.0	0.92	0.17

(b) Distribution of the respondents according to their Technical Constraints

Technical constraints	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	S.D.
Illiteracy	110	88.0	0.88	0.25
Female extension staff	123	100.0	0.98	0.09
Subject matter specialists for rural women	121	96.8	0.96	0.15
Technical training, knowledge and skills	120	96.0	0.96	0.18

Table III: Distribution of the respondents according to their suggestions for improving the involvement of rural women in extension services (n=125)

Suggestions	Frequency	Percentage
Female extension workers	80	64.0
Training program for female e.g. (agricultural development and livestock)	50	40.0
Govt. and private organization	65	52.0
Extension field staff should be trained to educate the women engaged in farming	15	12.0

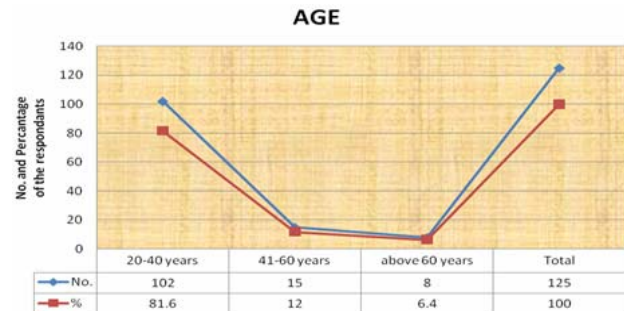
many international studies as reported by Sadaf *et al.* (2005), Raju *et al.* (2001), Shelly and Costa (2000) and FAO (1995). According to the Olawoye (1993) reported that shortage of qualified female extension staff is also the major constraint, which hinders the involvement of rural women in gaining access to agricultural extension education services. Sadaf *et al.* (2006) also reported that female extension staff are the major constraints faced by women involved in agriculture sector >80%.

Table III reveals that imperative suggestions given by the respondents were maximum female subject matter specialists should be produced in the field of agriculture 64.0%, training program for female e.g. (agricultural development & livestock) 40.0%, Government and private organization should focus more attention on problems of rural women 52.0% and extension field staff should be trained to educate the women engaged in farming 12.0%. Similar suggestions were also reported by Sadaf *et al.* (2005), Majaka (2001) and Raju *et al.* (2001).

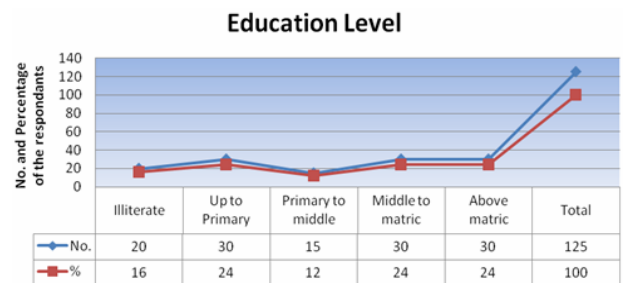
Fig. 1: Social-Economic characteristic of the respondents (n=125)

(a) Distribution of the respondents according to their Age

Fig. 1a reveals that 81.6% of the respondents fall under the age category of 20-40 years, followed by 12% of 41-60 years and 6.4% of them were above 60 years of age



(b) Distribution of the respondents according to their Educational Level



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It was concluded that cultural norms, male dominance and traditional belief system were the major social constraints faced by rural women as reported by >80% of the respondents. The major constraints in agriculture extension education services 98.4% of the respondents indicated lack of mobility. In technical constraints female extension staff, subject matter specialist for rural women, technical training, knowledge and skills, where respondent's response were >95%. It was also concluded that maximum female extension officer should be produced in the field of agriculture as suggested by majority 64.0% of the respondents.

For the betterment of rural women in agriculture sector, following recommendation have been made. In most countries legislative changes have been made to facilitate women's rights and women's have direct access to agriculture credit. For instance, Thailand had made changes in legal term from house wife to women farmer to allow her access to agriculture credit. Similar legislative alterations are also need in Pakistan.

1. To enhance women's literacy rates and to improve the levels of female education ratio, other urgent measures required. A separate education policy for women may serve the purpose.

2. Government should launch specific training skills courses and educational programmes for rural women keeping in view their problems and also should be broadcast through television, radio and group meetings at the access areas.

3. More female extension workers should be trained and sent to help female farmers. It is necessary to particularly identify women as an integral part of the agricultural extension policy and develop gender specific operational guidelines, which will direct the extension activities of women farmers.

4. The existing women's group in the village should be organized and strengthened to increase women's access to extension services, credit facilities, agricultural inputs and even marketing services.

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