

The Extent and Impact of Women Participation in Rural Development Projects An Analytical Review

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews some of the studies relevant to the role of women in rural development projects in some African and South-Asian countries. The aim of this paper is to study the extent of factors influencing participation of rural women in irrigation and agricultural development projects and to assess an overall impact of this participation on their household and family welfare. While fostering gender fairness and addressing gender inequality in rural development projects, the review of these selected studies reveals a variety of factors, including technical constraints, and social and cultural barriers; that limit women participation. However, this review calls for a positive but cautionary assessment. Rural development projects targeting women obviously have a strong potential to involve women whose daily lives are constrained by a pitiful lack of command over household and societal norms. This paper therefore suggests that the direct participation of women in rural development projects should be aimed at helping them capture their fair share of project benefits for greater welfare of the household economy. By doing so, it is concluded, a higher rate of human capital formation, slower population growth and stronger economic growth in particular and development in general can be achieved in future.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, governments of many developing countries and financing agencies have been making efforts to involve farmers in the development project stages. This approach helps the planners to design more efficient projects, which address the problems of project beneficiaries. Whereas male farmers are increasing in various phases of these projects, women are still left out. No efforts have been made to encourage women participation. Moreover, they are not considered as direct beneficiaries of these projects.

It is generally realized that involving women in development projects is a major factor behind the success of these projects in order to improve the living standards and the well being of the rural people, who are the intended beneficiaries. The participation of all the beneficiaries of development projects, both men and women is necessary for appropriate design, implementation and management of improved facilities. The lack of knowledge about constraints (social, cultural and technical barriers) and problems faced by rural women and, also, the impact of rural development projects on them and their families make it difficult to evaluate the accomplishments of the projects goals'. Above all, women have to be specifically approached to encourage their participation in new projects.

There is a broader consensus among the development economists that investing in women's education, health and family planning along with their access to agricultural land, inputs, credit and extension would lead to higher productivity and more efficient use of resources. It also contributes to environmentally sustainable development and produces significant social gains, for example, better household nutrition and reduced infant, child and maternal mortality. The failure to specifically include the needs of women in rural development projects often leads to their exclusion from project planning and design, and will limit their benefits from these projects. In a World Bank operation evaluation study, Murphy (1995) stated that insufficient attention to the roles of women was

detrimental to project efficiency and sustainability.

The overall objective of this paper is to study the participation of women in irrigation development projects and its impact on the household and family well being. From this study it should be possible to recommend strategies, whereby women can participate efficiently in irrigation and agricultural development projects. The direct participation of women should help them capture their fair share of benefits for greater welfare of the household.

WOMEN'S ROLE IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The women's position has been neglected and her role in production has been under-estimated. The concept that the male is the head of the household has guided development planners to focus their attention on male farmers. This contributed to the weakening of the household unit and the position of women (Presvelou, 1980). Detailed empirical studies of women's roles in local production systems have grown. There has been increasing pressure for more accurate estimates of women's contribution to national production systems.

The proportion of women in the agricultural labor force is (ILO) 34 percent for Pakistan. Cloud (1984) gave two possible explanations for the question of what benefits women receive from their unpaid agriculture labor work. One is that women are altruists. They derive their utility from the satisfaction of others, from serving their families to be healthy well cared for and well fed. Second that woman has little choice. Societies are arranged in such a way that women's independent access to productive resources, to labor markets, to information, to political and legal rights are seriously constrained.

Even though governments are well aware of the need to improve the living conditions and the status of women living in rural areas, higher level policy makers interested with the implementation of such programmes are often males. Either they don't have a specific knowledge of the problem of female non-

participation in development, or else underestimate women's needs. Rogers (1979) stated that the most common reaction among male planners in the field, who are asked question about the role of women, is, "I never thought about that".

An extensive review of the literature on the gender aspects of irrigation management by Zwartveen (1995) shows that most irrigation plans and designs continue to be based on the assumption that farm households consist of a male farmer, his wife, and a number of children. The difference between male and female access to resources (including irrigation) and the assumption that women can be automatically counted upon to provide free family labor to irrigate crops lead to irrigation projects that are poorly designed. Irrigation Project designers seldom realize that men and women have different incentives to invest in irrigation and thus evaluate new irrigation opportunities differently. Johnson (1996) stated that advancements in agricultural, irrigation and environmental technologies failed to acknowledge and include the role women play in these areas and left them unprepared for meeting the needs of today's agricultural activities. Okeya (1988) argued that current national development strategies in both rural and urban areas in Eastern Africa focus on women as consumers and passive recipients of new technologies. Women continue to be seen as social welfare problems and are not yet considered as a critical key to the solution of the rural development problems. This was confirmed by Chaney (1987) when she reported that there is a well documented tendency to ignore women's productive activities in projects that focus on agriculture production. In order to solve these problems, Okeya (1988) reported that many governments have made isolated efforts to lift the profile of women through the appointing of women to higher level decision making positions. Yet these appointments are not supported by sustained efforts to transform policies and create rural developments in such ways that will improve the living conditions of women.

THE FACTORS INFLUENCING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

The lack of investment in women's education is strongly associated with women's relatively low rates of participation in development. Also education and other social and cultural barriers contribute to women's inability to obtain credits (World Bank, 1995). Jiggins (1986) pointed out that there is insufficient attention by agricultural researchers to the institutional barriers, which prohibit the exchange of relevant experiences and information between women, agricultural researchers, and extension agents.

One of the most critical issues addressed during the women's decade of 1975 – 1985 is the effectiveness of national development policies and institutional machinery in facilitating the empowerment of women. The ability of women to control the products or income earned from their labor and to expand their economic activities through capital formation is severely constrained by institutional and socio-cultural barriers (Beoku-Betts, 1970). Cloud (1984) stated that there are, however, a number of other factors that affect the structure of female participation and decision making in the household. Such as the economic status of the household, a women's age, and the availability of child care. A major factor influencing women's productivity is the extent to which they have access to education and training. There is a general agreement that education increases productivity and substantial literature exists documenting the positive effect of women's education on human capital development, paid labor force participation and agricultural production.

Brown *et al.* (1995) wrote that there is a wide diversity in laws (civil, religious and customary) governing women's rights to own or lease land. In some developing countries where women don't have the right to own land, Murphy (1995) pointed out that some evidence suggest that independent land rights for women could enhance both the efficiency with which resources are used and the well being of women and their households.

THE IMPACT AND BENEFITS OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION ON FAMILY WELFARE

There is considerable evidence from past experiences that

increases in women's well being yield important integrational benefits and productivity gains in the future. Improving the status of women and increasing their access to assets and services will increase the returns on investment in human resources and improve the prospects for sustainable economic growth (World Bank, 1995). Studies show that if women and men share the same educational characteristics and input levels, farm specific yield would increase between 7–22 percent. An educated mother who seeks preventive care and early treatment of illness for herself and her children will reduce the cost of health care and in many cases, prevent premature death (World Bank, 1994 and 1995). Brown *et al.* (1995) and Murphy (1995) studies showed that women's productivity in agriculture could be higher than that of men, if women have the same access to services and they kept control of the income from their work. Evidence also indicates that women are equally, if not more likely than men to be innovators. For example, a recent study in Zambia found that wealthier farm households headed by females were more likely to adopt improved maize varieties than households headed by males (Brown, 1995). Guyer (1980) found that women in Ghana spend 74 percent of their income on food and minor household spending, 16 percent on personal transport and 10 percent on clothes. Tripp (1985) argued that women's production and income are more valuable than an equivalent male contribution in determining child welfare, and rural women's work loads are a particularly sensitive indicator of the time available for childcare.

In societies, where women participate in the market economy and have direct access to resources, women have higher status and greater power in intra-household decision making (Cloud, 1984). Zwartveen (1996) and World Bank publication (1994 and 1995) confirmed that female household members tend to allocate resources more directly to children, while men tend to allocate resources to adults. Brown *et al* (1995) stated that it is widely perceived that men spend a higher portion of their incremental income on goods for their personal consumption, by contrast, women are more likely to purchase goods for their

children and for general household consumption. A World Bank publication (1995) stated that providing credits directly to women and also their access to resources has a positive effect on household and individual welfare and improved gender equality. The study also showed that female borrowing has a greater effect on girls schooling and per capita expenditure than does male borrowing. The possibility of receiving credit may give women greater bargaining power within the household. Kumar (1994) confirmed that both economic theory and empirical observation have generally shown that increasing the women's' share of income (the value of women's time) results in a higher marginal utility for household food consumption, child nutrition and other investments in the quality of human capital than income from other sources.

A multi country study by the IFPRI (1995) and a World Bank (1995) on time allocation support the commonly held belief that women spent more hours in productive activities per day than men (The Gender cg Newsletter, 1995). Consequently, the daily level of nutrition and the living standard may depend more heavily on the woman's income than the man's. IFPRI studies have underlined the importance of women's control of resources in attaining better welfare outcomes in food, nutrition, education and other health statuses of children and their family members. Brown *et. al* (1995) reported that there is an increasing body of evidence from Asia, Africa and Latin America which confirms the positive impact of female control over the income on household food expenditure and caloric intake.

Ferguson (1994) wrote "Women and the Environment makes a strong case for women's certainty in efforts to promote a more sustainable agriculture. Women farmers' diverse knowledge and farming practices are central to agricultural and social sustainability. Women are often the repositories of knowledge and practices that underpin the maintenance of biological diversity and other ecological processes. Their marginalization from the agricultural sciences works to undermine both the social and environmental bases of sustainability itself".

Failing to include all the beneficiaries, both men and women in rural development projects is one of the main reasons for project failures to contribute to the welfare of rural people, the main beneficiaries of these projects. Webb (1991) reported that some of the reasons for the failure of a Gambia Irrigation Project were: (1) a gap between the irrigation needs and the equipment provided to meet these needs, and (2) the lack of user participation in the planning stage of the project, which gave rise to the gap in the understanding between the planners and the participants about the role of the project in the local economy.

Research done by Beoku-Betts (1990) in Sierra Leone, on the implications of the introduction of new technologies to develop the production of swamp rice on women, shows that these new techniques had an adverse effect on the Labor input of women.

The failure to involve women in development not only has a negative economic impact but also a negative social impact on women and their families as well. Islam (1976) in her paper, *Role of Women in Socio-Economic Development in Bangladesh*, emphasized that women in Bangladesh perpetuate a lifestyle too inadequate for development, and they transfer to their children the same pattern of behavior, which seriously inhibits improvement in the rural areas. The World Bank publication (1995) reported that making public investments in infrastructure would be stronger if gender differences in the use of projects and services were taken into consideration. The United Nations reported (1995) and Murphy (1995) argued that women's full participation and the equity between men and women are the keys to social and economic development.

HOW TO GET WOMEN INVOLVED IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

The problems of how to get women involved in the development projects are not fundamentally different from the problems of how to get a local population involved in the adoption of a new technique or process (Beoku – Betts, 1990). Kumar (1994) stated that "Like the need to provide inputs and resources to

small farmer's improving women's access to productive resources will require innovative policy approaches. Increasing women's participation in design and implementation of policy mechanisms is crucial to ensure that women receive the intended benefits".

In Sindh province of Pakistan, the same situation may be found with a combination of problems and potentials for involving women participation in irrigation management projects. The problems women face in irrigation sector in Pakistan may include; lack of access to control and management of land and other resources, lack of access to credit, lack of agricultural extension training, etc. Besides, the experience of the on-going irrigation reform process in Sindh province demonstrates some more problems for engendering irrigation management schemes. These include; no participation of women in the decision-making processes, no clear-cut rights as water users, and no representation in the irrigation-related organizations, such as SIDA, AWBs and FOs in Sindh province (Taherani Abida and Talpur, Musharaf, 2004).

Overholt *et. al* (1984) pointed out that one of the barriers to translating research activities about women into effective and beneficial development programs has been the absence of an adequate analytical framework for integrating women into project analysis. Integration of women is essential for transforming policy concerns into practical realities. She suggested three basic elements project analysis framework, which include: (1) Analysis of women's productive activities within the agriculture system, (2) Identification of factors influencing women's productivity, and (3) Application of this knowledge to each stage of the project process.

In the paper, Towards Gender Balance in Irrigation Management, Hulsebosch and Ombara (1995) discussed the research and experiments that were undertaken to include all Kenyan water users, both male and female in the participatory approach. The three measures that Provincial Irrigation Unit (PIU) in the Nyanza province in Kenya took to improve gender balance in formal decision-making are: (1) PIU requires that at each meeting a minimum of 50 percent of the water users present are

females, (2) A women - only meeting is necessary to discuss the role of women in rice farming and their ideas about participation in committees, and (3) The women's ideas on gender composition of committees are discussed with the whole group, group consensus has to be reached on the issue and subsequently election are held supervised by PIU staff.

The evaluation of the PIU indicated that the percent of women in water users meeting increased from 10 percent to 45 percent on average. The participation of women in discussions and decision making in the meetings did not change. Women - only meetings were received well, 90 percent of the women indicated the wish to have equal number of female and male representatives in the committees. In the majority of the groups, half of the chosen representatives were women. The performance of the chosen women during the implementation period was similar to their male colleagues. In the area of participation in the design procedures, right of way negotiation, and leadership training, men continue to be much more involved than women. The number of women with knowledge about the project increased from 50 - 60 percent to around 90 percent.

The researchers recommended that men should also be addressed with gender issues, so that they could understand and underwrite the involvement of women in decision making concerning irrigation - related activities. Also, they recommended the change of the women - only meetings to a general sensitization meeting. Man and Women need to split into groups to enhance open discussions on issues like gender composition of committees and the role of men and women in rice farming. Probably this will convince men of the need for women's participation in these committees.

In Burkina Faso, Zuidberg (1994) described the integrated development project (PDISAB). The projects overall objectives were to raise agricultural production without damaging the environment, and solve the rural population most urgent problems related to water, health care, education and illiteracy with special attention to women. However, the projects documents don't

describe the women's productive role or differentiate it from the men's role, whether with respect to production, the use of natural resources or organizations. The proposed plan of action for women is not related to the other plans, which the project intends to support, indicating that women's development is regarded as unrelated to mainstream development.

The study in Burkina Faso stressed on three suggestions: (1) Gender training of both decision-makers and field staff must be included in the project activities, (2) It is important to include a women and development specialist in the project team, and (3) The project proposal should be worked out in detail to be able to shape and cover gender-related aspects.

A South-Asian example of Andhra Pradesh, India, Groverman and Van Walsum (1994) studied the expected impact of irrigation projects on women. Two projects, The Andhra Pradesh Surface Water Lift Irrigation Scheme (APLIFT) and the Andhra Pradesh Borewell Irrigation Schemes Projects (APWELL) were selected.

The projects aim is to improve the living conditions of small and marginal farmers through sustainable and sound environmentally sound interventions. The idea is to do this in such a way that women can become equal partners of the male farmers in agriculture and other activities. The main objective is to increase the agricultural production of marginal and small farmers, providing them with irrigation facilities. The women showed interest in undertaking joint activities but felt they needed guidance. The study showed that:

1. Although the project objectives refer explicitly to women farmers as the main beneficiaries, there is lack of gender focus participation in the design is a general statement that training will include gender sensitization. Apparently it is believed that if small and marginal farmers participate, women will automatically participate, Moreover, no specific output and activities and in specific inputs and budget allocation have been provided to ensure the equal participation of women.
2. In one of the project areas there is tension between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. Farmer's inequity is because only part of the

community benefits from irrigation facilities.

3. The non-beneficiary women and households may lose out in terms of nutrition, health, means of production, self-image and work load. They may gain in terms of employment. The authors recommended that the following activities be taken at the project level, during each implementation phase:
4. At the initial stage, target beneficiaries (marginal households managed by women should be identified. Ways for involving various categories of women in the project must be carefully examined: a distinction must be made between women from households with access to irrigation, and women outside their category who could be involved in other ways.
5. Baseline information should be collected on village socio-economic profiles, gender division of labor access to institutions, and existing village level institutions.
6. Sufficient time must be allowed for building up the effective participation of women. Women participation in irrigation projects doesn't come automatically; it must be facilitated. An important first step will be to form women's groups around specific activities of direct and practical interest to the women involved.
7. Women's groups should be used to recruit labor during the construction stage.
8. At the initial operational stage, the staff should decide who should be trained for Operation & Maintenance. They should also consider the feasibility of involving women in such a training program.
9. An operational strategy must be developed to encourage households managed by women to participate such strategy should include information on the irrigation scheme and loan and credit facilities that are really accessible to women.

In their recommendations for promoting women's participation, Brown *et al.* (1995) stated that women could achieve much more in food production, provision and utilization for good nutrition if agricultural researchers plant scientists, extension agents and policy makers would only level the agricultural playing field and women's access to resources. There is a need of technologies that relieve women's burdens in agricultural production, time constraints, and household maintenance without sacrificing the ability to earn independent incomes. The problems

are compounded by cultural practices that constrain women's rights and their access to resources. Some of the major actions required include an improved awareness for both men and women at all levels, from farmers, service providers in agricultural and other institutions to policy makers (Kumar, 1994).

An important question by Presvelou (1980) is whether one should encourage projects and programs planned exclusively for women or development policies, which are intended to improve living conditions of specific groups. Murphy (1995) (USAID evaluation of Women in Development Program) and Mickelwait *et al.* (1976) added that the integration of women in mainstream projects was more effective than either women only projects, or women's components in larger projects, unless these components were well integrated into the main project objectives.

Murphy (1995) stated that four conditions were found to be associated with satisfactory achievement of gender-related actions in development projects. These include; (1) Country involvement and commitment to gender related activities and projects as a whole, (2) The clear integration of gender related objectives within the over all project objectives, (3) Presence of staff with gender experience, and (4) Supervisory attention to gender action.

Brown *et al.* (1995) emphasized that surveys and other methods of data collection can be designed to ensure that gender – desegregated data are properly collected and analyzed to ensure that the needs of women and other intended beneficiaries are adequately reflected in policy and project formulation. A range of participatory planning and management techniques should reflect the significant transfer of control to the community and local levels.

CONCLUSION

By directing public resources through the policies, towards the projects that reduce gender inequality, policy makers are promoting not only equality today but also a higher rate of human capital formation, slower population growth and stronger economic growth tomorrow. However, none of these goals can be reached

without women's participation. Women participation in rural development is increasing to ensure their fair share of the benefits. And as many studies have shown, increasing the benefits to women has a positive impact on the family welfare.

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