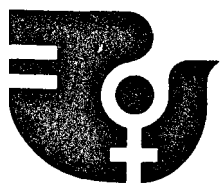




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THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Prepared by the Food and Agriculture Organization
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ABSTRACT

Women everywhere, but especially in rural areas, constitute an underprivileged group who through tradition and poor preparation are characterized by inferior social status. They themselves develop negative attitudes toward participation in the social, economic and political life of their country.

Although the reversal of this situation is a goal in itself, even through self-interest a country should throw its resources into bringing women into parity with men. In the rural sector, with which this report is concerned, the efficient use of women working together with men is one of the primary means by which improvements in many fields can be brought about. Food production animal husbandry and the land tenure system are a few.

The current involvement of rural women in productive activities is discussed and the reasons for the state of affairs are evaluated. A first attempt is made to clarify and codify types of "social visibility" of women and to list the obstacles limiting women's performance in development tasks.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Reasons for the study

Women's participation in their society has in recent years become a topic of major concern. Research has yielded ample evidence of the disproportionate social differences which exist between men and women to warrant the proclamation by the United Nations (UN) of an International Women's Year in 1975.

Everywhere, but especially in rural areas, women make up an underprivileged group characterized by inferior social status. They are discriminated against and themselves develop negative attitudes toward social participation. They give in to the situation because of tradition and poor preparation for the role they could and should play in the development of their country. But the efficient use of rural women working together with men is one of the primary means by which improvements in several aspects of agricultural life can be brought about in food production, animal husbandry, the land tenure system, the physical environment of the village and social relationships in the community. Women's participation in rural development should not, however, be considered solely in terms of their contribution to the society and the economy. It is a goal in its own right. The integration of women into the social, economic and political life of their community - as agricultural workers and citizens on the one hand, and as wives and mothers on the other - enhances women's personal destiny.

The emphasis given by the United Nations to rural development and efficient use of human resources constitutes a powerful stimulus for action. On the part of the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) it naturally brings to the forefront an interest in reviewing the condition of women as compared with that of men in similar backgrounds, in critically evaluating the action which has already been taken to improve women's participation in agricultural and rural development, and in suggesting measures to bridge the existing gap.

This report deals mainly with rural women in the developing countries. This choice was made to narrow down the limits of the investigation and analysis to areas where technological innovations have not yet become a cultural trait.

The report has two components:

- (a) a study of the ambiguities of women's dual participation, familial and non-familial, within the context of rural communities of the developing nations;
- (b) a critical appraisal of the obstacles which impede the participation of women in rural development programmes.

It is recognized that women's participation in rural development cannot be fully understood without an understanding of men's participation in corresponding roles and activities, but the simultaneous analysis which this would require was not possible in the present context.

1.2 Background of the study

1.2.1 United Nations Resolutions

The United Nations and its specialized agencies have in recent years intensified their efforts to define and encourage rural development. Improving the status of rural women is a means of facilitating rural development and to this end, a series of resolutions dealing directly or indirectly with the topic have been adopted, or are in the process of being drafted. Among these resolutions, four are particularly relevant to the present study, neither because they have a universal application or because they treat the problem of rural women in specific terms. These resolutions are the following:

- (a) Resolution 3010 (XXVII) entitled: "International Women's Year", adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations as its Twenty-Seventh Session on 11 January 1973;
- (b) Resolution 14 (XXIV) entitled: "Status of Rural Women, Especially Agricultural Workers", adopted by the Commission on the Status of Women at its 59th Plenary Meeting on 1 March 1972;
- (c) Resolution 3/71 on Agrarian Reform adopted by the FAO Conference at its Sixteenth Session in 1971.
- (d) Resolution VIII entitled: "Women and Food" adopted by the First Committee of the World Food Conference, Rome, 5-16 November 1974.

The scope and objectives of these four resolutions are complementary and in some ways they overlap. When combined, they provide broad guidelines for dealing with the status of rural women and suggest measures to help them put their abilities to full use in the development of their country.

1.2.2 Women in Rural Development as Subject of Study

Participation in rural development has now become both a driving force and an inspiration for action in most countries, especially the developing ones. The goals of development must include: satisfaction of the elementary needs of food, shelter, clothing and health, and improvement in the way of life of the more than 60 percent of the world's population living in rural areas; establishment of social justice through distribution of goods and services; freeing the individual from the uncertainties of nature through education and self-fulfilment; breaking the marginality of rural masses (Kötter, 1973, page 2), through participation in all the activities and at all levels of command. This is an exacting task. It is a gigantic one. It calls for the mobilization of all human resources to carry it out.

When one speaks of human resources, it is naturally implied that both sexes, are included. Inadequate use of either men or women is a waste which seriously impairs development, makes it poor or unbalanced and, because of the increasing consciousness of social justice, creates political and social unrest.

Both sexes, when adequately educated and trained, make valuable contributions to development. It can be said that women have the greater impact because of the socialising influence they have on their children, and hence on the nation's potential. Yet, strangely enough, women (especially rural women) are the "neglected resource in development" (FAO/UNESCO/ILO, 1970, page 2; ECA, 1972; Ford Foundation, 1973). They lag far behind men in education, work participation and performance. They do not belong to groups in which decisions, either about their own future or that of their children, are taken, in short, rural women suffer from inadequate "social visibility".

It is not necessary to justify either the role or contribution of women in overall economic and social development; this has already been done adequately several times in recent years and women's continuous involvement in the life of their communities has been amply demonstrated (FAO/ECA/SIDA, 1972; UNESCO, 1970, pages 20-21; UNICEF, Expre-208, 1972, page 90; UN, 1970; ECOSOC, Commission on the Status of Women, 1970 - to mention but a few publications). Instead, this study begins where others usually leave off, namely with a diagnosis of women's inadequate participation in rural development programmes and the identification of the obstacles in their way.

The role of women in rural development, as in overall development, can be classified into two broad categories, as follows:

- (a) the labour market and community affairs; the rural woman contributes to the productive agricultural labour force either as a paid labourer or, more often, as an unpaid helper or manager of the family-farm enterprise. She may also participate in all activities, including the decision-making processes, within the various institutions of the social system, such as the economy, politics, legislation and church affairs.
- (b) the home: the rural woman performs various tasks which are directly related to her role as wife and mother as well as educator of her young children.

The former category defines woman's non-familial involvement; the latter her intra-familial one. They are complementary and the ways in which they interact or are prevented from interacting give different profiles of women's social visibility. In some cultures, for example, the mother role is valued to the exclusion of the others; in other cultures, more roles are allocated to women.

CHAPTER II

RURAL WOMEN'S SOCIAL VISIBILITY

2.1 Social Participation and the Significance of Roles

All human groups and cultures create social roles and role expectations in order to facilitate relationships and understanding and to set standards of work participation. With the help of these role expectations it becomes easier for the individual to know not only how others in his environment are going to behave in a given situation but also what others expect of him.

But society not only defines social roles, but also exerts a controlling influence on groups and individuals to make them comply with its expectations. Roles are therefore a combination of behaviour expectations and social pressures, which are directed at individuals, not simply on the basis of their individual attributes but also on that of their sex and age position within the group. Thus, activities excluded in the rural mother's role are not only feeding and taking care of the children and of the household but also feeding the animals, growing the vegetables and helping in the fields. Reactions to and judgements of her performance depend on the expectations of a rural mother.

Social roles, like social status, are classified into superior and inferior. Sex and age are the basic and universal criteria for differentiation. Individuals who perform tasks contrary to their society's role expectations risk disapproval, leading to conflict. For instances, women who take up qualified farm jobs in rural communities which value only motherhood expose themselves to harsh judgements.

To avoid conflicts that might arise from deviations from prescribed social roles, every society has devised adaptative and coercive mechanisms, such as moral precepts, customs, laws, religious beliefs and rationalizations, whose purpose is to integrate individuals into their societal environment. Every major social institution related to work and life - such as the economic policies of enterprises (trade and credit policies), land tenure systems, customs of marriage and of family form, size and relationships, structure of family authority, religious and voluntary organizations, is equipped with mechanisms of positive encouragement and of negative sanction. Consequently, few men and women will brave social pressures or physical hardships to fill social roles which are contrary to sexual role differentiations imposed by their culture.

Rural development programmes may introduce social roles which are at variance or even incompatible with those prescribed by tradition. For instance, women might be expected to take up paid work as agricultural workers or accept other qualified jobs; but planners of programmes aimed at the improvement of rural women's roles cannot ignore the resistance of the community concerned. On the contrary, they should take into consideration the existing coercive mechanisms and avoid suggesting changes which might be expected to arouse strong resistance.

To sum up, social participation is the way in which individuals and groups relate to socially defined activities and goals through their specific social status and roles. Correlatively, the more individuals and groups conform to society's expectations, the more their social roles and social status are reinforced and valued.

2.2 Division of labour

All human societies divide labour according to sex. Though specific tasks performed by one sex may vary from one society to another, all societies have to some extent established sexual differentiation in social roles.

There would be no harm in this if a value judgement prejudicial to women were not attached to it. Instead there is evidence to show that household activities generally have lower economic and social prestige, although these activities are valued by all societies because procreation and the rearing of children are basic functions for the maintenance and perpetuation of the group. In most societies the ambiguity of women's social participation is established from the time of birth. Females are trained primarily to become mothers and transmitters to their children of the community's cultural heritage; their contribution in this regard for which in many societies they may be highly esteemed, overshadows their performance as individuals. Men, on the other hand, are generally valued primarily according to their individual contributions to productive goals in the society and only secondarily for their role as fathers.

When participation in socially esteemed activities is barred because of sex, race, religion or education, the group so barred tends to develop attitudes of underprivilege such as withdrawal, submission, inferiority, passivity. Unless appropriate measures are taken to change them, these attitudes will persist and will tend to be perpetuated.

2.3 Factors in Women's Social Marginality

Women in all societies constitute an underprivileged or marginal group when compared with the equivalent male population. Because of this they may have developed corresponding traits such as irregular work commitment, acceptance of poorly paid jobs, absence from community activities, and withdrawal from decision-making processes. Their marginality is due mainly to three sets of factors:

- the dual role of women;
- native institutions and attitudes;
- the effects of imported technology.

2.3.1 The Dual Role of Women

In all societies, women are broadly defined with respect to two kinds of activities and their underlying values: the home which includes all activities aimed at the organization of family life and relationships (familial roles), and labour and community affairs (non-familial roles). In the urban areas of developed countries, it has been found that the more a society adopts technological innovations the more these two reference values clash (Presvelou, 1972). By contrast, the more a society is rural and operates on a traditional mode of production and social relationships, the fewer conflicts there may be. In this type of traditional society, social roles are rigidly differentiated so that men will not assume female roles which are rated as inferior. Inversely, women will not transgress by taking on male activities. They accept social marginality by adapting their behaviour to the goals of their community.

2.3.2 Native Institutions and Attitudes

Women's social marginality is furthermore explained by the influence upon them of native institutions such as religion, marriage and the prevailing type of economy. They are

the major institutional and attitudinal systems which can prevent women from achieving full social participation.

As an example of the negative effects of religious beliefs upon women, it has been found that pre-Islamic society imposed no limitations on the participation of women in any sphere of life. No doubt, hard living conditions in those times forced men and women to share in almost all tribal activities. Islam, however, though it granted women some rights, made them unequal to men in matters of marriage (polygamy, repudiation), inheritance and testimony (Badran, 1972, page 8). Consequently, Muslim women's participation in economic activities performed outside the home has been banished. In Egypt, the proportion of active female population in 1960 was 7.9 percent against 87.4 percent of the male active population. The proportion of working women among the whole female population was even lower - 4.8 percent (Badran, 1972, page 12). The same author gives the figure of 15.4 percent in 1964 for Lebanese women out of the total active population (op. cit. 13). In this case, religious dogma has reinforced the mother role. This attitude finds an echo among those Muslim leaders who are still strongly opposed to women being employed (Hafez, 1965).

Customs relating to early marriage and high fertility also restrict women's employment outside the home. The proportion among the married female population in the 15-19 year age group is as high as 73 percent in Pakistan. In East Java 68.8 percent of women marry while still under 17 years of age (Ramos Sahani, 1973, page 37).

The subsistence economy has depressive effect on women's status. Several studies in African countries have established a direct relationship between low farming technology in a subsistence economy and female work participation. The system is based on shifting cultivation, where food production is the woman's task and carries a low social status. The cash-crop economy, based on plough cultivation, is carried out mainly by men with little help from women. It receives all the attention of development programmes, and enjoys a high level of prestige (Boserup, 1970, pages 16-33; ECA/FAO, 1972, page 45). A survey conducted by the UN Commission on the status of Women supports this view:

"..... Where subsistence economy is the main source of livelihood, women play a very active role Many countries reported on the low status of women in subsistence agriculture and in rural areas in general." (UN Commission on the Status of Women; 1970, page 4).

2.3.3 The Effects of Imported Technology

A third set of factors which affect the social status of women are new techniques and behaviours. Contacts between developed and developing countries have in some cases introduced changes which have emphasized the lower status of rural women in the developing countries. Such was the case, for example, in Rwanda where the colonial powers introduced a new educational system through schools, but paid special attention to teaching boys, thus reinforcing the existing rigid male-female social roles (Habimana - Nyirasafari, 1970).

The introduction of technological and scientific farming has in some instances further contributed to women's marginality. Development projects, agricultural services, training in modern farming techniques and the ownership of farming machinery and land have been aimed mainly at men (FAO, 1970). Some examples of the negative impact of scientific developments and technological advances on women's agricultural roles follows:

"Often the only type of innovations possible for the women farmers are those involving the use of (her own) additional labour, and not those involving the reduction of labour due to mechanization". (Wills, 1967, on Kenya). "Women perform 55 percent of the agricultural labour in a 'traditional' village and 68 percent of it in a village where 'improved farming techniques' are used". (Boserup, 1970, page 21, on Central African Republic).

The introduction of new kinds of crops, although it has increased women's participation in the labour force, had not always increased their incomes; in modern villages, there may even be a decrease. In the Bouské region (Ivory Coast) only 10 to 35 percent of the family income is allocated to women as against 50 percent in traditional villages (De The, 1968, page 83).

The relative unimportance given to women's participation is reflected in the budgets of development projects. Women's programmes generally receive a low proportion; and in many instances when funds run out they are the first to suffer from budget cuts. These decisions are often based on beliefs and attitudes prescribing the place of the woman as primarily in the home, with a subsidiary occupation in the family farm or in animal husbandry. With a small budget the argument goes, home economics can teach them the rudiments of home management, child care, cooking, sewing, as well as a few skills for earning a modern income. This argument ignores the fact, repeatedly verified in the field, that home economics is one of the most effective channels for contacting women and teaching them how to seek a balance between the traditional role of homemaker and the equally traditional role of hard-working agricultural labourer. The ideas and rationalizations behind the allocation of modest funds for the training of rural women have been denounced by several recent reports (FAO, 1970b, page 35; ILO, 1964; ECA, 1967).

In the broad framework of social marginality, which presents rural women from fully using their abilities to satisfy their own, their family's and their country's needs, the three sets of restricting factors are clearly interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

2.4 Unequal Social Visibility of Rural Women

Another concept - the degree of social visibility of rural women - is basic to our general analysis and to planning the services and programmes needed to help women to achieve balanced positions within the family and more effective participation in the country's development.

The social visibility of women is a concept which allows us to determine the place that women occupy in their respective societies. This indicator is obtained by combining numerous elements which make up rural women's two roles - that of mothers, educators and homemakers on one hand, and that of their involvement in income-producing activities and community affairs on the other. Central to understanding and interpreting this concept are the cultural and religious beliefs as well as economic and legal customs and practices which either favour or impede rural women's social participation.

In trying to determine social visibility, we aim at appreciating women's involvement in rural development: efficiency of their efforts and the degree of their self-fulfillment. Social visibility can be expressed in terms of social participation and status (high or low) attributed by society to such participation.

Patterns of women's participation in familial and extrafamilial tasks show great variations from one rural area to another, and from one country to another. It is therefore possible to construct a continuum or range between two extremes. One extreme defines groups of women with low intrafamilial and extrafamilial visibility; the other those with high visibility. The terms "low" and "high" are relative values. Essentially they refer to (a) the congruence between roles ascribed to be expected from and effectively filled by women, and (b) the contributions of women to development tasks, given the needs of the national community.

The criteria for constructing a "profile" of rural women's visibility are not as yet codified because further research is still needed; however, among them should be included quantitative and qualitative data on rural women's activities, information on the accepted legal, customary, economic and political practices and women's - and men's - rights and obligations, family and kinship systems, land tenure and religious systems. These data should be itemized according to whether or not a particular activity or practice relates to woman's commitment to the home (intrafamilial - I.F.); or, on the contrary, to work and community affairs (extrafamilial - E.F.).

As a first attempt towards clarifying the concept, four types of social visibility of rural women are presented below. Intermediary types could be constructed for greater precision and practical usefulness.

These four types are:

- A. Low I.F. and E.F. visibility
- B. Low I.F. combined with high (or medium) E.F. visibility
- C. High (or medium) I.F. combined with low E.F. visibility
- D. High I.F. and E.F. visibility

Information on the situation of rural women drawn from descriptions of countries in Africa, south east Asia and Latin America, though incomplete, does allow us to substantiate the above four types, as follows:

A. Low I.F. and E.F. social visibility of rural women

This type designates women whose efficiency with regard to both the family and the area outside it is very poor. Women in this category are generally to be found at the lowest strata of all rural areas. Economic under-employment, complete lack of education, poor hygienic conditions, undernourishment and illness together contribute to their low productivity. In all cases, cultural and religious prohibitions reinforce their low social status.

In some areas or countries, women as a whole (and not only as an economic class) present this low profile. It dominates in rural areas which combine strong religious authority, utter poverty and complete illiteracy. To be underfed, ill, uneducated, pregnant from the day of their first menstruation until menopause, is the lot of women in some rural areas of south east Asia and of the Arab countries. "The best half of the population, the womenfolk, is confined at home - almost in jail" (Dumont, 1973, page 19, on Bangladesh). Such women lead a subhuman life, entirely dominated by the adversities of the physical environment, as do their menfolk.

Elsewhere, women's conditions are not so harsh but their whole life is confined within the homes. Arab women and girls in rural areas use all their time in household tasks. "They sweep the mud floors of the house daily and wet them to keep the dust down. They bake bread once or twice a week, starting before dawn and continuing until noon or later. They are responsible for the laundry and washing the dishes, as well as bringing water to the house in jars, often from a considerable distance" (Badran, 1972, page 21). Their role as educators of children and managers of family resources is seriously impaired as a consequence of illiteracy and poverty.

Concerning illiteracy, it was pointed out during a seminar held in 1970 that the proportion of illiterate young females 15-24 years old was 84.2 percent in Egypt and 91.3 percent in the Sudan (Badran, 1972, page 39). These figures increase with the women's age. Country reports from the Economic Commission for Africa give comparable data.

Likewise, the management of family resources is difficult if not impossible as a consequence of poverty. Data illustrate how resources for food, housing, clothing and miscellaneous expenditures in the budget of poor rural families are distributed. They show that often four-fifths of the family's resources are spent to cover basic food needs. What is even more appalling to the analyst of such budgets is that as the level of annual expenditure per consumption unit increases and the average number of individuals per family decreases, the proportion of food expenditures in upper-income bracket households is greater than that of the poorest ones.

Poverty, illiteracy, confinement to the house, undernutrition, malnutrition and superstition tend not only to reinforce but also to perpetuate a pattern of idleness and low efficiency in all activities including agriculture, and to inhibit the full utilization of rural women as human resources for national development.

Even from a purely selfish economic and social point of view, no country can afford to neglect the potential contribution of womanpower. An illustration of the realistic approach is the recognition of women's participation in food production.

"... if one could single out the main factor that has precipitated interest in the education and training of women, it is probably the critical shortage of food supplies. Labour force statistics are beginning to show the significant extent to which women are actively responsible for food production in different parts of the world. This applies particularly to countries where subsistence agriculture is the main source of livelihood". (UNICEF, E/ICEF/L.1275, 1970, page 12).

Women with such a low level of social visibility can represent a formidable obstacle to change for their children as well. Attitudes of women regarding their own submissive role are perpetuated in their daughters. In Egypt, a survey in rural areas indicated that about 33 percent of mothers rejected any education for their girls whereas only 4 percent did so for their boys (Badran, 1972, page 27). In Lebanon, the mothers' hopes for their daughters are related to marriage whereas their hopes for their sons centre on education and employment (Prothro, 1971, page 126).

B. Low I.F. combined with high (or medium) E.F. social visibility

This group includes women who, in relative terms and within a given culture, deploy an intense extrafamilial activity but dispose of limited time and skills on tasks in their familial role. This pattern is found in rural areas where food production is taken care of by women with little help from men. In the African countries which lie south of the Sahara where shifting cultivation predominates, the major part of agricultural work is done by women. They are hard-working and spend many hours of their day in the fields. Women actively participate in farming operations such as planting, weeding and harvesting and in post-crop operations such as processing. In areas where cash-crop production is developed they also contribute, but only as unskilled labourers during the peak seasons of agricultural work.

In this system of farming, women have a limited right to support from their husbands. To ensure their own and their children's maintenance and subsistence, in addition to working in the fields, women market their crops. A woman's day is thus spent out of doors in producing and selling food. The little time which is left for the home is spent in preparing food, which includes time-consuming operations such as carrying water over long distances, gathering food crops, processing and cooking the meal. Little, if any, time is left to care for the children, or the home, or to create a favourable family environment.

Comparative studies on the use of time in rural areas of Africa indicate that in most cases, women have a heavier work schedule and that they also work longer hours on more days annually than men do. Their heavy schedule is broken up because of the variety of monotonous daily tasks which they perform, which include the following:

production and processing of food crops;
marketing of food crops and/or training of home-made foods;
travel to and from the market;
carrying water and firewood;
cleaning and tidying up the house (in some regions they must even build the house);
care of the children;
attending to and/or performing social obligations such as family gatherings, ceremonies or rituals. ^{1/}

To be sure African women are highly valued as workers in their community. Furthermore, they enjoy considerable freedom of movement and relative economic independence. They are entitled to use the land, but are prevented from selling it by the prevailing land tenure system which, in Africa, is that of community ownership (ECA/FAO, 1972, page 45).

The lack of time-saving facilities (household utensils, agricultural tools and proximity of clean water) and training in both agriculture and home management are the main obstacles to their social and economic fulfilment.

C. High (or medium) I.F. combined with low E.F. social visibility

In this category are grouped rural women who are accorded low regard as agricultural workers and who play a very secondary role, if any at all, in community affairs. Lack of the education and training which would allow them to hold qualified jobs in agriculture is the consequence not only of the country's economic underdevelopment but also, and more importantly, of traditional attitudes and religious beliefs concerning women's role.

Society places a high value on procreation and socialization which are considered the "natural" attributes of women; but it does not either create conditions or provide women with education and training, both of which are necessary for a satisfactory performance of extra-familial functions.

These women's relatively high status within the home contrasts with their low extra-familial one. In some rural areas of Latin America and North Africa (Tunisia) women's social visibility corresponds to this profile; in the former case, resulting from the combined effects of Hispanic conquest and Catholic dogma, in the latter as a consequence of the patriarchal family system and Koranic moral precepts. Both, however, value the mother-role which is in complete opposition to the male role.

In such situations, some jobs become "female", they have a social stigma attached to them and men will not perform them. Inversely, women will not be allowed to perform jobs of higher status and prestige. Rural women tend to be massively employed in unskilled work - on coffee plantations, for example - and to abandon their economic role as soon as the family income increases. Hence, the mother role of rural women is valued by both the society and by women themselves who consider it as their specific calling, better suited to them than the low-prestige economic role.

D. High E.F. and I.F. social visibility

Women in rural areas of the developing countries do not seem to have attained this degree of social visibility in any large numbers, with one, or possibly two, exceptions in some parts of Africa and China.

^{1/} Through polygamy the burden of work is shared with other wives so that a woman does not alone have to care for the husband.

On the African continent, women who are mainly engaged in trade for themselves belong to this type. Tradition has encouraged this activity, especially in cases where, according to customary law, women cannot claim support from their husbands for themselves or their children. The Yoruba woman of Nigeria and the women of Ghana are among the best illustrations. Half of the Yoruba women in Nigeria are engaged mainly in trade and 80 percent of village and urban trade in Ghana is handled by women (Boserup, 1970, page 93, 87). The power and influence of "fish mammies" is well known in Ghana (FAO, 1961, page 8).

However, it is difficult to group these women with rural women, even though they may originally have come from rural areas. Their chief occupation is established mainly in the city and they look to it for opportunities to develop their activity. Women who have reached this level of social visibility and who work side by side with men have more chance to assume a fair and balanced share and responsibility in the development of their nation.

Information about rural women in the People's Republic of China is scarce and does not allow factual descriptions. From the available data, it seems that policy toward women in general reflects the goals - primarily economic - set to bring China out of poverty. To this end, vast changes in the structure of everyday life are promoted. Women are encouraged to turn into independent, productive individuals through education, training and other incentives such as the prestige attributed to work participation. Women for example are cautioned against early marriage:

"Once you get married, you are bound to be harnessed by household chores, and if you have children early, it would inevitably affect your work and study" (SCMM, 1963, page 24).

At the same time, women are continuously encouraged to create new roles for themselves and to innovate.

The percentage of women on the Party's Central Committee - 4.5 percent in 1956 and about 8 percent in 1969 - indicates that women do not participate significantly in the political decision-making of their country. The situation does not seem to be different at lower levels and, furthermore, there is no evidence about their de facto participation.

In addition to the cases just mentioned, rural women who best exemplify this category are to be found in the urban areas of developing countries. These are professional women, trained in rural arts and crafts, in farm and household management, as rural engineers, dairy technicians or rural extension specialists in family life, youth movements and community affairs. Being qualified and working efficiently, they attain a high degree of intrafamilial and extrafamilial visibility. However, they represent a very small percentage and thus their impact on rural life is not yet very significant.

To increase their numbers and make their effects felt in the rural areas are the tasks of agricultural and rural development. Action programmes should attempt to create the conditions needed to encourage the progressive freeing of rural women from constraints imposed by the native culture and help them to increase their participation in economically productive tasks.

The improvement of the conditions of rural women cannot be obtained without a redefinition of men's roles inside and outside the home.

2.5 Rural Development and Women's Social Visibility

Rural development is widely defined as progress toward the acquisition of a series of goals in the rural sector which are valued by a particular society. To avoid negative effects

which occur when changes are unplanned or introduced at random or when the target populations are not ready for them and resist them as aggressions, and to speed up their positive effects, rural development increasingly tends to be seen as a result of a unified approach.

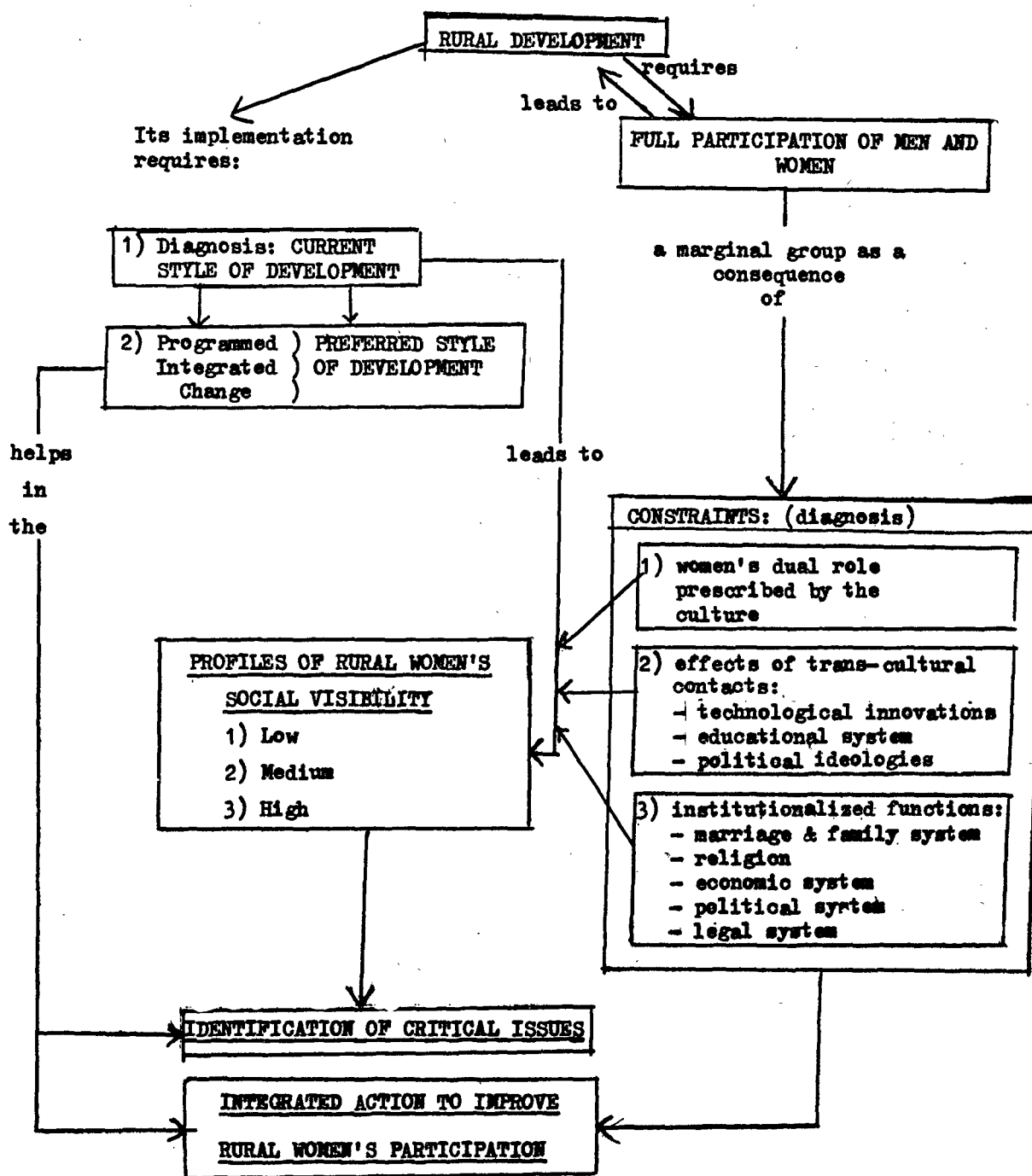
Rural development is a multi dimensional, so to measure it adequately we need a set of indicators, nor merely a single indicator such as economic growth.

To examine the degree to which women are incorporated into rural development, we must focus our attention on actual styles of development. We have to study development as "... an empirically observable system of interrelated changes: the nature and structure of production; the participation of different social strata and groups in economic, social and political activities; the distribution of incomes and wealth; patterns of consumption; systems of values; attitudes and motivations". (ECOSOC, E/CN 5/477, 1972, page 12). 1/

Both the profiles of women's social visibility and the actual styles of development vary from one country to another and from one rural area to another. Social, economic, political, religious and more generally, cultural differences in rural areas are evidence of different critical issues in women's integration and call for different developmental solutions. The frame of reference can be graphically presented as follows:

1/ The authors of the same document make a very useful distinction between real and preferred style of development. The former refers to what is actually happening in a given society whereas the latter refers to what the national political leadership or some other significant agent of change wants or expects to happen (op. cit. pages 12-13)

THE INTEGRATION OF WOMEN IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT



CHAPTER III

SOME CRITICAL ISSUES AND PROBLEM AREAS

Certain critical major issues confront women's participation in rural development programmes. An attempt will be made in the following pages to list the factors which can limit women's performance of development tasks required by the society. These will be considered in the light of the present situation of women in rural societies and the main objectives of development programmes.

3.1 Limited Educational Opportunities for Rural Girls and Women

Education and training, both formal and non-formal, are among the most critical factors influencing the effectiveness of women's participation in rural development programmes. In almost all the developing countries females constitute the majority of illiterates and school "drop-outs".

In 1968 the percentages of girls in primary education in Africa, Asia (excluding mainland China, North Vietnam and North Korea) and Latin America were 39, 39 and 49 respectively. These ratios have remained largely unchanged since 1960 although the total enrolment during this period increased by about 50 percent (ECOSOC, 8 February 1973, page 69).

In the rural areas of developing countries, the few girls who do enter the first level of education receive little benefit, either because formal primary education is very rudimentary or because they drop out of school as soon as they are old enough to assume responsibilities within the family or on the farm. In many countries the culture requires that girls work at home and on the farm, taking care of their younger brothers and sisters and carrying water for the family's needs. In addition, girls leave school because of early marriage or pregnancy. "Children, especially girls, begin to help with these portage tasks (gathering and carrying wood, dung) when they are about six years old" (Ford Foundation, 1973, page 11).

The report of the Regional Conference on Education, Vocational Training and Work Opportunities for Girls and Women in African Countries, held in Rabat, 20-29 May 1971, refers to many examples:

"In the social field, cultural and religious traditions often dictate that girls should stay at home to help their mothers rather than go to school; that girls tend to attend school irregularly, if at all; and that they drop out early because of domestic reasons, early marriages or pregnancies, etc.". (ECA, 1972, page 20).

"In Egypt and Lebanon, girls are usually expected to carry out certain tasks at home, more than boys. A five-year-old girl of a low-class family takes care of her younger brothers and sisters, and participates in all housework". (Badran, 1972, page 28).

In Ethiopia "it is widely expected from Ethiopian girls to assist their mothers in household duties and in the care of younger children. This means that in many instances a girl will not be free to attend school until there is a younger sister to take her place at home". (From a Country Report prepared for ECA in 1973, page 3).

There are few non-formal programmes - a form of recuperation of illiterate or semi-literate people - for women. An international survey noted that:

"... non-formal programmes for girls and women are often only on a token scale and are seemingly based on the assumption that the place of rural woman is solely in the home". (ECOSOC, 8 February 1973, page 68). ^{1/}

The net result is that despite huge sums of money spent in formal programmes of primary education and literacy classes, women in rural areas of developing countries are generally ill-prepared to assume responsibilities for the development of their community and country. They form an inert mass that perpetuates a life style that is inadequate for development; and, unfortunately, they transfer to their children - especially to the girls - this same pattern of behaviour which so seriously inhibits improvement in the rural areas. No concerted programme of development in the rural areas can succeed without a massive mobilization of all the available institutional resources to help rural women realize satisfactory individual, family and societal goals.

3.2 Unplanned Innovations

As was pointed out previously, the introduction of agricultural technology and mechanization has not involved women, nor has it decreased their work schedules. In fact, just the opposite has occurred. If technical and mechanical innovations are not integrated into both male and female agricultural tasks, a work overload for women results. In Zaire it was found that:

"Poultry schemes which are introduced into a rural community, but are not accompanied by a water supply, result in increasing the burden on the women. It is estimated that 100 chickens need approximately 25 litres of clean water per day. The task of fetching extra water falls on the shoulders of the women". (Mitchnik, 1972).

Compulsory or generalized primary education of children, without an accompanying improvement in living conditions, leaves women with an additional amount of work to be done, which was formerly shared by the children. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to talk of improvement in the situation of women. It therefore becomes exceedingly difficult to free women from their daily chores and enrol them in development action.

In areas with important male migration, women's responsibilities also increase. Indeed, women become de facto household heads. The mother stays behind in the village and besides her daily work she assumes that of the absent husband. An International Labour Organization (ILO) survey showed that in 1969 Kenya had about 525 000 rural households which were headed by women. As a rough estimate, 400 000 of these were households whose male head was away in town (ILO, 1972).

The migrant husband sometimes sends part of his wages back to the village, but often he does not. Then the mother is left with the full responsibility for the family since, by tradition and custom, she is responsible for the subsistence of her children.

Under these circumstances, it is a misnomer to say that women participate in development programmes. Rather, development policy seems to imply the abnegation, sacrifice and submission of women to unacceptable living conditions. It is also understandable that women may adopt attitudes which do not favour development, and so perpetuate a negative public opinion about the ability and willingness of rural women to participate in development.

Illiteracy together with either a lack of training or inadequate training tends to keep women in an inferior position. In self-defence the women perpetuate among themselves and

^{1/} The inadequacy of such training, especially in societies where the economic visibility of the woman has been traditionally recognized, need not be further demonstrated.

hand down to their children patterns of behaviour which contribute little to development. Because of this, their economic potentials are largely ignored, the economic productivity of rural areas is lowered, improvement in the quality of family life is seriously impaired and the creation in the younger generation of flexible attitudes toward change is affected.

The increased workload for women resulting from the unplanned improvement of farming and household techniques, and time spent on formal education, may well turn women against innovation and change. They may revolt or adopt an indifferent, if not hostile, attitude toward everything labelled as "development" or "programmes". It might be asked, is not the massive migration of rural women to towns (where they often resort to occupations which are detrimental to their self-esteem and/or health) an indicator of their revolt? To many of them, the uncertainties, humiliations and even slavery which they often encounter in the cities, either as servants or as prostitutes, may appear as an improvement then compared with the drudgeries to which they are submitted in their villages, and a promise of change for their children.

3.3 The Target Population

When action programmes consider women and especially rural women as their target population, the most salient limitations arise from the special position women hold in any culture. Because of their reproductive function, vital to the survival, maintenance and growth of every society, women's performance has always been defined more rigidly than that of men. It follows that changes related to the status of women, when introduced expeditiously into a given society, are likely to encounter resistance, particularly if the changes violate the existing equilibrium of social relationships and fundamental values.

It seems, therefore, that the degree of a country's tolerance to change related to the status of women should be taken into consideration when a development programme is designed. A variety of programmes, each one relevant for the particular community, should be the guiding principle.

A community that wishes to improve the status of its womenfolk is one which has truly recognized that the women's condition is inferior to that of the men. It is a community that has acquired a sensitivity which makes it possible to compare social inequalities based on sex. On the other hand a community which has not reached this level of recognition and self-criticism will not profit to the same extent from any development programme.

3.4 The Country's Political and Ideological Options

These form another set of factors which influence the formulation of programme goals, strategies and implementation. Therefore, a relatively clear knowledge of a country's official position regarding the role of women is an important prerequisite for action. Developing countries' official attitudes to women range from a position of keeping the status quo to the full integration of women into development tasks, on an equal footing with men. It is not unusual, however, for a country to change its attitudes, based on newly accepted ideological and political options. The rediscovery of national identity, which at present is a soul-searching endeavour of many developing countries, can provide opportunities to policy-makers and planners for re-defining women's roles in economic and social development.

3.5 Budget Resources

This is an important factor in determining the scope of a programme. On the assumption that (1) there are limited resources to cover numerous and ever-increasing needs, and

(ii) projects are not expendable in time, what are the most worthwhile objectives which will, it may be hoped, yield lasting effects? Should programmes involve a relatively large part of the female population in a given rural area, or should they concentrate on promoting the bettering of conditions of a few women who, in turn, will act as leaders of change in their own communities. The choice of programme is undoubtedly the one which has the best chances of generating favourable changes which will continue after the departure of qualified international and national experts.

3.6 The General Goals of a Programme

Though each programme has general and specific objectives which must be determined with care, some programmes will share a similar broad goal.

First, programmes should be designed to help countries to raise the social visibility of women. In some countries, the efforts should be directed primarily toward improving the professional visibility of women who traditionally hold jobs of lower economic and social status. In other countries, the programmes should be designed to improve women's household visibility because of the woman's traditional involvement in a subsistence economy. The latter's work schedules are so heavy and the society's prescriptions concerning their obligations to themselves and their children are so strict, that they have neither the time nor the adequate training to fill their roles as mothers, educators and household managers.

Development, does not mean the right for women to hold, in the name of equality between the sexes, painful, abject or poorly paid jobs. Such jobs may be necessary for national development, but at the most they should be only temporary and, in any case, should be augmented by training programmes which would enable a woman at a later date to use her intelligence and skills better. Israeli kibbutzim and Chinese communes provide examples of integrated technical training for outside employment and in the household as a complement to hard and thankless daily labour. Development should aim toward freeing rural women from remaining, or becoming, a cheap, easily discardable labour force.

Planners of programmes which aim at developing women's intrafamilial and extra-familial abilities should be careful to weigh the effects which a given action may produce. For example, in African countries where women's time is taken up mostly in subsistence agriculture, the best objectives of a programme may be training them in using time-saving devices. At the same time, however, provision should be made in the programme to teach these women how to use their time in a constructive way. In other words, to free women from one kind of drudgery implies helping them to avoid another kind. A single programme should thus include a series of carefully thought-out interrelated operations.

The lowest common denominator of programmes should be to help women accept the rural environment as an integral part of their contribution to development. "Back to the land" could be a very meaningful slogan provided that it is accompanied by facilities which will attract young people to settle in the countryside and encourage those who are already there not to migrate. Training programmes should be aimed at dissuading women from leaving their community by showing that migration to towns is not necessarily in their own, their family's or their country's best interests. Women who are thoroughly convinced of the positive aspects of the rural life could then persuade their kin to remain to work on the land. This assumes that training programmes should offer women the most relevant, realistic and convincing arguments, followed by demonstrations. In each nation, region and specific situation, different arguments and demonstrations are needed. To prepare these, the cooperation of existing institutions such as universities, research institutes, ministries, community services, is essential. All the components of the integrated rural development should be mustered in this effort.

Programmes should include provision for those women who will ultimately emigrate to cities. Training programmes are needed to help them to integrate themselves into the urban setting. Such programmes would be expected to reduce the failure rate among women who settle in the cities.

* * *

Helping women to participate in rural development bears long-term results. The attitudes of women shape those of their kin, and especially of their children. They project their aspirations and doubts and mould the latter's determination either to remain the village or to emigrate. Because of the mothers' close bonds with daughters, women are the best qualified associates of the agents of change; or, on the contrary, they can remain, the most adamant proponents of the status quo. Hence, no programme of integrated development can afford to minimize expertise in improving women's intrafamilial roles.

The above mentioned goals cannot and will not succeed unless men are closely associated in all the programmes aimed at women. The degree of sensitivity of men to women's problems varies from one community to another. There could be a great deal of resistance to change by the men, due to ignorance and feminist claims which bring the two sexes into conflict tend to widen the already existing gap between them. Often the inferior position of the majority of women is compared with the privileged one of a minority of men. It is necessary both that men as well as women become acquainted with each other's real condition, and that programmes in general obtain the full cooperation of the male population.

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