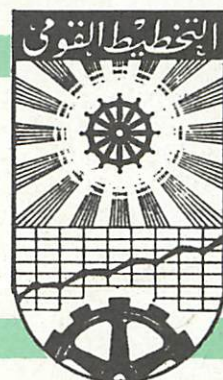


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The Role of Female Extension Workers
in Developing Rural Women:
A Case Study of El-Daqahlia Governorate

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1 - INTRODUCTION

Assuming that development is the ultimate goal of a continued series of qualitative and quantitative changes that take place in a given society, the aim of development is to rationalize the method which man uses to deal with his environment in order to control it and realize the utmost human welfare for him and the society.

The social dimension stresses the importance and priority of social development as represented in service projects. if man is educated, and acquires skills, and if his mental and physical health is improved , and if he adheres to national moral values, he will be able to create, innovate, produce and take off. He will be the capital of society.¹

Therefore the issue of development is one of the great challenges that face developing countries in their endeavors to realise food security for their peoples . This target will be difficult to achieve unless all population, males and females, actively participate in the development process. A comprehensive plan should be devised in order to mobilise all human and natural resources that are available.²

Rural women (RW) in Egypt represent a great national asset. They constitute about half of the human resources in rural Egypt , and perform most of agricultural activities. However RW'S roles are in real need to be developed by Female Extension weekwes (FEW) in an effective and

scientific way, based on their real needs.

Development of rural women is defined as the endeavours made to promote their capacities, i.e raising the medical standard and improve their skills and increase their knowledge. This will promote the benefit which their families enjoy as a result of the rural women's acquired capacities, either by enjoying leisure times, or realising the productive purpose such as increasing the family income or a reflected on cultural, social and political affairs.

It is necessary, therefore, to be acquainted with the work of FEW their activities, potentials and the problems they face, and how far RW respond to their advice, concerning their needs and diffusion of agricultural and household information that help RW in their daily life. It is essential also to overcome illiteracy in order to be able to raise RW'S standard of living.

1-1 The Purpose of The Study:

This study aims at determining how to make the optimum use of FEW's in developing RW. It will concentrate on the productive aspects of rural women. It was prerequisite to study the following points:

- 1- The nature of the work that FEW perform, the potentials, and problems involved.
- 2- How far RW respond to FEW's advice and guidance to satisfy their needs
- 3- To what extent agricultural and household information help in improving their life and increasing their production and decreasing the waste of their agricultural products (milk products domestic animals..ect).

Moreover, This study hopes to help underline the activities of FEW and how to improve their performance.

It is worthwhile mention that, this study's main concern are Female Extension Workers (FEW) and Rural Women. Part one of the Study deals with (FEW) their functions, activities, facilities available to them , their needs and the objectives they want to achieve . As for part II, it will deal with Rural Women (RW), and how they react to FEW's efforts, and their viewpoints to the services rendered to them.

1-2 Methodology:

This study took place in Daqahliya Governorate where there are 75 FEW in 11 districts and 35 villages. To achieve the purpose of the study a questionnaire was devised to detect the FEW's role in developing RW. This questionnaire covers the three points which were already mentioned in 1-1 (The Purpose of the Study).

Data were collected from only 57 FEW who were working directly with RW development because the rest were working in offices (either in the Agricultural Extension Department in Mansoura or in the Agricultural Cooperatives). Personal interviews with the FEW took place to fill the questionnaires which were administrated between january and February 1990. This study will display various aspects of how FEW's programs are being carried out and the major problems involved.

Before displaying the Results, an emphasis will be laid on RW's characteristics, participation in agricultural economics, and the problems they face.

2- CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL WOMEN

Some characteristics of RW such as size, age , labour force participation marital and educational status are summarized in Table 1.

The 1986 census reveals that women represent about 49% of the rural population of Egypt and in Daqahliya Governorate too. As for age structure the under 12 Years age group represents about one third of RW in Daqahliya. Less than two thirds are in the age group 12-65 , and only about 3 percent over age 65. It appears that age structure in Daqahliya is similar to that prevailing in Egypt in general.

RW in Egypt , as a labour force, fulfill endless tasks inside their household and sometimes outside . Nevertheless, most of the work done by RW has no exchange value and dose not appear in the national census or survey, beacause it is " invisible" in spits of its productive and social value. Therefore, participation of women in labour force in rural areas is apparently very low, and amounts to 6% of all women in Egypt, while in Daqahliya it is one percent higher (7%) , as calculated from Table 1 using the crude activity rate.

As regards marital and educational status, the percentage of married women in rural areas is 68% in Egypt in general, and in Daqahiya too, while the percentage of divorce/ widowed women is 16% in Egypt and 15% in Daqahliya.

Moreover RW in Egypt when young do not have the same chance as males in education and training although they work for longer hours. They suffer from a high illiteracy rate which amounts to 7% according to 1986 census. In Daqahliya the illiteracy rate is (67%) , which is less than that prevailing in Egypt.

3 - RURAL WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

IN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS:

Egyptian RW are overburdened with varied responsibilities. They are expected to carry out daily household activities which include cleaning, cooking, feeding and looking after children, washing, breadmaking in addition to removing animals' waste. Moreover, they are expected to go out to the market either to buy or sell home made products especially cheese, butter, fruits , and vegetables.³

At the same time RW are required to help their husbands in farming , planting and harvesting, especially during cotton and rice seasons. Hence, One of the causes that contribute to the high rate of births is that RW need girls and boys to help them in performing their varied activities. All these responsibilities augment their influence in the decision-making process. In most family affairs RW are the real decision- makers.

As RW constitute about 50% of the human resources in Egypt. their contribution in the development process is essential . Appropriate programs

would help to prepare RW to bear their responsibilities as working members of their society, because they effectively participate in agricultural and other productive activities.

For a long time, Egyptian RW have socially suffered much more than men. Out-dated traditions deprive females from education, medical care and nutrition and impose backwardness and isolation on them. These traditions impede RW from playing a role in public life as responsible citizens who are aware of their duties and rights.

RW's role, in general, and in developing countries in particular, should be stressed upon. RW not only perform their basic functions in raising their children and helping their husbands at home and in the field, but they are also involved in various development processes through home economics, cottage industries and social work. Women in Egypt constitute about 10% of labour force, and 38.2% of female labour force work in agriculture.⁴

RW's roles, nevertheless, are needed to be recognized, enhanced, and developed in an effective and scientific way. There is a chance to accelerate economic and social development in the next century by more investment on females⁵.

4 - RURAL WOMEN'S PROBLEMS:

There are four main problems of RW :

- 1- Illiteracy is overwhelming among RW. In rural areas, families are more interested in educating males than females. Education for females is not seen as important because they send girls early to work in fields instead of boys. They give male the right to be educated because they perceive them to be more productive and useful to their families in the future, while females, when married, will join their husbands' families. Males (and their children) also bear the family name and are a good source of income for the family if educated. Moreover, far distances between houses and schools deprive females from education while males can overcome this obstacle.
- 2- Mal-nutrition is caused by insufficient food that is available for females because of poverty or male preference , in spite of the great effort which females exert in their daily work.
- 3- Females suffer from bad health and spread of diseases because of ignorance and water pollution (washing clothes in the canal), repeated births and overwork.
- 4- Customs and traditions prevailing in rural areas give preferential treatment to males than females. Females are not treated as partners in the national production. RW's work is considered part of their duties

that is imposed on them by family rules. This explains why RW do not occupy their natural position as an important manpower factor in production and development.

5- RESULTS

Results are reported for the totality of FEW , as follows:

5-1 Experience and Educational Profile Of FEW:

Table 2 indicates that 91% of FEW are university graduates of the agricultural faculties and only 9% have lower qualifications than that of a university, while Table 3 shows that about 44% of FEW have medium or long term experience in agriculture (10 Years or more). A further 44% of FEW have between 5-10 years experience and 12% of them have less than 5 years experience in agriculture. Table 4 reveals that 65% of FEW's have spent less than 5 years in Agricultural extension, while the rest have up to 15 years experience.

Data indicate that 59% of the FEW are living near their work. Those FEW who live and work in the same village consider it a privilege, because they will be personally acquainted with RW, as relatives or neighbours. For example, some FEW use a room in their houses as a meeting place (where RW can learn sewing).

Moreover, FEW are accepted by local women because they already know them. Their advice and instructions are taken seriously. It is much easier for them

to enter RW's homes to talk to them at any time and encourage them to join the meeting place (workshop)⁶ where they can learn different activities. It is easy for FEW to choose the suitable time to visit RW when they are not busy. Living among RW gives FEW a chance to give advice concerning children's health, food, cleaning, etc. Those who are living far from their work have transportation problems and if they do not have a meeting place they find it difficult to meet RW at the time that suits RW.

Table 5 shows that the average number of FEW per district is 5.6 for the Governorate. In some districts they are more active than others depending on how far they are living from the village where they work.

It appears that FEW started working in RW's development field a long time ago, but they were not active until lately, when recent studies and seminars⁷ underlined the importance of RW's development and its impact on national production and on developing the rural society. At the same time, RW's activities were revived because the Extension Department became able to give FEW incentives and transportation allowances to enable them to perform their duties. In addition, the Extension Department in Cairo started two programs for training FEW on food processing and developing women's skills, in order to raise their training capacities.

5.3 FEW Training :

Training courses are arranged by the Agriculture Department, when the FEW are newly assigned to their jobs. Table 6 indicates that the majority of FEW have more than one training course and only 4 of them did not have any training because they joined the department recently.

There are different types of training programs with different durations such as:

- 1- Rural women development in home economics (one month)
- 2- Rural development (one month)
- 3- Family planning (one week)
- 4- Animal breeding improvement (one month)
- 5- General course in agriculture (three months)
- 6- Sewing and knitting (one month)
- 7- Silk worm (one week)
- 8- Food processing (one month)
- 9- Others (such as English language, Statistics, and Library)

All these programs started in 1986. Before that , training programs only concentrated on family planning. The duration of these programs usually ranges between two to four weeks and some of them last for three months. All training courses are given during work hours except the general training programs which are organized for new graduates in

order to prepare them for future jobs whether they work in a women development field or in an agricultural field in general.

Table 7 shows the numbers of FEW who attended different courses. Over 80% joined the home economics course, and 33% joined courses on rural development and family planning. The other courses were attended by around 10% only.

In sum, these training courses appear to be previously arranged at a central level in Cairo without taking into consideration local differences between Governorates, or the real needs of both FEW and RW. The majority of FEW offer RW few activities which FEW already know how to teach, like sewing and knitting, because FEW are afraid to teach something they are not sure of. Moreover, the duration of some courses is not enough to master the activities involved, because they concentrate only on theoretical aspects rather than practical ones.

5.4 Types Of Activity:

When FEW were asked about the types of activity they were involved in, it was found that 63% of them undertook all types of activity starting with food processing, sewing and embroidery animal breeding, poultry raising, food storage, marketing and packing agricultural crops (Table 8). Table 8 also indicated that 28% of them were working in

food processing only. This high percentage is due to the fact that the majority of FEW did not have a place to meet RW. FEW visited RW at home and taught them how to conserve the surplus of vegetables and fruits to consume or sell. In both cases income was increased and production waste was minimized.

Raising poultry needs rationalization by modern training because it is a traditional activity for women, while chick raising nowadays needs scientific ways to be able to generate substantial revenue. This can not be done now because given data show that only 26% of FEW concentrate on poultry raising . Most RW lack information on which breeds produce meat, and they seldom give the required periodical vaccinations either out of ignorance or because of the lack of vaccines in the market or in the veterinary clinic.

Women do not acquire the necessary concentrated rations for feeding poultry. Instead they depend upon the household food leftover. It appeared in a meeting between FEW and rural women that women needed FEW help in that field to learn where they could get good and cheap breeds of ckick, and how and when to use vaccination.

Table 8 indicates that 23% of FEW are working on animal breeding. Helping women to improve breeding , and increases their dairy production, such as cheese , butter, is badly needed.