

## **WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE SOKOINE EXTENSION PROJECT (SEP) (1)**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The experience in SEP shows that women can fully participate in extension programs as long as they are involved in the decision making process and are availed with the necessary knowledge. Women constitute 52% of the population of Tanzania and form the productive force in rural communities. It is estimated that as much as 97% of rural female work force is engaged in Agriculture (Killalea 1990) and generally perform over 80% of agricultural activities (WID-Policy 1988).

Since women are more concerned with agriculture and in particular food production (Mascarenhas 1991) their participation in development programmes is essential. However, women are not in most cases the target population for new agricultural techniques, innovations and training and that development assistance for women is usually directed to their domestic role (Lewis, 1984).

Since its inception the Sokoine Extension Project has considered women involvement in its programmes as a vital step in enhancing agricultural production in rural communities. (SEP original Project Document 1987).

### **THE SOKOINE EXTENSION PROJECT (SEP)**

The Sokoine Extension Project is a partnership programme of research and extension between Institute of Continuing Education (ICE), Sokoine University of Agriculture and the Department of Agribusiness, Extension and Rural Development, University College Dublin, Ireland. SEP was initiated in January, 1988, funded through the government of Ireland Bilateral Aid Programme administered by HEDCO (Higher Education for Development Cooperation) in Ireland. SEP is implemented through the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock Development and Co-operatives structure at national, regional and district level. SEP delivers the services of the pilot project to 41 selected villages in three districts in Morogoro region.

The specific objectives (SEP original Project document, 1987) are as follows:

- i) To investigate the current extension system and to identify its operational problems.
- ii) To make adjustments to the present structure particularly in relation to the nature of the roles performed by extension officers at local and district levels.
- iii) to design and implement a staff development programme that would be appropriate for the revised role of extension officers.
- iv) to plan long and short term village development programmes.
- v) To develop appropriate packages of extension methods.
- vi) to identify the support items necessary for the revised system in terms of transport, equipment, etc.

- vii) To continually monitor evaluate and adjust the revised extension system until an effective operational formula has been developed.
- viii) to make recommendations on the effective transfer of the operational formula developed in the pilot project to the district, regional and national levels.

## THE EXPERIENCES OF THE SEP

### Contact Farmers

The SEP has worked since 1988 in 20 villages in Kilosa and Morogoro districts and since 1990 in 41 villages, incorporating Kilombero district. The gender composition of extension workers (V.E.W.s) is shown in table 1 below.

**Table 1. Gender Composition of Village Extension Workers, Participating in SEP.**

District	Number of male	Number of Female	Total
Kilombero	6	0	6
Kilosa	12	3	15
Morogoro	13	7	20
Total	13 (66%)	10 (33%)	41 (100%)

Source: SEP Records.

After 3 years of work in co-operation with the village extension workers, SEP concludes that there was no significant difference in performance of extension workers across the range of extension activities (programmes, micro-projects, training etc.).

Similarly, in relation to extension managers involved in SEP all district agricultural training officers (DATOs) were/are male, all district agriculture and livestock officers (DALDOs) are male. Both the Regional Extension Officer (REO) and Regional Agricultural Training Officer (RATO) are/were female<sup>1</sup>

### Extension Programs

Planning of extension programs that meet the needs at village level is the core of SEP work (Kenny and Kimbi, 1991). In the SEP villages agricultural development programs have been used to improve the food and cash crops production situation. In the last three years SEP VEWs have developed and implemented two to four agricultural extension programs. Two of these programs were designed to coincide with the "short rains" period and the other two for "long rains" period. These programs were designed and targeted towards solving food and cash crop production problems of village households (Mannion and Lugeye 1990).

These problems were addressed using village extension programmes and micro-projects (Micro-project are discussed later in the paper). The village extension programmes were addressed to contact farmers groups (30 to 50 contact farmers) discussed previously. It was noted that while the needs identified could be related to the needs of households and particularly the needs of women as agricultural producers, the extension messages were related to the contact farmers group who were predominantly male. This implies that the husband would in 84 to 89% of cases receive the extension message and in turn would pass it onto his wife. Experience shows that the flow of information from husband to wife is small. When examined more closely it was found that extension workers adopted a preferential contact group of 10 to 20 farmers and in this group the percentage of women was much lower than the general contact farmer group, so women access to information was reduced as the intensity of the provision of extension information increased. On further examination it was found that women participation at demonstrations, village meetings, seminars etc. was relatively low, and that when they did attend they usually played a passive role.

### Micro-Projects

Micro-projects are an alternative extension approach that could meet needs identified in the extension programming process.

Ideally these were started to give VEWs the skills necessary to initiate and plan sustainable projects for the village communities, as channels to reach more farmers and to foster the farmers skills in managing small scale projects. As a starting point, planning of the micro-projects was done by VEWs together with target groups based on the needs emanating from the village needs identification exercise.

Micro-projects have emerged as an important tool in channelling extension advice and development assistance to targeted sub-groups at village level. Using a tried and tested procedure it would be possible to target advice and assistance to women at village level without the disadvantageous knock on effects and the obvious ineffectiveness of generalised extension programmes.

Information in Table 2 summarizes types of the micro-project in SEP villages along with target population.

**Table 2. List of Micro-Projects in SEP Villages.**

Type of Project	Villages Involved	Target Group
Oxenization	Kwipipa, Mvumi, Rudewa Gongoni Milama, Dihombo	Village Government groups
Nurseries (Veg. citrus, tree seedlings, coconut)	Kisawasawa, Kiberege, Mkundi Dumala, Mfulu, Kwipipa, Msufini, Mvomero, Makayu Hembeti, Mbogo, Konga Vikenge, Kisala, Mkindo, Rudewa, Batini, Rudewa Mbanini, Chanzulu, Mkula, Mdsudu	Village Government Youth* Primary School*
	Ichonde	Womens group*
Goats	Sonjo	Village Government
Rabbits	Mfulu	Youth

\* Both male and female

Table 2 shows that women were involved in nursery projects, and within nurseries mainly on the production of vegetables. This is not surprising since vegetable production directly touches domestic needs and it is an easy activity for women to carry out in terms of income generation.

Lack of women participation in other micro-projects as noted in Table 1 can be attributed to women's heavy workload and nature of the activities involved in these projects. It is widely known that rural women spend most of their time in domestic activities which mainly include agricultural work, water and firewood collection and childcare. It is therefore apparent that their engagement in implementing some micro-projects was limited.

Experience in SEP has shown that access to extension services by women may be influenced by the following: Customs which discourage prolonged contact between male extension agents and women farmers; and control village extension agents by village leaders; in such cases the micro-project has been an alternative to reach women as long as it does not add to the workload of women.

Recent experience of SEP indicates that culturally, the selection of the group is very important for the success of the group. Many lessons in relation to group formation are being learned from the PRDVL (Planning Rural Development at Village Level) Programme Kilosa district.

#### **Village Leaders Training Programme**

Initially SEP staff gathered information about villages and provided the best solution to the problems. The monitoring and evaluation was carried out by VEWs and SEP staff. In these cases it was difficult to determine whether real needs and problems of the community were properly addressed. The method was bureaucratic and not sustainable and was inefficient in that VEWs did not have adequate investigative skills, or adequate village social analysis to draw accurate conclusions.

During this phase SEP was examining the extent of participation in programme planning and implementation. SEP concluded that participation on extension programming could be optimised starting at the needs identification and planning stages. Hence it is at this stage that the village leaders training in planning village development programmes was initiated. These seminars were conducted to:

- help develop ability to plan, select problems and solutions of high priority to a majority of people in the village
- use farmer local knowledge, ability to analyse, judge and explain options to others
- prepare village development plans.

The village leader training programme involved: the village extension workers, village chairmen, secretaries and members of the village finance, planning and production committees. Selection of these participants was done by the village governments and SEP staff during village meetings.

Results from the village leader training programme showed that:

- there was no village research organs
- the whole process of planning and implementation was a top down approach relying on the village government leaders
- very few women were involved in developing village development plans

Hence, the SEP staff and village leaders agreed that there was need to improve the village planning structure.

The major improvement was the inclusion of the research committee in the planning process.

### **Village Research Committees**

The needs identification exercise has been considered as vital step in programme planning in SEP. Hence in order to get more farmer participation in planning a research committee for each village was formed. Village research committees included:

- village extension worker
- village technicians: ie. (women representatives, community development workers, foresters, medical workers and teachers, etc.)
- village leaders
- one member from production committee.

The members of the research committees were selected by the village governments in collaboration with VEWs. However, SEP encouraged the inclusion of women in these committees composed of six members in each village.

Training of research committees in their function and how to conduct research was conducted before they were allowed to perform their duties. The functions of the village research committee were basically to identify village problems, needs and prepare solutions based on village resources and potentials. The role of the committees was essentially to influence village planning process.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the SEP experiences pertaining to women participation in agricultural extension, the following recommendations can be drawn:

- Extension service should develop deliberate system of selecting women as target groups in village projects and programmes. These activities should adequately address women's identified needs and priorities.
- Women should be empowered to make decision on vital development programs in villages. In that case extension service should ensure their full participation.
- Village leaders should be provided with training in planning village development programs and be gender sensitized.
- Extension service should be reoriented to encourage villagers to conduct research and need identification exercise and this information should be used in the preparation of development plans.
- Greater priority in developing effective extension programmes should be given to identifying ways in which women can participate.
- Often the benefit of extension assistance and project assistance is assumed development services should adopt a more exactly who benefits and exactly the mechanisms by which the benefit is used at local level.

## CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions can be made from what has been discussed:

- In order to get full women participation in village projects it is important to select women as target groups. In situation where village governments were selected to implement the projects women were rarely involved.
- Extension programs addressing women issues should be decided by women themselves. Village leaders should not decide for women.
- Experience in SEP reveals that when women are provided with training, knowledge and opportunity to make decisions they are capable of participating in extension programs which can immensely improve their welfare and that of the entire community.
- Village leaders are very useful links to extension and research activities in the villages. They can help in the mobilisation and selection of women groups to participate in extension work.
- No research committees existed in the villages before their introduction by SEP
- village research committee are important organs at village level to assist in need identification, problem prioritisation and enhancing women involvement in development of village plans.

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