

## WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE EXTENSION

E. Shayo

### INTRODUCTION

In most of the developing countries, agriculture forms the backbone of the economy, employing about ninety percent of the rural population. Of these, women make up 75% (Mwambenja 1989 p.55) and therefore should be regarded as great contributors to the economy. According to (Markey 1990 p.113), Women produce 80% of the food in Africa. They also dominate the nutrition process in communities as they are also involved in food processing, preservation and preparation. It is obvious then that in order to have any impact in agricultural production, designers of rural development programmes have to involve women.

The history of extension in Tanzania dates back to colonial times. The conventional approach used, utilized by-laws to ensure the production of these crops regardless of the incentive structure for farmers. Traditionally, these cash crops were grown by men while women in the community produced food for the family. The conventional extension service then put much emphasis to training men on the production of the required cash crops mainly cotton, sisal, pyrethrum, tobacco and beverages such as coffee and tea for export at the expense of food production.

In order to further improve the production of cash crops, the commodity approach to extension was introduced with the formation of crop authorities. These ensured that the main cash crops received extra attention from extension workers under parastatals as well as from the normal extension service which was further weakened due to the drain of employees to the new crop authorities. This meant further deterioration of services for food crops and women. The T & V approach to extension has also been adopted and Regional Integrated Development Programmes as pilot projects. Since main crops such as coffee were addressed, the focus of the extension service was also geared towards men rather than women.

Clearly women have been neglected by the extension service in the past, although analysis of their contributions to agricultural development indicate that there is much justification for involving them in programmes.

### CONSTRAINTS TO THE INVOLVEMENT OF WOMEN IN EXTENSION

Women face a number of constraints that have made it difficult for them to get access to extension services. These are as follows:

#### Multiple Roles of Women

Although women are expected to produce the family food, they have many other duties to fulfil that take up much of their time. As mothers they have to bear and rear children while they also have to perform household chores such as cleaning, washing, cooking, fetching firewood and water and possibly taking care of domestic animals. Food processing and storage also fall under the domain of women. Moreover, women are not the decision makers in the household for such things as the use of resources. Women do not own land and in most cases it is men who decide on how much land should be utilized, the amount of inputs to be purchased, although some of the activities in crop production may be done jointly by men and women. In a survey done in 1989 in Morogoro, female respondents explained the low

attendance of women at meetings as attributed to their inability to make important decisions at the meetings. It was sufficient for men to attend such meetings and then pass on the messages to their wives. However, the danger of this tendency is known, as the information passed on might be erroneous and recipients have no chance for giving feed back.

### **Socio-Economic Factors**

In many rural societies the social status of women is inferior to that of men. Due to that, it is difficult for the extension service to hold meetings or address females farmers. Also due to lack of ownership of resources such land and other assets, women cannot afford some of the technology recommended by extension and therefore lose interest in seeking further advice. The men who own the farm resources are also the decision makers who dictate when advice is required. The procurement of loans for the purchase of new technological equipment requires equity and security, and both are owned by men. This has rendered women unqualified for much needed loans for improvement of agricultural production. Even with the soft bank loans being offered to women, it is still difficult for the later to fulfil the few requirements due to the reluctance of bankers to provide full information (Mzalendo 17.11.91 p.2).

### **Level of Literacy**

Since 1968, the level of literacy in both males and females has been rising steadily. However, according to Keregero 1990 p.26, there is still a big gap between literacy levels in men and women. A large percentage of rural women are illiterate and make up a significant part of the workforce in agricultural production. This poses a constraint to the extension methods that can be used to reach such clientele. Van den Ban and Hawkins observed that,

*"The low educational level of farm women in many countries makes it necessary to design special extension messages for this group"*

(Van den Ban and Hawkins, 1988, p.271)

Illiterate farmers cannot make use of leaflets, pamphlets, newspapers and offered courses. Chances for education are not only limited for female farmers, but girls also have fewer chances of attending secondary schools and later on agricultural training courses. There is therefore less chance of obtaining trained female extension workers who might address the female clients better.

### **Type of Extension Services**

The type of extension approach used may affect the type of clientele reached. An approach that addresses cash crops or deals with large progressive farmers is not likely to include female farmers.

The gender awareness of the extension workers will also affect the type of farmers contacted. Whereas female extension workers will be expected to work more efficiently with female farmers, they may also approach male farmers depending on their training and the importance they assign to women's great contribution to production.

Type of training offered to female farmers will also dictate whether extension training is appropriate for them. Due to their varied duties, the duration, time of the year or day for training ought to be organized in such a way that it does not interfere with other important chores. The content should also be carefully selected to answer their priority production problems. The venue should be within easy reach and the technology being taught should be affordable.

Selection of farmers for training is usually left to village leaders and is usually biased. Leaders would usually select men for courses, whereas women could have benefited more if they were consulted.

#### **THE NEED AND STRATEGIES OF INVOLVING WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION**

Women are responsible for food production and the attainment of food sufficiency in the rural areas. This fact justifies the need to involve them in extension activities so as to maximize production. Women also pass on this knowledge to their children, the future farmers, so that in training a woman one actually trains the nation (Kimambo 1989, p.1).

In giving extension advice, female workers can preferably be used since they identify better with the plight of women. Men extension workers lack the special skills to approach women. Van den Ban and Hawkins stated that,

“.....where male extension workers can talk directly to the women, communication may be less open than it would be with female extension agents. Often women are not supposed to go to meetings, or if they go, they are not supposed to speak unless asked. It may be necessary in such situations to organize meetings for women only, so they can speak freely”.  
(Van den Ban and Hawkins, 1988, p.271)

Due to their constant involvement in a wide range of agricultural activities, high production is impossible to achieve unless they also receive adequate technical support. For extension to be successful it must support all farmers including women, who have an important role in agriculture, and are also a majority of the population.

In order to effectively reach farm women, the main activities they perform must be researched. For some of these activities it is assumed that technology disseminated to men is passed on to women. Approaches employed by extension staff to involve women will vary in accordance to the sociological, and economical factors within the society, some of the strategies include:

#### **Use of Female Extension Workers**

The extension services should train and use more female extension workers who are more acceptable sociologically to train farm women. Only 34 percent of trained government extension workers in Africa are women (Kimambo 1989, p. 24) but even this small proportion could be used to reach female farmers if they were given incentives to live and work in the rural areas. Such incentives are adequate allowances, transport, housing, social services, promotion and recognition. Women extensionists are more acceptable to female farmers as they understand better their production networks in comparison to male workers whose messages might be ignored by female clients.

#### **Gender Sensitization**

Evidence from the FAO Extension Training and Sokoine Extension Projects in Morogoro has shown that even for villages with female village extension workers, women involvement in project activities was still much lower than that of men (Shayo, 1990, p.92, Kimambo 1989, p.25). An evaluation of the NALERP in Shinyanga in 1991 also indicated very low numbers of female contact farmers reached by the Training and Visit Programme. This clearly indicates that the extension service in Tanzania has a male orientation. However, gender awareness is now being included in extension training syllabi to ensure that both male and female extension workers realise the importance of women in agricultural

production and the major areas in which they require support. Women themselves should be mobilised to participate in extension training activities.

### **Planning of Extension Programmes**

Extension Workers ought to involve female farmers in problem identification, planning, implementation and evaluation of extension programmes. This process will ensure that only those activities of interest to women are tackled. Once women become aware that technology will reduce their drudgery, increase production, improve nutritional status and possibly generate income, adoption rates will be higher. Women will also gain confidence and offer more of their problems for solutions from researchers and extensionists.

### **Access to Resources**

Female farmers sometimes shy away from extension training activities due to lack of resources such as inputs and capital which are owned by men. Women can have access to some resources by being encouraged to join cooperatives and production groups. They can then receive Bank loans, inputs and even land allocation for agricultural activities. With resources women would have the chance to make decisions on production, the use of inputs, utilization of produce and the need for extension advice.

### **Introduction of Appropriate Technology.**

Like extension, research in the past has created technology that helped to facilitate the male tasks. Such tasks like ploughing are facilitated by the tractor but the larger areas cultivated invariably create more work for women in planting, weeding, harvesting, storing and processing. Parallel technology to reduce the tedium of the subsequent task that fall on women should be given priority. Women would appreciate to have hand planters, weeders, cheap herbicides, harvesters, threshers, transport facilities and milling machines. The use of technological equipment that simplifies women's tasks could be learned by women themselves. Operation of oil expellers, planters and milling machines if appropriately designed could be handled independently by women.

### **Organising Training for Women**

There is a need to use combination of training methods as no single method is the best. For example, a demonstration can be reinforced by group discussion to get feedback from participants. The use of visual aids such as slides, live specimens, picture and posters will add clarity to a lecture and enhance remembering. Also selection of the topic, time and venue of training is very important since farm women have a lot of roles. The subject chosen ought to address a priority problem.

### **Increased Integration of Farm Women into Extension Work.**

There are several methods that the extension worker can use to enhance the integration of farm women into extension work. Methods like use of groups and family training are useful in integrating women. For example, family training is advantageous in training both husband and wife on new technology to improve their farm production. According to Markey, 1990 p.115) the best way to get women to participate in extension activities is to meet both the husband and his wife when making a farm visit.

## CONCLUSION

The involvement of women in extension has always been handicapped by many constraints. Some of these include, multiple roles of women, socio-economic factors, level of literacy and the type of extension service. In order to improve involvement of women in extension several ways have been discussed and these are: the use of female extension workers, gender sensitization of people, planning extension programmes, improving access to resources, developing appropriate technology and organising training suitable for women.

Future programmes should look more into ways of increasing the agricultural production potential of women through the use of appropriate technology and constant advice from the extension services.

## REFERENCES

- Chambers, R. 1988. Rural Development: Putting the last First, Longman Group U.K. Ltd. England.
- Keregero, M. 1990. "Women in Agricultural Extension - Problems and Prospects: Some experiences from Tanzania" Paper presented at the Regional Course on Administration and Management of Agricultural Extension Services, Morogoro Tanzania, October 1990.
- Kimambo, E. 1989. "Women's Participation in the Agricultural Extension Training Project at Morogoro Tanzania: An Appraisal, Project written as part of an ad hoc FAO Fellowship Programme at Reading University.
- Markey, A.P. 1990. "An Evaluation of Aspects of the Sokoine Extension, Training and Demonstration Project in Tanzania", unpublished M. Agr. Sc. Thesis, Department of Agribusiness, Extension and Rural Development, Faculty of Agriculture University College, Dublin.
- Mwambenja, S.M.J. 1989. "Wanawake/Vikundi vya Wanawake vinaweza kukopa toka Benki ya Taifa ya Biashara kwa ajili ya Maendeleo" katika Karadha ya Benki ya Taifa ya Biashara na Wanawake katika Maendeleo National Bank of Commerce, DSM, Tanzania.
- Mzalendo, 17.11.91 No. 1071. Tanzania.
- Rwenyagira, B.W. 1988. "The Problems Facing Agricultural Extension Workers in Tanzania." in Training for Effective Agricultural Extension in Tanzania, Proceedings of TSAEE.
- Shayo, E. 1990. Farmers Involvement in SEP. Unpublished M.Sc. Thesis, University College Dublin, Ireland.
- Van den Ban, A.W. and H.S. Hawkins, 1988. Agricultural Extension, Longman group U.K. Limited. England.