

TRAINING OF FARM WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE
AND HOME SCIENCE

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Women and Education

Rural women are a significant force in the developing countries representing about 38% of Asia's total population. In Sri Lanka about 78% of the population live in the rural sector and nearly 48% of the rural population constitute women. Sri Lanka leads South Asia and perhaps most developing countries in the field of women's education as well as in general literacy. According to the 1971 census and statistics report female literacy stood at 70.7% against 85.2% among the males and an overall literacy rate of 78.1%.

TABLE 1 - Population of Sri Lanka - 10 Years of age and over
by literacy and sex.

| | | Census 1953 % literate | Census 1963 %, literate | Census 1971 % literate |
|---------|----|---------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Total | .. | 69.0 | 76.9 | 78.1 |
| Males | .. | 80.7 | 85.6 | 85.2 |
| Females | .. | 55.5 | 67.3 | 70.7 |

SOURCE : Department of Census & Statistics based on a 10% sample population.

However, wide regional differences are observed in female literacy rates. Colombo district leads in female literacy (85%) followed closely by other districts of the South West, West, North and North East. These areas have had greater exposure to Western influence and wide spread missionary activity developed a strong tradition of education. In the tea districts of the Central highlands, Nuwara-Eliya and Badulla and the adjoining Moneragala district more than 50% of the female population are illiterate, and the East coast districts of Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Ampara show even lower rates of female literacy. In addition there is a gap between the male and female literacy rates in these districts.

TABLE II - Comparison of Male and Female literacy rates of some districts

| | <u>% Female literacy</u> | <u>% Male literacy</u> |
|--------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Nuwara-Eliya | 50.7 | 79.5 |
| Badulla | 50.8 | 78.0 |
| Moneragala | 49.6 | 72.2 |
| Ampara | 52.3 | 75.6 |
| Batticaloa | 46.9 | 66.5 |
| Trincomalee | 56.3 | 73.3 |

Further more there is a large gap between the rural and urban literacy rates among women. Only 67.6% of the total women are literate compared to 81.3% in towns and cities.

Education opportunities are spread all over the island, at the secondary level an interesting variation to the usual sex ratio among the students exist, there are more girls than boys receiving education at this level, a phenomenon noticed even in the remote village schools.

TABLE III - Enrolment by grades and curriculum streams-1975

| <u>Grades</u> | <u>% Girls</u> |
|------------------|----------------|
| 1 - 9 | 48.5 |
| 10 - 12 | <u>52.1</u> |
| 1 - 12 | 48.6 |
| 10 - 12 Arts | 57.1 |
| 10 - 12 Science | 44.7 |
| 10 - 12 Commerce | 49.7 |

SOURCE : School Census March 1975

At the tertiary level, educational opportunity is highly restricted. Women increased their proportion in the total number of university students from 10.1% in 1942 to 38.9% in 1976.

TABLE IV - Enrolment in Universities 1961-1976

| <u>Year</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>Females</u> | <u>% Females</u> |
|-------------|--------------|----------------|------------------|
| 1961 | 6,279 | 1,547 | 24.6 |
| 1966 | 14,171 | 5,286 | 37.3 |
| 1972 | 12,835 | 5,428 | 42.2 |
| 1976 | 13,153 | 5,113 | 38.9 |

SOURCE - University of Sri Lanka Senate House, Colombo

TABLE v - Enrolment in Universities by Areas of Study-1966-1976

| <u>Courses</u> | <u>1966</u> | | <u>1972</u> | | <u>1976</u> | |
|---|--------------|-----------------|--------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| | <u>Total</u> | <u>% Female</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>%female</u> | <u>Total</u> | <u>% female</u> |
| Arts, Law, Education, Commerce, Developmental Studies | 10,974 | 43.5 | 8,555 | 48.9 | 8,106 | 43.0 |
| Science and Architecture | 827 | 23.8 | 1,416 | 36.3 | 1,871 | 33.7 |
| Medicine and Dentistry | 1,636 | 29.3 | 1,344 | 41.2 | 1,467 | 48.5 |
| Vt. Sc. and Agriculture | 153 | 13.7 | 307 | 28.9 | 499 | 30.9 |
| Engineering | 571 | 1.9 | 1,164 | 7.1 | 1,210 | 10.3 |

SOURCE : University of Sri Lanka

Thus we see that in the field of education women have been equal beneficiaries with men, and this is a departure from the normal pattern prevalent in most developing countries.

Although the rate of literacy is very high for women in Sri Lanka, yet males seem to have a distinct advantage over the females, possibly due to social attitudes drawing rigid lines between female education and male education especially in the rural sector. The inability of parents to extend education to all the children means that the girls are first to suffer. Shortage of educational facilities poverty, the care by girls of younger siblings, parental disregard for the education of girls to a higher level are still some of the reasons which prevent girls from progressing and thus limit their participation in economic activity and contribution to National Development. Most rural girls are also brought up with the idea, that their principal if not exclusive role in life is to be a wife, mother and home maker, thus in a changing world their outlook towards life and patterns in life style prevents

them from widening their horizons.

Other factors such as myths, concerning women's role and potential in society and work life, prejudice and traditions have a crippling effect, so that they are torn by conflicting considerations and are not venturesome into new fields in society.

Women and Employment

Sri Lanka has a largely Agrarian economy with half its employed population engaged in agriculture and fishing, slightly less than one third in the tertiary section and only about 5% in the manufacturing industry. Of the total female labour force almost 60% work in agriculture and forestry. The rural women including those working in plantations are mainly agricultural and production workers while urban women are largely in the service sectors.

An analysis of the employment structure reveals the following:

- (a) A pattern of male female occupations exists
- (b) Women tend to concentrate in low income jobs
- (c) Social attitudes continue to constrict full development of women.

Role of rural women in agriculture

Most of these women participate in a wide spectrum of activities, in their homes, on the family farm and in the rural economy. In addition to the role they play in agriculture, let us consider the multiple roles of rural women. Traditionally women's role in life has been limited to a great extent to domestic affairs. With the farm family as an economic unit of the rural community, women perform a variety of tasks both in the home and in the farm.

In the home a woman is responsible for the entire range of activities namely preparation of nutritious food, preservation, maintenance of the home, health, sanitation, child care, management and other related fields. She is expected to play the successive roles of a daughter, a wife, a daughter-in-law, a mother, a mother-in-law, and a grandmother. She is expected to bear children and if she does not she is frowned upon. Comparing with the modern facilities available the

rural woman works in conditions of real hardships, drudgery in the fields is combined with household drudgery, multiplied by the lack of adequate cooking facilities. The heat source for cooking is an open fire on the floor and due to poor lighting in the kitchens, bottle lamps are used during the day, while there is bright sunshine outside. Household activities are very labour intensive and in addition, they have to fetch wood and water from distant places. Supplies of water is obtained from unprotected wells, springs, tanks, and rivers which are open to contamination.

Pregnancy and lactation constitute a significant drain on a woman's nutritional reserves, especially among women where diets are inadequate. The recurrent cycle of pregnancy and lactation during the reproductive years can lead to a state of chronic malnutrition called the maternal depletion syndrome which undermines health and reduces the expectation of life.

Surveys in Sri Lanka indicates that the majority of mothers do not supplement their normal meals during pregnancy and lactation. It has been estimated that of the mothers who had five or more children, as many as 63% were in households with a low income per month.

In the rural sector women are an important source of agricultural labour. Tasks performed by women consists of transplanting, weeding, harvesting and selling of agricultural produce in the market. However they are not represented in the higher status jobs such as agribusiness, marketing professionals rural politicians etc.

In Sri Lanka the rural women have not received the rightful attention of researchers hence there is a dearth of research information on the role of rural women in agriculture and other related fields. A study conducted by the Agrarian Research and Training Institute in collaboration with the Farm Women's Agricultural Extension Programme of the Department of Agriculture in Kuliypitiya (Kurunegala district), Jaffna, Rajangana (Anuradhapura district) Beminiwatta (Kegalle district) and Kandupalatha (Kandy district) provides some insight into the activities of farm women in Sri Lanka.

The survey was intended to collect information on the allocation of time by females for various activities.

The percentage of female members engaged in family farm activities either on full time or part time basis in the areas were as follows :

| | |
|--------------|-----|
| Kuliyapitiya | 40% |
| Jaffna | 12% |
| Rajangana | 74% |
| Kandupalatha | 49% |
| Beminiwatta | 54% |

The study reveals high participation of female members in own farm activities, and also shows off farm non agricultural employment opportunities are inadequate in all five areas. This is seen to a greater degree in Rajangana where only 3 out of 91 female family members were gainfully employed in off farm non agricultural activities.

Coming down to specific agricultural activities such as Home gardening and poultry keeping the study revealed that the production of vegetable and fruits was low and that in most of the areas home gardening was not carried out systematically, except in Jaffna where 93% of the households surveyed were engaged in poultry keeping, in other areas only a few households were engaged in poultry keeping.

It is evident from the facts that women can play a greater role in small scale home based projects, such as home gardens and poultry keeping and thereby improve their economy.

Since women are an important part in the rural production process they should also be involved in planning and decision making within the community. However, as a decision maker they seldom participate outside their home.

Training facilities outside the educational system in the field of Agriculture and Home Economics

If we consider the training facilities available for women in the field of agriculture and home economics one has to admit that the facilities are very limited. The department has 3 practical farm schools for training girls, in comparison to 12 practical farm schools for training boys. The Sri Lanka School of Agriculture at Kundasale has a fixed quota of seats for girls. For many decades all agricultural extension programmes has been geared mainly to the farmer. Although a Women's Extension Programme

was inaugurated in 1970, the expansion of this programme is slow and receives little priority, although almost half the population of the rural sector are women and the roles played by women in agricultural production are no less significant. To this vicious circle must be added a description of their physical well being. Rural women often have poor nutrition, bear too many children and work long hours both in the farm and in household chores. It must be remembered that rural women bear primary responsibility for maintaining their family, the corner stone of rural society. Although women play very important roles they are prevented from full utilization of their potential.

In recent years attention has been concentrated on the small farmer and his potential for change. It has been perhaps widely assumed that improvements in farming practices, or the acceptance of improvements in agricultural techniques form the primary issue and the farmers concerned in making such are men. These assumptions are questionable, the small farmer's life is bound into a complex system involving at least his family, his wider network of kin and his community. Women are important at the local community level in processes of change which affect farming practices, family nutrition, health and other aspects of the community's economy and have a role to play in the development of the community itself. The functions and roles of men and women separately and together, in raising the level of living in rural communities neglect the social structure of their society as a whole. Yet developmental procedures are commonly initiated as if the roles played by men in the rural economy were well known and were all that mattered.

In this context it is increasingly important and appropriate to identify the ways in which women specifically contribute to rural development, how their capacity in various necessary activities might be increased, and how various skills, information and understanding can be transmitted to rural women for promoting better family living.

Development programmes cannot achieve the desired results without the fuller participation of a greater majority of women living in the rural areas. Since women represent 50% or more of the population, a society cannot afford to ignore half or more of the brain power available, and as women in agriculture are an important resource, their

proper training and utilization can increase both the level and rate of growth of an economy. When women's work is complementary to men's, such as when men plough and sow, and women transplant and harvest, then it is essential that women be involved in the training men receive. The imbalance of agricultural training programmes in favour of men could be a constraint to agricultural development. As women are important contributors to farm operations they should be included in agricultural training and it is essential to integrate women in economic life more effectively.

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