

integration of women in rural development in the near east region (1)

Women provide almost half of the human resources in the villages of the Near East Region for agricultural and non-agricultural production.

The percentage of rural women constitutes more than 60 per cent of the total number of women in the region.

Moreover, the number of women who head their own household and provide for their family is on the increase.

Considering the important role assumed by women in the development of their families and communities, efforts have been made by governments and welfare societies to improve women's conditions and thus allow them to play a more active role in development.

Programmes integrating women in rural development:

A large number of programmes have been prepared and adopted in various countries of the region for the purpose of increasing women's participation in development.

In Pakistan, for instance the following programmes exist: Social Welfare, Population Planning, Rural Women's centers, Youth Organizations, Village Programmes, Health Clinics, Child Welfare Centers, All Pakistan Women's Organizations, Philanthropic Associations, Cottage Industrial Centres.

In Egypt, at least 12 similar programmes have been created and applied. The same process has taken place in Syria, Jordan and Sudan. In all these countries, as well as in Egypt, radio and television programmes have been transmitted to rural families.

Progress, however, has been slow and the results highly limited. The high rate of illiteracy persists among women, as well as the problem of malnutrition among children and the submission of society to rigid traditions in all aspects of social life.

Causes of sluggishness:

1. Lack of coordination between programmes at the

(1) Abstract of a regional study prepared under special service agreement with FAO, by Hassan Dawood, Cairo, June 1978.

village level as well as with the overall development programmes.

2. Lack of well trained cadres.
3. Lack of necessary machinery.
4. Lack of research identifying rural women's needs.

Some efforts have been made by FAO to promote studies in this field. In 1977, a study was carried out in Lebanon and another in Sudan on Rural Family Resource Allocation(2). Studies on the role of women in rural development are being carried out in Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, to be completed at the end of 1978.

5. Shortage of financial resources allocated to government rural development programmes.
6. Meagre resources of non-government programmes.

Rural Development in Egypt:

The Land Reform Law, enacted in 1952, did not exclude rural women from the categories of those who were entitled to receive expropriated land. But the emphasis it gave to the family rather than to the individual led to the neglect of women's right to receive land because the benefits were directed towards the head of the family who is the man, and the land was registered in his name. The agricultural cooperatives include mostly men members; the new rural programmes favor men and neglect women.

However in the newly reclaimed settlement areas, women are included in community development committees.

Community development societies were created, composed of local people joining different committees whose members look after health conditions and economic and cultural aspects in village life. Women and child care programmes are part of these activities.

Income generating activities:

89 units for small and cottage industries in Egypt provide women with training and employment

(2) See Al-Raida, Feb. 1978, No. 3, p. 6.

opportunities in sewing, weaving blankets and carpets, dairy products, straw mats, etc.

Educational facilities for both sexes are available.

Nursery schools with a total enrollment of 1392 children try to lessen working mothers' burden.

Rural women in Iraq:

In Iraq, the new Agrarian Reform Law of 1970 has established a new development plan for 1974-1980, which aims at speeding up the social transformation of the Iraqi rural sector. A study made in 1976 showed that though women constitute about 44 per cent of the total human power engaged in permanent agricultural work, yet the percentage of women who own and operate land is negligible to the extent that no official figures are available(1). Although rural women help their husbands in the collective farms they are not allowed to become members of these farms. In the cooperative farms, rural women do work and receive wages only during the peak of seasonal work.

Iraqi rural women, like their Egyptian sisters, have not been substantially affected by the Agrarian Reform Laws of 1958 and 1970. The principle which relates land ownership to the family rather than to the individual and allows the registration of the land in the name of the head of each family, has served to deprive women of the benefits of the Reform Laws.

Conclusion

Women in rural areas constitute a major part of the untapped potential of human resources. Better access to education, to vocational and employment opportunities, will serve to improve their participation and raise their moral.

Measures have been taken by certain governments to improve the conditions of rural women. In Jordan, Egypt, and the Sudan, special departments for women's affairs have been created. Other governments supported their women's unions, as in the case of Iraq, Tunisia, Syria and Yemen Democratic Republic.

At the regional level, the Economic Commissions of Africa and Western Asia developed Regional Plans of Action for the integration of women in development.

Special efforts are needed to change legislation which hampers the integration of women in the developmental process, more particularly agrarian reform and cooperative societies' laws which failed to help women.

Qualified women extension workers are needed to reorient traditional rural women's programmes in employment, education and production.

Local committees and organizations can also help in the following ways:

Giving women better access to knowledge and technology, encouraging them to join cooperatives and credit, helping the expansion and improvement of their production and marketing of manual skills.

Research studies, of rural conditions, carried out at a local or international level, are of great importance as a preliminary step to development.

(1) See Al-Raida No. 7, p. 10.