

Role of Women in Sustainable Rural Development

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Theme: Science and Humanities

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Abstract:- Rural development was synonymous with agricultural development and, hence environmentally, safe living conditions, and reduction in gender and income inequalities. Women's active contribution in agricultural growth has been promoted and many recent agricultural extension projects have been making efforts to increase women farmers' participation; (Saito and Weidemann, 1990; Stuart, 1994). Sustainable rural development can be contextualized to three types of region: periurban, productive agricultural lowland, and economic periphery. A range of indicators confirm the contemporary absence of sustainable agriculture and rural development in Europe, although the constraints on sustainable development vary among the three types of rural region. Sustainable rural development can no longer be equated solely with agricultural development in rural regions, and a new balance is being sought between farming and restructuring economies and societies. A distinction can be drawn between top-down and bottom-up processes in the promotion of sustainable development, with networks of institutions in rural regions playing an increasingly influential role. However, state policies to promote sustainability in rural regions are commonly overridden by other policy imperatives concerned with economic growth and global competition.

Key words: Development, Role, Rural, Sustainable, Women

INTRODUCTION

Women are the backbone of the development of rural and national economies. They comprise 43% of the world's agricultural labor force, which rises to 70% in some countries. Women in rural India play a major role in shaping the economy of the country. As per 2001 census women constitute about 40 per cent of the work force engaged in agriculture, their number being about 92 million. By 2012, this number is expected to cross 110 million and it would be about 45 per cent of total agricultural workers. Women are key agents for development. They play a catalytic role towards achievement of transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. But limited access to credit, health care and education are among the many challenges they face. These are further aggravated by the global food and economic crises and climate change. Empowering them is essential, not only for the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities, but also for overall economic productivity, given women's large presence in the agricultural workforce worldwide.

UN Women supports the leadership and participation of rural women in shaping laws, policies and programmes on all issues that affect their lives, including improved food and nutrition security, and better rural livelihoods. Training equips them with skills to pursue new livelihoods and adapt technology to their needs. Development is one of the basic global discussions whose nature is altered due to changes in human knowledge. In some areas of the world, the dispersed and semi Numadic characteristic of human settlements associated with traditional livelihoods remains almost un-changed (Lopez et al., 2013). The term of development as like of other scientific expressions incorporates complementary and active procedure. Many rural-development scholars and practitioners have touted the benefits of governance, particularly regional partnerships that straddle traditional administrative boundaries, as an alternative to government in rural development and problem solving (Lu and Jacobs, 2013).

Sustainable rural development may be defined as the management and conservation of the rural resources base in such a manner as to ensure the attainment and continued satisfaction of human needs for present and future generations. Given that, mass communication/media has potential to bring out institutional change by changing people's mind set, this paper seeks to highlight the role of mass communication/media in sustainable rural development. This paper is analytical and heuristic in nature and based on secondary data. Elaborated in three sections, first section of this paper deals with the definition of sustainable rural development than limits itself to analyzing the two major components of sustainable rural development i.e. sustainable agriculture and sustainable rural energy. Second section presents contemporary media scenario and how it works. Third and major part of the paper includes how this media can play an important role in sustainable rural development. Frame of reference in which all this discussion has been made is limited to India.

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (Brundtland Commission: 1987). In fact, the concept of sustainable development is rooted in this sort of systems thinking. It helps us understand ourselves and our world. It contains within it two key concepts: First the concept of needs, in particular the essential needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given and second the idea of limitations imposed by the state of technology and social organization on the environment's ability to meet present and future needs." At basic level, sustainable rural development includes the sustainable development in agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors. It means conserving land, water, plant and animal genetic resources. It demands environmentally non-degrading, technically appropriate, economically viable and socially acceptable development that could not harm future generation.

Sustainable Rural Development through Sustainable Agriculture

Agriculture is directly linked to very many facets of sustainable rural development, including poverty eradication, sustainable consumption and production, management of natural resources, energy, freshwater, health, education, trade and market access, as well as technology transfer and capacity building. Sustainable agriculture is a way of raising food that is healthy for consumers and animals, does not harm the environment, is humane for workers, respects animals, provides a fair wage to the farmer, and supports and enhances rural communities. US government defined sustainable agriculture in Public Law 101-624, Title XVI, Subtitle A, Section 1683 (1990), as "an integrated system of plant and animal production practices having a site-specific application that will, over the long term, satisfy human food and fiber needs; enhance environmental quality and the natural resource base upon which the agricultural economy depends; make the most efficient use of nonrenewable resources and on-farm resources and integrate, where appropriate, natural biological cycles and controls; sustain the economic viability of farm operations; and enhance the quality of life for farmers and society as a whole." (United States Congress Act: 1990)

A sustainable system should be resilient, and able to withstand shocks and failures of parts of its systems without the whole collapsing, and without small shocks leading to a spiral of unsustainability. The integration of agriculture with other aspects of land management and ecosystem conservation is essential in order to promote both environmental sustainability and

Agricultural production.

For this, natural resources have to be accessible to the poor, which in the farm sector means secure rights to land, water and genetic resources. Further, policies for land and water resource management, biodiversity protection, infrastructure investment, strategy on institutional market reforms, reduction of tariffs and phasing out of possible commodity control are integral to achieving sustainable agriculture. Sustainability should be seen in the context of different agro climatic zones as well of as the country as a whole. Suitable technologies should be developed and indicators for sustainable agriculture should be identified for both. One might take the mode of Organic farming here that is principle of nature, which is a self-sustaining developing system.

It respects the environment's own systems for controlling pests and diseases in raising crops and livestock, and avoids the use of synthetic pesticides, herbicides, chemical fertilizers, growth hormones, antibiotics or gene manipulation.

Sustainable Rural Development through Sustainable Rural Energy

The farming can become remunerative only when it is tied very closely to industry. This can happen when farms also produce energy besides food. Thus when the major demand of fuel and electricity of the country is met by the farm then wealth will automatically flow into rural areas. Three types of fuels can be produced easily via agriculture – liquid fuels like ethanol or biodiesel; gaseous fuels like methane; and electricity. These fuels can be used for transportation, electricity production and motive power for industries.

The ethanol liquid fuel can be produced from sugar producing agricultural crops like sweet sorghum, sugar beet, sugarcane etc. while biodiesel can be produced from a horde of oil producing crops like Jatropha, Karanja, and Castor etc. Estimates are that agriculture-based liquid fuel industry can be of an order of about Rs. 40-50,000 crores/year thereby providing increasing wealth to farmers (Rajvanshi: December 2006).

In any agriculture only 25-40% of the produce is food. Rest 60-75% is the agricultural residues. Residues can produce electricity (via biomass-based power plants); ethanol fuel (via enzymatic hydrolysis process); and diesel (via high temperature pyrolysis route). Any marginal farm can produce agricultural residues even if the main food crop fails. On an average a farmer can get an extra income of Rs. 2000-4000/acre from the residues alone if they are used for producing energy. This income can give him benefits even in case of a distress sale of his crop (Rajvanshi: December 2006).

Women and Their Role in Rural Development

In rural families, women's role is significant even economically as they help their men in farm activities. Women constitute a little less than half of the total population of Pakistan. They offer great help in the fields, in cottage and in business. On the other hand, Mahmood and Malik (2007) note that Pakistani women are generally viewed as unproductive and deprived in many ways, due to early marriages, lack of schooling and employment, unskilled tasks and social isolations. Maria (2001) notes that opportunities for women and girls in rural Pakistan are limited by strict observance of the customs

and traditions practiced in different regions. Since empowerment is a necessary condition for women to improve their lives, establishment of small women groups can improve their lives. Innovative approaches to increasing women's economic opportunities, developing skills, literacy programmes, organization and mobilization within socially and culturally acceptable norms have been and continue to be initiated in the country.

Focusing on women- Experience worldwide indicates that indigenous women can ensure sustainable development and biodiversity conservation/enhancement. By addressing the structural obstacles to the advancement of indigenous women, the Fund has sought to facilitate the redefinition of gender roles and relations in the family and society. Efforts to enhance women's capabilities to promote social transformation, rural and economic development, and the peace agenda have begun bearing fruit. Such efforts must encompass not only women's social needs and economic empowerment, but also their increased participation in community organizations and in the political process, thereby building capacity and self-esteem.

Building on women's strengths- Indigenous women have long been custodians of valuable indigenous knowledge related to the management of natural resources. The Fund has realized the importance of revitalizing indigenous knowledge and blending it, where appropriate, with modern technology to achieve a greater and more sustained impact. Nevertheless, *research support* is often required to increase productivity and improve and/or develop new products at reduced costs

Ensuring equitable distribution of resources and benefits- The design and implementation of policy and legislation (tenure, benefit-sharing, free prior and informed consent, intellectual property rights, etc.) need to acknowledge that communities are not homogeneous and that mechanisms need to be established to provide equitable representation of women and allow for transparency, accountability and conflict resolution. Often mechanisms need to be developed to ensure that the rights and interests of indigenous women are protected, without sacrificing the potential gains of others.

Adopting a holistic approach- In approaching women in general and indigenous women in particular, there is a need for a holistic perspective that embraces the totality of the social organization, and economic and political life in which the household is embedded. This approach is also required in view of the plurality and diversity that characterize indigenous communities. Moreover, sensitivity to cultural issues and language is an essential ingredient. The promotion of indigenous culture and languages has proved a key element in the strengthening of indigenous women's identity.

Putting natural resources and other assets in the hands of women- As demonstrated in Nepal, creating new natural capital by transferring long-term usufruct rights to forest assets to women can be a powerful poverty reduction strategy that also enhances biodiversity. Secure access or ownership rights to natural resources need to be pursued systematically as they pave the way for compensating local people for the environmental services these resources provide. Moreover, recognizing local rights over natural resources can help prevent conflicts. Similarly, access to new financial assets (through microcredit, local development funds, etc.) has proved an important ingredient for self-empowerment and building confidence and self-esteem. Ultimately the involvement of local women producers in policy negotiations, either directly or through partners, will result in more practical and realistic laws and regulations.

Entrusting women's groups with funds and resources- IFAD has long recognized that capacity-building, self development and ownership can be considerably enhanced by entrusting women's groups with the direct management of resources and funds. This has been borne out by several initiatives in India and Viet Nam where funds are channeled through project implementation agencies, directly to interest groups promoted by the projects.

Rights-based approach to development planning- Recent experience indicates that such an approach may be required when dealing with indigenous women. In all instances, training women on their rights has proved extremely useful as it increases their awareness of the claims they can make and provides opportunities for enhancing their political capital and their participation in the policy process. Similarly, the establishment of legal defence funds has assisted indigenous women in asserting their claims and accessing their entitlements.

Scaling-up of isolated successes. Using resources to catalyse the linking up of local success stories and spread skills and benefits of development investments more evenly throughout the rural space has started bearing fruit in both poverty reduction and biodiversity enhancement.

Rural women in Rural Development Plans

Increasing attention has been paid to the problem of the role of women in rural development, resulting in the insertion of special measures in the Agenda 2000. Rural development programs aimed at identifying the constraints on women's full participation in local public and economic life and at developing specific initiatives in favour of women. European Union programs have already provided significant backing to developments in rural areas with a benefit for

women. The most significant actions included: (i) Regulations. 1257/99 and 1260/99, which defined the strategies and objectives of rural development policy (multi-functionality, multi-sector approach, efficiency and coordination of action, application of new measures, etc.) and aimed, among other things, at creating new jobs, so as to guarantee better use of existing human resources and promote equal opportunities for men and women; (ii) The Leader+ initiative for rural development, in which an improvement in job opportunities and/or the creation of jobs for the young and women had been a EU priority and contributed towards improving the conditions of women in rural areas by providing incentives for the development of new activities and sources of employment; (iii) The NOW (New Opportunities for Women) EU employment initiative that had been widely used to support training, employment creation and enterprise support projects for rural women. (Navarra, 2009: 65).

The Rural Development Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 (EAFRD) stated in Article 8 that “Member States and the Commission shall promote equality between men and women...” Therefore, the equality principles and needs of women were suggested to be taken into account in design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes. The EU programs for rural development aimed at singling out the factors handicapping the full participation of women in public and economic life at local level and at developing specific initiatives for this category.

The analysis of women’s role in RDPs shows that in national Rural Development Programmes gender equality has been recognized as a horizontal issue. Scanning of policy documents demonstrates, however, that few rural development plans have addressed gender issues and generally only by including some separate projects for women. Little has been done to address the systemic features of gender inequality and to realise inclusive developments that address the needs of all social groups. The depoliticisation of rural gender issues has resulted in policy makers ticking the obligatory gender box without envisioning any real change in the agenda or process of rural development policy making (Bock, 2015).

Rural women and sustainable development

In most countries rural women are not equal partners in the development process despite the fact that approximately one person in four falls in this demographic. Although rural women make essential contribution to the rural economy of all development opportunities are still remaining limited. Women are still held back by many education, unequal workloads and prosperity rights, limited control over resources and limited participation in decisions that affect their capacity to improve their lives and to better contribute to the economic growth and sustainable development of their countries. (FAO, 2009, 2011). Most published reports confirm that women face a surprisingly consistent gender gap in access to productive assets inputs and services.

FAO in her response to such women’s inequality taking as an example the agricultural sector showed that if women have the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yield on their farms by 20-30 percent. This could raise total agriculture output in developing countries by 2.5 – 4.0 percent, which could in turn reduce the number of hunger people in the world by 12-17 percent. Actually many countries are taken several steps to close the gender inequality gap by reforming marital and property rights laws, but, the implementation and enforcement are inconsistent. (World Bank, World development report (2012). Lessons learned from numerous case studies evidently indicated that no society will progress satisfactory unless women, who contribute almost half of their population are given equal opportunities. Now, women are influencing the course of social change in society, having their aspiration, abilities and qualities as a man does have. It is quite true that once women are on the move, the family moves, the community moves and the nation moves. (Abu Zeid and Hamdy (2010).

Constraints on Sustainable Development in Rural Regions

The constraints on sustainable agriculture and rural development can be analyzed conveniently by separating agricultural restructuring from broader processes of socioeconomic change.

Farming systems having characteristics normally associated with the manufacturing industry, namely the creation of scale economies at the farm level (i.e. fewer but larger farms), a reliance on purchased agri-inputs manufactured in other sectors of the economy (i.e. farm plant and machinery, agrichemicals, fertilizers), resource substitution (i.e. capital for labor), specialization of labor, and mechanization of production methods. Significantly, these trends can be found in both capitalist and (former) socialist farming systems.

The term industrialization describes this trajectory of development in agriculture, with modern pig, poultry, beef feedlot, and greenhouse horticulture probably representing the most industrialized sectors of agriculture. The industrial model of agricultural development can be usefully summarized under the following three terms: intensification, concentration, and specialization.

The term intensification can be used to describe the rising level of purchased agri-inputs (e.g., farm machinery, agrichemicals, fertilizers) and increases in output per hectare of farmland. These trends are readily observable in the rising per hectare application of fertilizers and the increasing average yields of most crops. In addition, in an increasingly sophisticated technological environment, there are management advantages in learning and applying specialist skills and knowledge.

This process of *specialization* on a narrow range of crops and livestock, when aggregated for groups of farms, produced the increasingly specialized agricultural regions observable throughout Europe. Equally important have been the

developing relations between agriculture and capital inputs *external* to the farm sector (e.g., agri-inputs, food processing, banking and credit capital).

Environmental gains are expected from more extensive agricultural systems following the recent withdrawal of state subsidies throughout Europe. However, such gains have been made uncertain by the parallel exposure of European farming to global competition: the industrial model of agricultural development may well be strengthened by the competitive international organization of farming capital.

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