

STATUS OF LEBANESE WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS: ROLES AND PERSPECTIVES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The following report is a situational analysis of the rural woman its characteristics, roles and aspirations in the Lebanese rural communities. It addresses policy makers as well as program planners, experts, researchers and practitioners in woman empowerment so that they can put forth programs and plans so as to improve the woman situation and its participation in the rural areas.

The specific objectives of the study were as follows: (1) to determine situation of woman in the Lebanese rural areas and explore its conditions specifically in the agricultural sector and related rural sectors to present it to decision makers so as to reorient the development programs and interventions to better meet the needs of woman; (2) to analyze the roles of man and woman in the rural household ; (3) to analyze the roles of man and woman in the agricultural cultural practices; (4) to analyze woman's role in the rural household economy and explore the areas that the woman is involved in; (5) to identify constraints and problems that the rural woman face and explore their needs (6) to assess access of rural woman to the various resources and services and its share in decision making; (7) to know dreams and aspirations of the rural woman ; (8) to draw potentials and capacities of the rural woman in the various socioeconomic aspects; (9) to put recommendations and suggestions related to rural woman in order to integrate it into development and improving its economic and productive capacities.

In order to meet the above objectives study areas were selected according to specific criteria's and participatory approach was followed. The study areas were the Cazas of Akkar, Byblos (central, upland and coastal side), Baalbeck (South and North part and Deir Ahmar region), Hermel, Marjayoun and Hasbaya. Sampling techniques were used to randomly select from among villages of the Cazas at 50% rate of the total villages and as such the surveyed villages were 150 villages. In addition to desk research a field survey was conducted with two questionnaires one addressing the rural household and the woman being the respondents and the other is Rapid Rural Assessment questionnaire addressing key informant people in the village under study. In addition, field observations documented by the enumerators were also considered. As a result the survey addressed 150 villages with 150 interviewed woman and 150 village level groups.

The Rapid Rural Assessment Questionnaire included the following: (1) major prevailing farming systems; (2) Touristic areas and its community based management aspects and related woman's role; (3) existing development facilities and its access by woman;(4) women's work involvement in and outside the village; (5) Women's roles and activities in agriculture; (6) woman's participation in the local authorities; (7) Health facilities and its access by woman.

The rural household questionnaire included the following: (1) Personal and socio-economic information's; (2) Economic activities of the woman and other family members; (3) Training needs of woman in business aspects; (4) the wife participation in the agricultural and agro-food activities and other related decision making; (5) household and child rearing activities and its related decision taking; (6) woman's other activities; (7) woman's participation in the community and local authority; (8) health and health awareness; (9) problems and constraints facing the rural woman, ad access to resources; (10) woman's aspirations; dreams and ambitions.

The study results showed that the Lebanese rural woman bear all the household activities as cleaning, laundering, cooking, insuring food stocks and child caring. The man on the other hand is responsible for the expenses of health for family, whereas expenses allocation is a joint decision the man and woman take. In addition the woman participates with the man in all aspects of his rural life and most importantly agriculture.

However, woman's role in agriculture is mostly undermined because it's considered as a part of its housekeeping activities. In fact, the results showed that around in 48% of the villages the woman main activity is in the agricultural sector followed by education. Results of gender division of labor showed that the woman contributes to agricultural activities in its various stages but at different rates and at percentage share. Her role is complementary with the men's role and it cannot be clear cut in most of the situations. The most obvious woman's role is that in the food processing tasks, whereas, the tasks that is equally shared by both is harvesting, weeding, and postharvest tasks and its related decisions. Other tasks such as pest control and fertilization is a man's activity.

The survey has also shown that around 18% of the woman in the village work outside the village premises. The work nature differed with the region and socio-economic conditions and educational level of the woman. For example in Akkar Casa the rate is only 15% and they are mostly engaged as agricultural seasonal labors in the nearby villages especially at harvest seasons. As for woman entrepreneur the rate is 15%. Woman business represent a good source for family income although that the woman cannot estimate it in most of the cases. The business that the woman has often represents employment opportunities for the males of the family. Nevertheless only 9% of these business women have their own product trade name. In fact 40.3% of them have confirmed the need for training on financial management aspects and banking procedures, time management and management skills.

Woman of the different Cazas under study were much alike in terms of their various roles even if their involvement rate would change with change in the geographic and socio-economic conditions of the village rather than with change in their religious beliefs.

The study has further showed the burden that the woman incurs with advancement in age. Moreover, their tasks would increase with increasing tough family and personal conditions which would mean more contribution to family care as its family size increases. Indeed, the rural Lebanese woman doesn't separate her needs from her families or community or village needs. When she was asked about her dreams and aspirations her response would be a suggestion that would revolve around the needs of other like social and community care or village level development rather than personal needs.

Woman in all ages suffer from in access to productive resources and its mostly in the age group of youth (18-29 years old) a group that usually aspire to improving their living conditions at their young age. Similarly in access to capital is another problem that is mostly faced by the same age group where 93.8% of the woman in this age group complained about having no enough capital. Lack of appropriate technology is another problem facing all women (75% of all women) and specifically the 18-29 year old age group.

As to participation in local municipal and parliament election, a considerably high percentage (77% of the woman) was shown. However, woman is rarely represented in higher leadership party positions and she rather affiliate with social groups. Similarly, women membership to agricultural cooperatives is very low (5%) a percentage that is the same as its peer male.

As to institutional mechanism and high decision making levels that care for the woman advancement or empowerment it is still weak despite the efforts done so far by the various public private and public bodies and international organizations in Lebanon. The woman still lack proper training, information, credit and development services.

Finally, the study put forth several recommendations for future interventions, among which is the necessity to conduct in-depth regional and specialized studies in the different areas as to put the appropriate program and interventions for woman empowerment. These could make up a strategy for the rural woman based on their needs. The strategy could be part of a national one that is to be adopted by the various line ministries and non-governmental organization in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture in the area of rural woman development.