

AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION WORK AMONG RURAL WOMEN IN SELECTED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

The main aim was to study the agricultural extension work at present being done among rural women in certain developing countries, with a view to assessing the likely demand for staff training courses in Britain.

Two overseas visits were arranged in 1968/69, one to Africa, in which visits were made to Uganda, Kenya and Western Nigeria, and the other to the Caribbean Islands of Trinidad, St. Vincent, Puerto Rico and Jamaica. While attention was focussed particularly on the provision of the agricultural extension services for women, the itinerary included contact with other relevant government organisations. The second aim was to assess the adequacy of the provision of courses in Britain, in the light of the identified needs. This study, which took place in 1969/70, was supplemented by a review of similar provision in the Netherlands, Denmark and Eire, and of the appropriate international agency, F.A.O.

ORGANISATION OF EXTENSION WORK AMONG RURAL WOMEN

Informal education programmes for rural women were undertaken by a number of different agencies within each country. For example, ministries concerned with agricultural extension, community development, and health were involved, as well as various voluntary organisations. These agencies tended to work somewhat independently and to train their own staff. Ministries concerned with agriculture were, on the whole, the more recent of the ministries to organise programmes for women, and to train women staff to run them.

At the time of the study, there were programmes for women in the agricultural extension services of Uganda, Kenya, Western Nigeria, Puerto Rico and Jamaica; consideration was being given to the development of such programmes in the agricultural extension services of the other two countries visited, namely Trinidad and St. Vincent.

The initiative for the development of programmes for women in agricultural extension appeared to be related to one or more of the following factors:-

- (i) the influence of the US model of co-ordinated extension, directed to farmers, rural women, and rural youth.

- (ii) public pressure for the admission of girls to agricultural colleges, and an increase in the number qualified to do so.
- (iii) the spontaneous interest shown by rural women in training facilities offered by agricultural extension services.
- (iv) the recognition by male agricultural staff of the need to involve rural women in the rural development process.

The subject matter considered appropriate for agricultural extension work among women included aspects of home economics and agriculture, for example, nutrition, home management, poultry keeping, and growing food crops.

Training for women staff in home economics/agriculture and extension work was more developed at the intermediate level than at the universities. Most intermediate level agricultural training institutions were administered by the ministries concerned with agriculture in these countries, and those open to women usually offered a course which was primarily in agriculture, but with some home economics.

There was at least one intermediate level institution open to women in Uganda, Kenya, Western Nigeria, Jamaica and Trinidad; in Kenya consideration was being given to opening other institutions to women. At the university level, degrees in Home Economics were offered in Kenya and Puerto Rico, but this was taught separately from agriculture. There were Faculties of Agriculture in the University of East Africa, in Western Nigeria, and the Universities of the West Indies and Puerto Rico.

Senior women employed within the agricultural extension services had received their training variously in the indigenous agricultural colleges, at teacher training colleges, or overseas. As a result of these different sources of staff, and types of training, women staff employed in extension services were qualified in home economics, in agriculture, or in a combination of both. The ratio of men to women staff varied very much from country to country. The figures available for 1967/68 showed the number of women employed in extension services, as home economists, agriculturalists, or a combination of both, to be 7 in Uganda, 172 in Kenya, 32 in Western Nigeria, 1 in Trinidad, none in St. Vincent, 121 in Puerto Rico, 1 in Jamaica plus 2 part-time.

NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE WORK

Most of the extension work with rural women was conducted on a group basis through short residential courses, or through the organisation of women's clubs. The service was primarily directed to women farmers, and farmers' wives, but in some cases also included girls in such organisations as 4-H and Young Farmers' Societies. Home economics in the context of agriculture was becoming less oriented to the teaching of specific skills, such as needlework and cookery, and more oriented to tackling the problems of the family in a comprehensive way, for example, in terms of home management, child care, and nutrition education.

Consideration was being given to means of co-ordinating the work of various agencies concerned with rural informal education programmes. The

focus of these efforts was changing from programmes dealing with narrowly defined problems, to integrated programmes to tackle common problems; for example, programmes on nutrition education allowed a number of agencies to be involved.

FUTURE DEMAND AND EXTENT OF NEED

The establishment of extension services for women, and the appropriate staff training, had relied heavily on overseas training facilities, and overseas personnel acting as trainers and advisers. It was clearly desirable that indigenous training should be developed, and that national staff should replace expatriates as soon as possible.

Intermediate level training for women to work in agricultural extension was developed rapidly, but there were very limited facilities for advanced training and research. The development of these extension services, and training facilities, was creating a need for experienced women, suitably qualified, to play a key role in the planning and administration of programmes, in staff training at the intermediate and university level, and in research.

The limited opportunities for advanced training in the countries concerned, the need sometimes for rapid promotion of field staff, or the transfer of women from other fields of work such as teaching, meant that women appointed to senior posts were often in need of supplementary training. This was where the greatest need for training arose, and where the countries concerned were least able to meet the demand. In some cases, the need was for further qualifications and in others for additional experience, and this required periods of time away from the job of from a few months to several years. The training need was sometimes related to subject matter, for example in nutrition or horticulture, and in other cases to the work role, for example in extension methods or staff management.

The size of the demand within any one country was likely to be limited to a few individuals at any one time, and called for programmes of training, at home or overseas, designed on an individual basis to meet the needs of a particular person in relation to a particular job. The most acute need was expected to arise in response to a specific development in the extension service, or in a training institution; developments in the service were especially likely in Trinidad, St. Vincent and Jamaica, where programmes were just beginning. The need for staff trainers was widespread.

In regard to training overseas, where a large part of the supplementary training described was likely to be conducted for some time, several factors appeared likely to contribute to its success. These included communication between the student's employing organisation and the training institution overseas, flexibility in planning the student's programme, and the provision of counselling and guidance for the student during her stay abroad.

It was considered that, in the long term, this process of training senior staff would make possible the establishment of the full range of appropriate training institutions in the countries themselves, including university level home economics with agriculture, and professional training for extension work.

In summary, the development of extension services for rural women appeared to call for training for women which would enable them to build the new training and service institutions required, involving both the creation of a new professional group, and the establishment of appropriate staff training.

ASSESSMENT OF TRAINING FACILITIES IN BRITAIN AND SELECTED EUROPEAN COUNTRIES

In making this assessment, the sponsorship, selection, placement, training, resettlement and subsequent employment of students on their return home, were regarded as forming an integrated and continuous process.

When reviewing the sponsorship system of the British, Netherlands and Danish Governments and of F.A.O., it was clear that the particular needs of individual overseas students were given close attention, so that the most appropriate formal or informal training facilities could be found. However, rather limited emphasis appeared to have been given in Britain to the particular needs of women in agricultural extension services.

There were, in Britain, general courses open to overseas students in agriculture and home economics. There were also special courses in these subjects, related to development and to aspects of professional roles having some similarity to extension work. These were at both university and non-university levels. However, there was no special provision for women with responsibilities in the dual areas of home economics and agriculture.

A relatively small number of women students, coming from developing countries and destined for agricultural extension work, had come to Britain in the years preceding this study. Up to that time, they had been dispersed among a number of training institutions throughout Britain. There was, however, some concentration of training effort in Britain for certain other professional groups related to extension work overseas, for example community development workers and teachers. The agricultural component of these courses was a relatively small one, but a few women from the extension field had been admitted to them. This form of concentration was therefore making some contribution to meeting the training needs with which the study was concerned.

However, in regard to agriculture there was a very limited degree of concentration of training effort to meet the needs of overseas students in Britain. There were a few courses at post-graduate level in agriculture related to the tropics, and one on agricultural extension per se. There appeared to be no such provision for overseas students in Britain at the non-university agricultural training institutions.

In addition to this relative lack of concentration of effort in training appropriate for the women in question, there was a negligible degree of communication and collaboration between home economics and agricultural training institutions admitting women students in this field. There was virtually no direct communication between the overseas organisations employing the students and the institutions in which they received training in Britain, except in the few cases where trainers had visited the country themselves. Overseas experience of any kind among the staff of British training institutions admitting overseas students was notably limited, even

in the case of some of the special courses designed for them. This was less marked at the university level, than in non-university institutions. In comparable situations in Denmark and the Netherlands, there appeared to be greater opportunities for visits overseas.

Considerable flexibility was built into the British courses specially designed for overseas students. But for those attending general courses, especially at non-university level, the pressures of the set curriculum provided little opportunity for additional or alternative studies and activities which might make some aspects of the work more applicable to the student's home situation.

The staff of certain home economics training institutions reported that the admission of individual overseas students to general courses was unsatisfactory, and believed that organising a special course for these students was much to be preferred. This would allow for much more individual programme planning and opportunities for guidance and counselling.

A major problem in developing valid training courses appeared to be the lack of an appropriate extension service for rural women in Britain, which might be used in the course of training for visits of observation and periods of attachment. There is however a very suitable model, geared to the needs of a primarily agricultural country, in the Agricultural Advisory Service in Eire. This service also has a training institution with the major function of providing women extension staff, either as Poultry Advisers or as Farm Home Management Advisers. Not only might this Service provide very valuable opportunities for observation, to supplement the facilities in Britain, but there was also evidence that applications from overseas women for formal training or a year's attachment, would be favourably considered.

The situation revealed by the study can be summarised as follows. It appeared that, if the needs of women training in Britain for work in extension services were to be adequately met, special programmes or courses would be required. These should ideally provide for training in the subject of agriculture and home economics and a range of selected aspects of professional training, according to individual needs.

CONCLUSION

While the development of extension services for farmers' wives had not yet received very high priority in the National Development Plans of the Third World countries visited in the study, there was little doubt of the serious intentions of the ministries of agriculture concerned to develop such services, as funds allowed. These programmes required women staff with skills embracing the many aspects of the woman's role in the farming communities as well as others equipped to hold senior positions as staff trainers and supervisors, and as policy makers.

Only through the combined efforts of a range of training resources in Britain, supplemented by visits to neighbouring countries with appropriate extension services, could women appointed to senior positions in this field gain the additional experience and training lacking in their own country. It was necessary that, in making plans for the future, account should be taken of the basic need to establish institutions in the countries themselves, and of the increasing role played by training institutions in non-Western countries,

both inside and beyond those visited during this study. It seemed that perhaps the most useful contribution from Britain would be to make known the resources relevant to this particular field, to develop centres of excellence concerned with these training activities, and to increase the opportunities for the men and women concerned with teaching overseas students to travel overseas and become more familiar with extension services, training institutions, and conditions in developing countries.