

Empowerment of rural women in income generating activities: a Lebanese experience

El Khoury Aoun N.

in

Hamdy A. (ed.), Sagardoy J.A. (ed.), El Kady M. (ed.), Quagliariello R. (ed.), Bogliotti C. (ed.).

Training of trainers in INtegration of Gender Dimension in water management in the Mediterranean region. INGEDI project

Bari : CIHEAM

Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 64

2004

pages 111-115

Article available on line / Article disponible en ligne à l'adresse :

<http://om.ciheam.org/article.php?IDPDF=6002385>

To cite this article / Pour citer cet article

El Khoury Aoun N. **Empowerment of rural women in income generating activities: a Lebanese experience.** In : Hamdy A. (ed.), Sagardoy J.A. (ed.), El Kady M. (ed.), Quagliariello R. (ed.), Bogliotti C. (ed.). *Training of trainers in INtegration of Gender Dimension in water management in the Mediterranean region. INGEDI project.* Bari : CIHEAM, 2004. p. 111-115 (Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 64)



<http://www.ciheam.org/>
<http://om.ciheam.org/>

EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN IN INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES: A LEBANESE EXPERIENCE

N. El Khoury Aoun*

* Project Coordinator, René Moawad Foundation,
Tel: 961-1-613367/8/9, Fax: 961-1-613370,
<http://www.rmfm.org.lb>, e-mail: nayla_aoun@rmfm.org.lb

INTRODUCTION: BRIEF CONSULTANT SCOPE DESCRIPTION

The Association d'Aide au Developpment Rural (ADR) and Rene Moawad Foundation (RMF) are two Lebanese NGOs. RMF and ADR are both operational in rural development. The former is implementing rural development projects in North Lebanon since 1991, the latter in South Lebanon, since 1998.

Both are already active in the field and have established relations at the National level and able to demonstrate their knowledge with practical experience in managing and implementing rural development activities and in promoting income-generating programs.

The consultant, ADR & RMF through their Joint Venture (JV), are coordinating work with RWDD local coordinators for the Beqaa, North & South Lebanon. The consultant is responsible for the identification, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of progression of IGAs and training correlated to identification of local associations, CBOs and women groups and their needs.

The Consultant will make chosen activities more demand-driven and more applicable to rural women, through participatory approaches that help ensure activities are relevant and responsive to local conditions and meet the real needs of the beneficiaries, within and around the IRMP Major, Medium and Small Irrigation Schemes.

The consultant is broadly responsible for:

- Identification of local groups/ and identification of minimum 20 activities
- Preparation of work plans and budgets for each IGA.
- Execution of technical, subject matter- specific and marketing training.
- Prepare and issue brochures/ flyers in Arabic.
- Implementation and supervision of IGAs.

The beneficiaries are directly targeting 400 women distributed evenly within the IRMP schemes (Irrigation and Rehabilitation and Modernization Project).

BACKGROUND

The broad objective of the project is to contribute to a sustainable rural economy that strengthens the social and economic fabric of the communities and ultimately plays a prominent role in the overall Lebanese social and economic development.

The government of Lebanon has received a loan from the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) as a supplement to the World Bank loan for the IRMP. The IFAD loan is intended for farm support activities and strengthening governmental institutions, who provide agricultural services. The main components covered by the IFAD loan are the Rural Women's Program, Technology Transfer Extension specific to the areas where Major, Medium and Small irrigation schemes will be rehabilitated under the IRMP, Applied research Quality Control, Strengthening the MOA Capacities and Small Irrigation Schemes.

The MOA aims at alleviating the repercussions of 17 years of war and to promote human resource development and balanced growth for women through its recent development plan. The MOA created

the Rural Women Development Program (RWDD) to ensure that women' concerns are incorporated within the mainstream of agricultural policy and practice.

In this sense, a program of income generating activities and training for rural women through built up cooperation between the MOA, service NGOs and village-based women groups is promoted.

The on-going project areas are those of the five Major Irrigation Schemes and the Small and Medium Irrigation Schemes. Olive, stone fruits, citrus are the main tree crops in these areas. Non-irrigated crops mainly cereals and legumes are also dominant.

SECTOR FEATURES*

Agriculture is a major productive sector within the economy contributing to about 10% of the Lebanese GDP in 1997. Its importance lies in securing food and self- sufficiency, acting as a source of foreign currency through agricultural; exports and providing job opportunities.

Whereas, the economically active population has been stable over the past years and is estimated at 24-25% of the total Lebanese population, the agricultural labor force has been continuously decreasing to reach a level of around 7% (10% men, 5% women) of the economically active population in 1997. The drop in labor force is due to severe labor migration from rural areas in search for more profitable work in cities and other economic sectors.

An extremely variable range of microclimates characterizes Lebanon, located at the eastern side of the Mediterranean and with a series of high mountain chains. Several types of temperate and subtropical crops are produced in the various agro-ecological zones. Arable land constitutes 30% of total land with 39% of it as irrigated land. The production of fruits, vegetables, floriculture and field crops comprises around 67% of the agricultural sectors in Lebanon. From a total cropped area of about 215,000Ha around 44% are dedicated to fruit crops, 24% for vegetables and 32 % for field and industrial crops. Among the most important crops are olives, grapes, citrus, apples, and stone fruits with a cultivation area of 32, 30, 12, 9, 7.5 Ha respectively (MOA, 2000) with Agricultural exports accounted for 23% of total exports in 1990. However, there was a clear reduction in the role of agriculture in the national trade structure in the following years to reach 14% of the national exports in 1997 and to contribute less to generation of foreign exchange since 2001. Among the most important commodities exported were fruits (citrus, grapes, apples and banana) and tobacco, both comprising 53% of the total agricultural exports. Still, however, Lebanon imports around 80% of its food requirements. Self-sufficiency is only observed in fruits, poultry, potato and vegetable production.

Among the major constraints that hinder a balanced development within the sector and people involved in it mention could be broadly stated as:

- High production costs
- Immigration
- Irrational use of natural resources and production inputs.
- Phyto-sanitary problems causing significant reduction in quantity and quality.
- Reduced marketing opportunities combined with reduced awareness of marketing components.
- Foreign competition combined with lack of enforcement of national quality standards.

PROBLEMS TO BE ADDRESSED

In an open economy and while agriculture is being progressively abandoned, the major constraints allowing for this are multifaceted: At the macro-economic level Lebanon is getting more and more integrated in regional and international trade agreements while suffering a heavy BOP deficit and annual squeezed budgets. Continuity of agricultural subsidies is questionable. Incomes of rural residents are risked. Within this, women comprise only 20% of the economic activity rate (plus an unemployment rate 7.8% just below average for both genders) signaling a reduced level of participation in economic activities.

* References: 1) *ESCWA Compendium of social Statistics & indicators. UN- ESCWA.5th Issue. Beirut, 2001*
2) *MOA, 2000*

Additionally, plant material and agricultural crops are facing a deterioration in quantity and quality through random multiplication of the primer and inappropriate use of chemical inputs of production on the latter. Consequently revenues and ability for competition are reduced, not to mention the accompanying environmental and health hazards.

In the same token, processing of agricultural products, whether of plant or animal origin, lacks the appropriate facilities and equipment for standardization and the right knowledge of quality standards, generally suffer poor organization of farming activities, on top of reduced extension service plus other political problems.

Marketing in rural areas is generally horizontal in structure and conduct with outside markets is mainly minimized by the impact of cheaper substitutes available to urban consumers, transportation and promotion. Intrinsically, the situation is ascribable to limited know how of the marketing components and absence of strong organizations that can handle the products, find outlets and network.

The rural exodus is often related to an out-dated concept of agriculture. None the less, the rural community is foreseen to have the greatest opportunity to develop competitive advantage through upgrading of skills of rural residents to improve their productivity, through strengthening rural women's capabilities, technological innovations and strengthening marketing capabilities of local organizations.

BENEFICIARIES AND PARTIES INVOLVED

The project is addressed to rural associations, CBOs, formal and informal women groups and specifically to 400 women in rural areas within the Major, Medium and Small Irrigation Schemes.

The institutions involved in the project are: IFAD and MOA as the Client, RMF and ADR as the applying Consultant.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The broad objective of the *Provision of Rural Women Income Generating Activities and Training Programs* is the empowerment of local areas, especially rural women, improving the living standards of the poorest strata and building the capacity of local associations and community-based organizations (CBOs). The approach relies on development of self reliant CBOs to take responsibility for overcoming problems facing them, identifying projects and generation of income. The emphasis is on institutional maturity, sustainable livelihood, human resource development, resource mobilization and financial self-reliance.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION

The main features of the project include the encouragement of CBOs to identify and solve problems, to plan, implement and generate income and manage their own development through participation and provision of institutional development support.

The projected fields thought in need of solutions to above- mentioned problems include:

- The fruit trees products and byproducts
- Olive fruit processing
- Nursery plant products
- Dairy goat products
- Traditional cheezes like "Chanklish"
- Aromatic plants production and processing

These cover the major crops in the country (fruit trees) or crops encouraged to produce and process (aromatic plants, clean nursery plants) because of environmental concerns or because of high opportunities for competitive advantage. Where quality measures are taken into consideration added value will be obtained and consequently sell for additional price premia. They also represent most of the fields in which women are more active and require low physical skills. Additionally, would benefit from raised awareness among consumers and increasing demand for traditional healthy products (Chanklish, oils and waters of aromatic plants).

Being common to all rural areas, they are projected to provide pilot activities that could be replicated by other women in the community.

Since none could be imposed the project will proceed by:

- Contacts for identification and selection of associations, CBOs and women groups, IGAs , followed with budgeting and preparation of work plans for each identified IGA
- The provision of funds for productive IGA through micro-grant program, and through training and technical advice.
- The enhancement of resource mobilization through raising awareness, development of marketing skills and networking.

APPROACH

Rapid Rural Appraisal concept, tools and techniques recommended for identification of IGA that are more demand driven, applicable to rural women, relevant to local conditions and meet needs, constitute the approach implemented for identification of associations, CBOs and women groups and IGAs and through their implementation and the accompanying training. The approach involves:

- Introduction of Community Organizers: Area Coordinators (ACs) and MoA coordinators as community organizers being central to the development of a participatory approach and introduction of gender-sensitive tools and practices. They will conduct, as a team, general meetings with groups in the Irrigation Scheme villages to introduce the project and explain the procedures and requirements for participation in decision making on proposals sought for selection.
- Open review process: Opening the decision making process through socio- technical profile review meetings in which (AC) and all CBOs get engaged collectively in revision of both social & technical issues, required as a problem- solving interaction. This is a routine part of planning processes, identification of training needs and identification and selection of feasible IGAs.
- Selection of associations, CBOs or women groups to be integrated in the implementation phase of the project is done through screening based upon selection criteria. These include being community based, already established (or in terms of), able to serve rural communities.
- On the job training: to provide women with correct approaches in planning and implementing IGAs through upgrading technical know- how and learning by doing. Hence, theoretical and practical workshops individual invitations to selected beneficiaries per IGA are conducted. The technical specialist coordinate all training activities and prepare the related documents and where subject matter specialist is required, they will cooperate to provide the material. Investment and marketing training will be conducted in all clusters equally and per IGA through a products/ market approach.
- Introduction of Financial Viability: through micro-grant support to IGAs that will be ultimately groups and CBOs managed.
- Networking CBOs within and between clusters for common marketing interests through development of cluster organizations and supervision of the marketing specialist of the development of a marketing plan.
- Technical and monitoring visits will be conducted all over the implementation phase and each beneficiary will be scheduled for supervising progress and evaluation of level of complying to technical, subject matter and marketing advice.
- Brochures and flyers: The technical specialist along with staff will publish brochures and flyers on the main topics, in Arabic and the logo of RMF, ADR, MoA and IFAD will be clearly printed on covers.

PROJECT ACTIVITIES

Since the approach of implementing the project is a participatory one, flexibility is a major component of the project. Hence all numbers included herewith are merely indicative.

The following activities will be undertaken during the start-up phase of identification

- The identification of CBO, women groups/ individuals and IGAs. Integration of identified CBOs in identification of feasible IGAs and training needs is the major activity. An indicative target of a minimum of 20 IGAs has been set by the end of the first quarter of the project duration.
- Development of detailed budgets and work plans per each IGA will be produced.

Around 20% of technical training will occur in this phase. Marketing specialist will partially participate for identification of required marketing skills development.

Following is the implementation and training phase. These are intended parallel. Training will comprise all the needs identified in the previous phase. It will be of three types: basic for capacity building, follow-up, technical, subject matter specific, and marketing and investment. Hence

- Identified CBOs will be supported with appropriate administrative training and their capacities will be strengthened with proper management and implementation skills. A target of 200 women is set by the end of the second quarter.
- Implementation of the IGAs is set for the third and fourth quarters. An indicative target of 120 women is set for benefiting from IGAs during this period. Micro-grants will be expended both in number of IGA and for the financing of the cluster involvement and for even geographical distribution between clusters.
- Provision of design and procurement of required equipment and material for approved IGAs.
- Starting third quarter, CBOs will be empowered with subject matter and marketing and investment training corresponding to identified IGAs. A target of 100 women is set for the end of this quarter. Most of subject matter and marketing training will occur in this period.
- Networking marketing activities through development of cluster organizations incorporating several CBOs. An indicative target of 3 cluster organizations is set in the fourth quarter.
- Preparation of 8 brochures/ flyers covering each of the training activities.
- Reporting to MoA through six English reports and a summary in Arabic. One upon identification of CBOs and IGAs and preparation of budgets and work plans, two IGAs progress reports, two training reports and a final one.

The development of cluster organizations is dependent on local initiatives. The achievement of marketing targets therefore is dependent on developments within the project and cannot be imposed by project design.