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Hamdy A. (ed.), Sagardoy J.A. (ed.), Quagliariello R. (ed.), Trisorio-Liuzzi G. (ed.).
Integration of Gender Dimension in water management in the Mediterranean region :
INGEDI Project

Bari : CIHEAM

Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 62

2004

pages 55-57

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

<http://om.ciheam.org/article.php?IDPDF=6002400>

To cite this article / Pour citer cet article

Dedja Y. **The role of women in participatory irrigation management in Albania.** In : Hamdy A. (ed.), Sagardoy J.A. (ed.), Quagliariello R. (ed.), Trisorio-Liuzzi G. (ed.). *Integration of Gender Dimension in water management in the Mediterranean region : INGEDI Project.* Bari : CIHEAM, 2004. p. 55-57 (Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 62)



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Part 2

Country Papers

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PARTICIPATORY IRRIGATION MANAGEMENT IN ALBANIA

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INTRODUCTION

In most of countries in the world the word for water is of female gender. Women being bearer of life i.e. as a symbol of fertility were in formers time and still are today linked symbolically with water, meaning water is life! In this article we want to present the problems and the outlook of women's participation in irrigation water management in the Irrigation Rehabilitation Project in Albania.

THE PROJECTS

The Irrigation Rehabilitation Project began in November 1993 with the first project which was completed in 1999. As a result the Second Irrigation and Drainage Rehabilitation Project started in 1999 and will be completed in 2004.

The projects undertook irrigation and drainage works for about 150,000 hectare in twenty Districts.

Another project is under preparation and will start the implementation very soon. This project will be called "Water Resource Management Project".

Up to now in Albania, there have been invested around US\$ 90 million for irrigation and drainage. The objective of the project is to increase agricultural production and incomes for our farmers, who get the project.

The IRP is financed by several donors and executed by the Albanian Ministry of Agriculture and Food. The establishment of Water Users' Associations was a great task that the project underwent since the first operation. The number of WUA which are established in the area covered by our project is 386.

In the first project, one of the most important components was women in development supported by Dutch consultant. The aim of this component was to include women in management of WUA's.

Some women were appointed in different district among men to support this idea and to promote this development. Our women promoters were more successful and regulative that man.

Different from the first irrigation project, the second one was implemented based on demand driven approach. The farmers had to pay their contribution to get the project. This condition will remain for the new project, as well.

The role of women to convince their families to pay their contribution was very important and the second project was implemented successfully one year before the schedule based of this support.

SOCIETY IN TRANSITION

Albania is a transitional society, were the privatization caused a new institutional farming production system. Like as most ex-communist countries this goes along with a change in value orientations including farm management approaches from security to risk from obedience to decision making and taking initiatives. Now mainly wheat grown and alfalfa as fodder for animals is very essential especially for women to complement the diet of the children and for cash from sale of milk. Beans are regarded as a women's' crop and vegetable is more valued as income earning activity. However, problems of good seeds, improved farm management in general and prevailing individual small scale marketing are bottleneck to impede a faster increase of these products then now.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Women are still facing a very traditional set up, where special gains especially for them of the past in education and in professional areas are almost safeguarded, but economic problems and structural changes made many of their jobs disappear and therefore too many women had to resort back to the house and housework or farm-work in the family farm. But in general women and men decide together on the farming and what to plant.

On the other hand, there are problems out of family concern at the moment that are basic bottleneck for transparency. The WID section works to sensitize and delivers many information for functioning of WUA to women who do not participate in meeting.

Women in Albania are still the silent half in irrigation projects although they are very much visible while working hard on the fields.

Role of women in agriculture is basic for the survival of the country and has ever been. In irrigation agriculture women are highly involved in the production activities and many people say they do more than the men. This is one of the reasons why the PMU/IRP is very interested to involve women much more than men, members, in the decision making bodies in the WUA's of the programme.

WHAT CHANGES DID OCCUR TO RURAL WOMEN IN ALBANIA?

After the end of the old regime every farm family got an average 1.5 ha as a private land. In most of cases that area is not enough to produce a surplus for covering necessary investments for intensive agriculture. People produce for their family needs and something extra for the sale. Albanians are skillful to add up to the farm income with other income generation activities. Further to that many families do not only rely on farm income. Many men are migrant workers in other countries and they help their families. In some parts of our project areas about 20% of households are effected by outmigration and many women have become head of households. They should become more active in the WUA's. But they are most of the time even more busy with household chores and farm-work than women from households where the husband, as the household head, is still present. Often they have to pay laborers for the hard work in the field like ploughing etc.

PROBLEMS FOR WOMEN IN WUA'S

Rural women in Albania are interested to participate actively in the WUA schemes, but structural changes and changes in technology are a burden especially to women. They have lost many communal and social amenities like bakeries, kindergardens, which on top of it in former times were free service. And even worse, agriculture is not anymore mechanized like before on the state farms.

So the double burden of productive work today leave only little time for women to participate actively in communal affairs like WUA issues. This seems to be a work for men.

THE PIM STRATEGY TO INCREASE THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN AWARENESS

In order to pull down some barriers and in order to get more women into the executive boards of our WUA's the WID section started a campaign and organized workshops to sensitize farm women and interested men on enormous responsibility as active members of WUA's. Pamphlets with cartoons and questions to be discussed in the immediate family circle were distributed at schools and on markets in order to increase the number of women in the decision making bodies like executive councils and administrative councils. In fact during the last elections for those within the WUA's we got on average three times more women in this sphere than men in comparison with a year before the elections. Women have proven in our project to be the better financial managers in WUA's and everybody in the project agrees to this observation. In cases when the WUA is chaired by a woman there is a better transparency. It is impossible to bribe them! So we used this argument for increasing their numbers in the executive bodies.

WORKING WITH FARM WOMEN IN WUA'S: TRAINING AND INFORMATION

This is the most important and challenging task for the project. The objective for this training is especially income generation for women. Here we view women as producers. In this logical line the

active participation of women in WUA's is required, to support appropriate irrigation systems. There will not be sustainable irrigation without the active participation of women in Albania at all levels!

Actually the most common crop in Albania is wheat, which is kept basically for subsistence or household food security reasons. This is the fact but one can also argue that the economic value for growing vegetables on suitable irrigated areas would increase incomes by 2/3rd. But this is not possible at the moment for reasons of input problems and their prices because of lack of adequate marketing places.

INCOME GENERATION THROUGH IMPROVED INTENSIFIED VEGETABLE PRODUCTION

In order to increase incomes from vegetables which are very much produced by women in Albania the project undertook some pilot interventions on improvement in intensified vegetable production. The aim is to save money by using and applying the right and timely correct pest management and fertilizer even on small and smallest plots.

The already existing knowledge of the WUA women in vegetable production was the base for this training and in a step by step approach their knowledge was coupled with our information spreading of the newest and cheapest methods available to cut down on their production costs and to increase the quality.

Training workshops for women from WUA in all districts on integrated pest management and mixed cropping for vegetables in order to cut down expenses on pesticides were carried out in all our districts. The biological pest management still known by their grandparents was a subject for lively discussion. Our training method is based on a lot of material, which was mainly developed by the WID section itself.

The participants are actively included in the presentation through active questioning and follow up discussions. Handouts were distributed to the participants as well to have something in their hands and to take home for discussion within the farm family.

The response of the farm women in the WUA's was positive and enthusiastic since in general they lack information sharing especially in these days. New ideas on farm management regarding the vegetable production chain from production to marketing even communal marketing were discussed and advantages and disadvantages were counterbalanced and discussed as well.

All this can help women in the WUA to open their horizons on how to solve special problems of the producers in bigger group than just the family i.e. a participatory way.

Nowadays, the results achieved by the project are obvious. Women work in group in green-houses, communicate freely with the water managers and the best result is the early and satisfactory production in the market.