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## **GEWAMED PROJECT AND ITS LINKAGE TO FOOD SECURITY MAINSTREAMING IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES**

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### **THE MULTIFUNCTIONALITY OF AGRICULTURE**

MAIB's (Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Bari) commitment in gender related projects and programme is part of an extensive process that is involving agriculture worldwide and by which agriculture is called to perform increasingly multiple functions: the economic (relative to the growth of economies locally and globally), environmental (associated with the protection of natural resources and ecosystems), social (related to maintaining vitality of rural communities, preventing unemployment), cultural (including landscape conservation and cultural identity), food safety-oriented (production of healthy and safe food), recreational (relative to the supply of tourist services), educational (concerning, for instance, educational activities on the environment).

This growing attention to multifunctionality of agriculture stems from the role assigned to the agricultural sector in promoting the economic and social development, and as a response to the consumption behaviours recently expressed by the civil society that is increasingly sensitive to environmental problems and to the search of healthy and high quality products.

From this multifunctional vision also stems the commitment of MAIB in the hard task of promoting women working in the rural environment, in general and engaged in assuring food security and safety, in particular. Commitment which has been carried on through the INGEDI project before and GEWAMED project, today. The subject of this Regional Workshop is one of the many faces of the multifunctionality of agriculture.

Any development policy can no longer avoid considering the close link between poverty, malnutrition, poor access to resources (water and food) and the gender gap as being a condition of woman's disadvantage and restriction in the society, a condition that dramatically affects other social groups, first of all the minors, and the environment in a broad sense.

Inequality undermines the effectiveness of development policies and, thus, promoting equality means promoting a good development policy.

### **THE LINKS OF WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AND GENDER MAINSTREAMING**

In December 2003 the General Assembly of the United Nations, has proclaimed the 2005-2015 as "Water for Life Decade", strongly recommending the international community to be involved in programmes and projects on the sound management of the water resource and specifically asking the commitment to promote woman's participation and involvement in water management.

On the other hand, even the "Millennium Development Goals", that agree with the "Water for Life Decade" to accept 2015 as the chronological deadline of the commitment taken, also insist on continuing working on gender equality and health promotion that inevitably requires qualitatively and quantitatively adequate water and food for all. Of course, such objectives are absolutely mutually dependent and mutually affect each other, both being aimed at achieving the single and major purpose of globally improving the living conditions on our planet.

An important and significant trend that has developed in the last few years within the framework of sustainable resources management policies is the birth and consolidation of the so-called "integrated management", namely, a multi-sectoral approach to problems, where exquisitely technical matters are dealt together with economic, political and social aspects thus resulting in a definitely more real and concrete global vision. This is an approach that tends towards a coordinated action between the different actors and aimed at environmentally sustainable economic and social development.

## **THE FEMINISATION OF AGRICULTURE, A GLOBAL TREND**

Women, however, are those increasingly involved in agricultural matters thus resulting in feminization of agricultural activity that is by now so widespread in the so-called Third (developing) Countries. In these Countries, men tend to abandon the land searching for different jobs in the hope of better living conditions and higher salaries and agricultural activities are increasingly carried out by those who remain there, namely the women, and for which agriculture often becomes the only source of livelihood for themselves and their household. Agricultural activity and the related access to the water and food are then rapidly evolving towards forms where the predominance of female work is no longer rare or fortuitous and thus, increasing the production capability of women and their contribution to water and food safety becomes a must.

Women collect, use and manage the water required for domestic uses as well as for the crops they grow. Statistically, worldwide, at least half of the food production is supplied from female-labour grown lands and such a percentage reaches as much as 80% in African countries. Not to mention the effects that such water and food management has on hygiene and sanitation of the rural communities where women operate and whose experience such communities quite often unconsciously rely upon.

Despite the data reported here and the above-said transformations, women involvement and the stimulus to a more conscious and qualified taking on of her role of grower and manager of resources like land, food and water, are still ignored and underestimated, failing to consider how important such awareness might be conducive to development and environmental sustainability.

## **THE TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE**

Awareness is undoubtedly linked to knowledge and knowledge should be ensured for the rural development strategies and policies to be really successful and on the long run with important effects also on social systems stiffened by long years of prejudices and customs that have sometimes stifled growth.

Then, the challenge to be relaunched is training addressed to all social classes, involving and providing specific skills and, in doing that being able to enhance and give visibility to roles and jobs frequently ignored and whose productivity is often not recognized nor promoted.

We refer to a kind of training that involves professional associations, that abandons the traditional education methods to adopt more participatory ones, that be able to interact with realities where grown ups are the active beneficiaries of training, indicate their priorities and learn to believe in the importance of knowledge, technical knowledge as well, of their everyday occupation. A type of training that can even be performed by women for women (thus overcoming obstacles that are sometimes highly penalizing), extremely flexible in time schedule (in order not to hinder the already complex everyday organization) and that conveys not only notions but also messages of social emancipation and encouragement to take responsibilities that succeed in promoting leadership roles also in the rural sphere. A kind of training that uses manuals and educational tools that consider and apply gender equality and that trains also women to water saving and food security and the techniques to apply them.

## **ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND THE EFFECT IN FOOD SECURITY AND SAFETY**

Women education assures an incredible amount of positive results, one of the most important being the improvement of children nutritional condition.

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), an important research organization on hunger and nutrition, has taken on a study demonstrating the evident relation between children nutritional status and women power to decide. If women could have the same decisional influence as men at the family level, in a geographical area as South Asia, there would be almost 13% less of malnourished children under three years of age which means almost 13 millions less of malnourished kids.

It is demonstrated that when resources are scarce (during flooding or drought for example), women tend to give priority to the family nutrition.

We could affirm that, where gender positively affects childhood, such positive influence is strictly linked to the parent having power on resources distribution.

Children living in families headed by women have a diet regime different from those headed by men, richer in micronutrient and proteins that provide the nourishment useful to the physical and mental growth.

In the families where women have power to decide, the resources assigned to children are much higher than in the other ones and, it has been demonstrated, that an increase in the women income implies an increase in the expenses devoted to foodstuffs.

Inequality in the access to instruction, labour and use of fertilizers doesn't allow women farmers to have harvests as good as those of men. Improving women access to the land and to the means for its cultivation, is crucial to guarantee food security of their families and better the nutritional condition of their children.

In conclusion, giving women a bigger control on land and farm planning and management, could mean achieving a higher productivity.

Within the year 2030 the world demand of food will be incredibly urgent, considering a population growth of more than 2 billions. In most of the developing Countries, the task to produce food will fall upon women. This reality could not be ignored being also considered that women involvement in agriculture gives a strong contribution to the conservation of the agro-biodiversity. In Africa, for example, women cultivate more that 120 different types of plants. Women farmers are particularly careful in preserving a variety of products and the richness of the wild flora. Often they know the environment where they live much better than any other and this knowledge assures a positive intelligent diversification of the agriculture production which leads to a better nutrition and food security for their families. The preservation of this biodiversity very often takes place inside the domestic vegetable gardens, but this is not of minor importance. Women actively take part in food manufacturing and rarely also in food trading, thus giving an immediate and a positive impulse to the family nutritional condition.

Helping women in their empowerment means, therefore, looking at a future where food security and safety could be guaranteed to the largest number of people.

## **RURAL WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND ICT DEVELOPMENT**

Projects for rural women empowerment should include their involvement in the ICT development. In the rural ambit and in agriculture, in particular, the use of technologies linked to the ICT is still very low and this doesn't facilitate the rapid improvement of the rural people condition. It is true that ICT technologies does not reach the lower strata of the rural population but their penetration is growing exponentially. It is becoming more and more common that local associations have access to these techniques. The diffusion of such a technology should offer the opportunity to solve the problem of isolation, should increase the level of literacy and the dissemination of information and, last but not the least, should help the creation of women networks that have a basic importance for their social growth. The ICT could offer women an extremely flexible instrument in time and space and a mean ready to be used to gain knowledge. Its value for the improvement of their quality of life is incredibly high and absolutely strategic and to some extent we expect that GEWAMED project could contribute to improve the situation through the regional and national websites.

What actions should we recommend? The evolution of the gender condition is undoubtedly a very slow process, where continuous information, a tireless work of persuasion and change of mind should never stop or be discouraged, nor should the basic importance of financial resources be ignored. Without them even a solid legislation or a better research work would be poorly effective. Unfortunately, very often the problem of economic resources is underestimated since gender equality is considered only the consequence of a social behaviour. This is not true. The governments commitment should include a strong, real economic effort, absolutely essential to turn theories into actions and to achieve greater equality and empowerment of women.

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