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The importance of gender empowerment in rural development programme GEWAMED and TERCOM Projects

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Abstract. In developing countries, an easier access to the labour market and a better wage treatment inevitably produce a greater self-esteem, a strengthening of decision-making in the family, a greater potential participation in the community's choices and in the social sphere. It is important to apply a cultural perspective to women : considering their status as an indicator of the development of a Country; mainstreaming the gender issue to combat sex discrimination; enhancing the image of women as guardians of the traditional know-how so as to promote their involvement in economic activities; supporting the policies that encourage women to run the farms. The first specific commitment of the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute to gender policies dates back to 2002 when it participated in a short-term project (INGEDI). At present it coordinates the European project "GEWAMED", an action that brings together 14 Mediterranean Countries under the 6th Frame program, focusing on rural development, especially water resources management. Another initiative undertaken is TERCOM project in Lebanon (started after the 2006 conflict). In 2008 GEWAMED and TERCOM joined their activities in a common project: the establishment of an Observatory on entrepreneurial activity and women's role in agriculture in Lebanon, resulting from the collaboration with Italian ONILFA and the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture.

Keywords. Socio-economic development – International agreement – Gender mainstreaming – Rural development – Networks – Lebanon.

La responsabilisation des femmes dans les programmes de coopération: Les projets GEWAMED et TERCOM

Résumé. Dans les pays en développement, un accès plus facile des femmes au marché du travail et un meilleur niveau des salaires génèrent inévitablement une plus grande estime de soi, le renforcement de la prise de décision au sein de la famille, une plus grande participation potentielle aux choix de la communauté et à la sphère sociale. Il est important de considérer les femmes dans une perspective culturelle : prendre en compte leur statut comme indicateur du niveau de développement d'un pays; intégrer les questions de genre pour combattre la discrimination entre les sexes ; promouvoir l'image des femmes dépositaires des savoir-faire traditionnels afin de promouvoir leur participation aux activités économiques; soutenir les politiques qui encouragent les femmes à conduire des exploitations. L'Institut Agronomique Méditerranéen s'est engagé pour la première fois dans les politiques de genre en 2002, en participant à un projet de courte durée (INGEDI). Actuellement, il coordonne le projet européen "GEWAMED", qui réunit 14 pays méditerranéens, au sein du 6e Programme Cadre, axé sur le développement rural, particulièrement, la gestion des ressources en eau. Une autre initiative est le projet TERCOM au Liban (entamé après le conflit de 2006). En 2008, les projets GEWAMED et TERCOM ont fait converger leurs activités dans une seule initiative : la mise en place d'un Observatoire sur l'activité d'entreprise et le rôle des femmes en agriculture au Liban, découlant de la collaboration entre l'ONILFA italien et le Ministère de l'Agriculture libanais.

Mots-clés. Développement socio-économique – Accord international – Intégration du genre – Développement rural – Réseaux - Liban.

I – The importance of gender empowerment in rural development programme

The commitment of the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute within projects and programs connected with the so-called “gender empowerment” has coincided with the resolute recognition of women’s role in the development strategies and policies adopted within the international cooperation activities.

Actually, connecting the binomial “woman and development” with the world’s plans to contrast under-development is the signal of an important cultural emancipation and of the awareness of women’s growing role in the countries suffering from social, cultural and economic backwardness.

This process of awareness-rising is effective, and after Beijing International Conference on Women (1995) it has involved a new and different attention to the social processes and economic mechanisms that are now also considered in a gender perspective, i.e. within an approach that considers both men and women as beneficiaries of a development-oriented policy in their specificity of social group with different needs, prospects, skills and involvement.

Item 3 of the Millennium Development Goals, which were adopted by the United Nations in 2000 and which are expected to be achieved by 2015, is focused on this theme and is directed to the adoption of strategies aimed at reducing the differences between men and women who are expected to achieve comparable standards of living by 2015.

Implementing *empowerment* processes that allow women to play more effectively their peculiar role in areas such as, for instance, food security or natural resources management is a prerequisite for sustainable and lasting development.

The notion of *empowerment*, however, is not easy to define because of its extremely variable meaning that varies as influenced by social contexts, individual conditions and political circumstances. Subjective *empowerment* is, for example, different from collective empowerment, and its implementation involves different objectives and paths. What is, however, unquestionable and unambiguous is that strengthening the role of women and enlarging their choice opportunities respond to a definitely greater and more complex commitment aimed at changing the political and social dynamics that produce discrimination and marginalization.

There is an inextricable relation between the social, political and economic dimensions in the achievement of the objective under discussion.

In the developing countries, a better access to the labour market and a better wage treatment produce inevitably a greater self-esteem, a strengthening of decision-making within the family, greater potential participation in the community’s choices and in the social sphere.

The essential actions leading to the strengthening of the role of women in rural and non-rural areas respond to some basic priorities: access to resources, support to self-determination, awareness-raising, participation in the production and right to welfare policies.

Women's development priority actions in the rural areas:

1. WELFARE
2. ACCESS TO RESOURCES
3. AWARENESS-RAISING
4. PARTICIPATION
5. SELF-DETERMINATION

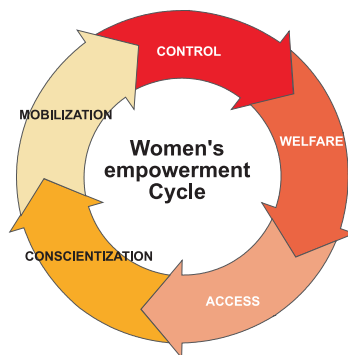


Figure 1. Women's empowerment cycle

Hence, the correct management of development projects should include, among other things:

- The integration of procedures and principles aimed at enhancing and promoting the role of women as creators of development, recognizing to them the dignity of interlocutors and implementers of actions that concern themselves, their family and the society in which they live;
- The assessment of women as a major resource for the development of a Country;
- The consideration of their state of health, educational level and nutritional status as significant indicators of the degree of development of a Country;
- Mainstreaming the gender perspective that contrasts sex discriminations since the age of development;
- The enhancement of the image of women as guardians of the traditional know-how so as to favor and promote their involvement in economic activities, not only as labor force, but also in decision-making and management processes, thus increasing their social prestige and reducing the existing gap between women and men;
- Directing more and more to women the access to food and water (actually it has been demonstrated that humanitarian assistance reaches more effectively the needy when women manage it. Moreover women are shown to be able to run farms and fields. 18 to 60% of the farms in the areas most affected by food scarcity are run by women; in these farms the per capita production of calories is significantly higher than in men-run farms, and the incidence of food-related diseases is lower);
- The support to policies aimed at poverty reduction through the improvement of women's conditions.

II – MAIB's main steps in Gender empowerment - GEWAMED and TERCOM Projects

The specific commitment of the Agronomic Institute to gender policies dates back to 2002 through its participation in some international events; then it was involved in a short project funded by the European Union (the **INGEDI project**), it organized a training course addressed to a group of Iraqi young women; it is still operating and strengthening its role by coordinating the European project **GEWAMED** that has involved a promotional action on the role of Lebanese women within the **Tercom** project entrusted by the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Institute after the well-known war events of 2006.

Gewamed project started in 2006, it lasted four years and involves 18 institutions from 14 Mediterranean countries.

It is a “coordinated action” under the 6th Framework Program of the European Union. Its main objective is to establish a permanent research and information network aimed at ensuring a constant exchange of information, diffusing knowledge and promoting a positive and constructive action.

Its scope is rural development with specific reference to the management of water resources; its main objectives are not only knowledge sharing (that is essential to save time and resources) but also promoting dialogue between Countries and within each single Country, and above all contributing to pursue national policies that can have a positive impact on the potential role of women in the economic growth of their own Country through their commitment in rural areas.

I have referred to the contribution in the implementation of national policies. The Gewamed project is at its second year, but it has already achieved a major result: the setting up of an Observatory on entrepreneurial activity and women's role in agriculture in Lebanon, that corresponds to activity n°2.6 of the Tercom project (mentioned before), resulting from the collaboration between ONILFA and MAIB within Gewamed project.

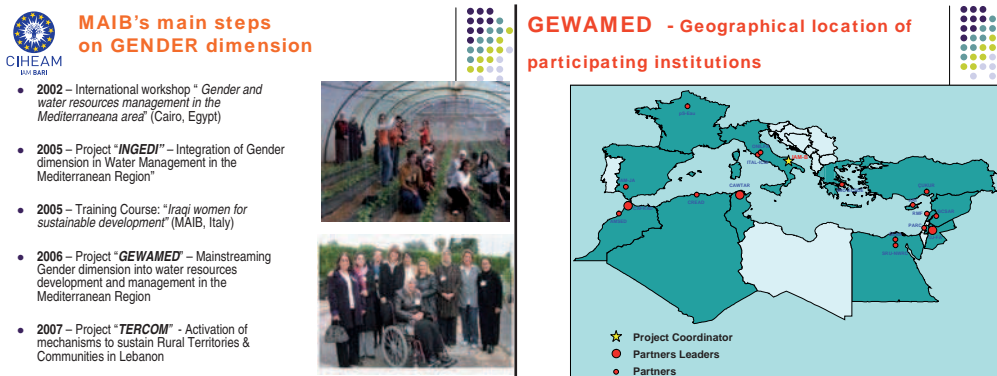


Figure 2. Gewamed project - details

The enhancement of the role of rural women has thus been recognized by the Italian government among the actions to promote and encourage in an emergency program to aid the economy of Lebanon, a Country that is experiencing a severe crisis.

Rural women in Lebanon are mostly involved in sowing, ploughing and harvesting practices; they take care of tobacco cropping cycle, and are largely involved in greenhouse crops, olive and fruit trees. Moreover they are mostly responsible for the activities related to animal production.

However, at a higher level of economic and professional involvement, the farms and agricultural cooperatives run by women tend to be significantly less efficient and productive than those run by men. This is due to many reasons, such as:

- A weaker entrepreneurial capacity (partly related to a poor specific training);
- A lower and more complex access to financial facilities (due to cultural barriers, poor schooling and a social paradox quite common in the developing countries of the Mediterranean region: land mostly belongs to men);
- The greater non-professional task women should fulfil.

This is the background in which **NOWARA** is growing, supported not only by the commitment of the Italian Cooperation but also and above all by the Lebanese political will (the Lebanese observatory, like the Italian one, will be established by ministerial decree under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture, and many other Lebanese Ministries and bodies will be involved in the implementation of the activities connected with NOWARA).

The official kick-off of Nowara is scheduled before the end of 2008, and we hope it will become the voice of Lebanese rural women, their “access” to the political and administrative bodies, their link with the private sector, investment agencies and the banking sector, and their tie with the scientific and academic institutions.

We hope that Nowara shall contribute to “engender” the Lebanese economy strengthening the existing cooperatives or creating new ones; to promote the image of a rural woman actively involved in the economic growth of her Country and participating in decision-making processes, to encourage women to invest in agriculture both economically and from a professional point of view.

Exploiting women's deep knowledge of land and their close link with it, and making them and the future generations aware of the importance of this link is important but not sufficient. Additional efforts should be directed towards giving greater recognition and rewards to rural women, studying more deeply their real conditions through research and statistical studies, overcoming the legal obstacles that still hinder their full economic and social independence, taking all steps in order that training and technological innovations can benefit everybody.

Through NOWARA a small step forward has been made, we hope that this experience might be replicated with beneficial effects in other Mediterranean countries.



Source: <http://www.nowaralebanon.org/>

Figure 3. NOWARA logo

