

Encouraging and discouraging factors for rural women participation in agricultural activities, (Case study: Fereidoonshahr County)

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1. INTRODUCTION

To gain benefit from women's talents and abilities in line with making maximum use of our human resources entails accurate and scientific study of their activities. Since half of the population of transitional society's lives in rural areas, and women make up one half of rural populations; one way of achieving these human resources is to study their economic activities in various arenas (Lahsay Zadeh, et al. 2006: 125). Studies and observations on rural women participation imply that rural women enjoying experience and local knowledge in production of food products play an important role in the agriculture. Besides, the majority of self-sustaining farmers of the world are women who account for 50 to 60 percent of food of the world.

According to Census of 2006, the rural women's share in employment is about 13 percent. But the undeniable fact is that on average about 40 percent of the labor force in agricultural activities are supplied by rural women. However, the rural sociology has overlooked the role and contributions of rural women. Ignoring the contribution of Iranian rural women in the economic activities of a family, as well as in value-added products of the agricultural sector, has caused not to take into account the value of their labor in the national evaluations. The purpose of this study was to identify and determine the extent of participation of rural women in agricultural activities in Fereidoonshahr County.

2. METHODOLOGY

The present study is an applied research of a survey type. Documentary and library researches were the basis of the theoretical framework, review of literature, objectives,

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and hypothesis and assessment items. Data were collected and analysis using field research and questionnaires, previous studies as well as adjusting questions to the conditions of the study area. In order to ensure the stability and reliability of concepts and items, at first by giving questionnaires to 30 individuals of the statistical society, a pilot study was conducted and nearly 85 percent of the total Cronbach's alpha was calculated. Statistical population of the study included all the rural households of Fereidoonshahr County. According to census of 2011, in Fereidoonshahr County there were 9,275 households with the total population of 39,397 people. Of these households 4,383 households lived in rural areas and thus were used in sampling as the statistical population of the study. Cochran formula was used for determining the sample size. However, given the time and economic constrains, and high population distribution, using a modified command, the questionnaire were reduced to 250 and given the homogeneity of the villages, eventually 10 villages were selected as the sample villages of the study area, and the number of samples and villages were selected in a systematic approach.

3. DISCUSSION

To determine the extent of women's participation in associations and cooperatives, Likert 5 item range (high = 5, low = 1) was used. According to study results, the average membership duration was 2.75 with standard deviation of 0.9 and minimum value of 1 and the maximum of 5. Besides, the research findings showed that only 2.90 percent of the members in organizations or cooperatives were rural women with a standard deviation of 0.9. From economies perspective, of 250 women of the study, 75 percent involved in agriculture, 63 percent in animal husbandry, 52 percent in gardening, 48 percent in handicrafts, 32 percent in greenhouses, 76 percent in poultry farming, 45 percent in apiculture and 71 percent in Salmon farming. According to the statistical data of the study, rural women were highly involved in agriculture and poultry breeding, and their most involvement was in farming activities. Using one sample t, and 5 item range (very high, high, moderate, low, very low participation) average participation of women was 3.1. As the value was significantly greater than 2.5, the theoretical mean used for assessment of rural women participation, therefore, the rural women's participation was assessed between moderate to high. The research results show that there was a positive significant correlation between the number of loans, the amount of property, participation in educational programs, family size and age, and the extent of rural women participation. For example, as the ownership of rural women rises, their activity and participation in the same village grows up.

4. CONCLUSION

Rural women acquiring local knowledge and experience in food production play a very important role in agriculture and thus account for 50 to 60 percent of food production of the world. In Iran, the rural women participation is approximately 40 percent. The study also

found that the average participation of rural women in agricultural activities in the study area was about 57 percent and the results of the t-student test showed that the level of women's participation in various stages of production was as follow: 76% in poultry farming, 75%, in agriculture, 71 % in Salmon farming, 63% in animal husbandry, 52 % in gardening, 48 % in handcrafts, 76 % in poultry farming, 45 % in apiculture and 32 % in greenhouse products. The research findings showed that the share of women in production of household income was 25%, but they do not get this money as the payment. In fact they are "unpaid family workers" and therefore the amount of their income does not affect the extent of their participation. However, women get more involved in agriculture and could be effective in increasing household income and welfare. It was found that among the personal factors, age and education affect women's participation. In a way that as they grow older, their participation increases, but as their education level increases, their participation declines. In other words, young educated rural women are less likely to participate in agricultural activities. The old age farmers, is one of the problems of our country's agriculture, and should receive due attention. The positive correlation between family size and rural women's participation also confirms the issue. In other words, the participation of older women-mostly less educated- in large households, is higher. The stepwise regression model identified the most important factors effective in participation of women. They were ownership, attending training classes, age, family size and number of livestock.

5. SUGGESTIONS

1- To give due attention to gender roles, i.e., needs and abilities of the rural women in agricultural planning.

2- To set a monetary value on agricultural activities of rural women, and create a database of their activities for better planning and education and promotion, etc.

3- To give special attention to the role and functions of rural women in agricultural activities and create a database of their activities for better planning and education and extension programs, etc.

4- Since the majority of rural women working in the agricultural sector (70 %) are adults and have high illiteracy rates, they should receive much more attention so that they can receive better training by training aids such as films, lectures and providing graphic examples and exemplary farms.

5- As the size of rural households is higher than average (5.1 people), population control policies might be effective in reducing the household chores and can provide more opportunities for women's education.

Key words: women's participation; rural economy; rural women; agricultural sector; Fereidoonshahr County.

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