

EXTENSION THROUGH
WOMEN'S COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT GROUPS:
a case study of female
extension assistants



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a case study of female
extension assistants
IN AZAD JAMMU & KASHMIR**

**Extension, Education and Communication Service
Research, Extension and Training Division
Sustainable Development Department**

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This study was conducted in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, which is located on the Pakistani side of the agreed Line of Control. The final status of Jammu and Kashmir is still to be agreed upon by the Government of India and Pakistan.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| PREFACE | v |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | vi |
| ACRONYMS | ix |
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | 1 |
| INTRODUCTION | 3 |
| Background | 3 |
| Purpose of the study | 5 |
| The study area | 5 |
| The study sample | 6 |
| FINDINGS | 7 |
| The area and its population | 7 |
| • <i>Situational data</i> | 7 |
| Female extension assistants | 8 |
| • <i>Response data</i> | 9 |
| Women's community development groups | 15 |
| • <i>Situational data</i> | 15 |
| • <i>Response data</i> | 16 |
| Views of Extension Department administrators | 24 |
| • <i>The Director</i> | 24 |
| • <i>The Deputy Director</i> | 25 |
| • <i>Female Extension Officers</i> | 27 |
| CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS | 29 |
| REFERENCES | 33 |

PREFACE

As the world tries fully to comprehend and meet the challenge of feeding millions of hungry people, there is growing recognition of the important role played by rural women in agricultural production. This recognition also underlines the fact that there is a serious lack of both female extension workers and suitable extension models for them to follow.

This case study concentrates on the extension modality followed by a group of female extension assistants in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, which is located in the north of Pakistan. The presence of female extension workers in this very traditional part of the world is in itself a real novelty. The use of women's community development groups as a platform for female extension workers to deliver extension advice has been explored and compared with the extension approach of contacting individual farmers.

This study, conducted in a traditional region with a prevailing Muslim population, provides valuable information that can be easily adapted to similar situations in other regions of the world where female extension workers are not yet present, or where their work is constrained by religious, cultural or personal safety factors.



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PHOTO CREDIT

All photos supplied by the Neelum and Jhelum Valley Community Development Project.

ACRONYMS

| | |
|---------------|---|
| AJK | Azad Jammu and Kashmir |
| CCP | Community credit pool |
| CDGs | Community development groups |
| CMST | Community management skill training |
| ESMA | Extension Services Management Academy |
| IFAD | International Fund for Agricultural Development |
| FAO | Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations |
| FEAs | Female extension assistants |
| NJVCDP | Neelum and Jehlum Valleys Community Development Project |
| Rs | Rupee (US\$1 = Rs. 51 – government rate at time of data collection in 2000) |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Programme |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In view of women's crucial role in the agricultural production system of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK)¹, and of the need for an extension service that reaches rural women, a diploma course for female extension assistants (FEAs) was established by the Extension Service Management Academy (ESMA), Garhi Dupatta. The trained FEAs were then employed and have been working for the Department of Agriculture Extension since 1992. On the recommendation of an FAO technical mission to Neelum and Jhelum Valleys Community Development Project (NJVCDP), women's community development groups (CDGs), operating with some financial but mainly technical support from the project, became the platform for the FEAs to impart extension activities. This modality was adopted in order to minimize functionaries' need of physical mobility and to maximize the convenience of coverage and coordination among the extension services.

The present case study was designed and conducted to find out the perceptions of the FEAs regarding the usefulness of the CDG model for promoting extension activities, as compared with the traditional model of contacting individual farmers and farm women. The opinions of administrators and supervisors at the Agriculture Extension Department regarding the FEAs' performance under the CDG model were also sought. Identification of the points of view of members of women's CDGs regarding the usefulness of the model was another main objective.

A representative sample of 50 members of female CDGs was drawn by adopting the multistaged stratified sampling technique. From among the 28 FEAs in position (at the time of data collection), 15 were contacted and information was collected from them.

Analysis of the data revealed that, in terms of convenience in planning of extension activities and coverage of clients, the FEAs found the CDG model more effective than the traditional model. However, the new modality was believed to have brought little relief to the FEAs in terms of physical mobility and personal security aspects. A majority of the FEAs also stressed the need for more and more purposeful training in job-related activities.

1 The area of Jammu and Kashmir located on the Pakistan side of the agreed Line of Control is called Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

Although, the members of women's CDGs reported that the CDG model was more effective than the traditional model, they were not fully satisfied with what had been done for them so far, and nearly half of them expressed complete lack of satisfaction. The CDG members also stated the need for more frequent visits from experts and subject-matter specialists to CDG meetings, in order to enhance their knowledge of plant protection and storage techniques as well as to improve their skills in poultry and livestock production and animal health care. They also emphasized their need for practical training in non-traditional skills for small income-generating enterprises.

The impact of making a credit facility available to CDG members for income-generating activities was also assessed. More than half of the CDG members interviewed were currently involved in some sort of income-generating activity. Disposal of handicrafts and vegetable products was constrained by the lack of marketing linkages, but there was great potential for earning from livestock production activities.

Agriculture extension administrators emphasized that the FEAs had proved their worth as agents of change. The delivery of extension messages through FEAs in the CDG model was perceived to be successful in bringing women into the mainstream development process. The sustainability and replicability of the CDG model were also advocated by the administrators and supervisors interviewed for the project.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), which is located in the north of Pakistan, lies between longitude 73-75 and latitude 33-36 and covers an area of 13 297 km². The topography is mainly hilly and mountainous with stretches of plains on which there are villages. The area is covered with thick forests, fast-flowing rivers and streams. The climate is of subtropical highland type with a yearly rainfall of 150 cm.

According to estimates, the population of AJK was 2 915 000 in 1998, with a rural-urban ratio of 88:12 (NJVCDP, 1999). Administratively, AJK consists of seven districts with a total of 1 646 villages. The population density is not uniform, being higher near towns and on foothill plains and lower away from towns and on steep slopes.

The pattern of agriculture in AJK varies according to elevation and ecological zone. Among the crops grown in various parts of the area are maize, wheat, bajra, rice, jowar, rapeseed, mustard and pulses; fruits such as apple, guava, walnut, apricot, pear, plum, citrus and almonds; and vegetables such as potato, onion, garlic, turnip, bringal, radish and spinach. However, the sizes of area under these crops are changing, as are cropping patterns, and there is a visible trend towards vegetables, gram and jowar.

Farming is neither subsistence nor full-time for the people in AJK, but mixed farming is an important way of life. The traditional occupations of agriculture and supporting crafts, which had bound people together within communities, have now lost both their prestige and their importance. The main causes attributed to this steady change include the small size of farm holdings and the consequent limited profitability of agriculture. These two limitations have been instrumental in the widespread geographic mobility of young males to other parts of Pakistan and elsewhere, where the wages they earn, even from unskilled labour, are higher than the income that is generated by the combined family efforts of both males and females in traditional agriculture. Off-farm employment provides the bulk of family income – 70 percent according to one estimate (Fida, 1991).

Male migration has resulted in crop farming and livestock raising and management becoming increasingly women's domain. According to a senior administrator at AJK's Department of Agriculture, livestock care and management is entirely in the hands of women in almost 90 percent of households. Similarly, women's participation is significant in farming-related operations such as harvesting and

the cleaning and storing of major crops (wheat, maize, fodder, etc.). In 85 percent of households, women are involved in sowing, weeding, transplanting and harvesting of vegetables for home consumption and sale; vegetables sales have become a source of income for some farm women.

Although there has been growing recognition of women's crucial role in the production, processing and preservation of food, planners have not included a women's component in most of their development programmes. There is a definite need for innovative change to the strategy and approach of extension programmes, in order to reach rural women who account for a large segment of poor rural communities. Since women's contribution to agricultural production has been significant and crucial over the past years, it is essential to shift from traditional male-dominated extension services to an integrated approach in which women become an important element within the scheme of extension programmes.

In areas such as AJK, rural women have reasonably good potential to assume an important role in development. All that they need is greater access to institutional support in terms of credit, inputs and technical assistance. Social services must be addressed to rural households, and women should be encouraged to participate in income-generating activities, based on resources and skills that are readily available to them. Farm women's interest groups and rural institutions therefore deserve attention and promotion. Rural women will not be able to take full advantage of technological advances unless they are mentally prepared for them and unless there are organized efforts, community action and group activities. A number of rural development projects have taken initiatives to bring women into the mainstream of development. The NJVCDP financed by IFAD, with technical assistance component by UNDP, is a good example of an intervention that involves women in the process of community development.

Established in 1992, NJVCDP is an integrated, multisectoral development project aimed at improving the quality of life indicators of rural dwellers. The project is based on a participatory approach that emphasizes the organization of rural communities at the grassroots level through the formation of both men's and women's community development groups (CDGs). The CDGs are designed to help and encourage people to take charge of their own affairs and achieve self-reliance for sustainable development.

NJVCDP aims at: social organization of the CDGs, emphasizing savings as a means of generating capital for credit and entrepreneurship; skill enhancement and upgrading of people's capabilities through human resource development; and strengthening linkages with government line departments (GLDs) and other development programmes. The programme package is delivered to the target community groups through the GLDs, which support the CDGs through training, provision of inputs and skills and transfer of technology, with the objectives of generating new income and raising the living standards of target communities.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study aimed at assessing the feasibility and productivity of the modality under which female extension assistants (FEAs) use women's CDGs as a platform for imparting agricultural extension advice, and comparing this performance with that of the traditional modality of making individual farm visits – usually followed by male extension agents.

The specific objectives of this study were:

- to find out FEAs' perceptions of the usefulness of imparting extension messages through women's CDGs compared with the traditional model which requires substantial travel in order to make contact with men and women farmers;
- to ascertain the opinions of the members of women's CDGs regarding the usefulness of extension messages delivered by FEAs through CDG meetings;
- to assess the views of extension supervisors and project administrators engaged in agricultural extension work about the relative utility of the CDG model compared with the traditional model.

THE STUDY AREA

NJVCDP operates in the Muzaffarabad district (excluding the Integrated Hill Farming Development Project area) across 32 union councils spread over an area of 5 500 km² (Table 1).

Table 1. General information on NJVCDP

| | Union councils (Number) | Villages (Number) |
|----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|
| Neelum Valley | 21 | 318 |
| Jhelum Valley | 11 | 113 |
| Total | 32 | 431 |
| Project area | 5 500 km ² | |
| Number of households | 70 000 | |
| Population | 550 000 | |

Source: Coordination Unit, NJVCDP, AJK, Muzaffarabad.

For operational purposes the project area was divided into eight field units. There are a total of 431 villages, and 416 of these were included in project activities. There are 416 men's and 324 women's CDGs in the project area, with total memberships of 10 634 and 8 271, respectively. The volume of total savings is Rs 12.5

million (Rs 8.5 million from men's CDGs and Rs 4.4 million from women's CDGs). Annex V outlines the present status of the CDGs in the project area.

THE STUDY SAMPLE

In the project area, the total number of FEAs working through women's CDGs was reported to be 32, one in each union council; all of these FEAs were included in the study sample. However, during the data collection it was revealed that several FEAs were no longer accessible because they had been promoted, had resigned from their positions, were on maternity leave or were located in the firing range.² Only about 13 FEAs were directly available to the study and a further two were able to participate through colleagues; thus, data from a total of 15 FEAs were available for processing and analysis.

In order to ensure a representative sample of members of women's CDGs, a multistaged stratified random sampling technique was adopted: five field units were selected from the total of eight in the project area; one union council was selected from each of the five selected field units; and one women's CDG from each of the five union councils was drawn.

The number of members in each of the five selected women's CDGs ranged from 20 to 45, of whom ten were randomly selected from each CDG for further detailed investigation. The study sample drawn thus constituted a total of 50 women's CDG members.

Using a checklist that had been specially prepared to allow for free and frank discussion of the usefulness of experimenting with the emerging new model of extension through CDGs, the points of view and responses of the main actors – i.e. the Director and Deputy Director of Agricultural Extension and the three Female Extension Officers responsible for supervising the CDG areas – were recorded.

Two separate interview schedules were developed for FEAs and CDGs. Extension supervisors and administrators, were interviewed in-depth using a checklist, and focus group discussions were held with FEAs, using another checklist.

The data collected from the study respondents were analysed by using Excel software. Most beneficiaries' responses were assessed and ascertained using weighted arithmetic averages and percentages. The FEAs' responses and opinion statements were quantified by assigning scores according to the Likert scale.

2 The firing range lies along the Line of Control between the Pakistani and Indian sides of Jammu and Kashmir, where frequent shelling poses problems to the civilian population, including loss of life and property.