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Factors Limiting Women's Involvement in Development: Lesson from Ithuseng, South Africa (Pp. 13-30)

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Abstract

This study investigates factors influencing limited involvement in development process by women in South Africa's semi and rural areas. The influence of government development policy, education and cultural values on rural women was also investigated. The results suggest that the majority of the women in rural areas are illiterate. These women have been involved in development related work without knowing it, because they lack initiatives, innovations, self-reliance attitudes and they are isolated, not exposed to information and are marginalized through the non-interactive government development policies. These symptoms reflect a lack of structured development strategy to create needed opportunities for women. All these are a result of high rate of illiteracy, unemployment, poverty and malnutrition. In other words, the development approach itself has failed them by not being able to enhance their welfare.

Introduction

Rural women's involvement in development has been the focus of intensive debates at most international forums in the past years. Among those forums that recognised the plight of the Third World women's involvement in development process are the 1995 Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies for advancement of women, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and the United Nations Development Fund for Women. These forums expressed that each member state was expected to promote women's economic independence, including the creation of employment, access to resources and credit, the eradication of

the persistent and increasing burdens of poverty, malnutrition, poor health and illiteracy (Allen & Thomas 1992). Although such declarations increased an awareness and understanding of the problems facing rural women and their needs, it has not yet resulted in significant development priorities in terms of their expectations and aspirations. Women's involvement in development dates for long time as suggested by the literature, however, this involvement has not been recognised by other people, especially men (UNIFEM 2000).

The impact of development on rural women differs from that of women in urban areas. Substantial evidence suggests that rural women have been consistently neglected in this process (Meer 1998). There is also overwhelming evidence that development policies and projects were formulated without the involvement of rural women in most African countries (Hunger Project 2000). The majority of population in developing countries lives in rural areas, where they play the role of food producers. Women in rural areas can also contribute to development in the same manner as those in urban areas, if they are initiated and guided in the development processes of their choice (Cartledge 1995).

Development is not an isolated activity and it implies progress from a lower state to a preferred higher one (Olopoenia 1983; Pradip 1984). Development is a process by which people are awakened to opportunities within their reach. Development, therefore, starts *with* people and progresses through them (Seer 1981; Gwanya 1989). About 55% of women live in South Africa's communal areas where they constitute almost 60% of the farmers and provide approximately 70% of the labour essential for food security (Martin 2001). This is the reason why rural women should be involved in development initiatives, because they are the most marginalized group of people in the country and they are the people contributing to the production of about 70% of food consumed in rural areas (Hunger Project 1999).

This paper investigates factors limiting an active involvement of rural women in development process in Ithuseng, South Africa. It is assumed that if these factors are not exposed, they are likely to cause a continuous impediment on rural women's involvement in development. This helps to increase our understanding and commitment toward the upliftment and empowerment of rural women, by eliminating plans, policies and projects that restrict their increased involvement in development process. The critical

levels of poverty and unemployment currently experienced by South Africa's rural areas clearly suggest that considerable pressure should be exerted on the economy to increase growth rate and to provide people with access to economic opportunities (Lightelm & Wilsenach 1993). Given the above background, the main purpose of this study was to critically document factors that contribute to rural women's inability to participate in development. This paper attempts to answer the following two main questions: 1) why participation in development is important for rural women? and 2) what strategy can be used to increase women's involvement in development to benefit them most? The rest of the paper is organised as follows: section 2 provides research questions and research methodology, section 3 reviews the main concepts, section 4 presents the results and section 5 concludes.

Research Methods

This was a descriptive survey study of the factors limiting rural women's involvement in development in South Africa. Data was collected using a questionnaire designed by the researcher and cross-validated by colleagues. The process of data collection involved travelling to the study area to conduct group discussions with various women groups including community leaders. The age grouping was necessary given that priorities and levels of involvement in development differ in terms of needs, aspirations and expectations. Ithuseng was selected because its different approaches to development. used in the past by both government agencies and NGOs. The study area is flat with fertile soil, indicating the potential for agricultural and livestock farming. It is densely populated area with fewer roads and low cost housing. Data was analyzed using the Excel Programme on Microsoft Office and the characteristics of the participants are given in the section under results and discussion.

Review of Related Concepts

Given that rural women have an important role to play in economy, it is important to review some literature related to women and development. This review provides an idea of the involvement of women in development in developing countries. In most literature on women's involvement in development, the impression gained suggests that these ongoing studies have not yet resulted in specific solutions to rural women and their inclusion and participation in development (Robinson 2004).

Women in African Society

Although each rural settlement has its own particularities, there are approaches or universally accepted development strategies to deal with development matters in these areas. Meer (1998) strongly believes that unless more effort is put into organising women in poor rural communities around their common interests, they are unlikely to benefit from favourable development policies. Friedman (1999) states that unless development policies include guidelines for process and practice of delivery, they are unlikely to challenge unequal power relations.

While both men and women are employed in agricultural and rural development, men predominate in land preparation, ploughing and pest control while women are mostly engaged in watering, planting, fertilizing, weeding, harvesting and marketing (Agenda Collective 1995). Women in rural South Africa need to be assisted to attain a certain degree of development as their counterparts in urban areas (Madonsela 1995). The focus on South Africa's rural women in this study is of concern; it implies that these people are conscious about their position as rural women although there are no strategies developed to effect change on them (McIntosh & Friedman 1989). Their needs, rights and concerns should be fully integrated into the individual country's development plans to benefit all sectors of the population (Hunger Project 2000).

When women are included in official planning, they are often regarded as powerless individuals who should be given assistance (Hunger Project 2000). Women must play crucial role as producers and agents of change in rural transformation, given that their limited involvement in rural development is brought about by gender disparity and marginalization (Momsen 1993). In our very tradition, we regard women as inferior to men, although women are still marginalized in the society (Kaplan 1993). The situation in rural areas conveys the following perception: If you are female, you do not play any role in the societal debates. The 1994 African Common Position on Human and Social Development Forum describes women as part of the marginalized, vulnerable sections of the population that are grouped together with children, the youth, the elderly and the disable (Ntomb'futi Zondo 1995).

No matter which rural government option is chosen, women in rural areas will always remain where they are, ultimately ending in a worse-off position (Hunger Project 2000). Women in developing areas need to initiate and

welcome change. The past practice of relegating women to inferior positions in society cannot be allowed to continue or else it will be a negation of the commitment to social justice and equality (Mwamwenda 1994; Kelly 1987a). Whatever process of resource rationalization is undertaken, one must ensure that it is not executed to the detriment and disadvantage of rural women as these women have untapped potential (Kelly 1987b).

Women and Development Related Work

Women in the United States work at home and outside home on an average of 6 hours per day, while in most African rural areas women work an average of 12 to 18 hours per day compared to an average of 8 to 12 hours of work per day by men (Buvinic et al,1978). The role of rural women is not only central to social advancement but also to economic progress in their respective countries. For instance, rural women in Lesotho worked almost 90% of road-work under the "Food-for-work" programme, while rural women in Gabon and Tanzania remarkably worked almost 200 days during in 1994. Comparatively, men worked only about 1,800 hours while rural women performed 2,600 hours in agriculture during the same year. These statistics revealed that rural women in these countries worked harder than others (Sneyder & Tadesa 1995)

In most instances the women in South Africa's rural areas manage their families while their husbands work in the cities, industries or mines. Traditionally, women in rural areas have been regarded as people who belong at home where they are expected to minister to the needs of their husbands and children, but decisions on economic and political issues are solely undertaken by men (Ntomb'futhi Zondo 1995). In many African countries, rural women are the food farmers who also carry the burdens of life. Africa's 100 million rural women grow almost 80 % of Africa's food, including food for subsistence and marketing. This amounts to food production of 3 metric tons per woman per year (Hunger Project 1999).

Addressing the negative effects of gender discrimination and inequality is an integral part of the socio-economic project of transformation (Kruppenbach 1987). Despite the equality provisions in the South African constitution and land restitution process established since 1994, it has become highly unlikely that rural women will be in a position to make claims as individuals (Friedman 1999). The restructuring of the South African agricultural economy requires affirmative measures to give effect to the principal of equal

opportunities (Van Rooyen et al, 1993). Women in Africa have a long tradition of participating in savings, production, marketing and mutual-aid organizations (UNIFEM 2000).

Women and Education in Africa

The fundamental reason for the existence of an educational system is that it plays a significant role in the economy of any society. In view of this, it is essential that the education provided meets the economic needs of a society, thus enhancing efficiency in the use of social and economic resources, leading ultimately to improved economic growth and social well-being (Mugisha et al, 1991; Mwamwenda 1994). Education contributes to economic development, equalizes opportunities between social classes, reduces disparities in the distribution of income and prepares the labour force for a modern economy (Kriefer 1985). International Organizations such as the United Nations, UNESCO, the World Bank and the Third World Countries are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of women in national development and the fact that education can contribute to their playing a more meaningful role in development (Kelly 1987a; Browne & Barrett 1991).

As are women in cities, women in rural areas also need to be educated not only to develop the country, but to also improve their social well-being as people who can benefit the country. There are many reasons that highlight the importance of the education of women. Research has shown that there is a strong association between education and an enhanced life, better nutrition, improved hygiene, low mortality rate, low fertility rate, and economic development (Browne and Barrett, 1991). Educating the women in Sub-Saharan Africa has been noted to have a powerful developmental effect in the light of the women's cardinal role of nurturing, rearing, socialising and educating children. Women are considered as economically active for they function as both producers and consumers of goods. Their capacity to actively serve in these areas can be enhanced if they are provided with adequate levels of education (Browne and Barrett 1991).

A lack of education deprives women from being productive in the rural areas. This can be attributed to the fact that they will remain ignorant of ways and means of increasing production on the farm (Kelly 1987a). Cultural values, as well as the economic realities of limited family resources and employment opportunities for women, which in the past have inhibited girls'

entry into primary and secondary education may now be prominent factors inhibiting Nigerian women from entering university (Biralmah 1987).

Reasons for Investigating Rural Women

There are valid reasons to focus on and to emphasize rural women's involvement in development process. The fundamental reason is that they play crucial roles in both subsistence and market food production in Africa. Not only are they considered to be harder workers than the average man but also because they are more reliable and committed to their tasks (Hunger Project 2000). Not only do the women constitute the majority in rural areas in Africa; they are also responsible for more than 50% of all productive activities, including those households where men are present. In many rural areas of LDCs, deforestation, loss of soil fertility, low productivity and poor living standards have been characterized as the features of these areas. All these have detrimental effects on the well-being of rural women. (Burkey 1993).

Therefore, overlooking the plight of rural women will negatively impact on the development of rural areas and that of the nation. To this end, there is a need to reverse this negative trend of approach to development by retrieving and revising the potential for involvement by rural women (Buvinic et al, 1978). Equally important is the fact that those who are not in crisis are often the beneficiaries of development efforts, whereas those entrapped in poverty remain exactly where they are with no hope of release (Van Rooyen et al, 1993).

Results and Discussions

Overall, the study sample comprised 346 respondents, mainly women. Respondents were classified into four different groups according to age structure, namely those below 20 and those who fall within the following categories: 20 - 35, 36 - 49, 50 - 64, and 65 years and older (table 1).

According to the data in table 1, respondents below 20 years represent 18,7%, those between 20 and 35 years represent 27,5%, those aged 36 to 49 years represent 26,9%, those between 50 to 64 years represent 25.3% while those above 65 years represent 1,8% of the total sample. The highest percentages of 27,5% and 26,9% are attributed to the economically active group of women between the respective age groups of 20 to 35 and 36 to 49. In terms of development strategies, greater efforts should be made to include

these groups of women in any development initiatives as they comprise the majority. Women as heads of households represent the majority of South Africa's rural households (National Social Development Report 1997). The number of poor rural women has recently increased dramatically, notwithstanding the increased female responsibility for agricultural production and income-generating activities in the rural areas (Cartledge 1995). Table 2 provides the marital status of the respondents. Data in table 2 indicate that the study area is characterized by single, married, divorced and widowed women, including those separated from their husbands as a result of employment.

The results in table 2 indicate that single women account for 17%, married women account for 24%, divorced women account for 23%, those widowed account for 23%, while those separated from their husbands account for 13%. Mazuri (1990) advocates that in South Africa the migration of men to mines and other employment became more problematic when the government enforced regulations against women joining their husbands at their places of work. This has subsequently exacerbated the rate of women separated from their husbands, resulting in these women occupying positions of heads of households.

The number of children between the ages of 0 to 3 is 17,3%, the age group between 4 to 7 is 25,3%; the age group between 8 to 11 is 23,1%; children above 11 years represent 20.6%, and children who are not declared represent 13,7% (table 3).

The highest percentage of children falls in the 4 to 7 age group, followed by those aged from 8 to 11. Excluded are those children not declared by respondents as being legitimate. The high birth rate is not only an attribute of the dense rural areas in South Africa, but is also pertinent to urban areas. Almost all LDCs' developing areas are overpopulated (Momsen, 1993; Kibuka 1990).

The educational levels of respondents in this study include both formal and informal education. Data on educational levels suggest characteristics which discourage the active participation of rural women in development process since a number of them are not educated (table 4). The number of respondents who did not attend school represent 22,0%, with 23.1% of those with primary education, 22,5% with secondary education, 6,6% of those with

college education (mostly teachers), and 0.8% of those with university degrees (individuals mainly employed in government district offices). The number of respondents with vocational education represents 22,0%. These women possess the skills to sew, make candles, manage vegetable gardens, manage poultry projects and, to some extent, small-scale businesses such as mini restaurants and tuck shops. The study also observed that many respondents with primary and secondary education did not necessarily complete the levels required. This has therefore contributed to higher illiteracy rates among respondents.

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Educational level is important for human capital. It is a tool required to stimulate, create, achieve and enhance productivity and foster the active involvement of rural women in development. The rate of women's participation in development initiatives is strongly influenced by their educational levels. The more highly educated the woman, the greater the likelihood of her being included in the labour force, and the lower the likelihood that she would be unemployed (Browne & Barrett 1991). A lack of education is enhanced by inequalities and disparities in the labour markets, including absolute poverty in rural areas (Adams & Kruppenbach 1987). The problem of limited involvement in development process by rural women is not only confined to the higher levels of illiteracy or to their traditional values and beliefs and gender discrimination of being excluded from the scene of development. It is also attributed to the lack of government incentives, commonly seen as absent ingredients, required to boost, equip and enable women to initiate and be involved (Kriefer 1985).

Respondents were requested to provide the researcher with various skills in terms of employment, occupation and economic activities such as income-generating ventures. Many ideas were provided and an analysis of these various ideas is provided in table 5. It is a description of respondents in both formal and informal sectors, including those actively employed or self-employed, and those unemployed within households. Following table 5, 26.9% of respondents are involved in farming, 21.2% is engaged in small business, 15.9% is occupied with income-generating activities as sources of income, 16.5% of respondents receive wages/salaries. Respondents who were inactive represent 19.5%. This group of women revealed that they are solely dependent on income from their husbands and are therefore unable to survive independently.

Literacy is a mechanism that can transform. It has the potential to boost women's involvement in development as it stimulates and enhances individual initiative. Innovation is, by and large, a major way to increase skills to participate in development process in order to eliminate dependency-syndrome (Mugisha et al,1991). A lack of initiative resulting from illiteracy has blurred rural women's mind-sets into believing in themselves—that they would be the “initiators of their own developments” (Tomb' futhi Zondo 1995).

Respondents were also requested to provide the researcher with areas which hinder their active involvement in development process in their respective communities. Many problem areas were identified and listed. The most important constraints against women's entrepreneurial ability to participate in the economy include the regulatory environment such as government legislation, education, culture and limited access to management and job opportunities as well as family responsibilities (Robinson 2004).

From the study's point of view, the following six factors were identified, namely: lack of government assistance, lack of resources; lack of information, lack of education; respect for cultural values and beliefs, and finally, gender discrimination (Table 6). In table 6 below, 21% of respondents attribute negative participation to lack of government assistance. This score indicates that people have high expectations of the government to continue doing things for them instead of them taking initiatives to shape their own destiny. Age grouping was necessary for this study for it reflects the fact that priorities and levels of participation in development differ in

terms of individual needs, aspirations and expectations (Agenda Collective 1995).

A lack of resources scores 16%; lack of information 15%; lack of education 17%, influence of cultural values and beliefs 15% and gender discrimination 15%. Although affected by such hindrances, rural women often contribute to family earnings in various ways. They assist on family farms, produce handicrafts, brew beer for sale or work elsewhere to support themselves (Popkin 1983). The same factors were also represented in the diagram as depicted here under in Figure 1.

The willingness to participate in various development initiatives was assessed by posing the following question to respondents: "If new approaches to taking part in development initiatives are made available, would you be willing to participate?" This purpose of this question was to evaluate the respondents' attitudes and keenness to participate in development (table 6).

In response to the above question, the number of "Willing to participate" accounted for 85,7%, "Not willing" accounted for 3,6% while 10,7% reflected that the respondents were "Not sure". The "Not willing" responses came mainly from women who were 65 years and older who claimed that they are no longer economically active to be involved in any development activities, while the percentage of "Not sure" answers included the physically/mentally handicapped and other sick women.

Table 6 demonstrates that the majority (85,7%) of rural women are either willing to participate or currently do so in developments in their respective communities. These women have the necessary knowledge to initiate, plan, implement, participate and further the development process to higher levels and thus contribute meaningfully to its expansion. The local governments should address this issue by removing any barriers imposed on the development of rural women—barriers to their active participation in socio-economic development initiatives (Snyder & Tadesse 1995).

Conclusion

The findings of this study have provided a good picture of possible reasons for rural women sliding into the obscurity of development process. Although they comprise the majority of the population in rural South Africa, only one

rural woman progresses to group consideration. Virtually none of the women progress into individualized selection, especially where they entail significant power and responsibility. Involvement of rural women in economic activities at all levels is crucial for the economic advancement of women and the development of South Africa. The economic framework needs to be hypersensitive to the gender implications for rural women and to any economic policy for their future. Such policies need to be adjusted in terms of the impact on rural women's employment, economic advancement and empowerment. Rural women need to be given incentives to start economic activities that improve their socio-economic conditions.

Investigating rural women's participation in developments is crucial for they are the backbone of rural economy, notwithstanding the discrimination levelled against them. Rural women's work is never complete; farm work is an integral part of their daily activities apart from the household burdens of caring for children. Rural women in most African households perform subsistence and near-subsistence agriculture and constitute over 80% of the agricultural labour force. They are also responsible for many other tasks such as planting, weeding, watering, harvesting and storing of crops.

The findings of this study suggested that the lack of government incentives and assistance, lack of resources, information and education, cultural values and discrimination against rural women were the most important factors contributing to their passive involvement in development. Further inferences can be drawn in relation to the age structure of respondents. This has impacted negatively on rural women's involvement, mostly for those in the category of 65 years and above.

The study recommends that mechanisms to practically promote women's involvement in development should be formulated by the national machinery. This is crucial for their advancement on the one hand and on the other hand to cope with these long outstanding development rs on them. Perhaps this could be achieved through combined efforts between the Departments of Local government and Social Development, including structured co-operation and employment strategy or through the existing Women Affairs structures. These bodies should be equipped to work and effectively co-ordinate rural women's issues. Such structures should also network with the Central Planning Unit, NGOs and any other organisation that deals with

women's issues such as self-help, development, local planning and policies to assist women prioritise their development needs.

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Table 1: Age structure of respondents

Age group	No of respondents	Percentage
0 - 19	68	18,7
20 - 35	100	27,5
36 - 49	98	26,9
50 - 64	92	25,3
Above 65	6	1,6
Total	364	100,0

Source: Research data, 2008.

Table 2: Marital status of respondents

Status of respondents	No of respondents	Percentage
Single	62	17
Married	87	24
Divorced	85	23
Widowed	83	23
Separated by jobs/others	47	13
Total	364	100

Source: Research data, 2008.

Table 3: Age and Number of children of respondents

Age group	No of children	Percentage
0 - 3	63	17,3
4 - 7	92	25,3
8 - 11	84	23,1
Above 11	75	20,6
Not stated	50	13,7
Total	364	100,0

Source: Research data, 2008

Table 4: Educational level of respondents

Educational levels	No of respondents	Percentage
Primary Education	84	23,1
Secondary Education	82	22,5
College	24	6,6
University	3	0,8
Vocational School	91	25,0
Did not attend school	80	22,0
Total	364	100,0

Source: Research data, 2008

Table 5: Business skills by respondents

Occupation	No of respondents	Percentage
Farming	98	26,9
Small business	77	21,2
Income generating activities	58	15,9
Wages/salaries	60	16,5
None	71	19,5
Total	364	100,0

Source: Research data, 2008.

Table 6: Main factors influencing negative participation of respondents.

Main factors	No of respondents	Percentage
Lack of government assistance	75	21
Lack of resources	57	16
Lack of information	55	15
Lack of education	63	17
Cultural values	56	15
Gender discrimination	58	16
Total	364	100,0

Source: Research data, 2008.

Figure 1: Factors Limiting participation

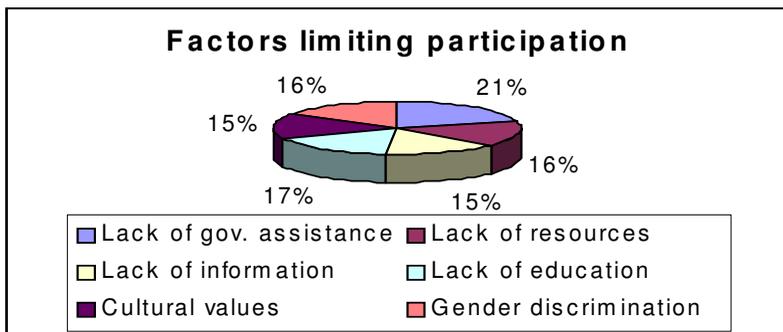


Table 6: Respondents' willingness to participate in development process

Willingness	No of respondent	Percentage
Willing to participate	312	85,7
Not willing	13	3,6
Not sure	39	10,7

Source: Research data, 2008.