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**GENDER ISSUES IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION  
(A Case Study of Wool in Baluchistan)**

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**ABSTRACT**

Women have always played a vital role in the Balochistan wool industry mainly through caring for the animals. Due to the conservative nature of much of Balochistan society, it has been difficult to service the women from a male dominated extension service. The Balochistan Agricultural Project (BAP) took a different perspective. First, it set out to improve the value of wool. This it did through a series of steps such as cleaning and washing the animals, elementary grading, shearing techniques, and baling. As the value of the wool rose, so too did the value of the services the women provided. BAP set out to increase the role of women in the wool value chain. It facilitated the formation of Female Wool Farmer Marketing Collectives. Extension activities included focusing on organising the marketing, pricing, and negotiating skills. BAP also facilitated value adding activities, such as spinning, dyeing, and carpet weaving, that the women could do to the wool. The result has been the cementing of the role of women in the wool value chain as well as a marked improvement in the status of women. Present manuscript described these extension activities.

**Keywords:** Gender Issues, Wool, Agricultural Extension, BAP, USAID, FAO.

**INTRODUCTION**

Gender issues prevail in all walks of life. However, women are particularly affected by it and face major issues in the field of agriculture. Apart from other, the low literacy rate for women in the province of Balochistan has foremost affected development of the agriculture extension services. This has led to the emergence of a predominantly male focused agriculture extension systems, not favoring the women who are contributing in one or the other way in the agriculture productivity enhancement. The traditional cultures, which have literally banned right of transfer of properties to the women, has further diverted the attention of all technological innovations to focus only on men that has implications on the livelihood of almost fifty percent of population which are women. The innovations that the Balochistan Agriculture Project (BAP) funded by USAID has introduced, has made substantial changes in the livelihoods of the women, not only in terms of enhancing their standards of life but

also empowering them through applicable and “*quick returning*” innovative packages, capacity building and in decision making process.

**BAP BACKGROUND**

The “Balochistan Agriculture Project” “BAP” funded by USAID is an extension of the pilot project and the follow up phase. The project operates in the eight districts of Balochistan namely Quetta, Mastung, Pishin, KillaSaifullah, Loralai, Zhob, Sherani and Musakhel, and has been one of the most successful agriculture productivity enhancement initiatives, using the participatory development approaches whereby the communities are equal partners in the implementation of the project interventions.

The outputs of BAP have been revised from those of the pilot and follow-up phases to reflect changes in the project’s outcomes, viz:

- i. Improved enabling environment for the development of provincial agricultural policies and legal and regulatory frameworks, market-led and community-driven investments, strategies and processes, and women’s empowerment in agricultural development – including the

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- “community organization” sub-component of the original USABBA Project.
- ii. Increased crop and livestock productivity and value of agricultural products produced, through improved technological innovation and management practices and improved community-based irrigation development and water management practices in project-assisted villages and their value chains – the same “crop and livestock production” component of the original USABBA Project.
  - iii. Small local agri-business enterprises established and market linkages strengthened for target poor communities to increase sales of their surplus produce and improve competitiveness and sustainability of their value chains – including the “marketing capacity building” sub-component of the original USABBA Project.

The “partnerships”, “women’s empowerment” and “gender sensitization” sub-components of are treated as the cross-cutting interventions to all three outputs listed above, e.g. collaboration with USAID and other donor-funded agricultural and value chain development projects and USDA, ACIAR and relevant centres of CGIAR and expansion of women COs, implementation of women FFSs and the development of women-oriented value chains (e.g. dairy produce, poultry, vegetables and wool). The current phase of the project places greater emphasis on capacity building, technological innovation and management and value chain development of new and improved production and marketing practices that have been researched and developed under the Pilot Project and the follow up phase, including interventions that are focused specifically in the uplift of women.

#### **AGRICULTURE EXTENSION IN THE GENDER DIMENSION**

Women have been found to participate actively in all subsectors of agriculture, namely crops, livestock, fisheries and agro forestry, and particularly in subsistence food production, where they contribute significantly to food production and processing of agriculture inputs e.g. grading, packaging and processing of commodities, however, the decision making would always remain with men who control the productive resources.

Attempts by outsiders from the international development community to focus on female gender balance and empowerment issues have in many cases

not recognized the reality of Balochistan’s culture; consequently, alienation of the males that control the society has occurred. Empowering males out of these roles dictated by the traditional culture of project areas was considered an important component of a gender approach in order to help both women and men. A change of strategy and focus was warranted, since the forceful insistence on the imposition of global gender policy on the fundamentally male-dominated community of Balochistan Province may not only hinder progress but will also add to security risks. These very real issues were fully taken into account of in the project approach to gender as they could adversely affect achievement of the project’s ambitious goals for active women’s involvement.

Many parts of north-eastern Balochistan are characterized by strongly conservative traditions and customs regarding the role and position of women within society, which significantly restrict the contribution of women to household, community and provincial economic growth and at the same time, however, the project has designed appropriate interventions to benefit the women within the boundary walls of their houses to overcome these issues. In many instances, it may be that the best way to empower women is to empower men and families as well. Successful project interventions are the ones in which women’s economic participation are seen to benefit the family and household as a whole. The project has therefore focused women centered activities on income generation and market-orientated activities in general. Importantly, livestock are more evenly spread across rural households than agricultural land resources. This means that productivity gains in livestock are more likely to be pro-poor (and have a stronger gender dimension) than productivity gains of major crops.

#### **RELATED PROJECT OBJECTIVES & INTENDED OUTPUTS**

“Gender equality and the empowerment of women” (MDG 3) is a fundamental requirement and ways have been demonstrated to achieve this Goal, e.g. the expansion of group-based women community organizations for empowerment and community-led development, women “farmer field schools” for technology transfer, and women farmers’ marketing collectives with an eventual mutual marketing organizations for produce marketing.

Particular efforts are being made to ensure that project design and implementation are fully gender sensitive and that benefit streams are shared equitably between men and women. In this regard, the Project has a strong gender dimension cross-cutting all project activities, while several interventions have women-specific activities (e.g. drinking water supplies, homestead gardening and poultry, dairy produce and wool processing). As a result, women are directly benefiting from the Project, leading to enormous income increases through agricultural improvements on the one hand, and new or strengthened market linkages on the other.

#### **EXTENSION SERVICES**

- a. **Scope of Existing Extension Services:** Women have always played a vital role in the Balochistan wool industry mainly through caring for the animals, collection of wool after shearing, grading, spooling and carpet weaving are the major activities in this respect. Outside the parameters of the boundary walls the male would take care of animals, once the animals are returned back it becomes women's responsibility. The women would feed, water and milk the animals. They would take care of the animal by-products (milk, yogurt, butter and wool). Men shear the animal but grading and processing of wool is done by the women. Due to the conservative nature of the society, it has been difficult to service the women from a male dominated extension service. The province, in terms of livestock extension, has always faced constraints in terms of non-availability of professionally qualified women extension workers. There is literally one female DVM who is serving the province with little or no diploma holder female extension workers available to serve the population in the animal health care.
- b. **Envisioning and Empowering Women:** The Balochistan Agricultural Project (BAP) took a different perspective in empowering the women. The project made it obligatory in the design phase to hire fifty percent female workers in each of the operational districts with a logical target of forty percent of the Community Organizations to be formed would be women only. This implied to pick and choose carefully designed interventions which would uplift the livelihoods of the women and provide them with income generation opportunities and wool was considered one among those.
- c. **Wool from a Thrown Away to Profit Making**
- d. Pre-season missions were organized to the various wool markets including Quetta, Karachi, Multan and Jhang where the project staff and participating beneficiary communities, including females, actively participated in the process. Based on these visits and market analysis a market led business strategy was developed as follows:
- e. **Wool Pre-washing & Grading:** The wool was sold in the market with contamination of dust and dirt which the buyer had to wash, clean and dry. This ideally meant that the wool merchant had to invest in heavy machinery to wash the wool, had to have sufficient drying space in addition to enormous use of labour for these activities. The project trained the farmers to pre-wash the animal before the actual shearing took place, which was an easy task for the farmers. The wool was then shorn with the help of a mechanized shearing hand-piece which not only results in the even staple size but it also increases the quantity of wool by 20-30%.
- f. **Grading by colour and parts of the body:** Once the wool is shorn, it is graded into colour and various parts of the body from where it came. The highest priced wool was the one which is shorn from the back of the animal.
- g. **Baling:** The wool was put at the back of a truck for transportation from farm to the market without baling, in which case the transportation cost were very high due to grossly underutilized space. The farmers could hardly transport two to three tons of loose wool in a single truck whereas through the use of baling machine it is possible to transport 20 to 30 tons of wool in a single truck. This resulted in huge transport cost reduction.
- h. **Bulk Production:** To be able to reach to economies of scales it was felt necessary to produce wool in bulk to reduce the costs and attract more buyers.

Some of the wool merchants would only accept 10 to 12 tons per shipment. This was only possible through a platform which would provide a mechanism to the farmers to produce and market collectively, thus the answer was forming "Marketing Collectives". A Farmer Marketing Collective, consisting of at least 10 women from the same locality each representing a Community Organization was formed for pooling together the resources of these women. They were trained on proper business planning, including marketing and financial plan.

- i. **Farmer Marketing Collectives (FMC):** FMC is a group of farmers that sells their collective produce for good prices. It is a business, owned by the farmers, who are members. FMC is based on the values of self-help, self-reliance, democracy, equality, and on the ethical values of honesty, openness, and caring for one another and others. FMC provides education and training for their members, supported by Business Support Services Persons (BSSPs) who offer services on charge basis.

The women went through a number of marketing principles/trainings e.g. identifying costs of production, Wish-Want-Walk, Ask and Offer. These well prepared them to act like business women in dealing with the wool merchants in the market place. They were well conversant with the rates for various types, grades, colours and the seasonality issue with the wool.

In addition, interested women were trained on wool spooling/spinning, natural and chemical dyeing, and carpet weaving. The spooling machines and looms were made available to them alongside a well conversant trainer in utilizing the equipment. This attracted the local carpet weaving industry, including the Afghani women residing in the suburbs of Quetta to look for processed wool. These set of activities enhanced the business horizon for the female project beneficiaries who are now well trained to take on the business as a business.

### RESULTS/OUTPUT

Traditionally wool was sold to the village merchants soon after shearing at very low prices. The market exposure and linkages through the Project resulted into the establishment of direct contacts with the manufacturers, a test marketing yielded manifold net sales as compare to the village merchants. This year the FMC plans to make commercial transactions. The

members are happy with sell through the FMC as it improved its bargaining power, offered volumes direct to the manufacturer thereby attracting good price and substantially adding to their net sales. They also learned how to wash, grade and store wool for sale during off-season when prices considerably improve.

The female farmers have realized 80 to 400% price appreciation on trial shipments keeping in view the basic methods of pre-washing, grading and beside all selling it during the off-season when prices considerably improve. The Female Wool FMC members have sold white wool from a 20 rupee per Kg local market to 75-80 rupees per Kg in the markets elsewhere.

Besides, direct sale of wool the females have learnt natural dyeing of wool, spinning and rug making those are not accounted for in this report. The spooled/dyed wool has huge demand in the market for hand weaving carpet industry and the possibilities of exploring those markets have also been taken into account.

### CONCLUSIONS

The results of the wool activity and also others, which are not the focus of current report, have had tremendous influence on the lives of poor female farming communities. This provided an insight to the females to the collective production, transportation and sale which have had meaningful gains to everyone. The word has spread in the surrounding villages and the Female Wool FMC would play the role of a catalyst in moving forward this intervention.

In view of the difficult environment of the province, relatively conservative social set up and low literacy, continued support in business planning, market linkages, product development & preparation for the market, record keeping and financial management will be required for achieving level of sustainability.

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