Despite the growing importance of the women farmers' role in agriculture and in overall rural development, lack of access to and control over productive resources deprives them of opportunities for their own capacity building and improved quality of life.
WOMEN'S WORK IN AGRICULTURE has become more visible over the last few decades as women farmers become more involved in agricultural activities, increasingly assuming the responsibility for household survival and responding to economic opportunities in agricultural production. This has made rural development in Asia considerably dependent on the capacity enhancement of women farmers as they increasingly provide a vital contribution to the development of rural communities.

A look at recent trends and prospects for 2010 for developing Asian countries reveals a striking point: the number of women economically active in agriculture is increasing and growing faster than the number of males economically active in this sector. This phenomenon is dubbed as the "feminization of agriculture," referring to women's increasing participation in the agricultural labor force, whether as independent producers, as unpaid family workers, or as agricultural wage workers. Yet, despite the growing importance of the women farmers' role in agriculture, as well as in overall rural development, the lack of access to and control over productive resources deprives them of opportunities for their own capacity building and improved quality of life.

In addition, the long tradition of gender gap and inequalities seriously restricts women's right to legal, institutional and policy support services. They are disadvantaged through limited access to land, credit, technology and information, and especially in the remuneration of their activities resulting to a wide underestimation of women's economic contributions. Also, there are very few programs for enhancing women farmers' welfare and their empowerment under a new rural environment.

Recognizing the need to overcome gender issues in agriculture and rural livelihoods, the international seminar on enhancement of women farmers' role in the development of rural Asia was organized with the overall goal to understand the situation of women farmers in agriculture in order to improve their status and enhance their contribution to rural development. The seminar also aimed to promote the integration of women's concerns in rural development policy agenda, particularly of developing Asian countries. During the paper presentations and deliberations, the participants looked more deeply into gender-demarcated responsibilities in agriculture in terms of social and economic activities, access to resources, and decision-making authority. A field observation tour of rural women organizations' agricultural and livelihood activities provided the participants with an insight into Korea's policy to encourage income-generating activities and volunteer works among rural women.

Issues and concerns faced by women farmers in Asia
The countries that make up the Asian region are characterized by considerable diversity in terms of geography, culture, religion and political systems, as well as economic performance and social development. Hence, programs and policies in gender equality in support of women farmers differ considerably among countries. The more developed Asian countries are much ahead in terms of enhancing women farmers' welfare and their empowerment under a new rural environment. However, in other less developed countries, rural women continue to struggle with dual responsibilities of economic production and domestic labor, and most are confronted by poverty, illiteracy, high health risks, inadequate access to productive resources, and lack of credit/market access.

The common issues among Asian countries which can form the basis for further deliberation and future action may be categorized into four major categories:

- Economic issues such as rural women's lack of title to productive assets and access to "inputs" (land, credit, water, fertilizer, seeds, information, technology, training, etc.) and markets; the increasing drudgery and time spent by women in agricultural activities which is not compensated.
by increases in value added; and the limited availability and/or relevance of technology and other aids for women.

- Program/planning issues such as inadequate gender-differentiated and disaggregated data, as well as data gaps with regard to rural women, which results in overlooking gender issues for planning; and lack of appropriate methodologies that recognize and value women’s contribution, actual and potential, to productive activities resulting in women’s marginalization in projects and programs.

- Political issues such as institutional barriers to women’s political participation and organization (patriarchy, non-organization of women, rural isolation).

- Sociocultural issues such as low status and disadvantaged position of women resulting in lower education; little access to training; non-participation in decision making; lower income; poor nutrition and health; few property rights.

Rural women in their dual roles as producers in the farm and the home and as caregivers need appropriate technologies to ease their work stress and to improve productivity. In developing countries, technology development and extension programs have not been responsive to household drudgery associated with different production activities undertaken by women. Hence, rural women’s demand for technology that improves their productivity while reducing drudgery must be recognized.

Most countries still lack adequate provision for women to hold land rights independently of their husbands or male relatives. Statutory laws often do not ensure independent land rights for women. In traditional or under customary practices, women’s direct ownership access to land may be limited, yet they may have greater management and use rights than men. Land ownership in rural areas determines the asset for production as well as access to credit and agricultural support services and the social power to negotiate for resources and membership in decision-making agencies. Hence, rural women must be empowered with legal and institutional measures to secure land and other productive resources.

The development of women’s groups should be promoted as a strategy to expand women’s access to information, increase their comparative advantage in the market, and improve their decision-making abilities.
bargaining power, and create opportunities for collective action to access economic inputs. In reality, however, persisting gender biases, deep-seated community dynamics and women's time constraints prevent women from actively participating in these organizations intended to bring about social capital benefits and female empowerment.

Literacy has serious implications for the future of the agriculture sector's productivity and the food security in many countries across the region. Prevailing shortfalls in rural female literacy achievement, coupled with trends towards the feminization of farming, underline the urgency to improve the skills and knowledge of rural women as a means to advance their technological and economic empowerment.

Successful cases of women empowerment
A country's economic and social development is a significant factor in creating recognition of the role women farmers play in rural development, and in bringing about gender-sensitive policies in the agriculture sector.

The Korean government provides vital support to the Rural Women Leaders Federation (RWLF), an organization of rural women playing lead roles in promoting healthy rural home and prosperous local communities. Government organizations like RDA have also been introducing various approaches in the promotion of rural values and enhancement of living standards among women's organizations through non-formal adult education, support for nonfarm income activities, and capacity building.

Technical and extension support is vital, especially in consistently providing women farmers with gender-specific practical technologies and information on agriculture and rural livelihood. Korea's agricultural cooperatives also support rural women by organizing them into cooperative work programs, giving them the means and opportunities to build up their own capacities in order to have access to extension/credit/marketing services.

Japan's "Farm Management Agreement" which rationalizes women's role in the farm through appropriate division of roles, ownership of property, share in income, and improvement of working condition, has considerably raised the status of women farmers in the country. The agreement is an effective tool in building a comfortable environment for farm families under a new social system in the rural areas, focusing on the promotion of gender-equal society in the aspects of agricultural production and daily living, and a more efficient farm management.

Recognizing the importance of creating jobs or favorable environment for woman entrepreneurs, the Taiwan government has been sponsoring projects to increase the financial viability of rural women for income generation and entrepreneurship. The projects make extensive use of internet marketing or even virtual shops as additional income sources, allowing women to work from their home while taking care of the family. The project named "Tien-Ma-Ma" initiated in 2001 has become a model for creating job opportunities by embracing modern communication and marketing channels.

Prospects and recommendations
What are the needs of Asian women farmers given their increasing role in the development and stabilization of rural communities in this new era, and what are the strategies, policy and program interventions needed to refocus attention on the situation of rural women in agricultural development?

Technical and extension support is vital, especially in consistently providing women farmers with gender-specific practical technologies and information on agriculture and rural livelihood. Education opportunities for women are also critical.
not only in the fields of agriculture and in nonagricultural gainful employment, but also in the sectors of health, nutrition, children’s education, and family planning. Women must also be given institutional and legal assistance toward having equal access to and control over productive resources, particularly land; make it possible for them to participate in business activities; and guarantee them a right to membership and voting in labor/credit organizations. Measures facilitating household work and care of the children should be introduced to increase the chance for women to participate in economic and training activities. The importance of women’s unpaid work in the home and farm production systems should also be clearly recognized.

In the Asian region, more efforts should focus on the integration of gender considerations and gender-differentiated indicators in the policy formulation process and in designing strategies to improve opportunities for rural women. Toward this end, sex-disaggregated data and gender-differentiated information for all aspects of agriculture and rural development must be collected to be used in policy and program formulation for the advancement of rural women.

International Seminar on Enhancement of Women Farmers’ Role in the Development of Rural Asia

Held in ITCC-RDA, Suwon, Korea, October 15-19, 2007

No. of participating countries: (10) China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan ROC, Thailand and Vietnam

No. of papers presented: 15
No. of participants: 15 speakers and about 150 local participants (local women-farmer leaders’ group, researchers, officials and guests)
Co-sponsor: International Technical Cooperation Center (ITCC), Rural Development Administration (RDA), Korea

List of papers

Keynote paper
1. Women’s roles and needs in changing rural Asia
   - Thelma Romero Paris, International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), Philippines

Resource/country papers
2. Rural resources and living development program
   - Young-Suk Shin, Rural Resources Division, RDA
3. Case study on the Rural Women Leaders Federation (RWLF) in Korea
   - Mee-Hwa Lee, RWLF, Korea
4. Women farmers’ role in the new socialist rural development movement in China: case study on the Yanbian region
   - Hua-Shan Jin, Yanbian University, China
5. The feminization of agriculture in Asia: implications for women’s agency and productivity
   - Govind Kelkar, UNDF for Women in South Asia, Sub-Regional Office, India
6. Family management agreement in rural areas: Japan’s experiences
   - Sumiko Abe, Japan Agricultural Development and Extension Association, Japan
7. The needs and demands of women farmers in agricultural production and rural livelihood, and

Participants joined in the demonstration of traditional Korean rice-cake making by members of the Ji-Mi-Dang, an income generating club for rural women in Yeoju county, Korea, which has now become a model in business and entrepreneurship for other rural women’s group in the country.
their expected roles in rural development
- Shu-Kwei Kao, National Taiwan University, Taiwan ROC

8. Engendering agricultural development to empower marginalized women farmers: a prerequisite for reasonable changes in Indonesia
- Rita Nur Suhaeti, Indonesian Center for Agriculture Socio-Economic and Policy Studies, Indonesia

9. Changes and problems of rural family and rural woman in Japan
- Tokuya Kawate, Nihon University, Japan

10. The current situation of women farmers in Malaysia
- Rosalizan Md Saleh, Researcher, Malaysian Agricultural Research and Development Institute, Malaysia

11. Ensuring rural women's voice in agricultural policy formulation
- Marlene D. Ramirez, Asian Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Asia (AsiaDHRRA), Philippines

12. An investigative report on successful cases of innovative projects for enhancing women farmers' role in the development of rural Taiwan
- Wen-Chi Huang, National Pingtung University of Science and Technology, Taiwan ROC

13. Women farmers in Thailand: the situations and needs in agricultural development
- Suwanna Thuvachote, Kasetsart University, Thailand

14. Women and agricultural extension in Vietnam
- Tran Thi Van Anh, Institute of Family and Gender Study, Vietnam

15. Development and application of the gender equality indicators in agriculture
- Gyung Mee Gim, Director, National Institute of Agricultural Science and Technology, RDA

For further information, contact:
Mr. In-Woo Lee, FFTC Agricultural Economist