THE NEEDS AND DEMANDS OF WOMEN FARMERS IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION AND RURAL LIVELIHOOD, AND THEIR EXPECTED ROLES IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

“Family farm” is considered as such when the farming site of a particular farming family is located within their area. It is the major type of agricultural management in Taiwan in which, the demand for manpower makes women an important source of farm labor. While work on the farm is shared between husband and wife in most farms of Taiwan, women farmers often participate in more farm work, which are supposed to be men’s tasks, as these require intensive and multifaceted labor. Aside from working with their husbands, women farmers also support their husbands’ careers. However, it was shown in previous studies that, while farming couples acknowledge that home management should be shared between husband and wife, it is, in most cases, the wives who do the work alone. As such, it has been observed that there is a gap between “concept” and “execution” in terms of labor division in home management of farming families. Almost all women farmers believed that it is necessary for them to attend classes and other learning activities, which are thought to be helpful not only in terms of increasing knowledge and expanding personal relationships, but also in relieving pressure and distress. However, actual participation of women farmers on these activities is hardly visible for the following reasons: they are busy at work; their children need to be looked after; their work will be delayed; they have no such information; transportation or time does not allow them; or they think their husbands’ attendance will be enough. Therefore, it is very important and urgent to help women farmers overcome their learning barriers. The New Agriculture Movement was established to contribute contemporary significance in highlighting the human resource development and lifelong learning of women farmers. Since then, the roles of women farmers became more diversified. They are now the mistress and supporter of the family as well as a citizen and service provider in society. It is, therefore, recommended to help them enhance their capability in playing appropriate roles and to further understand their need for learning and satisfy their other needs and demands.

Key words: women farmers, rural development, livelihood, human resource development, New Agriculture Movement, Tien Mama, learning barriers

INTRODUCTION

According to Executive Yuan (2007), the Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics (DGBAS), Republic of China (ROC), the total employment in Taiwan is approximately 10 million (as of 2006), in which females accounted for 42.5% or 4.3 million. Over the past decade, the percentage of male employment (relative to total employment) declined each year, while more and more females entered the labor force as a result of their higher education levels; the change in society and the transformation of industry structures (Table 1).

In 2006, the number of agricultural employment in Taiwan reached 555,000, (5.5% of total employment). Out of this figure, female
accounted for 161,000, (29.0%), which is 3.7% of the total female employment. Over the past decade, the number of agricultural employment decreased each year (Table 2), while female agricultural employment remained generally between 27.4%-29.0% (Table 3) from 1997 to 2006. This range would have been higher if women farmers, who are often called “the unseen farmers,” were also accounted to.

Women’s participation in agricultural management is often underestimated or ignored since household labor force is difficult to assess in terms of managerial efficiency, and is also often attributed a “maintenance” or “assistance” role (Jeang 1998). However, agricultural labor force has aged as rural youth moves out of the country and been slowly being dominated by women. These brought a significant contribution to the traditional pattern of gender division of labor (i.e., men are in charge of affairs outside the house and women, inside) and given women farmers more opportunities to participate in agricultural management and decision-making. Some women farmers even made their way to become major farm operators (Chen 1996). However, women farmers have long been the “unpaid family workers”, thus, their contribution to agriculture remains uncertain.

### DIVISION OF LABOR OF FARMING COUPLES IN AGRICULTURAL AND HOME MANAGEMENT

In Taiwan, the major type of agricultural management is the so-called “family farm”- a type of agricultural management wherein a

#### Table 1. Percentage of female employment in total employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Employment</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>9176 (100.0)</td>
<td>5563 (60.6)</td>
<td>3613 (39.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>9289 (100.0)</td>
<td>5610 (60.4)</td>
<td>3679 (39.6)</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>9385 (100.0)</td>
<td>5624 (59.9)</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>9491 (100.0)</td>
<td>5670 (59.7)</td>
<td>3824 (40.3)</td>
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<td>2001</td>
<td>9383 (100.0)</td>
<td>5553 (59.2)</td>
<td>3830 (40.8)</td>
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<td>2002</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>10111 (100.0)</td>
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Unit: thousand persons (%)  
Source: Yearly Report of Taiwan’s Agriculture, 2006, DGBAS

#### Table 2. Percentage of agricultural employment in total employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Employment</th>
<th>Agricultural employment</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Total Male Female</td>
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<td>9176 5562 3613</td>
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Unit: thousand persons (%)  
Source: Yearly Report of Taiwan’s Agriculture, 2006, DGBAS
farming family owns a farming site located within their area and where women are an important source of farm labor. Women farmers tend to play an important role in agricultural management by engaging in multi-tasking such as harvesting, agricultural product processing, packaging, transportation and financial management at the same time. Moreover, women farmers are often the main practitioners of “pro-environmental protection” agriculture and the source of strength for farming families and rural life, enabling them to give considerable contributions to agricultural and rural development (Liu, Li and Chang 1996; Jeang 1998; Lai and Kao 2007).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>878(100.0)</td>
<td>624(71.1)</td>
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<td>555(100.0)</td>
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<td>161(29.0)</td>
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Unit: thousand persons (%)
Source: Yearly Report of Taiwan’s Agriculture, 2006, DGBAS

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<th>Subsidy (thousand NT dollars)</th>
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<th>Sales (thousand NT dollars)</th>
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Total 39,200 119 851 248,752

Source: Council of Agriculture, Executive Yuan, 2007
Lin and Cheng (2002) interviewed farming couples in the flower farm in Hualien and Yilan Counties. They studied the couples’ division of labor in agricultural management and home management. The following observations were noted:

Agricultural Management

In most cases, husbands were in-charge of agricultural management and their wives assisted them. The husbands who were interviewed recognized their wives as essential work companions and the wives were all supportive of their husbands’ career. The husbands have identified three major tasks: 1) the purchase of sprouts, pesticides and fertilizers; 2) the prevention and control of pests and diseases and 3) the application of cultivation techniques. The husbands depend on their wives in the preparation of food for farm workers and in bookkeeping. The couples, in turn, will work together for packaging and harvesting. “We can’t do without our wives’ help!” is the inner voice of most farming husbands.

On the other hand, wives took nontechnical part in agricultural management, which usually, require nonprofessional knowledge and were easier tasks, such as pulling weeds, harvesting, planting flower seedlings, watering, spraying fertilizers, packaging, flower delivery, visiting clients and gathering market information while, their husbands were responsible for more technical and more professional work, decision making process (i.e. production planning; the purchase of pesticides, fertilizers and sprouts; capital operations and the maintenance of farm facilities). Handling of heavy objects, application of pesticides and fertilizers, and field preparation and sterilization were among the heavier work husbands had to undertake. However, there were some women farmers who have participated in the entire agricultural management process. They emphasized that they could do almost all the farm work except for pesticide application and handling of heavy objects.

According to women interviewees, the main reasons they participated in agricultural management include: hired labor is costly, some complicated work needs extra hands, and it is all right to help family business when circumstances allow. Women with lower participation explained that they have their own jobs and/or that children were still too young, but essentially, they all supported their husbands’ career. While some of them felt a sense of helplessness, they are nevertheless, supportive of their husbands’ work and willing to show compassion when their husbands were busy and tired: demonstrating the virtues of traditional women farmers.

Home Management

While it is a consensus between husband and wife to share home management, it is usually the wife who takes the responsibility and carries out home management alone. In terms of home management, the husbands responded that they were responsible for most of the maintenance work around the house including electric appliances being used by their wives for cooking, washing the dishes and doing the laundry while they (with his wife) will both take their fair-share on arrangement of family recreation activities, looking after sick family members, children’s education and the purchase of electric appliances and furniture. Generally, home management in most farming families was done by the wives. However, it was shown in the study that most husbands believed that they should also take part in home management. As observed, there was a gap between “concept” and “execution” in the division of labor and home management of farming families.

Affirming the conclusion that most wives took major tasks in home management, the wives who interviewed responded that their husbands took less part in home management primarily because most men were still bound by the conventional ideas that “men are in-charge of affairs outside the house and women, inside” and “household affairs are a woman’s business”. It may also be because their husbands might feel embarrassed doing household chores given that their own parents were living with them or that their husbands were too busy at work to do housework or simply not accustomed doing household chores. A few responded that they do home management because they were used to doing it by themselves and fear that their husbands would be too tired to do housework. Also, some responded that their husbands only
participate in home management when they have their own income; their own parents were not living with them; their wives were sick or under postpartum care; their children were too young, or if they have guests at home. It was noted that younger husbands were more open to the idea that housework should be shared between husband and wife and put it into practice more often, especially when it comes to childcare, household cleaning and daily chores.

Working Hours of Farming Couples and the Perceived Workload of Women Farmers

The flower industry, for instance, is labor-intensive requiring more efforts from both husband and wife who own/run a flower farm. Therefore, the working hours are very long both of them. The average daily working time is at least 14.8 hours per person even during slack farming periods, however, wives tend to work even longer (16.7 hours) than their husbands due to other household chores that they have to attend to. Most of the husbands recognized that their wives’ workload in home management was somewhat heavy however; half of the husbands interviewed did not agree that their wives’ workload in agricultural management was heavy. On the other hand, most of the wives felt that they had a very heavy workload, as they had to cope with both home and agricultural management tasks.

For home management, most of the farming husbands perceived their wives’ workload as somewhat heavy; because their wives have to attend to both domestic and farming affairs, while, few of the husband-interviewees thought the other way; they said that it was a woman’s calling and duty to perform home management. Whereas, most of the wives felt that their work was too heavy to bear and some even expressed their unwillingness to what had been their fate.

In terms of agricultural management, half of the husbands did not consider their wives’ workload as heavy primarily because their wives participated in agricultural activities minimally, while, those who said that their wives’ workload was somewhat heavy or too heavy were aware that their wives have to handle both household affairs and farming. For wives’ opinion, most of them felt that their load was too heavy but some said their workload was fair enough because they only participate when needed.

Apparently, husbands and wives subjected to interviews had different perceptions of workload in both home and agricultural management. From the husbands’ point of view, household affairs were not only a woman’s business but also her duty, which could not be too much workload. The husbands also perceived that their wives’ participation in agricultural management was only occasional and involved nothing but easy chores, in that way, their wives may looked busy but their workload was not too heavy. From the wives’ point of view, however, their workload for home management was too heavy and yet, they still have to help their husbands in agricultural management, making them feel a lot of pressure.

PARTICIPATION IN THE DECISION-MAKING AND MANAGEMENT OF FISHERY AND HOUSEHOLD AFFAIRS

Participation in Decision-making and Management of Fishery Affairs

Another study was conducted by Kao (1997). He interviewed three hundred and twenty five (325) women from families in the aquaculture and fisheries industries, analyzed their participation in, and views on, the decision-making and management of fishery and household affairs, and following results were gathered:

The husbands were usually the ones who have the last word or the final decision. Only a small percentage of the wives said that they made the final decision.

A questionnaire was provided to rate the items/tasks they usually decide on. The “usually” and “mostly” responses were then added. Capital raising and operation for aquaculture accounted for thirteen-percent (13%); followed by labor force allocation in the aquaculture farm (7%), then, management and maintenance of the aquaculture farm (6%); the purchase of feeds, fertilizers and medicine (6%); the species to culture and the choice of monoculture or poly-culture (4%); the purchase of farm equipment (4%) and lastly, whether to purchase, sell or lease land for aquaculture with three-percent (3%). More than seventy-
percent (70%) of the interviewees said that they would discuss with their husbands or other family members before making a decision, especially when it comes to the purchase, sale or lease of aquaculture land (78%). While the interviewees had a low degree of participation in decision-making, most of them were satisfied with the status quo. A further analysis of the interrelation between the frequency of fisherwomen’s participation in the decision-making on fishery matters and their degree of satisfaction, revealed that the more they participated, the more satisfied they were. Furthermore, fisherwomen who knew more about fisheries than their husbands had a higher degree of participation in decision-making related to fisheries.

In decision-making, the interviewees would experience problems such as lack of information or ability. The interviewees usually dealt with the problems by consulting with other people (mainly their husbands, sons, fathers-in-law or other family members). They wanted to improve their decision-making ability especially, in production techniques of aquaculture and in managerial aspect.

**Participation in Decision-making and Management of Household Affairs**

Seven out of the 12 items included in the questionnaire showed that the fisherwomen had a higher degree of participation in decision-making than their husbands: the purchase of household supplies (93%); family health care and looking after sick family members (82%); children’s education (71%); issues about the fisherwomen’s own employment (68%); family savings (66%); the purchase of major electronic appliances (58%) and the number of children to bear (57%). On the other hand, the husbands had a higher degree of participation in deciding on the following items: issues about their own employment (77%); whether or not to repair the house (63%) and family investment (60%). For family trips and monetary gifts to relatives and friends at weddings and funerals, almost equal participation between husbands and wives in decision-making was shown. The percentage of interviewees who would consult with their family members before making a decision was very high. Also, the more respondent participated in decision-making the more their degree of satisfaction increased.

The percentage of interviewees who would often have had problems making a decision on household matters was low. The usual problems they encountered were lack of information (10%) and not having enough time (7%). The interviewees would occasionally encountered problems such as: being indecisive (39%); not having enough stamina (37%), ability (36%), time (34%) and information (33%). Most of the interviewees had a higher degree of participation in the management of household affairs, including housework, taking care of children and grocery shopping. Also, majority of the interviewees were quite satisfied with the status quo and thought it was fine to hold on to the status quo.

**VIEWS ON WOMEN FARMERS ATTENDING IMPROVEMENT CLUBS AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

Lin and Cheng (2002) interviewed flower planting couples in Hualien and Yilan Counties, studied their views on attending improvement clubs and learning activities and found out the following:

**Reasons of Women Farmers in Attending or Not Attending Improvement Clubs/Learning Activities**

Most of the husbands supported their wives in attending learning activities in home management (80.8%) and agricultural management (76.9%) mainly because they believed that, such activities would help increase their wives’ knowledge and benefit both the family and their farm. Reasons against such attendance included wives’ full schedule and lack of interest. Some husbands even considered that there was no need for their wives to attend such activities because their mothers had joined the home economics improvement clubs already and it sufficed for the husbands themselves, to attend the agricultural improvement clubs. It seemed that husbands often ignore the feelings and psychological needs of their wives and tend to be more selfish. However, during the interview, some of the male interviewees said that they would like their wives to learn and see more of the world outside and would help with housework and childcare.
Almost all the women farmers interviewed believed it was necessary for them to attend classes and other learning activities, which were thought to be helpful in increasing knowledge and building personal relationships, as well as lessen pressure and distress. The women interviewees thus, sent a clear message: they would like to have the opportunity to attend some activities, (i.e. get-together or casual talk), where they could at least made friends and took a break. Yet, most of the women interviewees rarely have had such experiences. For the first time, they had the opportunity to meet and talk with everybody all at once through the interviews. Only two or three of the women farmers had been to home economics improvement clubs or learning activities in home management, in the same way that only a small number of interviewees had been to agricultural improvement clubs or learning activities related to agricultural management through accompanying their husbands. The main reasons for their absence were: 1) they were busy at work; 2) their children need to be looked after; 3) their work will be delayed; 4) they had no such information or transportation; 5) their schedule did not allow them, and 6) they thought their husbands’ attendance would be enough. Among these reasons, only two were the same as their husbands’ reasons: “busy at work” and “their husbands’ attendance will be enough.” All other reasons seemed to reflect that women farmers are more humble, responsible and considerate of their husbands. In contrast, the husbands were so inconsiderate of their wives that they believed in their wives’ “lack of interest” and offer such reasons as “my mother had already joined the clubs” and “the husband’s attendance alone would be enough”.

**Views on the Demand Content of Women Farmers’ Learning**

Most of the husbands agreed that their wives should increase their knowledge in home management (98.1%) and agricultural management (92.3%). The husbands’ stronger support for their wives’ knowledge enrichment than attendance at learning activities was an indicator that they worry that their wives’ participation in those activities may delay other work that should be done.

According to the husbands who were interviewed, in terms of what was the “most needed” content of home management knowledge for their wives includes was child education (72.9%), followed by financial management (42.3%), and daily care for the family (28.8%). While the “most needed” content of agricultural management knowledge was marketing strategies and market information (59.6%) then financial management of the farm (34.6%) and the least was flower cultivation (30.7%).

From the wives’ perspective, the learning content in home management that they wanted or demanded include child education, communication skills, flower arrangement, dietary nutrition, mental adaptation, financial management, the simplification of household affairs, gender education, time management, among others. In agricultural management, the learning content they wanted to see were: marketing strategies and market information, the prevention and control of pests and diseases, the management of soil and fertilizers, cultivation techniques, packaging techniques, cost analysis, etc. A comparison between the husbands’ and the wives’ opinion revealed that child education, which was the first choice of women farmers’ to be one of the learning content in home management was the same with that of the husbands’ list while other items were varied. In agricultural management, however, the wives’ demand of learning content was similar to their husbands’ view.

**Views on More Effective Ways of Learning for Women Farmers**

The husbands believed that, for their wives to enhance their knowledge in home management and agricultural management, the most effective ways of learning was attending workshops (46.1%) followed by attending observation and learning activities (43.8%) then, reading books and magazines (40.4%); whereas, the least effective way of learning was reading newspapers and by watching video tapes and listening to the radio.

For women farmers, the more effective ways of learning include: attending observation and learning activities, workshops (with hands-on practice and two-way communications) and group meetings; whereas, the least effective ways of learning are listening to the radio,
watching television and reading. While reading was the least effective for them, women farmers would still resort to it when their schedule did not let them join such activities and when transportation was inconvenient. It could be seen from this “better-than-nothing” attitude that women farmers in the flower industry have had a strong motivation for learning. The authorities concerned were therefore urged to plan appropriate programs and activities for these women farmers who were eager to improve themselves.

STRENGTHENING THE INTELLECTUAL ABILITY OF WOMEN FARMERS UNDER THE NEW AGRICULTURE MOVEMENT

On June 29, 2006, Executive Yuan, ROC of the Council of Agriculture (COA) formed the “New Agriculture Movement” in order to promote the integration, innovation and reform of policies on agriculture, farmers and rural villages, and strengthen agricultural administration. It also intend to broaden the vision of agricultural administration from tradition to innovation, from the primary industry to the tertiary, from producers to consumers, from the younger generation to the elderly, from Taiwan to abroad, and from research and development (R&D) marketing, covering such aspects as production, ecology and people’s well-being at the same time, so as to create an all-direction agriculture for the entire public to participate in and share.

According to the Council of Agriculture (2006), the New Agriculture Movement aims to: 1) accelerate agricultural innovation, reform and marketing; 2) establish a creative agriculture; 3) strengthen farmers’ health care, foster active farmers; 4) energize rural environment; 5) create charming rural villages, and 5) make Taiwan’s agriculture more competitive, developing a sustainable agriculture in terms of production, ecology and people’s well-being.

The New Agriculture Movement created three policies to establish a creative agriculture, foster active farmers and create charming rural villages.

In establishing, the policy is to promote the reform of agricultural structure and to develop knowledge-based economy in agriculture. In, the policy is to promote farmers’ conceptual innovation and to increase farmers’ health care. In creating charming rural villages, the policy is to promote the recreation of rural appearance and to ensure sustainable development of rural villages. The execution of these three policies depends on high quality human resource. And in order to cultivate such human resource, what needs to be done today includes: to foster agricultural elites, to promote the Wandervögel project, to advocate to farmers the concept of lifelong learning, to improve guidance to women farmers, and to assist agricultural groups in organizational management, manpower quality and operations. It should be noted that women farmers are involved in each of the measures above to cultivate high quality human resource.

Human Resource Development of Women Farmers

Chu (2004) pointed out that “the essential components of economic development were human resource, natural resource and capital resource, in which, human resource was the key for economic development.” Whether it was the utilization of natural resource or the accumulation and formation of capital, it would all depend on the effective cooperation of human resource. Moreover, he said that, “all the activities of an organization need to be carried out or managed by people, so that the organization can be stabilized and solidified, and its functions and objectives be achieved.” He also mentioned that, “Manpower, also known as labor force, refers to a population in a society who has reached their working age and is participating in economic activities. Human resource, on the other hand, includes not only those engaged in economic activities, but also those with working potentials who may participate in economic activities.” Therefore, human resource development (HRD) has become an important issue for the effective management of human resource.

Human resource development is accomplished through learning activities, which include not only training activities targeted at a present job and its future development, but also education programs to promote mental/ physical health and to advance intellectual ability. In other words, training and education are the main strategies of human resource development. Individuals can develop themselves through training and education,
thereby improving the efficiency of the organization they belong to. Development includes “3 C’s”, which refer to competence, commitment and capacity for change.

According to Chiang and Mo (2001), “human resource development refers to the execution of planned and systematic activities through training, education and developing in order to improve the efficiency of an individual, group and organization.” He said that nowadays, organizational human resource management was facing the challenge of human capital and that the era of knowledge-based economy; the concept of intellectual capital is used to evaluate the variety, level and extent of knowledge of an organization member. Further, he stated that, “Intellectual capital is an asset of human resource development and refers to intellectual materials such as knowledge, work experience, professional abilities, information, advisory relationship, organizational skills and intellectual properties. Intellectual capital is an intangible asset that can be used to create wealth and public welfare and to improve competitive advantage.”

In terms of intellectual capital, knowledge can be used by putting it into action. Therefore, with proactive development of human resource, dynamic allocation of manpower and guidance, appropriate assignment of human talent to suitable positions, and continuous learning and improvement, we may well be able to advance from excellence to perfection and cope up with new trends and challenges ahead.

While it is the basic right of a citizen in a democratic society to receive education, the opportunities for women to be educated are not as much as that for men. When compared with urban women, women farmers have even much less opportunities to education. In today’s education environment and system, young women often leave school due to family factors. For example, if a family can support only some of the children to receive higher education, the parents tend to give the opportunity to their son(s), forcing their daughter(s) to leave school earlier. As a result of traditional concepts and the uneven distribution of education resources between urban and rural areas, women farmers are in a more disadvantaged position in receiving education. Lai (1997) pointed out that, women in a rural society had to help in farming in addition to housework, but were usually excluded from the agricultural education programs in agricultural extension activities. The percentage of their participation in home economics improvement activities was not high, either.

However, the roles of women farmers have become more diversified through time. They are the mistress and supporter of the family as well as a citizen and service provider in society. It is, therefore, important to help them enhance their capability in playing appropriate roles and to further understand their need for learning and the satisfaction of their other needs and demands.

If the roles are to be well performed, be it a role in home management, farming or in other fields, it is important to evaluate the intellectual abilities necessary for the role. As such, a variety of education and training programs or activities can be planned for women farmers to attend to. If the role is more about farming, then, programs on agriculture and agricultural trends may be considered as priority while other programs such as courses on computer skills, creativity, operation standardization, service quality, personal relationship and emotional management may be provided according to personal needs or interests. Other forms of activities that provide good learning opportunities including demonstration, group discussion, advanced study at home or abroad, visiting and hands-on practices should also be practiced in addition to speeches, workshops, conferences and group meetings. Women farmers are even encouraged to join professional associations and participate in their conferences, annual meetings and training programs. Moreover, it is also good for intellectual growth to read professional journals and join book clubs.

Enhancing Women Farmers’ Intellectual Ability

If we want to increase women farmers’ education opportunities, it is necessary to identify their possible learning barriers and try to eliminate them. According to Huang (1989), Chen (1999), and Kao (2007), barriers to participation in learning could be generally divided into institutional barriers, situational barriers, intention barriers and information barriers. The barriers from learning institutions
include, among others, problems in administration and teaching. Examples of situational barriers include problems with transportation, time and conflict of roles. Intention barriers, on the other hand, refer to a learner’s own intention, confidence, patience, steadfastness and perseverance. Lack of advertisement or insufficiency of information such that, a particular piece of learning information misses its potential targets is an example of information barrier.

**Institutional barriers and ways to eliminate them.** Barriers from learning institutions are the main factors that impede people’s participation in learning activities. Institutional barriers include those involving administration and teaching. Barriers involved in administration are: inappropriateness of an institution to offer certain classes due to its nature and purpose, a higher threshold for participation, complicated procedures, high fees, a limited curriculum, unattractiveness of courses, severe regulations, lack of elasticity and a limited choice of schedules while poor teaching facilities, unqualified teachers and unsuitable teaching methods are barriers involved in teaching.

The administration and teaching problems mentioned above must be addressed in order to eliminate the institutional barriers. Ideally, the nature and purpose of the institution should fit the concept of adult education. Regarding administration, it is better to simplify the procedures of enrollment, lower the threshold of qualification, make fees affordable, offer a wide variety of interesting courses, provide an elastic timetable, allow students to take courses according to their own level and ability, and provide different learning channels including television, radio and the internet. In terms of teaching, all facilities and teachers must be up to certain standards particularly; the software in a learning environment should be given as much attention as the hardware. Care must be taken in course design, the choice of teaching materials, teaching attitude and class atmosphere. Naturally, the more professional the teachers, the easier it is to strengthen students’ interest and confidence, and to establish a professional relationship of mutual respect between teacher and student.

**Situational barriers and ways to eliminate them.** The main situational barriers are problems with transportation, time and conflict of roles. Some of the examples with transportation include the remote location of a learning institution and inconvenient transportation to and from the institution. Ideally, learning institutions should be easily accessible. A wider distribution of institutions with school bus services will be a better solution. However, if students can learn through the radio or the internet instead of the traditional way of face-to-face teaching and learning, there would be no transportation problems at all.

Problems with time and conflict of roles are usually the result of being too busy to leave work. Loaded with several roles, women farmers may be deprived from participation for learning for reasons such as: they have housework to do, children or family to attend to, or that someone important (such as their husbands, children, parents or parents-in-law) has expressed his or her dissent. Of all the factors that influence the participation for learning, time is the most variable. Thus, it is a challenge to make proper allocation of time between learning and other tasks. In other words, time management is of great importance. It may more or less alleviate the problem if the learning institutions can adapt their timetable to their learners’ needs and adopt distance teaching with multimedia teaching materials. It is definitely more proactive to establish a support system for women farmers. The understanding, support and encouragement of family members and the tolerance, and assistance of colleagues and office heads will be enormously helpful. In order to reduce the dependence of family members on women, by means of eliminating the learning barriers associated with the need to take care of family members, it is important to strengthen the basic training of individual management of daily life (especially for male members of the family). If all the barriers against entering into the education system can be eliminated, and supportive services such as childcare are provided, then, mothers will be able to go on with education.

**Intention barriers and ways to eliminate them.** The intention barriers lie in learners themselves and include problems associated with intention, determination,
confidence, patience, persistence, and perseverance. After graduation from schools, most people may think the so-called learning is unnecessary or take no interest in it. If it is not for a particular reason, people not enroll in a systematic learning project. In addition, people at a certain age bracket may have doubts in their learning ability and show lack of confidence. Therefore, it is crucial to inspire them the meaning of learning, to satisfy their needs to learn, and to build up confidence. Timely guidance and consultation would not only help eliminate the intention barriers, but also increase the chances for people facing institutional or situational barriers to try to overcome these barriers. For women farmers with a motivation to learn, if the intention barriers could be overcome, then all the other barriers would not be that difficult to overcome.

Information barriers and ways to eliminate them. The information barriers mainly come from the lack of advertisement or insufficient information. While learning opportunities are provided at the institutions, lack of advertisements makes the information known only to a limited number of people, leading to a few enrollees turn out. People living in remote rural areas often have very limited access to other places and media, and are therefore, could not be easily reach by such learning information. As a result, a lot of resources are wasted. To eliminate information barriers, it is advised to put great efforts in advertising when organizing learning activities, so that learning information could be disseminated through television, radio, publications, bulletin boards, flyers or by oral communication, allowing all targeted recipients to get and be aware of the information and choose from it their desired learning items. Institutions, which provide learning opportunities, should search for learners proactively and have the information known to potential learners.

Present Efforts to Enhance Women Farmers’ Intellectual Ability

With the advent of knowledge-based economy (KBE), the competitive advantage of an individual or organization and his/its ability to make a fortune depends on his/its niche of knowledge. The concerned authorities concerned (including county and city governments, special municipalities, the Council for Culture Affairs, the Council of Agriculture, the Council of Indigenous Peoples, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Education, etc.) have all been engaged in the enhancement of women’s intellectual ability. For instance, the five major tasks from 2006 to 2007 to strengthen women’s intellectual ability include: 1) to promote professional empowerment of women leaders and relevant groups and to expand the development and the issues of concern of women communities; 2) to organize women forums, conferences and observation and learning activities among women groups; 3) to guide the establishment of strategic alliances and integration among women groups; 4) to use mass media to publicize the concept of service and mutual help or report touching stories about services, so as to encourage women to participate in volunteer services; and 5) to set up a national information integration system of volunteer services which provides matching between the supply and demand of services and a platform for information exchange, with the aim to establish a volunteer worker matching mechanism.

To cope with the demands associated with changes in society and in the economic environment, the Foundation of Women Rights Promotion and Development (2006) endeavors to urge the authorities concerned to establish and promote education and training policies on women development, and to provide knowledge and skills necessary for the development of women’s career. In 2006, for example, subsidies were given to 32 projects on the development of fundamental women organizations and 442 projects on the empowerment of single mother. The foundation aims to increase the convenience and elasticity of women’s education, develop more resource channels that facilitate women’s receiving in-service and continuing education, and to ensure a friendly and safe learning environment. Moreover, the use of mass media (such as the internet, information systems, television, the radio, etc.) is also highly advocated as a powerful tool for education. (Please refer to the Foundation’s website.)

In an effort to deal with the impacts of Taiwan’s succession to the WTO in agriculture, rural villages and rural livelihood; the Council of Agriculture (COA), spearheaded
by Executive Yuan, helps guide women farmers to work in groups and cultivate the ability to operate side businesses in order to create new income sources and job opportunities. COA also guides Farmers’ Associations to utilize their interpersonal networks, marketing expertise and image; cooperate with women farmers in the emerging service industry. With the help of Farmers’ Associations’ home economics extension education system, the COA also tries to promote the Project of Creating Healthy Rural Life and Rural Production Support Systems.

Based on the concepts of lifelong learning and preventive medicine, the project combines the resources from local health and social welfare authorities and environmental protection departments to create healthy rural life and rural production support systems. The goals of the project include: 1) to reinforce women farmers’ ability, to guide women farmers to operate side businesses, and to create new income sources and job opportunities in rural areas; 2) to build up resources for community-based long-term care in rural areas and to help rural families with people with disabilities; 3) to prevent and alleviate problems deriving from rural aging, to promote and maintain the health of seniors, to enhance farmers’ ability in health self-management, to carry out the healthy aging programs, to prevent diseases and physical disabilities, and to lessen people’s burden from medical services and care; and 4) to improve rural living environment and to promote environmental protection.

ACHIEVEMENTS IN GUIDING WOMEN FARMERS TO START SIDE BUSINESSES AND IN CREATING RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITY-BASED CARE IN RURAL AREAS

Below were the results of the COA’s efforts in guiding women farmers to start side businesses and in creating resources for community-based care in rural areas (Chen, 2007, COA):

Guiding Women Farmers to Start Side Businesses

a. The “Guidelines for Funding and Guiding Women Farmers to Start Side Businesses” and the design of the “Tien Mama” logo were developed. The said guideline aims to fund and guide Home Economics Improvement Clubs or Women Farmers’ Clubs in providing “Women Farmers’ Side Business Operation Classes”, which are uniformly named “Tien Mama,”. According to the Guidelines, “Tien Mama” classes are divided into four categories and guided accordingly:

Category 1: Home-based housework services, care services and meal delivery services;

Category 2: Country cooking (to go optionally with the management of leisure agriculture, B&B, etc.);

Category 3: The processing of local agricultural specialties and the preparation of meals of rice and wheat; and

Category 4: Local handicrafts.

Categories 2 and 4 were already registered and ready for use, supported with media advertisement to increase people’s awareness, and support for “Tien Mama.”

b. To direct “Women Farmers’ Side Business Operation Classes” in creating job opportunities for side businesses and explore new income sources, a team of experts, (district Agricultural Research and Extension Stations under the COA and Farmers’ Associations of all levels, women farmers) worked together to operate side businesses and create new income sources with the agricultural resources at hand. The expertise acquired from Home Economics Improvement Clubs of base-level Farmers’ Associations and related cultivation programs were also utilized. In order to enhance “Tien Mama’s” managing abilities, the COA conducts yearly projects to help design lectures and workshops and to hold side business management contests and demonstrations of “Tien Mama”, where experts can respond to their questions in management, and where all their classes can learn the qualities and managerial concepts of a successful “Tien Mama” from on-site observation and an exchange of experiences. Home Economics Improvement Clubs, which live up to the concept of lifelong learning can be viewed as the basic classes for managing “Tien Mama.”

From 2001 to 2006, there were already 159 “Tien Mama” classes (including 12 classes on expanding management) conducted. In 2001, in response to a high
unemployment rate in Taiwan and its accession to the WTO, Executive Yuan proposed a number of employment promotion programs, in which “Tien Mama” had been a successful case- guiding more than 1,000 women farmers to start side businesses (as of the end of 2004). In 2001, 21 “Tien Mama” demonstration classes began its operation and created a total sales of NT$ 44 million that year and NT$ 49 million in 2002. From 2001 through 2005, the total sales of these 21 classes amounted to more than NT$ 200 million. In 2002, thirty-three more “Tien Mama” classes started. The total sales of these new classes in 2002 reached NT$ 30 million, and this amount was doubled in 2003. In addition to creating economic value, “Tien Mama” also contributed in closing the knowledge gap, widening women farmers’ vision, establishing interpersonal networks, increasing women farmers’ confidence, autonomy and the ability to fix problems. And most importantly in fulfilling women’s self realization.

c. In providing Farmers’ Associations with an opportunity to transform and engage in the service industry, Tien Mama has also played a very important role. In 2004, all “Tien Mama” classes were approved and these were jointly operated by Farmers’ Associations and women farmers. Its five classes had a yearly sale of more than NT$ 2 million each while in 2005, seven “Tien Mama” classes reached that same amount. In order to enlarge business scale, create more job opportunities and sell more agricultural products, the COA rewarded those “Tien Mama” classes jointly managed by Farmers’ Associations and women farmers, which demonstrated good results, encouraging them to expand their operation scale so as to create more job opportunities in rural areas and to provide Farmers’ Associations with a chance to transform and take part in the service industry.

In 2003, “Tien Mama” was included into the Local Cuisine Development Program of the “Challenge 2008 – National Development Plan”. From then on, in addition to its original business, “Tien Mama” also conducts regional and national competitions in local cuisine to add value to agricultural products and improve rural income.

Building up Community-based Care Resources in Rural Areas

a. Caretakers and family caregivers were trained to take care of people with disabilities, and to guide caretakers into employment: 391 caretakers were trained in 2002 (56 in employment, 91 as volunteer workers, and 244 taking care of family members) while 370 caretakers were trained in 2003 (126 in employment). Four hundred (400) caretakers were trained in 2004 (117 in employment); 229 caretakers (56 in employment) and 136 family caregivers were trained in 2005; and 172 caretakers (55 in employment) and 308 family caregivers were trained in 2006. Those providing enough hours of service could earn as much as NT$ 20,000, effectively improving rural livelihood. Furthermore, given that seniors who need to be taken care of were mostly looked after by their children or spouses, care training of farming family members lessens their burden of family care.

b. Community-based life support centers in rural areas to serve people with disabilities were established. In 2001, the Council of Agriculture continued to guide nine seniors’ consultation service centers to serve seniors in rural areas. In 2002, the Council guided ten willing Farmers’ Associations (base-level) in areas lacking long-term care resources to establish community-based life support centers. A total of 30 centers were established in 2006, and 750 volunteer workers were selected, trained and organized to provide information, consultation, referral resources, life counseling, reporting and other services.

c. Farmers’ Association were guided and encouraged in order to provide home-based services. In 2005, two Farmers’ Associations in Chiayi and Changhua Counties – each Association with more than 100 registered caretakers – were guided and trained to demonstrate the filing of caretaker information, employment matching service, support groups, counseling and other services. The two counties held a
conference on “Caretakers and Employing Units – Long-Term Care and Medical Institutions”, which was attended by 180 caretakers.

d. Farmers’ Association of Kanding Township, Pingtung County was established. In 2001, the Council of Agriculture approved the project for the Farmers’ Association of Kanding Township, Pingtung County to demonstrate the building and operation of a nursing center for senior farmers. The project became a model in creating local job opportunities in rural areas as well as a trial to assist in the transformation of Farmers’ Associations. The Kanding Farmers’ Association was especially willing to operate such nursing center and had intended to guide farmer and fishermens’ organizations to build and operate senior care facilities such as day care and nursing centers in the attractive and peaceful rural areas. It was expected that these facilities for “aging in place” would allow seniors to lead a leisure life in a familiar environment, with more time to spend with their family but without the trouble of transportation and other expenses. However, it was determined after evaluation that the project required professional abilities in both medical services and long-term care, and that it was difficult for farmer organizations alone to be responsible for the project’s hardware construction and software operation. To solve this problem, the Council then, began a guidance project and invited Taiwan Long-term Care Professional Association to aid in the hardware construction and software operation of the nursing center, which was eventually completed in 2002. In 2006 the center sheltered an average of 35 to 38 senior farmers each month.

e. Seniors service demonstration centers under Farmers’ Associations were created. These centers are considered the aging-in-place facilities of the targeted able seniors. Thus, the Council of Agriculture planned to create such centers using idle rural space. In 2003, the Farmers’ Associations of Douliou City and Tachia Township were subsidized by the Council to build seniors service demonstration centers, whose facilities include health service centers, computer and arts classrooms, fitness and dancing classrooms, audio-video recreation centers and restaurants. However, due to the frugal nature of senior farmers, which hinders the acceptance and prevalence of the “pay-for-service concept”, these centers have had difficulties in operation. To make both ends meet, these centers are now open to people of different ages while keeping services for seniors as priority. For instance, the seniors’ service demonstration center of Tachia Farmers’ Association, located at its Rih-nan office, operates mainly as a community college and provides quality services to dwellers in the Rih-nan area.

CONCLUSION

Embracing the New Era to Come

It is an undeniable truth that, due to the elevation of women’s education level, changes in society and the transformation of industry structures, more and more women have entered labor force. But women still have to deal with some challenges such as gender stereotyping, gender division of labor, gender discrimination and fewer opportunities for development (e.g., chances to receive education, to improve one’s abilities, to participate in public affairs and all sorts of development programs, and to access necessary resources) (Lai 2002).

Chen (1999) emphasized that education is a task to teach someone until he or she is fully developed and mature. The implementation of adult basic education gives everyone sufficient opportunities to develop his or her life for a second time, and that is the true meaning of “second chance education.” Furthermore, he emphasized that adult basic education should be viewed as having the same status as formal education, no matter what-it is about the quality of education, the facilities of education or the basic respect for the education. However, when it comes to non-basic adult education, there may be different views on whether it should claim the same importance as adult basic education. But considering the fact that the Ministry of Education had announced the year 1998 to be the Year of Lifelong Learning of ROC and released its White Papers on promoting the concept of lifelong learning, the answer seems positive.
We socialized at each and every moment of our lives. Socialization is a process by which an individual absorbs the culture and values of a society; a process by which an individual becomes part of a society, and a process by which the social self is formed. Through socialization, the values of a society are instilled into individuals. Therefore, socialization can be defined as a process by which an individual becomes a dutiful member of the society; he or she was born into every behavior which conforms to the norms of the society (folkways, mores, systems, laws). By way of socialization, an individual learns the way of life of a particular society so that, he or she can perform his or her social role. Role learning includes learning the rights and obligations of a role and cultivating appropriate behaviors so that one can play that role properly.

The future society will be a society of lifelong learning. It is hoped that Taiwan will move step forward into a learning society. At the beginning of the 21st century, it is an issue demanding everyone’s attention to promote the concepts of lifelong education an education for all, and to ensure that women have the same opportunities to receive education as men. It is hoped that with the New Agriculture Movement, women farmers have better chances to advance their intellectual ability. Once the four learning barriers (institutional barriers, situational barriers, intention barriers and information barriers) were overcome one after another, the door for learning will be completely open to facilitate the improvement of women farmers’ intellectual ability.

Today, women farmers’ roles at work and in the family are far different from their grandmothers’. It is, therefore, advised to determine and evaluate the intellectual abilities needed in a farming family in both the agricultural and household arenas; and help women farmers increase such abilities, enabling them to enter labor force, expand their choices of occupation and handle their family roles at the same time.

World Rural Women’s Day is celebrated every October 15 and each year a theme is set for discussion. For the past seven years, World Rural Women’s Day had carried the following themes:

- “The Right To Food: Rural Women Produce and Provide” (2007)
- “Rural Women: Leaders of Tomorrow” (2006),
- “What Rights For Women As Rural Citizens?” (2005)
- “Education and Training: The Key To Poverty Eradication” (2002)
- “Peace for Rural Women To Achieve Food Security” (2001)

In addition to these celebrations and discussions, there have been proclamations and conferences promoting the concept of “equal rights between men and women” and emphasizing that policy planning and execution should be done to safeguard gender justice and to incorporate women’s viewpoints, demands and life experiences. It is believed that the realization of women’s rights and the improvement of women’s welfare will help reinforce women’s economic independence and broaden their contribution to society.

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