



THE FILIPINO WOMEN IN RICE FARMING *

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INTRODUCTION

A Look at Rural Life

All over the Philippines, places have been linked through an intensive program for a nation wide construction and repair of air, water and road travel facilities. However, there are still barangays which are isolated during certain times of the year. Mobility of people and delivery of commodities are still hampered by poor roads and lack of public means of transportation.

Standards of living are generally low due to low income levels. Houses of light materials like bamboo are common in low production areas.

Major health problems are communicable diseases transmitted through air, water and food. Most common are the respiratory infections and gastrointestinal ailments.

There is still much to be learned and adopted in the real concept of cleanliness in food handling, drinking water supply, environment, and health habits in general.

Kerosene lamps and native stoves using charcoal or wood for fuel are still very common. But one-third of the countryside is now with electricity since the operation of the rural electrification program started seven years ago. Aside from the lights in the homes and streets, night schools are now available to farm workers to complete their education. Safe and clean water systems have been installed for the use of whole communities. Ice and cold storage plants for fish are the benefits for fishermen. Other gains are more convenient facilities for housekeeping and income generating activities. For progressive families, the radio, stereo and TV have gained their place in the home as media of information and entertainment.

The Farm Family

As one drives by the countryside, he can see the farmer, under the sun and rain, patiently tilling the soil, his legs soaked almost knee deep in mud. He is dependent on the land for his livelihood whether it is owned or leased by him. Land, water, and the carabao, plus a few farming tools are the source of the rural man's food, security, occupation and wealth. The land consumes all his energies. In it, he puts all his heart and soul. It is not strange, therefore, that farmers fight and stake their lives over a piece of land.

The Agrarian Reform program, has transferred ownership of land from the landlord to the land tiller. This is the promise for a better life for the man of the soil.

**Philippine Country Paper, Workshop on Women's Participation in Paddy Production and Processing, Malaysia, October 21 to November 5, 1981.*

Contrary to the common impression that the rural family is an extended one, about 80 percent are of the nuclear type. The young rural couple usually establishes their own home with parents providing a great deal of assistance. The father is the head of the family and the principal breadwinner. The wife accepts her role as second in authority. To compensate for this, she is the treasurer of the family income. She participates in decision-making in affairs related to their occupations.

The Filipino rural family is characterized with stability and solidarity, which must have been a result of hundreds of years of interaction. It has developed, however, a feeling of insecurity which can be traced back to the country's history of many social and political unrests, starting from the warring barangays, the Spanish Occupation, Philippine Revolution, Philippine American War, the Japanese Occupation, the Huk Movement, and other peace and order problems. The family must unite to protect itself from external danger. This is also the reason why the Filipino has the attitude of individualism and small group-centeredness. This is early manifested in the "Kamag-anak" and "Kabayanan" system where there is mutuality of assistance among family members and people coming from the town or region.

This attitude may be well utilized as a motivation to undertake family and community projects.

The average number of children in the rural family is five (5).

The value of children stems from the social orientation that children are blessings from God, economic assets, insurance in the future of parents and joy in the home. These are reasons why there are big families in rural areas. Another reason is that young boys and girls who are out-of-school, perhaps have no other options. To the teenage girl who is oldest in the family and working to support the younger brothers and sisters, marriage may open up new horizons for her. Rural people have a way to cope with exigencies. As the family increases, there is a corresponding increase in family earners. Children get odd jobs, like farming, selling puto, shining shoes, etc. In 1971, the per capita income of the rural household was P490, while that of the urban was P1,006.

Generally, rural parents have a limited formal schooling. The average is about 6 years. This is a barrier to acquiring knowledge on new farming and homemaking practices unless demonstrated with an explanation as simple as possible.

There is strong impression that the problems of rural families are those that confront people everywhere — sickness, poverty, schooling for children, faithfulness of one's spouse, unemployment and protection from fire and theft. Asked about their goals and aspirations, frequently mentioned by farmers are: to progress or get rich, to send children to school, to have enough to eat, to build or repair a house, to have a bigger area to till.

Education

In 1970, the literacy rate of rural women was 77.2 percent as compared to 97.1 percent of urban women. Seventy-five percent of rural women had attended school. The majority, 44 percent had completed elementary grades. Only 17 percent graduated from elementary school, which indicated a considerable drop-out rate. Those with elementary schooling (61%) either started

or completed, and probably went through their life without access to continuing education or with very limited opportunity to practice the limited learning acquired in school.

Only 7 percent rural women went to or completed high school and 4 percent attended/completed college. Higher education in the rural areas is usually not available. Vocational training reached only 1.1 percent of the married rural women. The average length of training is 9.47 percent months.

Although the government provides educational opportunities for both sexes without discrimination under present circumstances, males more than females usually have more educational opportunities, particularly in poor families. Traditionally, parents send boys to school.

The low educational attainment of females may be due to a number of social and economic factors such as early marriage, pressures to get a job and the need to help in the home or on the farm. In addition, elementary or primary education is usually the only level of education which is free.

Types of employment

One third of the rural women are in the labor force. Over half of rural women in the labor force are employed in the agricultural sector (54%) while 45 percent are in the non-agricultural sector. Among females who work in agriculture, 59.13 percent are farm workers, 18.44 percent act as farm managers, 8 percent work on coconut farms and 6.8 percent in other crops, poultry and livestock. Of the female agricultural labor force, about 70 percent are in rice and corn production. They perform most of the farm labor activities such as transplanting, weeding, fertilizing, harvesting, and threshing. It is for this reason that the issue of labor-intensive technology poses a dilemma since it is mostly the rural women who bear the physical burden which goes with this type of technology.

The National Demographic Survey (1973) gives more detailed breakdown of the employment of rural women; farm workers — crop production (59.3%); (13.38%); maids, laundry women and nursemaids (13.26%); basket weavers (12.34%); market vendors (11.39%); dressmakers (10.23%); sewers and embroiderers (not in factory, 7.30%); and salesgirls in wholesale and retail stores (7.11%).

Compared with other industry groups, with the exception of domestic services, agriculture pays the lowest among the various industry groups. For full-time workers, the average weekly cash earnings of females in agriculture in 1975 was P27.00 against P40.00 for males. The highest weekly average was P95.00 for government female employees. Perhaps these data do not really mean much to a great majority of rural females since the bulk of rural females in the labor force are unpaid family workers (70%) while 15 percent are self-employed. Only 15 percent are wage and salary workers. Nationally, only 37 percent of females (53% of males) are wage and salary workers; 43 percent are unpaid family workers (57% of males) and 20 percent are self-employed (80% of males).

Family Size

The mean number of children among married Philippine women at the reproductive age was estimated to decline from 5.44 percent in 1975 to 5.0 percent in 1980.

Income

In rural households, the wife is a contributing source of income for 43.8 percent of the households.

The NDS (1973) reports that 92 percent of the rural housewives earned less than P1,000.00 as cash income in 1972. Among those who received non-cash income in 1972, 51 percent received less than P500 and 12.4 percent received an equivalent of P500 – P3,999. The contribution of rural women to household income may, therefore, be considered significant (NDS, 1968).

Decision-making Participation at Work and Home

Chua (1973) conducted a survey on decision-making regarding the amount of money to be spent on the farm. In spite of the fact that almost half of the wives contributed to the family income (NDS, 1968), the husband was still the major decision-maker in the use of family finances. The husband was the principal source of decision in 55 percent of the cases; the wife alone in 18 percent of the cases; joint husband-wife decision was arrived at by 27 percent.

In the farm business decisions, the husband usually consulted the wife more than half the time on the following matters: buying fertilizers, where to sell agricultural products, engaging in a new enterprise, buying a carabao, buying farm tools and equipment, buying farm chemicals, where to borrow money, adopting new rice varieties, and changing rice cultivation practices (Hsueh-Yi Lu, 1968).

After analyzing the data on Filipino women, Castillo (1976) concludes that the decision-making pattern in the Filipino households is egalitarian. The wife participates in the management of the households and other family matters, this includes farming and other means of livelihood. Castillo points out, however, to the need to know the content and quality of the decisions made by women.

The above results appear to be very optimistic. However, the general picture still portrays the wives working very hard on the farms with very little say in work matters and with hardly any training in farming.

Roles of Women in the Home

In a survey made in three farming barangays in Batangas, the activities of women in the home and on the farm were summarized as follows: (1) Home Production Activity – food preparation/cooking, marketing, laundry work, cleaning the house, child cares (feeding, cuddling, playing with child), fetching water, gathering firewood, renovating old clothes, other productive activities. (2) Market and Production Activity – wage earnings (cottage industries), farm activities, homeyard gardening, backyard livestock raising, selling produce in local market, other productive activities. (3) Personal Consumption Activity – personal care, sleeping/resting, recreation and socialization, other productive activities.

The following table shows a representative sample of the daily chores and time spent on these chores by farm women:

Time	Activities in the home
4:00 – 5:00 AM	Food preparation/cooking

5:00 – 6:00	Taking care of the school children needs/ husband
6:00 – 7:00	Cleaning the house and yard
7:00 – 8:00	Feeding the chicken/pigs, etc.
8:00 – 9:00	Washing the clothes and other laundry work
9:00 – 10:00	Marketing for food/marketing produce (done only twice or thrice a week)
10:00 – 11:00	Preparing/cooking meals
11:00 – 12:00	Attending to the food needs and other needs of school/pre-school children and husband
12:00 – 1:00 PM	Washing dishes, kitchen equipment
1:00 – 2:00	Continue washing clothes, rest a little
3:00 – 4:00	Home gardening, doing some cottage indus- try work
5:00 – 6:00	Feeding pigs and chickens, preparing/cook- ing foods
6:00 – 7:00 PM	Looking after the family's needs husband
7:00 – 8:00	Continuing some tasks left undone
8:00 – 9:00	Sleep

During the peak seasons of planting and harvesting the women spend all of their daylight hours on agricultural chores, arriving in the field as early as seven o'clock. During these periods, they leave some of their domestic tasks undone, e.g. washing clothes, cleaning the house or their cottage industry work. These are done later in the day or at night after arriving from the field. In the field, the women help the men in any field operation except plowing and preparing the field.

Social and Political Participation

In terms of participation in community activities, the average rural woman, considering all aspects of community life, projects a high degree of participation in social activities, such as fiestas, wedding funerals, baptisms, etc.

Rural women also show increasing participation in civic activities, such as the "Green Revolution", nutrition programs, community beautification, cleanliness drives, puericulture center programs, and club membership. However, there were no data presented on the extent and quality of participation of women in these projects. Membership in Rural Improvement Clubs (RIC) for example, is mainly composed of rural women.

In the recently launched nation-wide cooperatives development program at the village level, which includes a compulsory savings program for capital information, participation by women was only incidental. They were involved only in the absence of their husbands.

Another point to consider is that while agricultural programs are male-oriented, family planning activities focus primarily on females. Such a segregation in program targets immediately puts a constraint on the achievement of program objective and may work against total development efforts. After all, planning the number of offsprings involves and should therefore be decided upon, by the couple. Any enterprising woman who has tried to get some types

of business licenses would know that a married woman has to get the husband's consent before the government gives its approval.

Group/Cooperative Action and Leadership

For a village-based type of organization whose membership is mostly agricultural and rural, a representative example is the female participation in the Samahang Nasyon, a pre-cooperative association at the barrio level — which is a part of the nation-wide cooperatives development strategy. Of the total 10,690 Samahang Nasyon with 472,569 members, only 5.4 percent are women officers. However, the position held by the women can have wider implications because almost half of the female officers are Secretary-Treasurer and about 18 percent are auditors and 12 percent are managers.

As secondary workers, women consequently have little access to productivity, increase opportunities of family in new technologies, promotions and other work experiences which may lead to new marketable skills and better employment opportunities. Given a society's prejudice against leadership capabilities, women do not get top administrative positions even in areas of employment of relative equality with men.

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN RICE FARMING

Female Labor Inputs in Rice Production

Of the total number of rural Filipino women in the labor force 54.5 percent are employed in the agricultural sector. Of the female agricultural labor force about 59.3 percent are in rice and corn production. In the 1975 agricultural statistics, 43.9 percent of the total number of female rural workers unpaid family workers, 89 percent of whom were in agriculture. Rural women have always had a dual contribution to economic production. First, in the crucial task of reproducing and caring after the members of the family, and second, in their personal achievement in economic production. Their contribution to agricultural production, in particular, is at least equal to, if not greater than that of men, since they share in the pre-and post-harvest operations. They perform most of the farm activities requiring intensive labor such as preparing the seedbeds and sowing seeds, transplanting, weeding, fertilizing, harvesting, threshing, drying and other post-harvest activities. As partners of husbands and men these unpaid female workers help till an average of 1.5 hectares of irrigated land and 1.5 hectares of unirrigated rice land although this farm size varies from region to region.

Wage Payment of Rice Farm Worker

Compared to other industry groups, with the exception of domestic services, agriculture pays the lowest among the various industry groups. For full-time workers, the average weekly cash earnings of females in agriculture in 1975, was P27.00 against P40.00 for males. The highest weekly average was P95.00 for government female employees. The national average for both sexes was P40.00. Perhaps these data do not really mean much to most of the rural women, since majority of them who are in the agricultural labor force are unpaid family workers.

Hired female workers participate also in almost all types of farm operation especially during the peak seasons. A comparison of wages of hired workers for rice production shows the difference in pay, with females getting slightly higher amounts for harvesting and threshing, Table 1.

TABLE 1. WAGE PAYMENT OF WORKERS FOR RICE PRODUCTION
(₱/per day/person)

Activity	Male	Female
Land Preparation	8.16	5.78
Transplanting and related tasks	9.43	8.72
Weeding	10.36	9.51
Other pre-harvest	—	—
Harvesting	12.86	14.32
Threshing	14.69	15.73
Post-harvest	9.78	9.45

At present, landless women, who work as farm laborers during the past seasons in such pre-harvest activities as preparing the seedbeds and sowing the seeds, transplanting the seedlings, weeding and fertilizing earn P20.00 a day with free lunch and snacks in the morning and afternoon. They work from 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. or 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. During harvest seasons, they usually want to be paid in grains. After harvesting and threshing, they receive 1/5 as their share; e.g. if they harvested and threshed (manually) five cans of palay, their share is one can.

FARMING OPERATIONS AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Preparing the Seedbeds and Sowing the Seeds

One method of preparing the seedbed is the "dapog" system.

The field, usually plowed by the husband, is finally prepared thus making the soil clean and fine and properly irrigated (in case of lowland).

The soil is then raised to about four inches, making a raised plot of about one meter in width and 5 meters in length. The plot is lined with vinyl or plastic material or banana leaves and fenced around with peeled banana trunks and bamboo sticks. Beforehand, the palay seeds are placed in a vinyl sack and soaked in water for two days. On the night of the second day, the sack is wrapped in rice straw and kept overnight to be heated. The heat hastens the germination of seeds. On the 3rd day the seeds are scattered evenly in the plots. After twelve days, the seedlings are ready for transplanting. (This method varies from region to region).

Transplanting

Women group themselves in transplanting the seedlings. A schedule among them is arranged. With the use of simple tools such as strings, planting board for making lines in the field, the women transplant the seedlings to the prepared rice fields in properly spaced distance.

Weeding

Women use three types of weeding, either manually (by pulling with the hand) and by the use of mechanical tool as weeder, and chemically by the application of weedicides. The first method is done in a squat position and pulling the weeds with one or both hands. This is very tedious work as the legs and other parts of the body become stiff and sore afterwards. The use of a steel weeder lightens the women's work. The weeder is easy to manipulate since it is only pushed in between the rows of the plants.

Weedicides are recommended by agricultural extension workers and are sprayed as soon as weeds infest the rice fields. This effectively controls most of the weeds although stubborn ones are pulled by hand. The men mostly do this job but women also help.

Fertilizing

This technology is part and parcel of the Philippine rice farming. As recommended by the agricultural extension workers, the kind, amount, time of application and proper method of application of fertilizer are taught by the husband to other members of the family. Women at times do this chore.

Harvesting

Majority of those who harvest the palay are women. With "salakot", a kind of head gear, or a hat, long sleeve blouses, pants and "takuyan" (grain basket) slung on the shoulder, a simple instrument called "yatab" (for upland rice) or "lilik, karet" (scythe, for lowland) the grains are harvested. The panicles of palay are transferred from the "takuyan" to the vinyl packs and are either transported by women who carry these on their heads or in a carabac cart from the field to the house or shed where they are to be threshed.

Threshing

Threshing differs from region to region. The grains are finally separated from the rice straws or panicles by means of hand; or by holding the stalks of palay and threshing or striking them on an object (hampasan) until the grains are separated and fall on a mat or canvass or cemented floors.

Women also thresh the panicles of palay with their two feet. The panicles of palay are placed on a mat, vinyl or cemented floor and brought between the two feet and crushed until the grains are separated from the panicles and fall on the mat. These are heaped in one place ready to be dried. When a small threshing machine is used, women help in pushing the palay stalks into the machine. They also help in removing the hay after threshing.

Winnowing

With the aid of a circular flat basket made of bamboo, women scoop the grains from the mat or cemented floor and with their two hands bring the basket a little bit above their head and positioning themselves from where the breeze blows, let the grains cascade down to the mat. The breeze separates the light unnecessary materials and *chaffs* from the heavy grain, rendering the grains clean from foreign materials.

Drying

Women do most of the drying of the palay. First, they spread a mat or any large material in front of their houses or in the sidewalks where sunlight is available and unhampered all throughout the day. They place and spread the palay thinly and evenly on the mat with their hands, or feet or with the use of simple hand tools made of wood, bamboo or steel. They care for the palay throughout the day, turning it over and over again or driving chickens and other animals which may pester or eat the grains.

Sometimes, cement flooring is available and drying is done on this, Village roads, town plaza, basketball courts are utilized.

Storing

This is also a task of the rural women. Storage containers such as vinyl sacks, "balaong" – big bamboo baskets, and others are used to store the grains. A small hut built separately from the house, a small room in the house, or a corner of the house serves as storage facility for the harvested grains.

Milling

Since small millers are available in the barangays, the wooden mortar and pestle are seldom used these days. These tools are only used in processing green palay for a native delicacy called "pinipig".

All throughout these paddy production and post-harvest activities, women also do their roles in preparing the food of the labor force and taking care of the home management of the family.

Other Activities

1. *Paddy Field Utilization After Rice Harvest*

Many farmers plant new crops after harvest not only for additional income but for soil enrichment. Most common crops planted are pulses, such as mungo, red and black beans, peanuts and other vegetables. Women assist their husbands in the planting and harvesting of the crops.

2. *Marketing*

Women in consultation with their husbands, are responsible for marketing the crops. However, the wife is mainly responsible for marketing the vegetables raised in the paddy.

3. *Food Processing and Utilization*

Processing and utilization of farm produce is the main responsibility of the women who process these home use and for market.

Amount of Time Used by Women in Rice Farming

A survey in three barangays in Batangas shows the amount of time used by women in the different farming operations. Harvesting ranked highest, followed by weeding, threshing activities.

TABLE 2. AMOUNT OF TIME USED BY WOMEN IN RICE FARMING

Field Operations	Number of Hours	Man days per Cropping Season
1. Preparing the seedbeds and sowing the seeds	2	—
	2	—
2. Transplanting	5	—
3. Weeding	80	10
4. Fertilizing	—	depends upon the task given by the man
5. Harvesting	240	30
6. Threshing	80	10
7. Winnowing	80	10
8. Drying	80	10
9. Storing	16	10
10. Milling	—	depends upon the volume

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE SLOW GROWTH OR PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN PADDY PRODUCTION AND (POST HARVEST) PROCESSING

Women spend at least eight hours a day fulfilling housekeeping and child rearing activities. Additional farm work increase their working hours from 14 to 17 hours. Often the needed assistance is provided by girls who drop-out of school even before completing their elementary education in order to devote fulltime to household chores and help on the farm, thus, easing a little the burden of women in the performance of their traditional role as housekeepers.

Limited/lack of appropriate home technology hinders to some extent their active participation in paddy production and processing.

The very limited education usually confined to elementary education, attained by most rural women is a contributory factor for the slow growth of participation of women in paddy production and processing.

In the rural areas, the majority of women also have to work on the farm as unpaid family members. Thus marriage and family life necessarily have to be combined with daily farm work routine. Moreover, the teaching of modern agricultural methods, provision of facilities and the like have so far been directed to men only or geared towards the men, thus, creating a big drawback to the development of rural women's economic participation. Through training in appropriate modern scientific agri-skills and home-management, women will improve their productivity.

PROBLEMS AND NEEDS OF RURAL WOMEN

As Perceived by Rural Women Themselves

Gonzales' study (1976) investigated the women's perception of the causes of their problems, and their suggestions: The majority (85% of the mothers and 69% of the daughters) felt that the problems were due to the external conditions and circumstances over which they had no control. Very few considered the problems as being due to their personal inadequacy or the inadequacy of others. Sixty-six percent of the mothers and 76 percent of the daughters felt that poverty presented social immobility, but this could be alleviated by education. The majority, (63% of the mothers and 78% of the daughters) felt that they had to personally strive to overcome the problems. Few of the women (58% of mothers and 2.8% of the daughters) felt completely helpless or gave in to fatalistic solutions. It is interesting to note that hardly anyone suggested enlisting the aid of the government or some external agency in order to solve their problems. This was mentioned by only 2.9% of the mothers and 2.8% of the daughters. The findings are encouraging in spite of the fact that the problems themselves were attributed by the respondents to external conditions. This means that given the proper motivation these women will learn how to mobilize themselves for reforms and there is a need for external structuring to help rural women solve their own problems.

As Perceived by External Agencies

The following were the problems of rural women as perceived by external agencies: (1) Traditional attitude of male dominance, lack of recognition of women's potential, and unequal opportunities for men and women. (2) Seemingly, traditional attitudes of rural women: that they are just destined to be with their husbands and/or live in the barangay. They seem to be generally resigned to their present roles. (3) Low education and background. (4) Lack of training opportunities: farm modernization programs are usually directed to men. (5) Poor economic conditions. (6) Lack of social services. (7) Lack of comparative rural planning.

SUGGESTIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Development assistance to projects which apply work simplification methods and activities of rural women at home, in the homeyard and on the farm including the appropriate technology to lessen their domestic burdens, improve and lighten their household and farming activities. This would also entail a survey of existing appropriate technology for the various tasks performed by rural women to determine how they can be adopted locally and shared with the target population. Subsequently, training schemes should be developed and tested to transfer these skills to women and to determine how these improve the fulfillment of their roles as farm workers.

Provision for technical and financial assistance for the implementation of functional education and training programs. The content of these should relate the motivation activities to raise the level of consciousness regarding their rights and responsibilities to the various tasks women have to perform in the home, on the farm and in the community.

Educational and skills training for effective community participation such as interpersonal relations, problem solving, leadership and organizational development and management.

Home management – work simplification, budgeting; use of time and labor – saving devices at home.

Farming – scientific soil and fertility conservation, improvement and recycling of resources, use of appropriate modernize tools.

Provision of technical and financial assistance to implement and document projects/trainings of rural women in modern scientific farming, on management, cooperative formation and home management to enable them to combine efficiently work in the household and in farming. Training programs should be provided to develop their skills in their various roles and functions both in agricultural programs and in home management.

Provisions for day care centers for children during the farming season.

Proposals for Action on Collaborative Effort

Joint training for women in the Asia and Pacific Region on Management and enterpreneural skills in cooperative and credit schemes for farming and income generating projects.

Strengthening rural women leadership in support to farming operations through women leader exchange and study tour programs among groups in the regions.

Cooperative efforts in a study of small tools and practical technology used by farm women in the home and on the farm.

Exchange and sharing of extension information and materials used by agencies among farming women groups.

Promote international and regional cooperation through the sharing of technical experience and expertise, thru international/regional meetings and conferences and such other means to achieve objectives.

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