Integrating women in development

The experience of nine EDF rural development projects

by Dorothée VERSTEYLEN-LEYZER (*)

Last October, the third and last phase of a thematic evaluation on the integration of women in nine mainstream EDF-financed rural development projects was finalised with the completion of the synthesis report, summarising the main conclusions and recommendations (1). This meant the end of a complicated but interesting exercise which the Commission launched some two years earlier. The following article presents some of the main findings.

Why a WID evaluation?

Women in Development (WID) has become an increasingly important development issue, not only because of equity concerns but also as a result of the recognition that the integration of women in development operations is of vital importance for the chances of economic success and sustainable development.

Indeed the new Lomé Convention underlines the important economic role of women and stipulates the need for both men and women to participate and benefit on *equal terms* from development operations. With the priority under Lomé IV continuing to be on rural development, the need to recognise and support women's role in the sectors of agriculture, livestock and fisheries is given special attention.

Thus, compared to Lomé III, where the issue of women and development was merely confined to the socio-cultural dimension of EC/ACP cooperation, the Lomé IV Convention constitutes a quite different approach to WID, the implementation of which represents new challenges for EC/ACP development administrators.

In that respect, the WID evaluation was rather opportune, as we can learn from past experience: To what extent have women been able to participate and benefit from EDF projects so far? What are the major constraints to their participation? How can these be overcome? These were some of the questions the WID evaluation had to address. The ultimate objective was to arrive at a set of operational recommendations and guidelines aimed at integrating the WID dimension more fully and systematically in EDF projects and programmes.

Scope and methodology

The evaluation concerned four sectors of rural development, i.e. rain-fed and irrigated agriculture, animal husbandry, forestry, and village drinking-water supply.

The study was carried out in three phases. After a phase of documentation and preparation in Brussels, nine projects were selected for further examination in the field. Care was taken that the selected projects were representative as to type and size for the sector concerned while the sample had to cover different geographical and socio-cultural regions in Africa. Thus, nine projects implemented in eight different countries were selected: Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Kenya, Niger (2 projects), Swaziland, Togo and Zambia.

The projects in Cameroon, Kenya and Togo were integrated rural development programmes, covering more than one sector. As a result, six agricultural operations, three actions in the forestry sector, three water supply projects/components and two livestock programmes were evaluated from a WID perspective.

The second phase consisted of field missions proper. The missions were carried out by a multi-disciplinary and "multi-national" team of female consultants. The team included agronomists, livestock specialists, forestry experts, economists and sociologists, all with a wide experience in development cooperation and gender analysis.

Through in-depth interviews with relevant administrators and project staff as well as with women from different social levels in the project area, supplemented by literature and direct observation, the consultants collected a wealth of information, which permitted a thorough and interesting analysis.

Findings

The findings of the field missions have been presented in nine separate reports, which, in the third phase of the exercise, have been summarised in the synthesis report.

Role of women in the project areas

An important finding of all nine field missions was that women play a crucial role in the sectors concerned, either as crop and animal producers or as managers and collectors of water and fuel. In many project areas, women's contribution to agricultural production in terms of labour input was found to be much higher than men's. Except for a few areas where the prescriptions of Islam keep women in "purdah" (as is for instance the case among the Foulbe tribe in the Cameroon project area), women contribute to almost all the agricultural work. In livestock, women play an important role in the everyday care of cattle and small stock and are often the owners of goats, sheep and chickens. Not only are women the main collectors and users of firewood; they are in some cases also involved in tree planting and management. Women are usually responsible for collecting water for domestic purposes as well as for use in personal economic activities, and they are traditionally the main deci-

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(1) BMB/Femconsult: Thematic Evaluation on the Integration of Women in Rural Development. Evaluation of nine projects financed by the European Development Fund in Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Kenya, Niger, Swaziland, Togo and Zambia. Synthesis Report. Tilburg, The Hague, October 1990.

sion-makers in matters related to water.

Moreover, in *all* project areas, women were found to contribute to a major extent to family subsistence while in many areas, women are the sole *breadwinners*, due to temporary or permanent male migration to the cities or other countries. In Eastern and Southern Africa in particular, the missions encountered very high rates of de facto and de jure female-headed households (up to 50%).

Participation of women in the projects

This crucial role of women as producers and (co) breadwinners in all project areas, however, was not reflected by their actual participation in the projects:

In only two of the nine projects (the Swamp Rice development project in *Burkina Faso* and the Livestock project in *Botswana*), were women found to participate and benefit to a fairly high degree in different activities such as extension, credit supply, local management and marketing.

In two other projects (the Maize development project in *Zambia* and the Water supply project in *Swaziland*), women participated to a certain extent though not commensurate with their role in the sectors concerned.

In the other five projects, women had virtually been ignored as a target group.

Effects on women

The main lesson learned from the study is that women do not automatically benefit from development interventions. In particular, where women do not constitute an explicit target group of *agricultural, livestock* and *forestry* projects, these projects have often had the unintended negative effect that *women's workload increased without countervailing benefits.*

Thus, for example, the introduction of oxen for ploughing in the Savane's rural development programme in Togo and the Benoué programme in Cameroon had led to a greater demand on women's labour. Since ploughing with oxen reduces the workload of the male farmers, it enables them to cultivate a larger area. This in turn increases the labour requirements for all subsequent operations, With the result that women have to do more work on the family fields than in the past. In addition, the improved cultivation techniques promoted by the projects require more frequent and careful weeding. Thus, women come under increased pressure, but do not receive direct benefits, since decisions on what to do with the produce from the family field are taken by the men.

Women's workloads also increased as a result of the introduction of improved cattle breeds in combination with the promotion of fodder crop production, as was for example the case in the Machakos Integrated Rural Development Programme in Kenya.

Because women are in charge of the everyday care of cattle, the extra labour input required to care for grade cattle (e.g. fodder crop production, taking the animals for vaccinations and dipping) is usually provided by the women.

Men's workload may also increase, but the important difference is that they usually own the cattle and therefore economic returns accrue for the most part to them.

This has to be understood in the sub-Saharan context of gender-differentiated resource allocation within the household. Usually, incomes of the spouses or indeed their granaries, are not pooled in order to meet daily family requirements. Traditionally, each of the spouses has different responsibilities in respect of family maintenance on the understanding that the women are usually expected to pro-



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An increase in farmers' production and income does not necessarily mean an improvement of women's position—an example (1)

One of the evaluated rural development projects is situated in an area which is characterised by regular periods of drought, over-population and degradation of the environment. With EEC funds, a development project has been initiated which aims at an increase of the income of the farmers and an improvement of agricultural production and productivity. For this purpose infrastructural facilities have been constructed (roads, clinics, wells, etc.), farmers' organisations have been created, agricultural research has been initiated and farmers are being informed and trained through the Training and Visit system. The introduction of animal traction is one of the improvements which is to result in higher yields.

The main crops in the area are millet, sorghum, beans, groundnuts, cotton, rice and maize. Except for ploughing, women perform almost all the agricultural work. They work on both the family fields and their own fields. On the family fields, the men are responsible for the ploughing, and control of the produce from the fields. Women perform most of the other cultivation operations, namely all the sowing, 75% of the weeding, 50% of the application of fertiliser, all of the harvesting and transportation, and all of the winnowing. On their own fields women are in charge of all the work, and are also able to control the outputs. Women use the produce from their fields and the money earned from them to contribute to the basic needs of their family (food, clothing, domestic utensils, etc.). During the pre-harvest gap they also regularly have to take over the household contributions of the men, which include the daily grain provision for the family, housing matters and, sometimes, the children's school fees.

Project interventions have increased the income of the male farmers considerably (they now earn four to five times more money than before). The control over this money is entirely in the hands of the men, heads of the household, who spend it for different purposes: repayments for new technologies (such as animal traction), purchase of new agricultural equipment, housing improvements, purchase of beer, purchase of personal requirements and payment of the children's school fees. No real changes in responsibilities for family subsistence have occurred. Women's own income has not increased. On the contrary, due to enlargement of the family fields, the continued existence of their own fields and thus of their own income—is increasingly threatened.

Women are directly affected by the project because of the significant increase in their workload. The introduction of oxen for ploughing as a labour-saving technological innovation reduces the men's workload and enables them to expand their cultivated area. This is turn increases the labour requirements for all subsequent operations, with the result that women have to do more work on the family fields than in the past. In addition, the improved cultivation techniques promoted by the project require more frequent and careful weeding. Since no technologies have been introduced for this part of the work, it has not only increased, but at the same time it still has to be done by hand. Furthermore, the felling of trees to obtain larger fields forces women to walk greater distances to collect firewood for domestic purposes.

The increased pressure on women's time can in turn lead to a reduction in family welfare. Since the priority work on the family fields will require extra time and energy inputs from women, they will be less able to carry out their other activities, namely food-crop cultivation on their own fields (to contribute to the basic needs of the family) and tasks as mother and caretaker of the family.

The project appears to have had an important social impact on the farming communities and households. While men have benefited from an increase in income, skills and organisation, for women no such changes have taken place. In many households this inequality has resulted in family quarrels and a weakening of women's position.

When considering the negative impact of the project on women's lives and the widening of the gap between men and women, the project can hardly be called successful, in spite of the registered increase in income and crop production. At the same time, the bypassing of women cannot but hamper the effectiveness and sustainability of the project, not only because of the growing inequality between men and women, but also because of the inefficient use of women's important contribution to agricultural production and productivity and to family subsistence.

This situation is a direct consequence of the fact that the roles and needs of women and the constraints on their participation were not taken into account during project preparation, design and implementation. If a careful analysis of the gender division of tasks, responsibilities and constraints had taken place, special measures and activities could have been introduced (for instance, the introduction of appropriate technologies in women's work, extension and training for women in their role as farmers) to enable both men and women to participate and benefit.

Fortunately, project staff became aware of the project's negative impact on women's lives and the fact that their potential contribution to the development activities had not been sufficiently taken into account. During its second phase, therefore, it is planned to pay more attention to women, through, among other things, the assignment of more female extension workers. A specific WID approach will also be necessary, focusing not only on women's needs and constraints, but also on the attitudes of extension workers and techniques used to reach women.

(1) Excerpt from the synthesis report.

vide the basic commodities such as food, ingredients, medicines, clothing and sometimes school fees; whereas the men will contribute part of the staple food requirements while their remaining income usually is spent on consumer or luxury goods.

An increased income for the husband as a result of development projects therefore does not automatically improve family living conditions. At the same time, the increased workload for women caused by intensified crop or animal production decreases the time available for the cultivation of their own fields, and thus decreases their own income. Consequently, the achievement of the project's ultimate goal of improving living conditions of rural families will be negatively affected.

Furthermore, where women have not been a target group in their own right, as was the case in the Kenya, Togo, Cameroon and Niger agricultural operations, not only their workload increased, but women also hardly benefited from project inputs or services which could have increased their productivity on their own plots and thereby their incomes.

By contrast, projects or components which did involve women as a target group, often have reduced their workload and improved their income. For instance, the agricultural and livestock projects in Burkina Faso, Botswana and Zambia have improved incomes of an important group of women by enabling them to obtain land, credit, animal traction, extension advice, inputs and marketing services. Moreover, the Botswana livestock project reduced women's workload, inter alia by facilitating access to veterinary services and marketing.

Projects in the drinking water sector have generally benefited women by reducing time and energy needed for water collection. Time savings of several hours a day have been reported and this time is often used for the collection of more water, as well as for the execution of productive activities. However, not all water projects have been successful in reaching targets and sustainability. Thus, in Niger, 30% of the pumps visited by the mission were found to be out of action. This was due partly, to women not having been involved in the planning and decision-making concerning the siting of the facilities, the setting of water tariffs and the organisation of operation and maintenance.

This leads us to another aspect of women's participation: its consequences in terms of cost-effectiveness and sustainability of development.

Development effectiveness

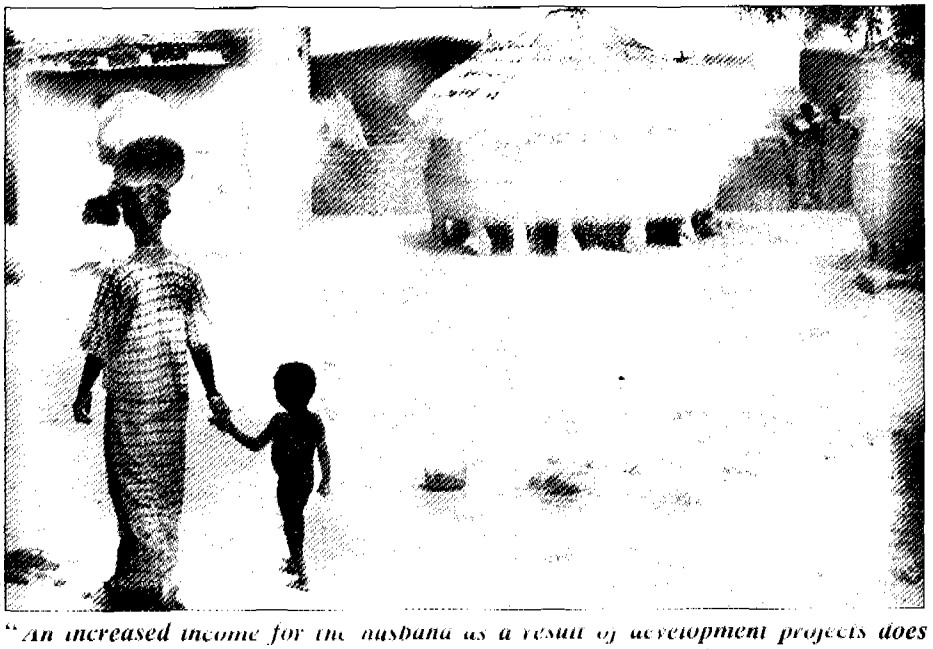
The evaluation clearly demonstrated that participation of women is not "just" a social issue - a question of benefiting women or not - but that it is highly inefficient to direct project activities only at men where women do most of the work.

For example, in the Togo and Cameroon projects, women had virtually no access to agricultural extension, technology or inputs. This, according to the consultants, almost certainly reduced the project's effectiveness. For example, a main constraint on the intensification of agricultural production was that weeding is still done by hand, by the women. The project in Cameroon has recently introduced cultivators to mechanise the weeding. However, those who have the most vested interest in adopting the new technology - the women—are not reached by the demonstration session. The distribution of cultivators would probably go much faster if women participated, as was the experience of another extension agency in the project area.

The case of the swamp rice development project in Burkina Faso is a clear example of how bypassing women's roles and interests can be counterproductive for the achievement of project goals. During the initial stages of the project, women's traditional role in swamp rice production, and the importance of swamp plots for women's own income was not fully recognised and the improved fields were at first allocated to male heads of household. The dissatisfaction of the women with their new situation caused a lack of motivation, resulting in bad maintenance of the constructions and stagnation of the yields. Thanks to the open and flexible attitude of the project management, the land has been redistributed and in the new schemes women have been given priority in the allocation of land. Now, women constitute 87% of the applicants.

This example shows that women are not always passive victims. Where culturally feasible, they make, from their point of view, rational decisions on time and labour allocation. Neglect of their interest in project planning can therefore cause a loss of time and money during project implementation and thus limit the project's cost-effectiveness.

Moreover, in the drinking water sector, women's participation appeared to be effective in achieving objectives and sustainability– in par-



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ticular, where women have not only been considered as passive beneficiaries but where they have been actively involved in the planning, management, operation and maintenance. Thus, in the Swaziland project, the functioning and reliability of the new water facilities improved significantly when women, at a later stage, became actively involved and occupied prominent positions in the water committees. They have been instrumental in introducing a successful cost-recovery system and financial management system.

Conclusions and recommendations

Projects may bypass women but women can never bypass the projects: all operations were found to have an effect on women, intended or not, positive or negative. Women either benefited or lost, depending on whether they were recognised as an autonomous target group or whether they were (mistakenly) considered as indirect beneficiaries through their husbands.

The study also revealed that neglect of women's roles and interests is not only bad for women but also for the project's economic performance in achieving its objectives of increasing yields and outputs and improving standards of living of rural families.

As the participation of women was only found to be satisfactory in two out of the nine projects, there is an obvious need to change conventional approaches and methods of development planning and implementation.

The consultants made a number of recommendations in this respect, which have implications for both EC and ACP development administrators.

During *project preparation* for example, gender-differentiated data have to be collected on the role, needs and interests of both men *and* women in the project area. This will require the use of WID expertise and often female interviewers will have to be employed.

The *project design* (and budget) should allow for special activities and strategies in order to overcome barriers to women's access to production factors or services. For example, agriculture extension and credit services often need to be adapted as to content, methods and conditions. Also special activities for women may be indicated such as literacy training or introduction of labour-saving technology.

A condition for women's participation in almost all cultural settings is the availability of qualified female staff who can work with rural women and/or intermediate services of male field staff.

These are just a few of the measures recommended by the consultants.

The Commission has already taken steps to give a follow-up to some of the most pertinent recommendations which are incorporated in a programme of actions aimed at enhancing the capacity of relevant Commission staff to handle the WID issue in a systematic and efficient manner.

However, in the framework of the Lomé Convention, it is not only the Commission administration which is relevant for the implementation of WID related project strategies.

The above mentioned examples of measures to be taken during project preparation and implementation have financial implications and it is here where the ACP partners have a crucial role to play, particularly as under Lomé IV, much of the decision-making on the utilisation of the EDF rests with the ACP authorities.

It is in this regard, perhaps where the otherwise excellent report fails to make a recommendation which might be couched in the following way:

The need to increase recognition amongst ACP politicians and development administrators that investment in women as part of the human capital has a high pay off, both in the short run by increasing economic efficiency and impact of development operations and in the long run since improved opportunities for women will lead to a higher social status, lower population growth rates and more effective use of natural resources. ○ D.V.-L.