

**Rural Women and Family Farming:
A Developmental Approach**
المرأة الريفية والزراعة الأسرية: مقاربة تنموية

Samir Youcef Khodja *, University
Mouloud Mammeri –Tizi-Ouzou
samir.youcefkhodja@ummto.dz

Nissa Zeghoud, University Mouloud
Mammeri –Tizi-Ouzou
zeghoudnissa@gmail.

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Abstract:

The rural woman constitutes a pivotal element in social and economic development, especially in the agricultural community, and is among the fundamental factors that greatly influence the continuity and effectiveness of agricultural production and the rural economy. Within the agricultural family, she occupies a central position that goes beyond the traditional roles attributed to her, to include diverse contributions in various aspects of agricultural and social life. Accordingly, this scientific paper addresses the role of rural women from several important angles, starting from the importance of her role within the agricultural family, passing through the tasks she performs in agricultural production, and arriving at her participation in food processing. The objective of this work is to shed light on the vital role of rural women and to explore ways to enhance their capacities and abilities in order to achieve sustainable development in the agricultural sector and rural communities, and to empower them in light of social and economic challenges.

Keywords: Rural Women; Family Farming; Development; Economic Empowerment; Social Challenges.

* Corresponding author

ملخص:

تُشكل المرأة الريفية عنصراً محورياً في التنمية الاجتماعية والاقتصادية، وخاصةً في المجتمع الزراعي، وهي من العوامل الأساسية المؤثرة بشكل كبير في استمرارية وفعالية الإنتاج الزراعي والاقتصاد الريفي. وتحتل المرأة الريفية داخل الأسرة الزراعية مكانة محورية تتجاوز الأدوار التقليدية المنسوبة إليها، لتشمل مساهمات متنوعة في مختلف جوانب الحياة الزراعية والاجتماعية. وعليه، تتناول هذه الورقة العلمية دور المرأة الريفية من عدة جوانب مهمة، بدءاً من أهمية دورها داخل الأسرة الزراعية، مروراً بالمهام التي تؤديها في الإنتاج الزراعي، وصولاً إلى مشاركتها في تصنيع الأغذية. ويهدف هذا العمل إلى تسليط الضوء على الدور الحيوي للمرأة الريفية، واستكشاف سبل تعزيز قدراتها وإمكاناتها لتحقيق التنمية المستدامة في القطاع الزراعي والمجتمعات الريفية، وتمكينها في ظل التحديات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المرأة الريفية؛ الزراعة الأسرية؛ التنمية؛ التمكين الاقتصادي؛ التحديات الاجتماعية.

Introduction

Discussing development and issues related to it requires more research and attention to society and the matters connected with its progress and prosperity. Development, in its various dimensions and elements, is interrelated and integrated in order to achieve a better standard of living for individuals. Thus, research on the subject of development in general is no longer limited to the issue of employing industrial workers, administrators, or public policy planners; rather, it requires more than that, across many diverse fields, since it is a complex, composite, and comprehensive process encompassing economic, political, social, cultural, and even legal aspects.

It can be said that one of the basic conditions for development to be successful is that it should not be restricted to the economic aspect. The central issue upon which thinkers and specialists in this field agree is that the human being is both the means and the end of development. Hence, the participation of different social groups in this process is very important. Contemporary social studies abound in broad analyses of women's work and its importance in the economic and social life of modern society (Al-Asfar & Aqil, 2003). From this emerges the importance of women's contribution through their role in activating family farming and its contribution to the process of local development. The rural woman constitutes the backbone of agricultural work,

participating in various agricultural stages, from planting seeds to harvesting crops.

She also contributes to the marketing of agricultural and livestock products, by selling them in local markets or participating in cooperative projects. In addition, rural women are distinguished by their skills in handicrafts, such as carpet weaving and traditional clothing, which provides an additional source of income for the family in particular and contributes to the process of local development in general. This is what we seek to clarify through this research paper, in which we aim to identify the contribution of rural women in the process of local development through their participation in activating family farming.

The Role of Rural Women within the Agricultural Family

The rural woman is an essential element in the social and economic fabric of rural communities, and she plays a pivotal role in ensuring the stability and continuity of agricultural families. In the face of the harsh living conditions in rural areas, women have borne a heavy burden of responsibilities. In addition to household chores, they have contributed and continue to contribute significantly to agricultural production, family care, and the preservation of cultural heritage. Rural women possess wide traditional knowledge about agriculture and medicinal herbs, which contributes to the preservation of biological and cultural diversity (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2019). In this context, some of the main aspects of the importance of rural women can be highlighted:

a- Contribution to agricultural production: Rural women contribute directly to agricultural production through work in the fields, caring for livestock, and harvesting crops.

b- Supporting the family: The rural woman provides material and moral support to her family, contributing to the upbringing and education of children.

c- Maintaining food security: Rural women play an important role in achieving food security at both the family and community levels.

d- Promoting rural development: Rural women contribute to rural development through their participation in various economic and social activities.

e- Preservation of cultural heritage: Rural women help preserve cultural heritage by passing traditional knowledge and skills to future generations.

Challenges Faced by Rural Women within Family Farming

Rural women face many challenges that affect their daily lives and their role in society, similar to other obstacles and problems that hinder women's work and their contribution to development in general, particularly those linked to traditional attitudes (Khater, 2003), especially in rural areas. The most prominent challenges include:

a- Gender discrimination and social restrictions: Rural women suffer from gender-based discrimination, limiting their rights to work, education, and participation in family and community decision-making. Customs and traditions sometimes impose restrictions on their movement and ability to work outside the home (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2019)

b- Lack of education and training: Many rural women suffer from limited opportunities for education and vocational training, which affects their ability to develop new skills or improve their economic status. Low education rates among rural women constitute a major obstacle to their empowerment.

c- Heavy and multiple workloads: Rural women bear multiple burdens of agricultural work, childcare, and household chores, without sufficient support. This double or triple effort exhausts women and reduces their chances of enjoying a healthy and balanced life.

d- Limited economic opportunities: Rural women suffer from a lack of formal and sustainable job opportunities. Many depend on agricultural work or traditional handicrafts that generate limited and unstable income.

e- Social isolation: Rural women experience isolation due to long distances and difficulties in mobility, which limits their access to basic services and participation in social and educational activities.

These challenges require concerted efforts from governments, NGOs, and local communities to empower rural women by improving access to resources, providing education and training, and strengthening policies that protect their rights and support their effective participation in economic and social life. Women's work and their participation in economic activity and social development is one of the positions that carries different social implications among members of society, which reflects back on them in facing many economic, social, health, educational, and other problems. This, in turn, enhances their contribution to the development process as full partners in achieving it.

Opportunities Available to Rural Women within Family Farming

The most important opportunities can be identified as follows:

a- Empowerment programs: Many empowerment programs target rural women, helping them acquire new skills, improve access to resources, and participate in economic and social activities.

b- Cooperative projects: Cooperative projects help empower rural women by providing job opportunities, improving their ability to market their products, and accessing financial services.

c- Technology: Technology can contribute to improving rural women's lives by providing access to information and education, increasing agricultural productivity, and facilitating market communication (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2019).

d- Supportive policies: There is a need for supportive policies that enhance rural women's rights and allow them to participate fully in public life, thereby contributing to gender equality.

Thus, it is necessary to strengthen efforts to support rural women by improving their access to resources, enhancing their legal and social rights, and providing educational and professional opportunities to strengthen their participation in rural development. Empowering rural women is not only a matter of justice and equality but also a key to sustainable development and prosperity in rural areas, especially in the Kabylie region.

The Contribution of Rural Women to Agricultural Production

Rural women play an essential and central role in agricultural and community development, as they are effective partners in all stages of agricultural production and related activities. In rural communities, women bear major responsibilities that include not only farming and livestock care but also the management of daily family affairs and handicrafts. Despite the economic and social challenges they face, rural women continue to make significant contributions to food provision and the achievement of food security for their families and communities, making their role in agricultural production vital and indispensable (NCRWDI, 2021).

Agriculture and Crop Production

a- Daily farming: Rural women play a vital role in daily farming, dealing with all aspects of crop cultivation. These activities include planting seeds, watering plants, removing weeds, and tending crops

until they mature. Such tasks require specific technical knowledge, such as determining appropriate planting times, proper irrigation methods, pest and disease control, and the correct use of fertilizers to improve production quality. These activities are also culturally inherited and often passed down from generation to generation, making them part of the agricultural identity of rural communities.

b- Harvesting and storage: Rural women play a significant role in harvesting, which requires considerable physical effort, such as cutting or collecting crops from the fields and sorting good crops from damaged ones. Afterwards, they store these crops using traditional methods to preserve their quality for as long as possible, such as drying or storing them in sealed spaces to prevent spoilage. Women also play a key role in the efficient use of farm resources, which enhances household food security.

Livestock Production

a- Animal care: Rural women play a central role in animal care, including cows, sheep, goats, and poultry. This includes daily activities such as feeding, ensuring hygiene, and monitoring animal health, including providing vaccinations and necessary treatments when needed. These activities contribute to the provision of high-quality animal products for local consumption or sale, thus supporting the family and community economy.

b- Dairy products: In addition to daily care, women milk cows and goats and process milk into dairy products such as cheese and butter, which often constitute an additional source of family income. These practices rely on traditional knowledge passed down about the best methods of milking, preserving milk and its products, as well as managing production to meet both family needs and local market demand (Junni, 2003).

Household Activities

a- Domestic tasks: Alongside participation in agricultural activities, rural women carry major domestic responsibilities, including cooking, cleaning, and childcare, which strengthens family and social stability. These activities form an essential part of rural life and require special skills and good time management to ensure balance between household and agricultural duties.

b- Handicrafts: Women contribute to handicrafts such as spinning and weaving, which are traditional industries that play an important role in supporting the local economy. These crafts provide an additional source of income for rural families, help preserve the cultural heritage of local communities, and create job opportunities for women, thereby enhancing their economic and social empowerment (Junni, 2003).

Financial Management

a- Budget management: Women often play a vital role in managing the family budget, planning expenditures and savings based on available resources. This skill is essential to ensure the financial stability of the household, as it helps distribute resources effectively to meet basic needs such as food, education, and healthcare (Junni, 2003).

b- Market participation: Rural women play an important role in selling agricultural and handicraft products in local markets. These activities provide cash income that can be used to meet family needs and achieve financial independence. Moreover, women's participation in markets helps strengthen social interaction and the exchange of agricultural and commercial knowledge and experiences.

It can be said that the importance of rural women and their role in agricultural production and family economic management goes beyond mere participation in daily work to become an integral part of sustainable rural development. They make tangible contributions through agricultural and livestock production, in addition to handicrafts, which enhance family income and financial stability. Women's management of financial resources and participation in local markets also support the strengthening of family and community economies as a whole. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen support for rural women and provide them with the skills and resources needed, which contributes to increasing their productivity and enhancing their economic and social position.

The Process of Product Orientation within the Framework of Family Farming

Family farming plays a vital role in food security and environmental sustainability, and it is considered one of the fundamental pillars of the rural economy. The process of product orientation within this framework requires precise management and comprehensive planning to ensure efficiency and profitability. Accordingly, we will review here the different aspects of the product orientation process in family farming, focusing on planning, marketing, and resource management.

Agricultural Planning

a- Crop selection: Agricultural planning involves selecting appropriate crops based on several factors such as soil, climate, and market needs. Knowing the nutritional needs of the local community and the wider market is crucial in this context.

b- Scheduling: Determining the timetable for planting and harvesting depends on agricultural seasons and expected weather. Proper management of the timetable helps improve productivity and reduce losses.

c- Resource management: This is divided into two parts:

- Human resources: Agricultural families are the main source of labor in family farms. Distributing tasks among family members based on skills and experience helps achieve high efficiency.

- Material resources: Material resources include land, equipment, seeds, and fertilizers. Proper management of these resources ensures cost reduction and increased productivity.

d- Marketing: This includes:

- Market study: The product orientation process requires studying the market to determine demand for agricultural products. Understanding the market helps in setting appropriate prices and effective marketing strategies.

- Distribution: The distribution process involves selecting appropriate channels to transport products from the farm to the consumer. These channels may include local markets, traders, and cooperatives.

e- Environmental sustainability: Which relates to:

- Sustainable agricultural practices: Family farms adopt sustainable agricultural practices such as crop rotation and organic farming to maintain soil health and reduce environmental impact.

- Natural resource management: This includes efficient water use and biodiversity conservation, which can be achieved through advanced irrigation techniques and the use of natural fertilizers.

Challenges and Opportunities within the Framework of the Agricultural Product Orientation Process

a- Challenges: Despite the vital role women play in the development process through family farming, women in Algerian rural areas are less fortunate in obtaining government support, even though they are more productive in terms of food compared to their urban counterparts (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2022). Here we point to the most important challenges facing the process of orientation and marketing of agricultural products for rural women:

- Lack of funding: Family farms face challenges in obtaining the necessary funding to develop infrastructure and purchase equipment.
- Climate change: Climate changes affect agricultural production and make planning more complicated.

b- Opportunities:

- Technology: Technology can improve farm management and increase productivity by providing innovative agricultural solutions.
- Supportive policies: Government policies that support family farming can provide funding and agricultural extension services to improve efficiency and productivity (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2019).

Here we can say that the process of product orientation within the framework of family farming requires integrated management that includes planning, resource management, and marketing, with a focus on environmental sustainability. By adopting sustainable agricultural practices and exploiting available opportunities, family farms can play a key role in achieving food security and sustainable rural development.

Rural Women and Food Processing

Rural women play an important role in various aspects of agriculture, including food processing. This role involves transforming agricultural products into final consumable foodstuffs and is a vital part of the agricultural value chain. Rural women contribute to increasing the added value of agricultural products, which enhances food security and supports local economies. Women represent an important and influential aspect through their role as productive actors, participating in various agricultural activities and food processing, such as poultry raising, livestock rearing, and dairy product manufacturing, in addition to their role in building families and raising children (Hassan, 2003).

The Various Activities of Rural Women in Food Processing

a- Preparation of agricultural products: Rural women participate in many activities related to preparing agricultural products. These include cleaning and sorting crops, drying fruits and vegetables, and preparing grains for consumption. Women also carry out various processes such as grinding grains and turning them into flour, which contributes to improving nutritional value and extending shelf life.

b- Dairy production: Dairy products such as milk, cheese, and butter are an important part of the food industry in rural areas. Women contribute greatly by milking cows and goats and processing milk to produce these products. Many rural families depend on women for the production and sale of these products, which increases household income.

c- Jam and pickle production: The production of jams and pickles is a traditional activity carried out by rural women. Seasonal fruits and vegetables are used to prepare these products, which are stored for use outside production seasons or sold in local markets (Elias, 2000).

Challenges Facing Rural Women in Food Processing

a- Lack of financial resources: Rural women face major challenges in obtaining the necessary funding to purchase equipment and raw materials needed to expand food processing operations. The financial resources available to them are often limited, restricting their ability to improve product quality and increase productivity.

b- Lack of training and education: The lack of training and education is another major challenge, as many rural women lack educational and training opportunities that could help them improve their food processing skills. This affects production efficiency and limits their capacity for innovation.

d- Marketing challenges: Rural women suffer from difficulties in accessing markets to sell their products, and many lack the knowledge and resources needed to market their products effectively. In addition, poor infrastructure in rural areas leads to difficulties in transportation and distribution.

Opportunities Available for Rural Women in Food Processing

a- Government support and development initiatives: Government policies and development initiatives can play an important role in supporting rural women in food processing. Providing training, education, and assistance in obtaining funding can enhance the capacities of rural women and increase their opportunities in this field (World Bank, 2009).

b- Technology and innovation: Technology offers new opportunities for rural women in food processing. Using modern techniques in preparation, storage, and packaging can improve product quality and increase production efficiency. Technology can also contribute to improving market access through e-commerce and digital marketing.

d- Agricultural cooperatives: Agricultural cooperatives provide an important platform to support rural women in food processing. By joining cooperatives, women can gain access to shared resources, exchange knowledge, and increase bargaining power in markets.

From this we can say that rural women play a vital role in food processing, contributing significantly to transforming agricultural products into final foodstuffs. However, women face many challenges, such as lack of financial and educational resources and marketing difficulties. Nevertheless, the opportunities available through government support, technology, and agricultural cooperatives provide possibilities for improving their conditions and increasing their contribution to the local economy. Therefore, enhancing the role of rural women in food processing can contribute significantly to achieving food security and sustainable development (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2011).

CONCLUSION

It is clear here that rural women have an important and effective role in activating family farming through various roles that include agriculture, animal care, marketing, and handicrafts. However, they still face major challenges such as lack of financial resources, gender discrimination, and limited education and training. Yet, there are always important opportunities to support them through empowerment programs, cooperative projects, and technology to revitalize family farming in the service of community development.

In the field of agricultural production, rural women play a major role in farming, animal care, and organizing domestic and agricultural tasks, with responsibilities in financial management and environmental conservation. They also contribute to food processing through preparing and transforming agricultural products, dairy production, and jams, despite marketing challenges and lack of training. This requires enhancing the capacities of rural women and supporting them to achieve development and food security, in order to strengthen their central role in rural communities and lead them toward better prospects.

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