

PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE AGRICULTURAL EDUCATORS REGARDING THE
ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE IN UZBEKISTAN: IMPLICATIONS
FOR AGRICULTURE AND EXTENSION EDUCATION

Julie A. Tritz, Project Coordinator
Midwest Agribusiness Trade Research & Information Center (MATRIC)
578 Heady Hall
Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa 50011
(515) 294-4542
(515) 294-6336 (fax)
jtritz@gcard.iastate.edu

Robert A. Martin, Head
Department of Agricultural Education & Studies
204 Curtiss Hall
Iowa State University
Ames, Iowa 50011
(515) 294-0896
(515) 294-0530 (fax)
drmartin@iastate.edu

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Abstract

This study focused on perceptions of women educators regarding the roles and responsibilities of women involved in agriculture in Uzbekistan. A qualitative study was conducted using interview data from fourteen women educators from the Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Agricultural Mechanization Engineers (TIAME) in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. The interviewees held roles and responsibilities as teachers, advisors, and researchers. The interviewees defined agriculture in terms of production and revealed with some hesitation the viability and significance of women in agriculture. They cited male dominance of agricultural professions, domestic responsibilities, and a desire for the more "feminized" professions as reasons for women not pursuing professions in agriculture. Implications for agricultural and extension education are that training and information are needed to incorporate a gender perspective into curriculum, extension, and development programs to increase awareness of the importance of women in agriculture. Furthermore, a gender balance at the secondary and post-secondary level should be ensured so that women and their needs remain visible in the eyes of educators, administrators, and extension personnel.

Introduction

Nestled in the heart of Central Asia, Uzbekistan is one of five Central Asian states. The republic is the most populous of the five states with 71% of the population Uzbek, followed by Russians at 8% (Pomfret, 1995). Uzbekistan was under Soviet rule for nearly 70 years and has undergone economic, social, political, and

cultural changes since independence in 1991 (Olcott, 1996). For much of the past century, cotton production has dominated Uzbekistan's economy. The transformation to a collective system deployed modern irrigation equipment, produced a cotton monoculture, and exploited an entire region agriculturally, politically, and socially (Mesbahi, 1994). In 1940, cotton occupied 30.4% of all sown area, in 1950, 39%

and by 1986, 52% (Craumer, 1995:27). According to Pomfret (1995), Uzbeks felt that the Soviet Union deliberately destroyed Uzbekistan's grain-growing capacity that made it difficult, if not impossible, to reverse the devastating environmental impacts associated with cotton production.

The agricultural revolution that evolved throughout Uzbekistan had a dramatic effect on women. The emancipation of women under Soviet rule increased their role in the labor force, especially in agriculture and intensified cotton production. More women became visible on state farms or kolkhozes. Yet, they remained invisible with respect to their domestic responsibilities. Women in Uzbekistan were given many of the production responsibilities, spending numerous hours in the field, whereas men managed, marketed, and distributed cotton (Critchlow, 1991:62). The policies of agrarian development implemented throughout Uzbekistan promoted inequalities and health risks as more women were seen working the land. Currently, 61% of Uzbek women reside in rural areas and play a significant role in agriculture, either directly or indirectly (Griffen, 1995).

What made Uzbek women unique were the social structures under Soviet rule that allowed higher levels of literacy and better social protection when compared to women in other Muslim countries. However, according to Bridger (1987), women were hindered from entering agricultural professions for two reasons. First, traditional Islamic attitudes made it difficult for women to seek specialized training, and second, the schools or institutes were located at a great distance from their village. According to Medlin, Cave and Carpenter (1971) women had made significant strides pursuing work outside the home and experiencing some degree of economic independence but were still viewed as inferior in many ways to men in social organizations and at work.

Theoretical Framework

The agricultural sector has often been the context for much of the research conducted in the area of women and development. The theoretical framework for this study centers on women and their role in the development process. During the early 1970s, women moved to influence government policy in such a way as to change laws regarding women, and to improve women's overall status (Tinker, 1990:28). What evolved was a conceptual belief that women's issues and development were linked. Economic development is closely related to the advancement of women and their inclusion in the development process. Research has shown that women have advanced in situations where economic growth has prospered (Craumer, 1995:x).

The theory of women in development (WID) began as a policy concern to help improve and better the goals of development agencies through economic development (Tinker, 1990:3). Throughout much of the 1970s and early 1980s, WID emphasized making visible the invisible work, needs, and contributions of women in developing economies (Henderson and Hansen, 1995). WID succeeded in initiating a dialogue on women's issues, in drawing attention to the many roles women hold throughout the world, as well as the benefits of including women in the development process.

The WID movement failed to recognize three key factors. First, women's lives were shaped by relations with men, so to exclude them would slow and/or hinder the development process (Young, 1993). Second, the WID movement sought to involve more women in public arenas and more non-traditional work, but failed to recognize the fact that a majority of women worldwide resided in rural areas (INSTRAW, 1996). Third, the ideology of women in developing countries was different from those trying to initiate change. The unequal balance of power and position in society was seen as normal, so why change, was the overwhelming response by women (Young, 1993).

These key factors were the impetus for the evolution of the most recent theory. Gender and Development (GAD) was an approach that focused on women and men. The emphasis with GAD was on changing the structures and processes such as laws, religions, political institutions, systems of thought, and socialization practices that helped identify disadvantages among women. GAD offered a more holistic view of women's issues and shifted the attention from a focus on women to a focus on women and men (Young, 1993:134).

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to describe the role of women educators at the Tashkent Institute of Irrigation & Agricultural Mechanization Engineers (TIAME) in Tashkent, Uzbekistan and to determine the implications for agricultural and extension education. Specific objectives were to (a) identify roles and responsibilities of the Institute's women agricultural educators, (b) identify perceptions regarding the role of women in agricultural professions, and (c) develop a demographic profile of female agricultural educators.

Methodology

A qualitative research design was used. Three qualitative research techniques were used to accomplish the objectives of the study: historical research, in-depth interviews, and observations. Fourteen interviews were conducted over a two-month period during the summer of 1996 at TIAME.

The population consisted of eighty women educators at TIAME. Five were (U.S. equivalent) full professors, 35 were associate professors, and 40 were assistant professors. Fourteen women educators were purposively sampled due to the uncertainty of the conditions in Uzbekistan. The on-site coordinator

recommended a list of women educators based on the following criteria: professor at TIAME, Uzbek or Russian nationality, and an educator of an agricultural or agriculture-related subject.

An interview schedule was derived from the literature review and checked for face validity. The instrument included 34 open-ended questions to meet the objectives of the study. Information from the historical research, interviews, and observations was triangulated to assure validity of the findings. Two interpreters worked with the researcher prior to the study to ensure that the interview schedule was understood and interpreted in the correct manner. The findings were analyzed using Ethnograph 4.0, a qualitative computer program. The data from each interview were analyzed based on code words.

Findings

The average age of the interviewees was 46.7. All the women were married, except for one divorced woman, and one single woman. Each interviewee had at least one child. None had more than three children. A majority of the women described their social status as middle income with monthly incomes ranging from 1,300 soum to 3,000 soum (\$33-75). Twelve interviewees practiced Islam, one interviewee was Russian Orthodox, and one was atheist. Except for one Russian, all the interviewees were Uzbek, a proportion similar to the population.

Eleven interviewees held the associate professor rank, two were assistant professors, and one a full professor. Their roles and responsibilities were as teachers, advisors, and researchers with fields of specialization largely in the technical agricultural sciences. Areas of specialization based on the highest degree earned are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1.

Areas of Specialization of Respondents.

Specialization	No. of women
Agricultural Economics	3
Hydro-Technical Construction	2
Machinery Usage	2
Agricultural Economics/Water Management	1
Agricultural Melioration	1
Automation/Technical Process	1
Construction Engineering	1
Cotton Engineering	1
Inorganic Chemistry	1
Irrigation	1

Their responsibilities outside the institute were closely tied to the home, their children, and husbands. Their involvement in women organizations varied. Three women were involved in formal organizations such as the Women's Union at TIAME and governmental organizations. Several women described their involvement in informal meetings with women friends and colleagues, while several others indicated that their domestic responsibilities allowed no time for outside organizations.

The interviewees revealed with some hesitation that the agricultural industry was a viable profession for women. Several women believed that pursuing a profession in agriculture was a matter of character, determination and desire, noting that women had a significant role and had made important contributions to agriculture. However, interviewees cited male dominance of the agricultural profession, domestic responsibilities, and the desirability of other, more "feminized" professions as reasons for women not pursuing professions in agriculture.

There was a perception that agriculture was linked with work on kolkhozes and production agriculture. Examples of work on kolkhozes included bookkeepers, accountants, construction, and food processing. Most felt that women were respected in agricultural professions. However, two interviewees believed that Uzbek women and those women in

production agriculture found it more difficult to earn respect from their male counterparts.

The interviewees stated that success in agricultural professions was attainable, but that women had to work harder to achieve it than men. The women believed their domestic responsibilities were among their biggest barriers in their chosen profession, and balancing both family and career was difficult. Overall, the women perceived women as equal when compared to their counterparts in similar occupations.

Six interviewees were in favor of providing more educational opportunities for young women entering agriculture as a profession, whereas five were against, and three had no opinion. Those in favor believed workshops and seminars would allow young women to understand agriculture as a profession, especially the health risks from environmental degradation in Uzbekistan. They also stated that educational opportunities were already offered in other areas, and that information on professions in agriculture was not necessary. Coupled with these findings were their beliefs on encouraging young women to enter agriculture as a profession. The majority revealed that women should not be encouraged because of the demands of household and family.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of this study indicated that the interviewees balanced the responsibilities of both career and family. It is recommended that traditional roles in the household be looked at and that alternative methods of supporting women in both roles be addressed. Educational workshops, seminars and informational meetings are needed for both women and men to address traditional roles, stereotypes, and gender differences.

The study found three women involved in formal women's organizations and several involved in informal gatherings. Whether informal or formal, these meetings are apparently supportive atmospheres for women. It is recommended that involvement in these types of networks increase through recruitment and encouragement by women and men currently involved in women's organizations. Further analysis of the Women's Union at TIAME and other governmental organizations should address women's needs, which would help facilitate a more holistic view of women in Uzbekistan.

Women perceived agriculture as largely production. Yet, agriculture is a dynamic industry and encompasses a variety of professions. Women are involved in a variety of careers, but are unequally represented in the agricultural profession. It is recommended that a broader view of agriculture be disseminated through workshops or seminars on various professional opportunities conducted by agricultural educators and supported by printed material distributed through universities, institutes, and secondary schools in Uzbekistan.

On the continuum of success, a career in agriculture was viewed as being somewhat neutral for women. Therefore, educational programs should be developed to increase awareness of gender roles in agriculture in primary, secondary, and higher level learning institutions. To achieve a gender perspective in agriculture and to encourage more women to be involved in agricultural professions, it is recommended that men and women be actively

involved in establishing policy for agricultural development at the local, regional, and national levels.

The perceptions of the interviewees led to a belief that women play a significant role in agriculture. This finding, coupled with the fact that many women are employed in the agricultural industry and that many reside in rural areas, indicates a need to address the role of extension in Uzbekistan. It is important to assure that a gender perspective is incorporated into workshops, projects, and research within extension, and that women are not overlooked in the dissemination of information.

Despite the women's belief that agriculture was generally a viable industry and that success was attainable, professions in medicine and teaching were frequently mentioned. It is recommended that the role of women in the workplace be addressed from a gender perspective. There is strength in gender diversity, and it is important to have women employed in both agriculture and "feminized" professions. Promoting agriculture as a viable career choice will be a key in accomplishing this recommendation.

Significance and Implications

This study serves as a point of inquiry and opportunity to further study the areas of women in development, agriculture, and extension education. As agricultural educators and extension professionals, this study can serve as a point of reference for women's issues around the world. The information procured from this study can be incorporated into a agricultural education curricula across the country and globally. Incorporating a gender perspective into such classes as administration, curriculum, leadership, and teaching methods would be valuable for both undergraduate and graduate students. Disseminating the information in this manner would ensure that gender issues are addressed across the curriculum.

The study also adds to the breadth of research in agricultural education. As agricultural education broadens to encompass a wide array of issues and subject matter, it is important to include

women and their place in agriculture as a priority. Failing to recognize gender issues may continue to marginalize young women at the secondary and university levels. Young women who have not adjusted to the male-oriented atmosphere may struggle or eventually leave the profession because (a) the only mentor/advisor was male, and, (b) that individual was not gender sensitive. Therefore, incorporating a gender balance in professorial and administrative positions becomes increasingly important as more women enter agriculture at secondary and post-secondary institutions.

Gender perspectives need to be infused and gender issues mainstreamed into curricula, extension, and development, so that students, staffs, and faculties are cognizant of women's issues. Agricultural and extension education can inspire women to become leaders in agricultural development through extension activities and programs at the local, regional, national, and international levels. Well-educated women can become strong models and advocates for agriculture and extension education, but to do so requires a team effort by both women and men.

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