

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

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Rosa Kambuou explains her soya bean trials to visitors at the Field Day held at Bubia in November, 1976.

Training women in agriculture

Many people, particularly our nationals, think that training women in fields like engineering, architecture and agriculture is a waste of time and money. They regard these professional jobs as men's exclusively.

Women are quite capable of handling these jobs, but they were never given the chance in the past. The author feels strongly that our national women who are interested in agriculture should be given the training and as much help as possible.

Traditionally, agriculture is women's work. Women prepare the land, plant and harvest the crops, while men are traditionally hunters, fishers and fighters (warriors).

Women were the outstanding figures in traditional agriculture, but this was forgotten when the western education system was introduced.

Training women in agriculture is certainly important for any agricultural developing country like Papua New Guinea. Therefore, provision should be made to take in women students at the various agriculture institutions and colleges throughout the country. It is encouraging to know that our government has recognized this by taking women into Vudal and Popondetta Agricultural Colleges. Next year women will also attend at Highlands Agricultural College.

The training programme for women agriculturalists should not be based on agricultural subjects only. It is obvious that most of our young emerging agriculturalists (whether male or female) will be going into rural areas on completion of their courses. These people should know the ideas on handling, and perhaps solving, the problems that are faced by our rural communities; not only in agriculture but also in fields of health and community development.

Role of women field workers

There are numerous jobs women can do as field workers.

(1) They could join the research stations, as research workers, or perform an assisting role in any research programme. If our national men can do the job there is no reason why our women can't.

(2) Women can do just as well in field work as men. They can either perform a role of rural development officer or act as government liaison workers between the Department and the local farmers. Patience, gentleness and friendliness are the key points to remember when dealing directly with the rural people. It is likely that women possess all three qualities and this will enable them to communicate and contact the rural people more easily and successfully.

(3) Participation of women in agriculture, particularly in field work, will encourage more women to go into agriculturally oriented businesses.

(4) Most of our rural women concentrate mainly on subsistence gardening to produce enough for their families and for selling at the local markets. Women field workers can aid these women to make larger village gardens for community consumption. Field workers can also assist women's organizations in the villages, like the women's club, to make community gardens and arrange for the markets for selling the products. The income from these products can be put into the village fund for the community use. This of course fulfills the idea of self-reliance, one of the aims of our government's Eight Point Plan.

(5) Nutrition status of the villages as we know is sometimes very poor. There are various ways of solving these problems. One way is for the nutrition officers to talk to the people.

However, the villagers will understand if they see the various sources from which the nutrients are derived and the ways of producing nutritive food. Women field workers then have a role to play and this is to encourage the village women to grow crops that are nutritionally important. Since garden making and meal preparation in rural areas is performed by women, it will be a successful mission if women field workers are involved in the rural nutrition advisory work more than their male counterparts.

Problems likely to face women field workers

Women in any field of work face all sorts of problems, both big and small. Field work is pretty hard and often very difficult for a woman to handle. Here women are dealing with men from the village, especially in research work where all the labourers employed are male. It is tough and at times very difficult for a woman field worker to tell or give orders to middle-aged men who were never ordered by women before, especially when our country has been male dominated all along.

Women doing extension work are likely to face similar problems. They are likely to face the situation where the village men refuse to listen to them because they are women. There is no evidence reported of this problem. However, it is a likely problem in the future.

PNG MAKES OWN PEANUT BUTTER

The Minister for Finance, Mr Julius Chan, officially opened Papua New Guinea's first peanut butter factory on Saturday, 6th November.

The opening was witnessed by 1 000 people from the Markham Valley area of the Morobe Province.

The technology used at the new peanut butter factory was "quite simple and appropriate to a village situation", he said.

"Atzera is an example that other rural groups might do well to follow. It is an excellent example of self-reliance,

decentralization, rural development and processing in Papua New Guinea—in fact, it fits the government's eight point plan in many ways", Mr Chan said.

The peanut butter factory is owned by Atzera Rural Co-operative Limited and is the first factory to be built in the country.

The factory will provide peanut paste for the whole country. It cost more than K\$1 000 to build.

The factory was built from a government grant of K\$12 549 and a Papua New Guinea Development Bank loan of K\$14 000.