

Zimbabwean Women in Co-operatives: Participation and Sexual Equality in Four Producer Co-operatives

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of a study on the participation of women and of sexual equality in participation in four producer co-operatives in Zimbabwe, and contextualises the results in terms of women in other socialist countries and the current Zimbabwean government policy on women and co-operatives. Particular areas which are seen as obstacles to the participation of women are identified and recommendations made which may address these obstacles and lead to the increasing participation of women in the future.

Introduction

"Under social formation men cannot oppress women, neither can one individual oppress another, because a man must work in a collective or co-operative side by side with the women and both receive payment for their equal labour."

(Statement by the Prime Minister, Zimbabwe, *The Chronicle*, 2.11.84)

Orthodox Marxist-Leninist theory contends that women will inevitably be emancipated under socialism. Women do not constitute a uniform stratum, for their status is linked to the existence of a class society, based on the exploitation of person by person on the basis of private ownership. Revolutionary struggle is necessary to achieve the emancipation of both men and women. Furthermore, orthodox theory contends that women cannot be emancipated as long as they are excluded from socially productive work.

There has developed in recent years a Marxist feminist critique of orthodox Marxist-Leninist principles (Barrett, 1980; Young *et al.*, 1981). Feminist writers have argued that orthodox analysis entails no attempt to deal with the problems of the relations between the sexes, or to acknowledge the differential

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effects of class relations on men and women. The Marxist explanation of the origins of women's subordination lying in their marginalisation from productive work does not hold in the Third World, where women are the main agrarian producers (Molyneux, 1981b). Marxist feminist writers have argued for the relative autonomy of women's subordination from class and economic factors, and pointed to the existence of women's oppression in precapitalist and socialist societies.

The Zimbabwe Government is aware that a change in the mode of production does not necessarily lead to changed attitudes and behaviour.

"The physical process of achieving the correct relationship between the masses and the means of production cannot be attained overnight, for the physical process of achieving the correct relationship between the masses and the means of production, not being an end in itself, must be accompanied by vigorous programmes of training and of ideological and political education in order to provide such qualitative dimensions to the transformed structure of property relations as will enhance and maximise their productivity." (Government of Zimbabwe, 1982:17)

Government policy on producer co-operatives emphasises the need to promote socialist, egalitarian lifestyles, the implication being that such lifestyles do not evolve automatically from the formation of co-operatives (Government of Zimbabwe, 1983). The experiences of other socialist countries also suggest that economic transformation alone does not necessarily lead to egalitarian lifestyles and the equality of the sexes.

The progress of co-operatives and the emancipation of women are both major concerns of the Zimbabwean Government. The policy of socialism through co-operative development is seen as the key to the liberation of women. Women are urged to participate in development, to participate in co-operatives and to form new co-operatives. Many women have responded to this call, but it is not yet clear whether they are participating fully in all aspects of co-operative life. They cannot be considered to be equal to men if they only participate in productive work. In addition they have to share in the benefits of the co-operative and participate in the decision-making.

The study reported on here should be seen in the context of the current concern for the progress of women and co-operatives. The intention is not to be divisive, but rather to indicate ways in which co-operatives may be able to further improve the participation of women, and thus work towards sexual equality.

Women under socialism

Some recent literature has attempted to evaluate the achievements of socialist states regarding the emancipation of women. The indications are that considerable advances have been made in comparison with the pre-revolutionary situation, and in comparison with many capitalist states at comparable levels of economic development. Women have entered employment in large numbers, they have become involved in political institutions, many inequalities in education and the law have been abolished, para-domestic services have been extended and the burden of child care and housework reduced. Despite these advances, collectivisation has often meant an increase in the workload of women and, whilst women have benefitted economically, they have not been paid on an equal basis with men. Their role in decision-making and planning has been limited, in spite of expectations to the contrary (Croll, 1978, 1979a, 1979b; Molyneux, 1981a; Isaacman & Stephen, 1980).

Women generally work longer hours than men, because they have to combine work on private family plots of land with work in communal fields. This is the situation in China (Croll, 1978) and in Tanzania, where women provide most of the labour force in ujamaa crop production as well as on the private food and cash crops (Fortmann, 1978). Women also take most of the responsibility for child care and household labour. They generally work a 'double shift', which the limited rural service sector and the continuing sexual division of labour within the household have done little to alleviate (Croll, 1979a). Child care facilities in Mozambique, China, Vietnam, Cuba DPR Korea and DPR Yemen are limited in availability and quality (Isaacman and Stephen, 1980; Molyneux, 1981a).

Women still receive less remuneration than men, and they do not necessarily receive an individual wage. In some cases, the payments are made to male heads of households as, for example, in Tanzania, where the men are the registered members (Croll, 1979a). Often women work only part-time in collective production, and so earn less than men, as, for example, in Mozambique (Isaacman and Stephen, 1980).

Women have not entered into formal positions of collective decision-making in proportion to their representation in production. In Tanzania, Ujamaa village committees are made up of men, and hence women are in effect excluded from village decision-making (Fortmann, 1978). In Mozambique, women who work full-time on the collective do have the opportunity for participation in decision-making, but this is often limited to their appointment as assistant work brigade leaders (Isaacman and Stephen, 1980). Various

reasons for this lack of female participation have been advanced. Many local political positions are part-time and unpaid, with meetings being held outside working hours. Men have acquired experience and skills in agricultural management, and so are elected to committees (Croll, 1979a).

The experiences of some socialist countries suggest that many women do not participate in co-operatives and collectives as full members. Many do not work full-time in co-operative production. Those who do rarely participate in decision-making, and some do not themselves receive payment for their labour. Various reasons for women's marginal and subordinate position have been advanced.

It may be suggested that women remain subordinate where there has been an incomplete transformation in the relations of production. In many Third World socialist countries, the individual household still plays an important role in subsistence production. In some countries such as Tanzania and Cuba, the private commercial agricultural sector remains. It has been argued, however, that sexual inequality is not just a survival of past relations and a feature of societies in transition. Inequalities are inherent in the policies of many socialist states. Women are made primarily responsible for the domestic sphere, and the importance of the family as the basic cell of society is emphasised (*Cuban Family Code*, quoted in Molyneux, 1981). Chinese and North Korean officials have expressed the view that domestic work is women's 'natural' sphere of activity (Molyneux, 1981a). In China, women have usually been found in relatively undemanding, lower paid jobs (Croll, 1978).

The overwhelming amount of labour to be performed by women acts as a constraint on their full participation in the economy and political life. This is the case even where the private sector has been abolished and the household no longer serves as an economic unit of production. It has been argued that the conditions for reducing the domestic demands on women require a material base of their own. Not only are child care facilities needed, but also accessible water and fuel supplies, and food processing equipment such as grinding mills. It is not enough simply to involve women in wage labour (Croll, 1979a).

Furthermore, it has been suggested that the reallocation of material resources to socialise child care and household duties is in itself insufficient. Sexual equality cannot be achieved until there is an equalisation of responsibilities, and this cannot be achieved until attitudes have changed. Traditional attitudes conserve the sexual division of labour, which should otherwise have changed with the change in the relations of production, and limit women's role in decision-making (Molyneux, 1981a). Change is therefore required at both

the material and ideological level if women are to participate fully in collectives and co-operatives.

Participation

I have used the term 'participation' to refer to both participation in productive labour, or 'visibility', and participation in the running of the co-operative. Although women's entry into social production might not guarantee them equality with men, it is an essential pre-condition. Women can only expect to participate in the running of a co-operative, and share the benefits, if they participate in the productive work. Women cannot, however, be considered to be equal to men if their participation in a co-operative is limited to their labour. This study therefore focused on three aspects of women's lives in co-operatives:

- (i) participation in productive work
- (ii) access to resources
- (iii) participation in decision-making.

In each case, the relative position of men and women was examined. The following indices were used:

- (i) Participation in productive work
 - a the amount and type of work allocated
 - b the amount and type of domestic work undertaken
 - c training opportunities
 - d type of training received
 - e use to which training was put
- (ii) Access to resources
 - a remuneration for productive work
 - b welfare payments and benefits in kind
- (iii) Participation in decision-making
 - a formal membership status
 - b active interest in the co-operative, as indicated by knowledge of co-operative affairs.
 - c participation in co-operative general meetings
 - d formal representation on the key decision-making body – the management committee.

These indices, then, form the basis of an overall assessment of the equality of men and women in the four co-operatives.

Aims and methodology

It was hoped that the study, which examined and compared the participation of men and women in four mixed-sex producer co-operatives, would shed some light on the debate over the position of women in Zimbabwe, and in particular on the question of whether a socialist mode of production is a sufficient condition for equality. The literature indicates the importance of both material and ideological constraints on equality. An attempt is made to identify these in the Zimbabwean context.

A case study of one co-operative, conducted largely through participant observation, was followed by a survey, conducted by means of structured interviews, of male and female members of that co-operative and three other co-operatives. The case study co-operative was selected on the basis of a recommendation that it was a well-run co-operative in which the female members participated in all spheres of activity. The other three co-operatives were selected from those in a specific geographical area. They had all been in operation for over one year and were the largest of the available mixed-sex co-operatives.

Forty-four people (24 men and 20 women) out of a total membership of 102 (60 men and 42 women) were interviewed. In the case study co-operative, which had almost equal members of men and women, equal numbers were selected for interview on a random basis. Over one third of each sex was selected. In the other co-operatives, where there was a marked imbalance in the sex ratios, a different procedure was followed. All of the members of the sex which was in the minority were interviewed, because the numbers involved were so small. A random sample of half the members of the other sex was interviewed. In all, 46 co-operators (26 men and 20 women) were selected for interview, but one man refused to be interviewed and another suddenly went home on leave.

When I completed the research project, I circulated a summary of the findings among the four co-operatives for comment. The summary, together with comments, was then submitted to OCCZIM, the Organisation of Collective Co-operatives in Zimbabwe.

Whilst the study cannot claim to be representative of producer co-operatives in Zimbabwe, it gives an indication of trends and of the need for further research.

The four co-operatives

Co-operative A, the case study co-operative, is a mixed farming co-operative. It is not part of the Government resettlement scheme. The co-operative had been registered for three years at the time of the survey. There are 55 members, 28 men and 27 women. Many are ex-combatants and some are former farm workers. The members live communally.

Co-operative B is a mixed farming co-operative, which had been registered for three years at the time of the survey. It is not part of the Government resettlement scheme. There are 19 members, 17 men and 2 women, most of whom are ex-combatants. The members live communally.

Co-operative C is a retail co-operative, which had been registered for three years at the time of the survey. There are 18 members, 14 men and 4 women, and most are ex-combatants. The members do not live communally.

Co-operative D is a dressmaking and tailoring co-operative, which had been registered for eighteen months at the time of the survey. There are 10 members, 9 women and 1 man. Several members worked from their own homes as dressmakers before joining the co-operative. The members do not live communally.

What follows is a brief account of the research findings.

The role of women in production

Allocation of work

Both men and women in the four co-operatives were fully involved in production. None had other productive work, such as farming private plots, outside their co-operative. Members were assigned specific duties in particular departments, and hours of work were laid down. Although it was not possible to assess the actual contribution of each of the interviewees, everyone said that men and women worked equally hard. In Co-operative A this was seen to be true, although women with very young children unofficially worked shorter hours.

In the four co-operatives, there was a marked allocation of jobs on the basis of sex, with 54% of men holding managerial jobs or jobs which are traditionally men's, such as driving, mechanics, care of livestock. Fifty per cent of women were found in the jobs which are traditionally women's work, such as sewing,

knitting, care of poultry. A few men (13%) and women (10%) did jobs traditionally assigned to the opposite sex. Both men and women worked in agriculture and horticulture. In Co-operative A, the men and women in these departments shared all the duties, with the exception of tractor driving. In all the co-operatives, both men and women worked as typists, book-keepers and sales assistants. (33% of men and 40% of women were in agriculture, office work and sales.)¹ Some men worked full-time as co-operative managers. No women were employed in this capacity, although in Co-operative A some women were the heads of their departments.

The members interviewed thought that men were best for particular jobs, and women for others. They also gave examples of some jobs which they thought were impossible for women to do, and a few which were impossible for men to do. Some members showed an awareness that the sexual division of labour was not immutable. They thought that men and women could do jobs other than those traditionally assigned to them if they were trained for them. All respondents said that, apart from the jobs they had singled out as being suitable only for a particular sex, men and women worked equally, and any member could do any job.

Child care and domestic labour

The arrangements made for child care and domestic work were investigated, since these responsibilities can limit both women's contribution to production and the extra time they can give to the co-operative.

Female co-operators had a considerable responsibility for young children. Half the women in the sample had children under seven, and a third children under two. These women relied heavily on their mothers and other female relatives for help with child care. Only Co-operative A had a creche, and this was well utilised. The case study, conducted before the creche was established, revealed that child care demanded much of women's time, and limited their participation in productive work. None of the men interviewed were responsible for the care of young children.

Women in all the co-operatives said that child care was a problem. In Co-operative A, they said that creche facilities were inadequate because of lack of funds. In Co-operative B, the lack of child care facilities was coupled with a shortage of accommodation. In Co-operatives C and D, women generally had to pay someone to look after their children. Another problem faced by female co-operators was loss of pay through taking time off on account of a sick child

or any other domestic difficulties. Few men referred to child care or the lack of creche facilities as problems facing women.

Women had a greater responsibility than men for household work. They did the laundry and the cleaning. Men only did this work if they had no wife or female relative living with them. Some single men in the residential co-operatives were assisted by female co-operators. In Co-operatives C and D women did the cooking in their own homes. Male members of these co-operatives rarely cooked. In Co-operatives A and B there was a communal kitchen, and the cooking was done in working hours, thus considerably reducing the women's workloads. In Co-operative A there was a kitchen working team, usually composed only of women, whereas in B all the members were on a cooking rota.

The women in Co-operatives C and D said they had difficulties finding time for their domestic work, particularly since they spent a considerable time each day travelling to and from work. The women in Co-operatives A and B were more concerned about the lack of adequate accommodation. Few men in the four co-operatives mentioned domestic work as a problem facing women.

Training

In the four co-operatives, there was no significant difference in the proportion of men and women being sent on training courses. In the sample, the men and women had undergone different types of training, with men predominating on management courses and on courses in traditional 'male' skills, such as building, welding, mechanics and care of livestock. Most women had done courses in sewing and knitting. The case study revealed that men were sent on technical and management courses, and women on courses in crafts and office skills.

The women in the sample utilised their training less frequently than men. This was particularly the case with women who had learnt sewing or knitting. Co-operative A had a small craft department and hoped to expand it.

Co-operative B had no craft section, but hoped to establish one.

Men and women in the four co-operatives wanted to go on different types of training courses, with 75% of men opting for management and traditional 'male' skills, and 45% of women for sewing, knitting and cookery. Some women (20%) wanted to study management, driving or mechanics, but very few men (4%) were interested in 'female' skills – 21% of men and 35% of

women wanted to follow courses in agriculture, book-keeping and typing. It has already been noted that both men and women undertook agricultural and office work.

Some co-operators had said that men could do women's jobs, and vice versa, if the appropriate training were offered. Men, however, did not express a desire to learn cookery and dressmaking. Of the co-operators who had already done some training, most expressed a wish to do further training in the same subjects. The women who wanted to depart from the norm, and drive tractors or study mechanics, had been inspired by the example of some women at an agricultural training centre. Had their horizons not been broadened in this way, they would probably have opted for further dressmaking courses. The courses men and women opt for seem likely to prolong the sexual division of labour.

Many women with young children had been on training courses, despite the difficulties involved. In some cases they left the children with relatives, and in others they took them to the training centres. Sometimes the training institutions provided child minders.

Access to resources

All members received equal payment for work. Co-operatives A and B did not always have sufficient funds to pay monthly allowances. In Co-operative A, members were sometimes paid in goods from the co-operative's shop instead of cash. In all the co-operatives those who took leave because of family problems or sickness received no allowances. As noted above, this affected women more than men. In Co-operative A, women going on maternity leave received a loan. Co-Operative A also ran a welfare fund to cover bus fares to clinics and hospitals, a scheme which largely benefited the female members. In Co-Operatives A and B basic medical care and all food were provided.

The role of women in decision making

Membership status

All participants in the four co-operatives were full members. There were no cases of members' wives working in the co-operative as non-members, although some gave occasional voluntary help. There were, however, some men and women who, despite their membership status and contribution to

production, were apparently not fully involved in their co-operatives. Formal membership status is not a clear indication of participation in the running of a co-operative. In addition, members' knowledge of co-operative affairs and their participation in general meetings are outlined.

Knowledge of co-operative affairs

An attempt was made to assess co-operators' level of knowledge of co-operative affairs, and hence the extent to which they were fully involved members. The information sought was the type of information one would expect any member, not just those on the management committee, to have. The majority of co-operators were founder members of their co-operatives. Most of the others had joined during the first year of operation. One would expect them all to be equally well informed.

It was found that women were not as well informed as men in financial matters or on national co-operative development. Many more men than women knew the purchase price of the co-operative's farm or business (79% of men and 45% of women), full details of the major loans received by the co-operative (67% of men and 30% of women) and at least one of OCCZIM's responsibilities (75% of men and 30% of women). There was no significant difference between men and women in terms of their knowledge of the year of registration of the co-operative, of the number of members, of whether the co-operative had received any loans, and of whether OCCZIM had assisted the co-operative. Members who were not well informed were possibly not participating fully in co-operative discussions.

Participation in general meetings

The case study indicated that women's attendance at meetings was not as good as men's. Women, particularly those with young children, often arrived late at meetings and left early. Sometimes they left for a period in the middle of the meeting. Men were rarely seen to leave a meeting. Obviously the women concerned missed out on the discussions and on the voting taking place in the meetings.

The survey respondents were not asked directly about participation in meetings, but several raised the issue in response to other questions. Men criticised women for not contributing in meetings and for their lack of self-confidence. A few suggested ways in which the co-operative could help women

develop self-confidence. One suggested that women on training courses should be encouraged to hold meetings so that they could get practice in speaking to a large group.

One woman referred to women's lack of participation in discussion, but offered no explanation. None of the women interviewed mentioned lack of confidence as a particular problem. This may be because women do not think they lack confidence, or because, in reality, they do not lack confidence, but men too ready to find fault with women.

Representation on the management committee

Women were under-represented on the management committee of their co-operatives. In co-operative A women had comprised at least 50% of the membership at any time, but had held only 25% of the committee posts on the four committees elected since the co-operative started. This situation was, however, probably better than in many other co-operatives. At the time of the survey, co-operative B had had no women on the four committees elected since the co-operative started. One would expect three of the available 28 posts to have been held by women, since the co-operative had 17 men and two women. Co-operative C had had only one committee at the time of the survey, and that comprised solely of men. One would expect one of the seven posts to have been held by a woman, since the co-operative had 14 men and four women. There had been a female committee member in the very early days, but she had left the co-operative after a short time. Both co-operative B and C recently elected a woman to the committee – as treasurer and deputy secretary respectively. Co-operative D had had one committee at the time of the survey. The first chairperson had been the one male member, but when he went on a course a woman was elected in his place. One would not, however, necessarily expect the only man out of a membership of ten to be elected to to a committee of five.

There was a marked difference in the committee positions held by men and women. Men predominated in the positions of chairperson, deputy chairperson and secretary (69% of men and 17% of women). These were key posts, involving representing the co-operative, meeting national and international organisations and receiving visiting donor agencies. Women served as deputy secretary, treasurer and committee members (83% of women and 31% of men). Although the post of treasurer involved a great deal of work, it was largely, in all the co-operatives, a job of routine book-keeping. Similarly, the post of deputy secretary involved very mundane work.

There are many possible reasons for women being under-represented on management committees. Four are considered here:

- (i) Women's workload prevents them from serving on the committees.
- (ii) Men are better educated than women.
- (iii) Men have more experience in administration.
- (iv) Traditional attitudes prevent women from being elected.

Women's workload

Women with young children had served on the committees. During working hours most children were cared for by relatives or were in a creche. Only co-operative D, however, confined its meeting to working hours. In the other co-operatives, meetings were often held in the evenings or at weekends when women were fully committed domestically. This may have discouraged some women from standing for election.

Nobody made direct mention of child care or other domestic responsibilities as factors preventing women from standing for election. Several men and women said that a woman could not serve as chairperson, because the post would necessitate some travel, and women could not leave the co-operative easily.

Formal education

There was found to be no significant difference between men and women in the four co-operatives in terms of the level of formal education reached. Committee members were not better educated than the other co-operators, and neither were those holding the key positions of chairperson, deputy and secretary better educated than the other committee members.

Educational background does not appear to be a possible explanation for men predominating on the committees and occupying the major posts. Although women were not less educated than men, several men clearly believed they were, and this might have influenced their choice of committee members. Some male co-operators mentioned lack of basic education as a factor hampering women's progress. Others said that women needed more basic education in addition to training in specific skills.

Administrative experience

More men than women in the four co-operatives had previous administrative experience (54% of men and 10% of women). They had acquired this experience in the struggle, through serving on school and voluntary club committees and in previous employment. Those elected to the committees were not more experienced than the others. There was, however, a marked difference between the administrative experience of the holders of the key positions, 80% of whom had experience and that of the other committee members, 22% of whom had experience. As more of those in the key positions had had administrative experience, this is one possible explanation for the predominance of men in the key committee posts, although no definite conclusions can be drawn.

Nine people in the sample had received training in administration since joining their co-operative; seven men and two women. Eight of these (seven men and one woman) had served on the committee, and had been sent for training to equip them for their posts. It has already been noted that men, rather than women, were interested in, and were sent for, training in management. It seems, therefore, that the present division of administration responsibilities is likely to persist.

Attitudes towards women as committee members

Most of the co-operators in the sample said that men and women could serve equally well on the management committee. The majority said that women were capable of holding any committee post. Some, both men and women, expressed doubts about women's capabilities. A few said that women were best suited to particular posts – treasurer rather than chairperson. Women could be trusted with money, but the job of chairperson was too difficult for them. Several said that women could serve on the committee only if they had training and help. Again, male respondents pinpointed lack of confidence as a major obstacle. Several women said that women had to prove their capabilities before they could be elected. Those men and women who thought it would be difficult or impossible for women to sit on the committee, or to hold one of the key posts, gave their reasons as women's lack of confidence, their inability and inexperience. Despite the insistence of many interviewees that men and women could serve equally well on the committee, in practice women were under-represented in leadership. This suggests that prevailing attitudes did not encourage women to stand for election.

Many interviewees stressed the existence of sexual equality in their co-operatives, but, when questioned in detail or when talking at length, revealed certain 'traditional' attitudes about women's role. When discussing both the election of the management committee and the allocation of productive work, they began by stating that men and women could all do everything. Later on, it became apparent that they did not actually believe this.

Traditional attitudes were not identified as a problem by anyone, nor did anyone say there was a need to change the attitudes held by either men or women. Those men who referred to women's weaknesses put the onus on them to change. They said that women should participate in meetings, be trained and be helped to develop confidence. Neither men nor women mentioned possible ways in which men might change—for example, by allowing women the chance to speak in meetings, by assisting with household work.

Women's workload, men's administrative experience, and traditional attitudes, including prejudice regarding women's educational background, probably all exerted some influence on the relations of power within the co-operatives.

Conclusions

In the four co-operatives studied, women were working full-time in co-operative production. This contrasted with the experience of women in co-operatives and communes in socialist countries discussed above, such as China and Cuba, who generally had to combine work on private plots of land with labour in communal fields. In two of the co-operatives women's domestic responsibilities had been reduced. In all the co-operatives women and men were paid equally, and on an individual basis, again in contrast to some of the co-operatives in other countries such as Mozambique, where women could not be fully involved in communal production, and Tanzania, where women themselves did not necessarily receive payment for their labour. All the women in the four co-operatives were full members, and some had been elected to leadership posts in some of the co-operatives.

Despite this progress, women in the four co-operatives were not completely equal to men in terms of their participation in productive work and decision-making. Most women still worked a 'double shift', because of their domestic responsibilities. There were clear examples of a division of labour on the basis of sex, and the routine tasks usually fell to women, whilst men predominated in management. The training courses followed by members seemed likely to

perpetuate this state of affairs. Although all the women were full members of their co-operatives, many were badly informed on co-operative issues. Women were still under-represented on the management committees, particularly in the key leadership posts.

The women in the four co-operatives seemed to be in a better position than many women in co-operatives in other socialist countries. There are two possible explanations for this. Firstly, the Zimbabwean women were occupied on a full-time basis in their co-operatives, and were not trying to combine this work with private agricultural production. Secondly, three of the four co-operatives were composed largely of ex-combatants, who might be expected to be more aware of co-operative principles and of the possibility of sexual equality than many peasant farmers.

The experience of the four co-operatives indicates that women's entry into social production does not necessarily lead to sexual equality, and that a socialist mode of production is not a sufficient condition for sexual equality. Women were fully involved in co-operative production, and yet they were often assigned to the least prestigious and traditional female tasks, and they played little part in co-operative management.

The study has identified several factors which may be hindering the further participation of women in their co-operatives. Firstly, there are material constraints on women's participation. Child care and domestic labour not only formed a 'second shift' for female co-operators, but also interfered with their regular work in the co-operatives. Despite the determination of women not to be deterred from going on training courses, and despite their resourcefulness and ability to cope with conflicting demands, they were inevitably restricted in the amount of extra time they could give to co-operative activities.

Another material constraint is women's lack of administrative experience, which is one possible explanation for the predominance of men in the key committee positions. Trends in the four co-operatives indicate that women's administrative experience is unlikely to increase, since more men are sent for administrative training.

Secondly, women's progress is limited by ideological constraints in the form of traditional attitudes. Both men and women held traditional views on the jobs which men and women could do, and on the role of women in leadership. There was little awareness of the existence of such attitudes. Some men attributed women's limited role in decision-making to their own lack of ability or confidence, rather than to attitudes prevailing in the co-operative. There were

no formal steps taken within the co-operatives to make men and women aware of the attitudes they held, or to try to change them.

Recommendations

Four possible directions for change might be indicated. Firstly, there is a need for women to train in management and in traditional 'male' skills. Women require encouragement and practical assistance if they are to undertake this training, and predominantly male committees need to be convinced of the value of sending women on such courses. At present women are being channelled into craft projects, which may exist only as a sideline within a co-operative.

Secondly, the establishment and improvement of child care facilities would enable women to participate fully in productive work, in training, in co-operative meetings and in leadership. Such facilities represent a considerable cost to struggling young co-operatives, but, unless provision for child care is made in the early days, there is likely to be little significant change in the traditional position of women.

Thirdly, women must be relieved of some of the burden of domestic labour if they are to pay a full part in their co-operatives. In residential co-operatives cooking could be organised on a co-operative basis. Other jobs, such as laundry, could also become the responsibility of the co-operative, but the provision of such services would necessitate moving more members out of productive work. An alternative approach – and indeed the only one possible in non-residential co-operatives – is the sharing of domestic chores within each family unit.

Fourthly, co-operative education courses within the co-operative should address the question of members' attitudes directly, since the practical measures suggested above are unlikely to be accepted or supported in the present climate of opinion.

Feedback from the co-operatives

Three of the four co-operatives gave detailed comments on the research report. One co-operative held a meeting to discuss the report, whilst in the other two, individual members gave their comments. The co-operators thought that the report was fair, and they expressed agreement with the recommendations.

In general, the existence of traditional attitudes was acknowledged, but no suggestions for changing them were made. Some women emphasised the problems caused by men's attitudes, but they said men would not change. Some men said that women have received encouragement to speak at meetings, but they still lack confidence. It was pointed out that there were some men who never spoke at meetings, and further, that there were both men and women who felt that they were not educated enough to serve on the committee.

Co-operatives claimed to have encouraged women to go on a wide variety of training courses, but women themselves chose sewing and knitting. One co-operative was surprised to learn about the lack of knowledge of some members, and stressed that everyone had access to the information. Finally, it was pointed out that men had founded many co-operatives, and so became the leaders. Women were on the committees of the co-operatives which they had founded.

When beginning the research, I was told by a male committee member at one of the co-operatives that the women were looking forward to meeting me. It was the first time that any visitor had asked to speak to them. It is imperative for researchers, donor agencies, government and anyone interested in the progress of co-operatives to take account of women – their views, experience and aspirations.

Footnotes

1. All percentages given are derived from figures for which the differences between men and women are significant at the .05 level or beyond.

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