

Gender Relationships in Agricultural Cooperatives in Camagüey

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ABSTRACT

To empower women in the rural sector, equitable and sustainable participation is fundamental so they become part of the several different management levels. Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to explain the role of women in rural cooperatives in the province of Camagüey. The results from a qualitative and quantitative research are disclosed in this paper. They spoke for the need to keep updating the Cuban economic model, in response to the National Conference of the Communist Party of Cuba. The outcome of how much has been done in terms of women who manage cooperatives in Camagüey is presented as well.

Key words/Cooperative movement, gender, woman, management

INTRODUCTION

Since the First World Conference of the United Nations on Women, in 1975, to the Beijing Conference, a great deal of critical changes have taken place regarding International Law, particularly, after the signature of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The third goal of the Summit of the Millennium (2000), makes clear and accurate reference to the need of equality in promoting gender equality, and the empowerment of women (Goals of the Millennium, 2005, p. 5). However, in recent times, in Latin America, women participation in rural development has been minimized and broken down, as a result of capitalist globalization (Alberti and others, 2001, p.7).

Cultural and ideological factors have always played a key role in rural women, which strengthen pre-set gender role assignment, especially different in households and at work. Country women are not recognized as rural producers

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in the same dimension as men. The former have limited access to resources, like the land, credit, and supplies, with a negative incidence on the material working conditions, training, and decision making on planning, organization and work distribution. Women get the merit of rural development more for their breeding and household roles, than for their economic contribution in the fields (Alemán Santana, Figueroa Albelo, 2005, p. 54)

The First National Conference of the Communist Party of Cuba focused on the party improvement for the current and future times, as a way to ensure transition to socialism. One of its main goals was the need to,

"Face prejudices and discriminating behaviors because of the color of the skin, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, origin, and others, contrary to the Constitution and the law, which threaten national unity, and limit the rights of the people." First National Conference of the PCC, goal No. 57 (2012).

The absence of true equity between women and men makes it impossible to properly use women's full potential in production, especially in the rural areas. It is important to stress that stereotyped and male-chauvinist conceptions are much more imbedded, due to the inculcation of a patriarchal culture that comes from ancient times (Almaguer Rondón, 2009:13).

The social and economic changes that took place in Cuba from 1959 on, not only involved women as direct protagonists, but also their living standards were significantly changed, by progressively turning them into social and participatory subjects in every event of society. However, this widespread participation is not equally observed in terms of decision making. Still, the pyramid is built on a broader female base, and crowned by males, which is unsatisfying, particularly considering 66.5% of technicians and professionals are women (Figures of Cuban Women, 2008: 5).

The implementation of policies that encourage women access to labor, by means of generating and restructuring jobs, has enabled them to take part in complex activities within production, services, agriculture, and management. Yet, when there is a lot to do in terms of real equity, the role of women in management positions (in politics and business) lags far behind the potential for decision making they may have as professionals (National Follow-up Action Plan of Beijing Conference, 1997).

The above grounds justify the appropriateness and current need to study the factors that limit female participation in management posts in different areas of the Cuban society, and wherever this problem is manifested. Scientific research provides strategies and positive measures that ensure women's rights to participate equitably in decision making. The aim of this study was to discover the factors that made it difficult for women to access management posts in the Credit and Service Cooperatives (CCS), and Agricultural Production cooperatives (CPA) in the province of Camaguey, between 2006 and 2009. It is an important element to consider for updating the Cuban social and economic

model. An important result from this study was the application of several actions in ANAP (Association of Small Farmers) cooperatives in the province, which helped increase the number of female managers in that sector. (Almaguer Rondón, 2014: 12).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was made possible through agreements with provincial ANAP, funded by the Local Program for Humanities and Social Sciences, from CITMA.

The research was analytical and descriptive, with a mixed perspective (quantitatively and qualitatively). This perspective guaranteed the combination of several methods and techniques (qualitative and quantitative) at different levels of analysis: leaders, cadres, municipal ANAP presidents, boards of managers, and other members involved in production; as well as common men and women.

In that sense, the appropriate thing to do was to perform a methodological triangulation (objective and subjective) of the social reality studied. The use of both qualitative and quantitative techniques guaranteed a thorough glimpse of the phenomenon studied, by complementing quantifiable data and field observation, provided by the subjects of the investigation, on family features, and living and working standards, within a cooperative context.

Samples were collected intentionally, from livestock CCS and CPA, in the province of Camagüey, because this activity plays an important part in the rest of the municipalities. In order to conduct this research, a case study was made, with the inclusion of 12 livestock cooperatives, one for each municipality hosting ANAP, 6 CPA, and 6 CCS (Almaguer Rondón, 2012:11).

Depending on the type of research and goals set, the following information collecting techniques were used:

The study began with an interview to the 10 women presidents of cooperatives in 2007. The interview helped probe all the variables and indicators set for the study, which served to collect information straight from the female subjects that have acquired management expertise in the livestock cooperatives. In addition to it, a survey was applied to the members of the boards of directors (19 women and 64 men) from the 12 livestock CCS and CPA in the municipalities.

A second survey was applied to cooperative members, same amount of women and men (total of 164, 84 men and 84 women), to collect the data of functions and activities that men and women carry out in production organizations, and within the family.

A questionnaire was also applied to the municipal presidents of ANAP (3 women and 9 men); its main goal was to gather information about management, the potential for more women incorporation, and the role they might play in higher

management positions. It would also provide knowledge on female expertise, through their experiences in management at the cooperatives.

Likewise, 16 female ANAP cadres in the province were interviewed, in order to gather assessment, standpoints, and their representativeness in the organization's management, the positions held, the functions developed in the framework of gender relations, and the predominant managing styles. Information was also requested on the way management roles have fit household chores, and family responsibilities. Overall, 261 individuals (122 men and 139 women) were surveyed. Interviews were made to experts, national (4) and provincial (5) ANAP officials; as well as comrades that deal with gender in such organizations. The 12 cooperatives selected for the study held gender workshops, through which group discussions focused on opinions and experiences of cooperative workers about living standards, working conditions, and the roles played by men and women at work and at home.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cuban legislation has been explicitly protecting of women, by granting equal opportunities and possibilities of social engagement. For over the 50 years of revolution in Cuba, correspondence between the law and the facts from life, has been slowly turned to the positive side, though it is still insufficient. However, in late 2013, the figures of female engagement in society became relevant, if compared to other countries in the region (Agulló Pasto, 2013: 1; Cedeño de Fernández, 2014:1- 5). Women in Cuba account for 66.5% of all professionals and technicians; 72% in Education, 70% in Public Health, 63.80% of General practitioners, 51.6% of researchers, 48.9% of Science and Technology workers, 75.2% of social workers, and 46% of the civil sector employed by the government in Cuba (Cuban Women in Figures, 2008:5).

The number of female ministers and vice ministers has increased too (8 and 40, respectively). Two women were elected vice-presidents of the Council of State, whose membership account for 42% of women (2013:5).

Concerning education, female university students represent 63%, with 62.7% university graduates, 45.7% of graduates from polytechnic schools, 40% studying science and technology, and 53.4% are higher education teachers (Cuban Women in Figures, 2008:6).

The country's political life is widely represented by women (48.8% of the National Assembly members), 5.5% larger than the precedent legislature. Cuba is the second country in the world with the largest female representation in parliament (Más, 2013, p.5).

These statistics support the idea that the responsibilities women have acquired as a result of the Cuban social achievements, are high, even when at the national level they do not have such protagonism (Almaguer, Rondón, 201: 16).

A discrete increase in the number of women in managing positions was observed. Although statistics only show quantitative data, it must be the starting point to accomplish greater female responsibility in terms of political and social power. The pursuit of equity will be erratic if women themselves are kept apart from the same responsibility men have, the same rights and obligations: the distribution of power and income, the ways to organize labor and time, among others (Almaguer, Rondón, 2010: 6).

Although the existence of a legal and political framework _as mentioned above_ is a necessary condition that favors equity. It still falls short in terms of ensuring equality between men and women. Women promotion is far more complex. The more demanding a post is, the more it calls for a man to hold it, due to the known male characteristics, able to make important decisions, for his authority and almost unconditional engagement. Obviously, it had a negative effect on women selection for high-ranking positions (Proveyer, Fleitas, González, Munster & Auxiliadora, 2010:16).

That phenomenon is often observed in urban life, but it has a greater impact on rural settings, where the prevalence of objective and subjective factors have been deeply rooted. Structural inequality between men and women should not be seen as a natural thing, but as the result of a power structure around inequalities of a patriarchal order of society that continues to exist today.

To achieve balanced agricultural and rural development; that is, equitable, effective, and sustainable progress, it is important to consider the evident recognition of rural women to agriculture. To achieve that goal, it is essential to empower women, so they can be present in all management stages.

Country women who work in different CPA and CCS, in Camagüey, do not have the same access to management positions as men. Most women get to have a few jobs: technicians, economists, office clerks, vendors, warehouse clerks, swine farming, fields and community gardens care, etc. However, the figures shrink when it comes to management positions in comparison to men.

The information provided by local female managers in interviews, may lead to the idea that cooperative female workers in the province must sort a lot of obstacles in their working lives. Some of them are invisible, others are clearly seen, but all keep them away from certain scales of power where certain decisions of production are made.

The problems that affect women most, in terms of involvement and permanence by the cooperatives can be identified through a sociological perspective, from a gender approach. Active female involvement in livestock activities is remarkable.

The contribution made by men and women to the country's development is corroborated, especially to import substitution, community sales, tourist

resorts, small-scale industries, etc. It leads to the country's social and economic development, particularly local, in the province of Camaguey.

The role of female Cuban cooperative members has been determined in this paper. Women combine their wife-mother roles, despite the traditional conception of responsibility to household chores and family care. The Cuban society grants the possibility to meet other personal aspirations, and the relations among neighbors and other cooperative members. A reduced number of those women have begun to gain consciousness of their training and personal improvement. Although their rights are supported by law, on many occasions they have been undermined, so women are committed to fight for them. The favorable environment created at the cooperatives allows them to integrate more in society, through various relationships and social networks, participate, exchange, feel like any full-fledged member, and try to actually take the position they deserve as a subject of social development.

This research proved that women are not excluded from the rest of the family members, considering the possibilities given by the revolution in terms of rights and opportunities. They can be owners, credit holders, organizers and community leaders. They can receive training, study, improve technically and professionally, access to paid jobs and management positions, among others. However, further actions must be promoted in order to achieve effective and real emancipation of women, self-esteem, social engagement, and relevant decision making, that grant them a more active, conscious and protagonic role of their own development and that of the society. Job offers for women are limited, and the positions available are uninteresting, both due to low salaries, and their activity.

In the livestock raising sector, the role of men and women is critical for the country's development, especially concerning import substitution, in order to strengthen supplies to individual customers and social organizations.

Even when the studies make reference to the wide range of women inserted in particular management roles in the economy, for instance, all have a common subordination experience, mainly in the area of sexual division of labor. As a result, women undergo excess responsibilities, whereas the control of valuable economic and social resources is being denied.

Although the legal framework supports women, the legislation, institutions and guidelines, and common practice have been arranged from a male-only perspective. Accordingly, a price must be paid, one way or another, in equal engagement of men and women in decision making positions.

Female engagement could be higher if their contribution in the individual and cooperative sectors were taken into account, provided they received proper educational and professional training.

In short, there are factors that keep women from accessing management positions in the cooperatives, in the province of Camagüey, though currently an increase has been observed, due to the implementation of proper actions.

1. 1. Gender stereotypes reproduced in the consciousness and behavior of people following conventional standards that placed women at the command of the household chores, including the children and the rest of the family. As a result, women are managing in disadvantage to men. They perform the same responsibilities men do, but their effort is twice as hard, at a higher personal and family cost.

2. 2. The working conditions are unfavorable to women's access to management. Without such guarantees, women are unable to do their jobs and be a housewife at the same time.

3. 3. The Board of Directors and interested parts ignore legislation that encourage a more equal participation of women in cooperatives.

4. There are remarkable differences between men and women incomes. The former get higher salaries for over-achievements of production standards, and management. On occasions, setting a production standard does not include physical or biological differences between men and women.

5. The time set for cooperative meetings prevents women from participating, due to their household responsibilities inherited from a patriarchal culture. This factor has a negative effect on labor, and places women farther from getting decision-making positions.

6. Insufficient training, which has a negative effect on management.

7. The existence of prejudices and gender stereotypes observed in the homes of women that took part in this study, explain the limited participation in economic activities in some cooperatives.

8. Unequal role distribution in the homes, and the indifference of other family members to female work overload is a hindrance to greater women involvement in public life, especially in cooperative management.

9. During this research, several gender workshops were given, which became a starting point to create awareness in all the cooperative members about understanding equal participation of men and women in different activities, including management positions, where they can prove their abilities and capacities for the job.

The results of this research are being implemented since 2009 in all CPA and CCS of Camagüey. They have been validated with higher results through the application of a set of actions.

By 2015, the balance of female ANAP leaders in the province had changed, with 20 cooperative presidents (5 of CPA, and 15 in CCS). It was only 9, in 2009. Ten women have been appointed vice-presidents, an only-man position so far. A

number of 328 women are part of Boards of Directors (a 119 increase, in comparison with 2009). Accordingly, the actions recommended in this study have had a positive effect. The provincial Bureau accounts for 61.5%, and the Committee has 22.8% of women (Statistical Report, provincial ANAP, 2015).

Common practice and way of thinking of all cooperative directors, the municipality, and the province were changed, by means of constant assessment of gender issues with specialists and cadres. As a result, women were more often promoted to management positions. Today, 5 women are municipal presidents, and 1 is a provincial director; in the past it was only 3 women (Statistical Report provincial ANAP, 2015).

Twelve women joined the Bureau professionally, 10 as ideological organizers, and 2 as agricultural food directors, positions usually held by men in the past. Fifteen of them were promoted as directors, 8 in the municipalities and 5 in the province (Statistical Report provincial ANAP, 2015).

Other 72 women are part of the reserves, 41 more than the former figure. Actions taken with a gender approach have increased labor quality made by 278 cooperative activists, as well as members of the municipal and provincial commissions, and the management structure at all levels. These actions have also stopped a decline in the number of female CPA members. It now has 830, and the number is still growing in CCS, with 5 530 women (21.8% of the total) (Statistical Report, provincial ANAP, 2015).

As a result of the investigation, the following actions were taken:

- Identification of female potential to join the cooperatives.
- Diagnostic of the main causes that hinder women incorporation to cooperative labor.
- Continuous awareness campaigns to encourage women to join cooperatives.
- Review and publication of ANAP requisites and regulations to encourage women membership.
- Diagnostic of women in cooperative cadre reserves.
- Meetings with Board of Directors whose cadre reserve policies are apart from the current ANAP guidelines.
- Diagnostic of low representativeness (women and men) of youth and elders in management positions.
- General election of the best person in the cooperative to hold management positions, not considering sex-biased criteria that limit female potential as managers.

- Inclusion of human values in cooperative general meetings, based on the Main Program of Values, promoted by the national government, that considers a woman with deep values right for proper management positions.
- Talks with men and women who hold management positions, and their reserves, about management standards, according to their genders and roles in society.
- Promotion of information and spaces for discussion about gender among women, and among women and men who run cooperatives.
- Improvement of working conditions to increase female composition in the cooperatives.
- Management training courses to men and women, according to their roles (still insufficient).
- Completion of tasks within the working hours, so women and men are not affected in their family roles.
- The income of women was estimated, examining the established requisites so that other relatives of the land owner can become ANAP members.
- Discussion was encouraged in member meetings about the working standards that affect women's income.
- Cultural, recreational, sports, and political events were promoted, in coordination with the civil society organizations in the community.
- Arrangements with public health staff (physicians and nurses), and workers of the National Institute of Sports and Recreation (INDER), to provide better care to elders of both sexes (creation of the association of elders, talks about nutrition, health care, and fitness activities).
- Better use of the possibilities given by the Ministry of Education in terms of educational training.
- Restoration and construction of homes by the cooperative members, depending on the resources available.
- Coordination of school transportation in the cooperatives _according to their possibilities_ to help mothers.
- Access to basic services, like day care, elder care, transportation, etc., were especially guaranteed to women with management positions, as a compensatory decision for their three-sided responsibility.
- Each municipal government and ANAP worked together to provide home-support services (repair shops, hairdressers, barbershops, eateries, etc.).
- Coordination with the Federation of Cuban Women, ANAP, and other organizations in the community to promote cultural, recreational, and sports events, and encourage youth participation.

- Family-oriented talks about equality, equity, self-esteem, human rights, and others, depending on the needs of cooperatives.
- Continuation of gender workshops about equal responsibility of men and women in education and care of sick children, elders, and family members.
- Encouragement of events through gender workshops to encourage ANAP members and their families to share household chores, thus providing greater female participation in public life, particularly in managing positions.
- Development of gender workshops by outstanding activists.
- The municipal activists diversified their experiences in the use of the new manual, during the gender workshops.
- Organization of workshops with discussions about the legislation that supports Cuban women in society, especially, Act 95, which provides knowledge about their organizational obligations and rights.

As a result of the application of the actions, the role played by the board of directors with community leaders, community doctors, area government delegates, FMC secretaries, local projects in favor of gender equality have been accomplished, in close relation with homes for women orientation and each community government (Statistical Report, provincial ANAP, 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

This study made a sociological analysis of the cooperative women environment and their role as social entities in the livestock sector in the province of Camaguey, intentionally included because of the relevance it has in the province and the limited number of studies made in that sense.

The cooperative women from Camaguey had limited participation in CPA and CCS management, between 2006 and 2009. Out of 283 cooperatives, only 9 had female presidents. The figures included 49 men and 19 women with managing positions; young women involvement was very limited.

Today's results, after the application of gender-oriented actions, have allowed women to hold managing positions at all ANAP levels, in Camaguey.

The economic contribution of men and women has been corroborated in the cooperatives of the province.

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