Enhancing the Capacity of Livelihood-Improvement Extension Workers to Empower Rural Women Entrepreneurs in Sabah, East Malaysia

Chee Su Mie
Graduate School of Life and Environmental Sciences, University of Tsukuba, Tsukuba, Ibaraki 305–8572, Japan

Livelihood-improvement extension workers are key people in enhancing the success of rural women entrepreneurs in Sabah, East Malaysia. They have the skills to provide rural women with basic training in areas such as food processing, health, handicrafts, and sewing. The extension workers provide training courses for rural women with the objective of giving them these skills and educating them in farm family development so that they become motivated to form into groups to start business projects, and then to gradually expand their businesses. Although these training courses are conducted annually, the number of successful rural women entrepreneurs is significantly low. This study analyzes the approaches used by extension workers to train and motivate rural women to starting business projects and determines the factors that contribute to rural women’s success in their entrepreneurial activities. This paper also considers the necessity of dealing with gender issues in the training of extension workers and concludes that further fundamental training is needed to enhance the capacity of extension workers to improve the livelihood of rural women. In particular, training extension workers in gender issues, the use of a participatory training approach, and improving their facilitation skills will ensure that their work will benefit and empower rural women and help them to start businesses and thus achieve a degree of financial independence.

Key words: small group formation, decision making, facilitation skills, gender and development, participatory approach

Introduction

Sabah, East Malaysia, is one of the 13 states of Malaysia. It has a total area of 73,997 square kilometers and an estimated population of 2,997,000 (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2006). In spite of significant achievements in improving the distribution of income in the country under the new economic policy, there are still wide gaps in income, and economic imbalances among ethnic groups and regions. The new economic policy was launched in 1971 with the aimed to reduce poverty and to restructure the socio-economy community in Malaysia. It ended in 1990 but many of the tangibles economic benefits for the bumiputra (ethnic groups) and certain indigenous groups are still on going. Although the incidence of poverty in Sabah has decreased from 33.2% in 1993 to 24.2% in 2004, it is still high compared with other states such as Trengganu (18%) and Kelantan (11%) in Peninsular Malaysia. The high poverty rate has slowed the pace of development in Sabah. The Malaysian government expected the new economic policy (Second Sabah Agricultural Policy, 2000) to increase the economic growth rate and help overcome poverty in Sabah. It also expected rural women to play a positive role in enhancing the economic wellbeing of their communities and families. The enhancement of agricultural and related activities among rural women is seen by the government as...
one of the best means to increase family income, to empower rural women to use available resources, and to involve them in economic activities. The Department of Agriculture (DOA) was given responsibility for directing food production, offering access to agricultural technology and services, and assisting the development of systematic farming and competitive farming families. The DOA includes a unit that implements programs to help rural women’s groups through the Farm Family Development project and Rural Women Entrepreneurs groups in Sabah. The rural women first have to undergo the quality farm family development training and will form the rural women entrepreneur group after graduating from the quality farm family development training. Details of the farm family development project and rural women entrepreneurs group are explained after the following two paragraphs.

The common understanding among the population, especially in rural areas, is that women’s economic activities provide only a subsidiary income for families; this limits women’s participation in economic activities. Men, who are considered as household heads, are the main income earners. In the villages, job opportunities are scarce and are taken predominantly by men. Consequently, many households headed by females live in poverty. Households headed by women generate their subsistence income by using resources such as bananas and coconuts that are found in their local surroundings. The women process these resources by traditional means for daily consumption; for example, using coconuts to produce cooking or massage oil, or as a darkening and thickening agent for hair. Bananas are usually used to make snacks or traditional cakes. In these pursuits, rural women mostly use traditional methods that have been handed down by their parents.

Rural women are rarely involved in decision making; this has given them a passive approach to economic matters. They have few opportunities and little experience in thinking for themselves. Thus, they have little idea of how to improve their livelihood or that of other members of their group. The DOA Farm Family Development unit was set up to train and educate rural women, to make them aware of their potential, and to help them realize that potential (JICA, 2004).

The training courses conducted by DOA extension workers to develop and improve the livelihood of rural women are shown in Table 1. The Quality Farm Family module is an introductory course to help rural women start income-generating activities. It covers family health, parenting, family motivation, consumer education, family and entrepreneurship, vegetable farming, agricultural product processing, sewing, handicrafts, and embroidery. The Rural Women Entrepreneurs group module is for women who have completed the Farm Family Development module. It covers business management and book-keeping, business planning, credit facilities, and quality control and licensing for food-handling activities.

After completing the Farm Family Development module, women can form a Rural Women Entrepreneurs group if they meet certain criteria. For example, there must be at least five women in a group and their individual monthly household incomes must be below the Malaysian poverty line of 1200 ringgit (approximately 60,000 Japanese yen) but per capita income must be 100 ringgit. Such groups qualify for entrepreneurship assistance and are entitled to lease processing equipment for use in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of training</th>
<th>Targeted training</th>
<th>Actual trainings</th>
<th>Training duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality Farm Family</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Short courses:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food processing</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>1 day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Packaging training on:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handicraft/Handiwork Sewing</td>
<td>370</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>2-3 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Women Entrepreneur Group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1 month</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Farm Family Development Unit, Department of Agriculture, Headquarters, 2006
their businesses. Extension workers also link rural women to agencies other than the DOA that provide similar assistance. Eventually, after accumulating business experience and funds, members of Rural Women Entrepreneurs groups are encouraged to leave their groups and to continue to work independently.

A total of 806 rural women participated in Quality Farm Family training courses in 2006 (Table 2). However, the number of women who became successful entrepreneurs as a result of this training was very low (53 or 6.58%). This study analyzes the approach used by extension workers to motivate rural women to start businesses and determines and benchmarks the factors that enable them to become successful entrepreneurs. As well as determining what needs to be done to enhance the capacity of extension workers to increase the number of rural women entrepreneurs participating in economic activities in Sabah, this study aims to enlighten government policy makers and planners so that they become more sensitive to the gender-specific needs of rural women and the problems they face.

Method

A descriptive survey research design was used in this study. Data were gathered through interviews and questionnaires. The research data for this study was collected from Sabah, Malaysia on 3rd September, 2007 by means of simultaneous interviews and answering questionnaires with the help of extension workers. The questions asked of rural women entrepreneurs included; frequency of visits by extension workers, who provided them information, what were their activities, whether they were satisfied with the present business situations and if not how the group improved the situation. Questions on gender issues were also asked especially on decisions with regards to business management, investment in life insurances, household roles, land ownership, and house ownership. In addition, rural women entrepreneurs were also asked to mention their initial problems when starting an economic project. The questionnaires for the extension workers included; what were the main problems encountered by them when working with a rural women entrepreneurs group, the solutions, strategies used to overcome the problems, whether they ever attended gender training and who prepared the training manuals. The research data for this study also included the interviews with two successful Japanese rural women from Chikusei City and a Japanese livelihood extension worker from the Agriculture Training Center, Chikusei City, Ibaraki Prefecture. The same set of questionnaires was used to interview the two successful Japanese rural women and the Japanese livelihood extension worker.

Relevant secondary data were collected from documents and reports compiled by Farm Family Development units at DOA headquarters in Kota Kinabalu, and from other documents held by related agencies such as the Rural Development Corporation as it is one of the 16 agencies that was involved in the pilot study for enhancing rural women entrepreneurs in Sabah, Malaysia in 2002. At the time of the pilot study, the Rural Development Corporation was the Secretariat and majority of the staff were trained in gender issues and later became the trainers for Rural Women Entrepreneurs Development in Sabah. Therefore, the trainers for Rural Women Entrepreneurs Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>No. of Districts in Division</th>
<th>No. of groups</th>
<th>No. of members</th>
<th>No. of successful entrepreneurs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kudat/West Coast</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper/Lower Interior</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandakan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tawau</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Farm Family Development Unit, Department of Agriculture, Headquarters, 2006
in Sabah were comprised of staff from the Rural Development Corporation, related agencies that participated in the pilot projects and 3 extension officers from the DOA Farm Family’s Training Team. However, in this study only the extension workers were involved as respondents and fourteen livelihood-improvement extension workers were selected for this study, each with 25 years’ experience in the field of livelihood improvement for rural women in Sabah. In addition, 18 successful rural women entrepreneurs were randomly selected as respondents for this study. The 18 successful rural women entrepreneurs started their economic activities in 1998 using traditional processing skills. They were selected to participate in the pilot project in 2002 and received further training on product development, diversification, labeling and packaging. They were selected with the help of extension officers from the Farm Family Development unit at DOA headquarters. However, the extension officers had not received gender-awareness training, which was not introduced to the extension unit until the Study on Development for Enhancing Rural Women Entrepreneurs in Sabah was undertaken from January 2002 to February 2004. As an outcome of that study, 25 DOA extension workers were selected to undertake training in gender issues and participatory approach for developing business skills in rural women, as well as on gender awareness and other social issues.

Problems that Prevent Rural Women Starting an Income-Generating Project

Extension workers reported that many rural women encountered difficulties in starting projects and experienced particular difficulties in obtaining start-up funding for their businesses (Fig. 1). Rural women in Sabah are generally not involved in family decision making and need their husbands’ permission to apply for loans. Moreover, most banks require loan applications to be made by the head of the household, which they assume to be a man. However, in Sabah, many household heads are single female parents or widows. In some cases, husbands have left their rural homes and gone to urban areas to seek jobs, leaving their wives and children to look after themselves. Some husbands never return or send money to their rural families because they have formed new families in urban areas (JICA, 2004). Most rural women are not used to making decisions and they often need their husbands’ permission to access resources or to apply for loans (JICA, 2004). Some husbands refuse to allow their wives to participate in extension activities because they feel that the economic returns are low and slow to materialize. An example of this arose in a pilot study in Sabah. Here, a group of 15 women who had been trained to process paper using natural resources was soon reduced to only 5 members (JICA, 2004). When asked why they left the project, the women replied that their husbands told them to resume their former vegetable-growing activities, for which the husbands believed the income was more lucrative.

Some livelihood-improvement training involves minimal cost: for example, sewing and embroidery. However, extension workers found that rural women did not have funds to buy even basic materials such as cloth, measuring tapes, dressmaking rulers, thread, and needles. In many such cases, extension workers contributed to the cost of these materials, but often found that they were not repaid. Consequently, extension workers tried to minimize costs by training women to use local resources that did not need to be purchased. At times this was impossible because the women wanted to learn new skills, such as sewing or embroidery, which required start-up purchases. Extension workers attributed the poor attendance at courses (Fig. 1) in part to the inability of rural women to pay for the materials required for skills training.

Case studies within the pilot study of rural women in Sabah (JICA, 2004) showed that they have limited decision-making power and no control over family income. They depend on their husbands for cash and need permission to participate

Fig. 1. Problems that prevent rural women in Sabah from undertaking business activities
in any activities outside their normal routine. Thus, they are in a vulnerable position if support from their husbands is not available.

Another example of the vulnerability of rural women is shown by a case study from Nepal (Hunt et al., 2005), which shows that Nepalese men monopolize family decision making and control family finances. They determine the share their wives receive from the proceeds of the sale of livestock, even though the wives are responsible for raising and caring for the stock. Moser (1993) concluded that all rural women are always subordinate to men, especially in division by gender of labor, domestic labor and childcare, access to land, property and credit equity, political involvement, and freedom to make decisions about childbearing.

However, that study also shows that the subordination of rural women can be overcome to some extent if gender is properly considered at all levels in rural development programs. Participation by women in group activities increased from 26% in 1991 to 51% in 2004 after they were given gender and participatory training (Hunt et al., 2005). This case study shows that women with previously conservative attitudes became self-reliant and confident when their husbands allowed them to control their own incomes from the sale of goats, sold either solely or jointly with their husbands. The husbands involved their wives in decision making on livestock management and willingly assisted them with fodder collection and childcare while their wives attended group meetings. The main reasons are that the husbands saw good economic returns from the activity their wives participated and they are also exposed to gender awareness training. These results show changes in gender relations, which Hunt et al. (2005) attributed to the exposure of both husbands and wives to gender-awareness training. Therefore, it is important for family members to give full support especially by involving the wives or daughter-in-law in decision making on family, financial and property matters. This can be further seen from the following interviews conducted with two Japanese rural women entrepreneurs who were given the autonomy to participate in decision making by their family members.

The Importance of Empowerment: Interviews with Successful Rural Women Entrepreneurs in Japan

The JICA (2004) study also shows that rural women need to be self empowered especially in decision making on financial, family and property matters. Interviews showed rural women need support from family members to enable them to gain confident and capability to start an economic project. The following two case studies are based on interviews with women group leaders from rural Japan on 29 September 2007 and 22 October 2007 in Chikusei City, Ibaraki Prefecture, Japan. Mrs. Ueno is a 63-year-old group leader for 14 women selling traditional Japanese food, cakes, and sweets. Mrs. Inose is a 66-year-old leader for a group of 70 women who sell agricultural produce at a farmers' market. Mrs. Ueno's husband involved her in decision making on family, financial and property matters after they married. In the case of Mrs. Inose, her father gave her the autonomy to carry out the decision making task after her mother passed away. Both of these women have been permitted by their husbands and parents to participate in decision making on family and financial matters. They both went to the Rural Women's College, Ibaraki Prefecture and in 1983 were the first women to graduate from the college. After graduation, they helped their husbands in their businesses: Mrs. Inose cultivating pears and Mrs. Ueno raising pigs. In 1996, the two women ventured into their own businesses and both are now leaders of their Rural Women Entrepreneurs group. Thus, rural women given trust and responsibility, like Mrs. Ueno and Mrs. Inose, have been empowered. They are capable women of strong character and possess qualities such as determination, persistence, responsibility, and independence, and are able to support and organize the members of their groups.

Role of Extension Workers

The rural women who graduate from the Quality Farm Family training course are expected to start their own economic activities. Extension workers give support by visiting the groups, initially twice weekly, then gradually reducing the frequency of visits to monthly, depending on group capability. The pilot study in Sabah (JICA, 2004) shows the
importance of forming small groups, which are more effective than large groups in helping passive rural women learn to cooperate and improve their livelihood. However, certain strategies are necessary when forming small groups. For effective outcomes, women of similar background in terms of livelihood and education must be grouped together. This avoids domination of a group by a particular family or individual (JICA, 2004). The pilot study also shows that newly formed groups require close facilitation by extension workers with both good facilitation skills and experience working with small groups (JICA, 2004). In Sabah, extension workers lack facilitation skills and have no experience in working with small groups.

Analyzed data from questionnaires shows that extension workers in Sabah reported that some rural women (35.7%) had difficulty working in groups (Fig. 1), mainly because they had to qualify for a micro-credit loan application and to join extension training. The rural women had no experience working with other members in a group. There are no proper regulations, rules and specific objectives or directions. These situations cause the rural women to have different opinion and frequent misunderstandings often arise among members. However, as these women were not trained in small group dynamics they should not be blamed for this.

Some extensions workers (14.3%) said that they used visiting as a strategy (Fig. 2) to motivate inactive group members and, in particular, to convince those who had left their groups to rejoin extension activities. A study by Oakley and Garforth (1985) showed that visiting and listening are important roles for extension workers. Visiting of groups allows extension workers to listen to the women and hear about their needs and problems. Visits also provide opportunities to establish rapport with family members, especially husbands, and to encourage them to be supportive of the women’s projects. Oakley and Garforth (1985) stressed the importance of recording the details of visits to group members’ houses. These should include the date and purpose of the visit, problems raised, and decisions made. Detailed records of all visits, including follow-up visits, provide invaluable material for evaluation of the progress of group members, and as a reference should there be a change of extension worker (Oakley and Garforth, 1985).

Enabling Factors that Contribute to Rural Women’s Becoming Successful Entrepreneurs

Examining some of the enabling factors that contribute to rural women’s becoming successful entrepreneurs will help extension workers to develop better strategies to address rural women’s problems and needs when starting economic projects.

In the early stages of income-generating activities, 42% of successful rural women entrepreneurs faced funding problems (Fig. 1). However, they were assisted by extension workers who established linkages for them with agencies that provide micro-credit, training or leasing of equipment. The availability of micro-credit allowed women to start up activities such as small retail shops, sewing, selling handicrafts, and food processing.

Rural women see extension workers as their primary source of information to support their entrepreneurial activities (Fig. 3). For example, extension workers provide them with information...
Successful rural women entrepreneurs have great strengths. To satisfactorily run their businesses, rural women entrepreneurs save their efforts about schedules of cooking competitions where they could market their food-making skills and on product improvement. Extension workers need to prepare simple booklets or leaflets providing information that will assist entrepreneurial activities: for example, lists of institutions providing micro-credit or bank loans at reasonable interest rates, or suppliers of processing equipment. Extension workers need also to prepare answers to frequently asked questions in booklet form. The questions should cover entrepreneurial activities and their management. Examples might include the step-by-step processes for applying for micro-credit or trading licenses, how to prepare documents in support of an application for a bank loan, and information about the products of successful women’s groups. Information of this type will be very useful, especially for rural women starting new income-generating projects.

Of the successful rural women entrepreneurs interviewed in this study, 55.6% said their determination to carry out their business activities was the result of ongoing motivation and support from extension workers (Fig. 4).

Rural women entrepreneurs who have gained a degree of financial independence by way of their projects have more autonomy and are thus able to make their own decisions about the types of activities they wish to carry out and the investments they wish to make. However, successful rural women in Sabah still have limited power in decision making, especially on issues of household roles, life insurance, and land and house ownership (Fig. 5).

Major problems encountered by rural women entrepreneurs included competition from other Rural Women Entrepreneurs groups, limited product diversification, and lack of understanding of information technology (Fig. 6). The solutions to these and some other problems (Fig. 7) present a number of challenges for rural women. They include the need to improve product quality, packaging, and labeling; the need for product diversification, improvements in cleanliness in product handling and maintenance of the workplace and surroundings; and the need for further training, particularly in the use of information technology. However, without self-empowerment it is difficult for rural women entrepreneurs to deal with these challenges. A study by Handy and Kassam (2004) showed that individuals who have not gained confidence in their own capacity do not dare to take up risks and face challenges. Extension workers should note that individual empowerment is an important enabling factor that contributes to the success of rural women entrepreneurs.

Successful rural women entrepreneurs have greater money-saving capacity than the general population of rural women, and clearly that saving capacity varies with income (Fig. 8). The savings are normally reserved for business maintenance and emergencies. Rural women entrepreneurs save their income for many reasons, including business expansion, children’s education, and life or health insurance (Fig. 9). Extension workers should encourage rural women to save from their income to cover emergencies such as illness, drought, and family funerals, as well as for their children’s education.

To satisfactorily run their businesses, rural women need to undertake regular training programs to
improve and update their knowledge and skills. Most of the required training is in areas of business entrepreneurship (Fig. 10). Training on gender issues has not yet been included in the Quality Farm Family training module. In future, the importance of this training must be recognized: it will make rural women aware of gender issues and inform them of their rights. Of the rural women entrepreneurs in this study, 77.8% had no understanding of legislation dealing with women’s issues, and many were ignorant of the existence of women’s rights, especially in relation to issues such as domestic violence and land ownership.
The Importance of Empowerment: Interviews with Successful Rural Women Entrepreneurs in Japan

The Importance of the Role of Extension Workers

The involvement of extension workers is one of the main factors that contribute to the success of rural women entrepreneurs. However, possession of qualifications alone is not enough to allow them to enhance women’s participation in economic activities (Oakley, 1991). Extension workers need to have particular qualities such as flexibility, readiness to listen and learn about rural women’s issues and problems, emotional maturity, compassion, sympathy, and the ability to inspire trust and confidence (Oakley and Garforth, 1985). Both the need for and the value of such qualities as these were verified during an interview on 3 September 2007 with Mrs. Suzuki, who has worked as a livelihood-improvement extension worker with the Agriculture Training Center in Chikusei City, Ibaraki Prefecture, for 36 years. Mrs. Suzuki is very committed and hardworking and has produced many important information booklets and other publications for rural women’s groups. For example, she has provided details of available training courses, successful products developed by rural women’s groups, rules and regulations for the formation of small groups, and instructions for preparation of working papers to support loan applications. Mrs. Suzuki has come across many problems during her 36 years of working with rural women. Some of the issues discussed in case studies from the early 1970s still prevail (JICA, 2006). For example, Mrs. Suzuki reported recent cases of rural women prevented by their husbands or mothers-in-law from joining extension activities. However, her persistence and the cooperation of her supervisor have allowed her to persuade the husbands and mothers-in-law to let these women participate. Mrs. Suzuki initiated the establishment in 1983 of the Rural Women’s College in Ibaraki, Prefecture, where women study agriculture and technical farm management. To date, about 200 rural women have graduated from this college and some are now engaged in small entrepreneurial activities such as food processing and farmers’ market sales. There are now 18 successful Rural Women’s Entrepreneur groups and 14 individual rural woman entrepreneurs in Chikusei.

Another initiative of Mrs. Suzuki was Farm Family Management Agreements. These agreements are designed to encourage family members to participate in farm work, to define the tasks and roles of participating family members, and to provide equal access to farm resources. The agreements cover issues such as salaries and holidays and are drafted by family members with assistance from extension workers.

Mrs. Suzuki also demonstrated her motivation skills by encouraging networking between rural women’s groups from different prefectures. This allows women to exchange information and ideas for improving their products and activities. Mrs. Suzuki also selects group members who show leadership qualities so they can be trained to take over some extension workers’ responsibilities during the workers’ absences. For example, they may help to organize other local groups or give demonstrations to assist in spreading new ideas. These leaders also serve as links between extension workers and other rural women. This strategy allows extension workers to reach far more rural women than they would by working alone, and builds close ties between extension workers and local group leaders. It also builds the confidence of rural women in extension activities and increases their willingness to participate (JICA, 2004).

Conclusions

For extension workers, adopting appropriate strategies, possessing particular qualities and qualifications, and performing roles that concentrate on the key enabling factors does not completely solve the underlying problems and thus does not totally satisfy the needs of rural women trying to start businesses. The current approach of extension workers of the DOA Farm Family Development units in Sabah needs improvement. Extension workers need training in the participatory approach to training small groups and in dealing with gender issues so that they have a better understanding of the different needs, priorities, roles, and responsibilities of men and women in rural societies. They must also address the need for active participation by rural women throughout an entrepreneurial pro-
ject cycle and help them to strengthen their individual awareness, capabilities, and capacities. In addition to having the right approach and appropriate training, extension workers must have good facilitating skills, as well as knowledge of small groups and experience working with them. The effective formation of small groups provides an important vehicle for women to learn the skills they need to start their own economic activities.

**Recommendations**

The main recommendation arising from this study is that all extension workers should be trained to use a participatory training approach that takes into account gender issues. Firstly, refreshing course should be given to extension officers by the local gender consultant, assisted by the trainers of the Rural Women Entrepreneur Development organization in Sabah, and become the “primary trainers” within the DOA Farm Family Development unit. These officers should in turn train all senior extension workers at DOA to form a group of “co-trainers”. These two groups (primary trainers and co-trainers) should then provide training for extension workers throughout the 25 districts of Sabah. Training should be delivered in lecture format and should include practical on-the-job training. This approach, the on-the-job training in particular, will hasten the development of the awareness, capabilities, and capacities of extension workers throughout Sabah, and enhance their ability to improve the livelihood of rural women. The training process and the training material used for both primary trainers and co-trainers must be reviewed after the completion of these training sessions. The training modules should include clear directions on:

- using a participatory approach and developing participatory training skills
- the appropriate approach to organizing and holding introductory workshops and discussions on livelihood-enhancing activities
- the origin of gender issues in rural societies
- dealing with gender issues in a rural environment
- the use of gender-situation analysis to address women’s needs and problems
- division of labor on the basis of gender
- formation and development of small groups
- exercises in listening skills
- planning skills needed by rural women to improve their livelihood.

**Acknowledgements**

I greatly appreciate the advice and support of Dr. Ruriko Nohguchi during this project. I thank her for the invaluable time she devoted to accompanying me while interviewing extension workers and other officers at the Agricultural Extension Training Center in the Ibaraki Prefecture Livelihood Improvement Extension Center, and while visiting a rural women’s group at Chikusei City in Ibaraki Prefecture. In particular, I express gratitude to JICA for giving me the opportunity to take up my Master's Degree course in Sustainable Rural Development. I thank Mr. Shun Nesaki and Mrs. Makiko Nakano for their assistance with translation of documents written in Japanese. Special thanks go to Miss Theresa Moguil and Miss Maisalma Hj. Kirah, who provided me with important information to support my research. Last but not least, I thank the professors of Tsukuba University who have taught me and provided me with advice and guidance during my Master’s Degree course.

**References**


Internet URL: www.istr.org/coferences/toronto/workingpapers/handy.ferndia.pdf