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THE VILLAGE WOMEN COOPERATIVES STORE:
A CASE PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN A KOREAN VILLAGE*

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1. Content of the Study

In line with the SAEMAU (New Community) Movement all 35,000 administrative rural villages (Ri unit) in Korea have improved their community lives and uplifted the standard of the residents' living to such an extent that their average farm household income per annum in 1978 was publicly announced as much as 1.78 million won (roughly \$3,700). In such development milieu the role of women has been gradually changing in the way that they are more engaged in farming and organize Women's Club for more economic, educational and cultural activities like cooperative store operation, home economics class, mothers club family planning class, field trip to some advanced area, and rice saving. Since their literacy level is low and their organizational activities are not well trained, however, their group work is frequently limited and often inactive with an exception of some model cases. This study is to deal with an event in which a Women's Club came to play vital role in a village called Bangchuk.

*Paper to be presented at the First International Investigative Forum of Participatory Research, held in Yugoslavia, April 13-22, 1980.

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The Bangchuk Village, Bang-A Ri, Namsa Myon (subcounty), Yong-In Gun (County), Kyung-Gi Do (province), Republic of Korea, which is a subject of the study, had 57 households predominantly farming with a population of 334 whose accessible market is about 14 kilometers in distance away from the village and the public bus was so inconvenient that the residents might use it not more than three times a day near the village. The village is located remote from the national road (14 kilometers) and consanguineous with 40 percent of households (23 out of 57) being same family name (Kwon from Andong). Most of the cultivated lands(81 percent) are paddy and the main crop is naturally rice. The average cultivated land size per household was 1.63 hectares which is above the national average (0.9) and the land ownership is somehow evenly distributed. (See Table 1) But their level of income and living standard did not reach national average in rural setting.

Although there were many formal and informal small group organizations like Village Association (Dae-dong-hoe), Women's Club/Mothers Club, and several kinds of Kye. But most of them were not so viable except one farmers association called "Dae-ji-hoe" consisted of 11 small farmers who were cooperatively farming in their labor and farm machinery ~~management~~ management. A women's Club was existing but nobody knew who was the president and it was once called Mothers Club upon the request of local

Table 1. Distribution of Cultivated Land Ownership of Bangchuk Village
unit:

Content	Land size (hectare)			
	0.5	0.5-0.8	1.0-1.9	2.0 or more than
Household number(percent)	6 (11)	16 (28)	17 (30)	18 (31)
National figure in percent	36	32	26	7

government for its family planning program. And most of the villagers perceived that the most serious problem impinging upon the village development was lack of cooperative spirit and existence of two factions between upper and lower parts of area residents having some conflict internally and intrinsically. They were not much convinced that any kind of village cooperative work would succeed and hesitated to work together for themselves.

The Rural Development Laboratory Project of Seoul National University College of Agriculture was ^{launched} to tackle this case problem in early 1975 and put one field worker/graduate student to work together with farmers for participatory research. This study is one of many development events focussed on the Cooperative Store of Women's Club.

II. Origin of the Study

Patterning after and slightly modifying the social laboratory idea of Dean Chi-Wen Chang who elaborated the idea as a rural development strategy in Asian countries through his half centennial experience, the Rural Development Laboratory project was launched on a small scale pilot basis in early 1975 by the researcher with an initial grant from the Asia Foundation. It had four clientele villages to fully mobilize their human resources, and to transform the present traditional farming into modernized commercial agriculture. Three graduate students working on rural development at the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education of Seoul National University were assigned to work in the villages and one of them resided

in Bangchuk Village after his induction/orientation training on the Rural Development Laboratory project and its strategies.

The basic strategy of the Laboratory is an institutional or organizational/group approach by which the people are to be trained and motivated to organize for themselves and to participate in every course of development action to the point that they lay their self-help basis.

In Bangchuk village, the existing Women's Club was not viable at all so that the field worker motivated and trained the village women who were mostly wives of farmers/household heads to reorganize the Club and to cooperatively work for village development meeting the villagers common needs and solving crucial community problems. Finally he succeeded in persuading the village women leaders to reorganize the Women's Club and after a series of formal and informal meeting they decided to collect some amount of fund from each member to operate a Cooperative Store with such objectives as (1) strengthening cooperative sense among members and (2) raising the Club's fund for its cooperative work. At first 42 and later on 45 members eventually were affiliated with the Club by paying entry fee (1,000 won: roughly \$2.00), constitution and by-law for Cooperative Store operation were articulated at the initial meeting, and five officers were accordingly elected. The residential field worker helped the Women's Club to viably and vigorously operate the Cooperative Store by way of rendering technical and educational guidance service in addition to some inevitable material provision like some formats of record keeping for purchase and sale of goods.

The present study is just to describe what and how of the event on the Cooperative Store operated by the Bangchuk Village Women's Club. This event had been observed by the residential field worker for one year (March 1975-February 1976) and this report was written by the principal investigator of the Rural Development Laboratory project who had visited the field area about once a week in 1975 and occasionally thereafter upto now.

III. Process of Women's Cooperative Store Operation: Detailed Description of the Events

Reorganization of Village Women's Club

It took almost one month for the residential field worker assigned at the case village for his participatory research (called action research at that time but its basic strategy is similar to PR) to be acquainted with the villagers and related institutions of the area, to grasp the overall situation, and to get villager's permission for his participatory action working together with them. Out of several events of his activities taken with some different groups such as Farmers Association, 4-H Club and informal Kyes, Women's Club reorganization was one of the most imperative task felt by many of villagers as well as women in order to solve their marketing problem. Through informal interview with a dozen of individual women and a small group of former officers of Women's Club the field worker succeeded in convening all women who

had been interested in such reorganization and in planning together future programs. At last on April 10, 1975 the Bangchuk Women's Club was fully reorganized with 30 members who got their membership by paying 1,000 won (\$2.00) each as entry fee and five new officers (president, vice president, secretary and two information officers in charge of two subvillages) after constitution/by-law passage drafted in advance by the worker in consultation with three leaders in group.

Outset of Cooperative Store

At the first meeting when the Women's Club was reorganized its members adopted cooperative store operation as its first cooperative fund-raising program and agreed that this project would be a part of the Laboratory's participatory research in which all the members were involved.

At the second meeting a week after the first, several small groups were organized for getting approval of village leaders who were mostly male and members' husband, getting all or maximum size of homemakers affiliated with the Club, contacting wholesale stores in the market of nearest town (Osan Eup) for purchasing goods with the cheapest possible price, and preparing how to efficiently operate the store. In this meeting they seriously discussed over a few fundamental problems and their solution ideas prior to the outset of the store operation. The first was that the cooperative store would give a critical impact on the existing private store operated by one poor family from the major village clan so that considerable objection could be imposed on instituting the store

and operating it in full support of all the villagers.

Another problem was that many of the members were so sensitive as for two village factions which might destruct or disorganize the Club or cooperative store that two separate cooperative stores would rather be independently operated and managed in two subvillage areas.

Regarding the first problem of private store, the Women's Club officers invited the store owner and two village leaders (Village Chief and Kinship representative) to their cooperative store planning seminar for consultation and finally compromised that the small store owner might change his job soon in assistance with the village leaders. For the second problem on separation was in fact strongly attacked by the field worker in such a way that he delivered lecture for about half an hour on importance of cooperation for wider community development with some successful case stories and with a nonfiction movie film produced by and borrowed from the Office of Rural Development and that he persuaded all the members to work cooperatively for one store and since then the problem was no longer argued. But two women from different subvillage area were assigned to sell Korean liquor (Makgeoli) whose competition made the cooperative store more salable.

In the third official meeting held on April 21, 1975 the Cooperative Store of Women's Club was announced open with increased number of members (30 to 43 later on 45) and 63 kinds of commodities which were to be sold to the villagers by Club member at whose house popular goods were stored and managed for one week in turn with a cooperative store flag to be easily noticed to all.

Some Strategies for Effective Cooperative Operation

With the information on preparatory action and survey made by the Club members, they democratically decided on the following operation principles:

(1) All the goods purchased at the town wholesale store and sold in the village should be recorded by kind of commodity, by person bought and sold (by whom and to whom) with date and amount as well. And all the records should be turned over to the next member at the every weekend with the unsold commodities and store flag;

(2) The Club member who buys any commodity purchasable at the Cooperative Store at any other store or directly in the town market should pay penalty as much as its amount and each member should help it in the cooperative sense;

(3) If a member in charge of weekly store operation sold some commodity in credit, she should be responsible for getting on cash even with her own so that no confusion be made in accounting;

(4) The field worker should supervise each member to keep record well and assure that weekly account and turnover go correctly through at least for one year until such a process be conducted by themselves;

(5) The member who sold most and bought most during the year would get prize at their evaluation meeting;

(6) The Secretary of the Club should record the weekly accounting, keep stocked commodities, purchase necessary commodities in time, and do other management concerned.

Through the Cooperative Store operation the Club's fund almost doubled every month and all members were so excited and enthusiastic in paying every effort. Finally at the evaluation meeting on February 7, 1976 after every member had experienced one-week-long store operation, they found their investment, (45,000 won at the beginning) was raised eight times (upto 358,612 won) over the invested and they were so confident that cooperation be a great power to make possible what they want to do.

After the field worker withdrew this village at the end of February 1976, his role was replaced by the Village Chief and the Women's Club has continuing it with some transformed strategies in such ways that one fixed member operate the store with some share for her private earning and that the Women's Club fund be used for credit and trip to advanced area and even donation for village development.

Worker's Methods of Contact with Villagers/Women

The fundamental method for worker to contact with the people was in a word organizational and educational one. Through his individual and group contact with villagers, he first let them newly organize existing group for participatory research to be done in cooperation and before and after such agreement and organization a variety of relevant nonformal educational methods such as persuasive lecture in short, group dynamics, using audio-visual aids including movie film, slide, tape recorder, chart, etc., group discussion and mobilizing resource persons were employed.

When the organization made decision, the worker instructed its members how to democratically discuss and make final decision rather than what to decide. It was observed that at the beginning their discussion was just like quarrel in chaos and monopolized by two or three opinion leaders and that quite gradual a change had been brought about for one year.

Besides, in order to get along with the village women it was found necessary to make good friends with their elders and husbands and even children, namely, fine character and sense of humour to get along with man or woman, old or young, were desired in addition to his organizational and educational techniques. Under no circumstance he should not expose his anger nor complaint, no matter how strong such feeling was. But with smile he could better stimulate or inspire them to empathize with the worker together working for the village development.

Steps in the Research Process

When the Rural Development Laboratory project was launched at this pilot village, neither research title nor problem was set, but only intention to help villagers and to work together for community development was firmly implicated and recognized so as to make an agreement between field worker and villagers to work together whatever type of activities they are. As mentioned earlier, the villagers mostly expressed their common community problems such as inconvenience and inaccessibility to market, lack of cooperation among villagers in general and between two subvillage area residents in particular, functional illiteracy for record keeping,

and inaccurate information on villagers purchasing power. Out of these four problems the first two were not measured quantitatively but seriously perceived by the majority of the villagers so that the Cooperative Store could be smoothly adopted to tackle those two problems.

Regarding the third problem on functional illiteracy the Women's Club members asked the field worker to gather accurate data in their cooperation promised. For this research all 45 member women were subject observed and analyzed by the worker and its result/report appeared in Korean Journal of Agricultural Education (7:1, PP. 37-42) entitled "The Functional Literacy of Korean Rural Women Reflected in Their Cooperative Store Operation". The result ~~result~~ revealed that more than two thirds of members were functionally illiterate in keeping record, while another quantitative survey made at the beginning showed that only about one fourth of them were illiterate. This higher rate of functional illiteracy was fully accepted by those members who were thereby so modest and even ashamed but active in working for the Club. It was often observed that those illiterates kept the amount of their sales in mind/and when their children came back home from school, they asked kids to keep record. With this information on high rate of illiteracy the field worker catalyzed the illiterate women to learn Korean and expressed he was willing to teach them and asked them to discuss what to do, but they all thought that the time to learn Korean was too late for them to make effective use for their rest of lives and they would rather enjoy watching television and working hard for their easier family and better community life. Nevertheless, they were convinced that their experience of participation in the Cooperative

Store operation would surely improve their functional literacy in any way.

And finally in regard to the fourth problem on purchasing power of the villagers, the Secretary of Women's Club kept record of the total amount of sales per week per household and by kind of commodity and reported it at the monthly meeting of the Club where new strategy for increased sale was inquired. In such a participatory research process the number and kind of commodities dealt were increased more and more and the weekly sale amount also gradually increased approximately from 30,000 won to double or even more so that Club members were encouraged to work harder. Once they decided to work hard in cooperation at least for three years until they could earn large amount of fund with which they lay firm foundation to improve their housework.

IV. Description of Outcomes and their Implications

Based on the foregoing participatory research the following facts and implications were found and reassured:

(1) Institutional or organizational approach to community development with special reference to women's cooperative work is one of the best possible strategy for village development and it should be accompanied by a variety of nonformal education at all times.

(2) Involvement of people as many as possible who are expected clientele of any development program/research in every course of action/research from planning to evaluation is indispensable precondition of

democratic and humanistic development program. Possibly, their initiatives to make decision in all phases of action needs to be strengthened so that even any probable failure would not be solely ~~attributive~~ ^Y worker but rather give lesson to all of participants.

(3) In virtue of this participatory research true humanistic communication and interaction between villagers and change agent (field worker and RDL personnel) could be certainly made to such degree that their serious problems which were seldom identified by quantitative survey might well be explicated and solved by joint and egalitarian efforts. Such communication and interaction made the villagers/women to be more conscious of their community development, directly to raise cooperative fund which would lay their prospective cooperative work, to learn how to participate in community work as a good democratic citizen, and to be self supporting and self governing in doing their community development work.

(4) It was reconfirmed that a variety of educational methods relevant to the situation with individual or in group should be used and more effective methods need to be developed by professionals in the field of adult education. In particular some educational materials and aids for illiterates to be motivated to acquire the basic literate functions for self realization should be developed and devised. The educational television program for them to easily learn Korean and for farmers to update information on agricultural techniques and marketing needs to be