

# Food Production; Can it be Used as a Tool in Empowerment of Rural Women? A Case Study from Turkey

**Funda GENCLER**

[funda.gencler@ege.edu.tr](mailto:funda.gencler@ege.edu.tr)

*Celal Bayar University, School of Applied Sciences, Turkey*

**M. Metin ARTUKOGLU**

[metin.artukoglu@ege.edu.tr](mailto:metin.artukoglu@ege.edu.tr)

*Ege University, Faculty of Agriculture, Turkey*

## Abstract

This study contains the basics on certain problems that food producing-as an earning activity that is used empowerment of women- face in rural areas and some advice on how those difficulties could be overcome. The results of "Winpeace" project are evaluated from the point of view of women empowerment and food production. After the project, women faced several problems. Those problems are negotiated by the help of the strength and weaknesses in the presence head of the cooperative. The discussion results are highly appreciable to evolve effective thoughts about reinforcing the rural women.

**Key Words:** food production in rural areas, women, empowerment

**JEL Codes:** I3, J00, O22, Q00, A2

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, in order to raise the income of rural women and to enable those to participate more in social life and to empower them, many projects are put into practice in several developing countries. These projects make women work in labor-intensive activities by using a small amount of capital. Above-mentioned projects particularly target foregrounding the knowledge, experience and skills of rural women without capital, and thus, enabling them to participate in economical activities (Midgley, 2005). Worldwide, women play a major role in agriculture (including fisheries, forestry and livestock) and rural development. In many countries, they are the mainstay of agricultural sectors and food systems (Akhter, 2001). Yet the most disadvantaged population in the world today comprises of rural women in developing countries, who have been the last to benefit from - or in some cases have been negatively affected by - prevailing economic growth and development processes (FAO, 2007).

There are many factors that impede rural women from participating in profitable activities. Apart from the lack of capital, the most significant factor is the poor quality of education. Beside that, in some rural areas, women's working out of home or field might be criticized by the public. In this case, women work in hand-skill based jobs, cleaning or they get jobs on daily pay. Those activities are not only temporary, but they also limit women in developing themselves and almost make it impossible to provide a stable income.

At this point, in order to give self-awareness to the women through education, to enable them to get an efficient role in society, and to raise their income, the projects aim to make women participate in jobs that may usually be approved by public (Afshar, 1998; Eber and Tanski, 2001). Women mostly prefer sewing, embroidery jobs or local food production. Therefore they can raise their children without getting far from their houses by using their skills and make some profit as well (Kohinoor, 1989). Before women start working and making money, within the project, they

participate in basic training and informative programs (Maretzki, 2007; Kantar, 2003). In the projects in which women are expected to produce food and take part in an economical activity, training activities are particularly held significant (Weinberger, 2001).

In Turkey, many projects are being realized by public institutions or by Non Governmental Organizations (NGO). However, the budgets of those projects are usually only enough for making projects focused on training. In this respect, insufficiency of capital and some other reasons reveal that, only a few of the women who got training have the chance to implement what they have practiced during the training. These problems sometimes make huge barriers for women to tackle. In order to construct prosperous project, leaders should be sagacious and able to make sustainable income for the project contributors.

This study tries to find out the food production could be influential tool in empowerment of rural women via a "case study" in Turkey. In this study, the results of the project implemented by Winpeace (Women's Initiative for Peace) are evaluated from the point of view of women empowerment and food production. Food production is known a good alternative for rural people both conserving agricultural products into food and source of income. However the foods which are produced in rural areas should compromise certain sanitary standards in order to be a commercial good. After the project, the participant-women faced several problems. Among those problems, the most crucial ones are related to getting legal permission on food production and marketing. Those problems are negotiated in the presence of the cooperative members.

## **2. Material and Method**

Regarding the study, a survey and a workshop was realized. The aims of the survey study are to define women's point of view about the project, to find out how the project helped to their self development. After taking crucial data, a workshop was organized within the participation of the all cooperative members (18). With the assistance of this workshop, the outcome of the project was evaluated by the women themselves. This study with the women was composed of two parts. In the first part, personal development of the women was displayed and in the second part, strength and weaknesses of the food production was determined. However in this study SWOT analysis was used to determine the situation of the women.

SWOT analysis of external opportunities and threats as well as the internal strengths and weaknesses of the enterprises is important for strategy formulation and development. If it is used correctly, SWOT can provide a good basis for successful strategy formulation (Chang and Huang, 2006).

All the members of the cooperative came together in a workshop to discuss their status and find out the opinions regarding the topics of the SWOT analysis. During the workshop, authors took notes about the subjects and organized them. In this workshop women tried to revise their current situation, discussed how to overcome these weaknesses and treats. Furthermore, SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analysis has proved to be an effective tool and has constituted a suitable baseline to diagnose current problems and to sketch future lines of action.

## **3. Food Production in Rural Areas**

Particularly in developing countries that have inter-regional development differences, the farmers have faced certain problems converting agricultural products into food and marketing of these products. First of all, due to the high prime cost, the agricultural production is threatened. If these countries do not take any protective measures for protecting their farmers, imported agricultural products gain a crushing superiority over the locals in the domestic market. What is more, the local farmers cannot compete with the companies that have industrial capacity and give up on agricultural production (Fairfield University, 2007).

Also all over the world the local food produced in rural areas are demanded as they are produced naturally and as they are particularly tasty. In the phase of food production, the factors threatening

human health should be eliminated. Food producers should be self-aware, trained and have basic technical equipments, in order to meet the requirements. However, the lack of both financial and social substructure endangers food safety.

For instance, in the EU countries, the companies that produce food in rural areas are registered and their activities are closely watched (EU, 2007). Also, in the EU regulations, detailed directions on each product about production, preserving and marketing could be found (MARA, 2007). Some products such as olive oil, wine, cheese, sausages and pastry are produced by using traditional recipes in small or mid-size plants. Those products are marketed mostly in farmers' markets or in stores selling local stuff under local brands. In this way, consumers could buy reliable and delicious food at reasonable prices.

Agriculture in Turkey is quite extensive sector. Due to both socio-economical factors and habits of consumption, most of the people in Turkey are using the food produced in rural areas. Those foods are usually produced by the relatives or the acquaintance. Those are usually tomato paste, cheese, pasta, jam, jarred food, dried vegetables and fruits. However, it is not clear whether these products are produced and conserved healthily.

#### **4. Case Study: Karaburun Women**

In many countries NGOs have a deep impact on empowerment of women both in rural and urban areas (Osirim, 2001, Premkander, 2003, Vaergas, 2002). Karaburun Agro-Tourism Project was started in 2002 by Winpeace. Winpeace and Eymir Cultural Foundation carried out this project which contributed to the development of relations between Greece and Turkey in order to reinforce women. In an agro Tourism Village Programme which anticipates the foundation of Women Cooperatives in three villages of Karaburun, it was thought that they could use the experience of a women's cooperative which has been active since 1983 in Petra, Lesbos Island, Greece. Also with this project it was aimed that after the international cooperation of Greek and Turkish women who took part in the project will develop in economic and social ways, that agriculture will be done by natural ways and that the region which has tourism potential will develop. The project was supported by EU within the Programme of Reinforcing Civil Society that was started in 2001. For the project, the villages of Küçükbahçe, Parlak and Sarpıncık were chosen. Because these villages have the traditional products of Aegean Region, have tourism potential and have women volunteers.

Karaburun is a peninsula in Izmir, closest area to our neighbor Greece, and is a protected area. The east of the peninsula has a good road and the villages receive summer habitants from big cities. But in the west, half of the area is untouched and genuine. The coast and the sea are totally unpolluted and clean from the invasion of city people. Agriculture is very dominant. No fertilizers or hormones are used, the agriculture is totally ecological. Main commercial products are artichoke and flowers (hyacinth and narcissus) during the 6 first months of the year, then all others of the climate - almonds, figs, olives, mandarins etc. The villagers have their main houses on the hills and summerhouses on the seaside. So there are enough accommodation alternatives for home pensioning.

In the project, firstly educational trips were organized to examine agro-tourism in its own place. The education was on gender awareness and empowerment, cooperation between women, what is agro-tourism, hygiene, human relations, legal and financial basic information, how to start room renting / training related to tourist accommodation, how to produce and preserve local products (such as jam, honey, pickles, handicrafts, etc.). Between April and October 2003 about 25 women went through an intensive training period. These trainings aimed at giving the women more self-confidence and transmitting valuable and practical information in order to enable them to conduct their new tasks in the agro-tourism sector.

One of the highlights of the project was the visit of the 18 founding members to the Women's Agro-Tourism Cooperative of Petra on the island of Lesbos in early October 2003. The visit to Petra

enabled the women to see and hear for themselves how the women of the Petra Cooperative started with a similar project some 20 years ago, what problems they faced and what difficulties they went through and – most importantly – what very positive results they obtained from all their efforts. The visit to the Women's Rural Production Cooperative of Mesotopos gave Karaburun women a good idea of the way they should organize their production activities. In another part of the same project, women members of Petra Cooperative came to Karaburun, therefore they gave a great support, education and shared their experiences with the women of Karaburun to increase their ability of entrepreneurship.

Members of Winpeace visited the governor of İzmir in order to get the support of public officials in the region, then introduced the project and asked for his support. The governor of İzmir, having great interest in the project visited the development areas himself. During these visits, the governor agreed with many of these women's demands, the public officials employed other local officials to supply these demands. So that the infrastructure problems of these tree villages, such as litter collection and sewerage system were solved. A local office was provided for the cooperative and the women were allowed to use the village school. With the attempt of the women the governor of the city visited the region for the first time and this visit increased the courage and honor of the folk and especially of the women. Local officials still extend their support to women.

In the course of the project, 18 women who supported the project and took part in the training sessions founded the Agro-Tourism Cooperative of Women of Karaburun in 2003. Today the cooperative is serving guests both from abroad and within the country with a capacity of 25 beds, with food made by fresh grown vegetables in the garden and with its handcrafts. Moreover, 'Karaburun Women Agro-Tourism Project' has received Federation of Turkish Tourist Guide Associations (TUREB) 2004 award. This award is given annually to projects individuals and foundations which make an effort to develop cultural tourism to protect cultural heritage by TUREB on the 21 February, Guides' Day.

Although the aim of the cooperative, which has been active since 2003, is to earn money through managing guesthouses, the number of the guests has never been at the desired level. For this reason, the participant women have leaned on the production of jam with the knowledge from the courses in the project to have a regular income. They have produced jam from locally grown artichoke, the flowers of French lavender (*lavandula stoechas*) and mallow (*malva vulgaris*). The demand for these jams is high due to both the healing effect and the good taste. But at this point they have faced to some problems of marketing. The most important of these problems is the lack of food production permits. It is necessary to have a permission of food production to produce food in Turkey. To get this permission it is essential to have an establishment and the equipment and they have to be inspected if they are suitable for food production or not. Furthermore it is necessary to employ a manager regarding the capacity of the organization. At this point, the women who produce the jam at their homes have faced problems in acquiring this permission.

In the agrarian sphere we can postulate that value capture at the producer end of food supply chains has at least three potential dimensions. First, it suggests that local producers and their networks attempt to capture more of the economic value of their products in a prevailing context when more of this value is being lost to the down-stream sectors (Renting et al., 2003; Marsden, 2004).

Second, it also suggests, as we will outline below, that in order to achieve this it also requires new innovations in the mechanisms for distributing value among producers and processors at the local level. This involves new types of entrepreneurial activity which is socio-ecological in the sense that it is based upon distinctly different types of networks and activities. Third, these two types of value-capture can lead to new potentialities with regard to forging synergies between agricultural practices and different types of multi-functional activities; such as agri-tourism, engagement in off-farm incomes activities and environmental schemes and projects. As a result, these can also stimulate further, multi-functional forms of value-capture.

## 5. Outcomes of the Study

The average age of the women in the workshop is 40.9. These women have an average 5.4 years of education, 83, and 3% of them are married and have 1.7 children.

**Table 1: Personal Information**

Average Age	Average Education Period (Year)	Marital Status (Married)	Average Children Number
40.9	5.4	83.3%	1.7

The women involved in the workshop exclaimed that they have their income by means of agriculture, cleaning, cooking and handicrafts works. It was determined that only 3 women get retirement salary.

## 6. The Opinions of Stakeholders about the Project

When we asked the question of "How did you get information about the Project?", 68,0% of women said that they had been informed by the headmen of the villages. The rest said that they had learned from the meetings of Winpeace members in the villages. 50,0% of the people who participated in the project stated that they got involved because of economic reasons (such as earning money, repairing of houses and gaining value), 26,0% of them contributed to their self development (meeting new people, being sociable, having other relations, expressing themselves better), 24,0% to help the village and region to develop.

29,0% of women stated that from the educations they got use mostly "how to start room renting / training related to tourist accommodation", 29,0% percent of them how to produce and preserve local products (such as jam, honey, pickles, handicrafts etc.). Following these are agro tourism and hygiene with percentages of 14,0% (more than one answer were given to this question).

During the educations, all women said that they had started their experiences with each other. Also they stated that they will share their experiences if there is another study like that. After the project, it is learned that 30,0% of women had self-confidence, 27,0% had the opportunity of being in relation with other places, 12,0% had economic income, 12,0% had positive behavior change and 4,0 % had new knowledge. Especially women declared that their self reliance increased, they could have easier communication with strange people and made known the names of both themselves and their villages. The women who had first been abroad were expressed that they become to know another country and the women they are encouraged them. They also added that the education of the project changed them positively and they had stronger relations with their husbands and children. It can also be said that the new knowledge and the experiences of those educations have strong clues to increase women's income.

After the project, women were united under the title of cooperative, and worked actively to have some gains so these enables them to develop their economy. Especially the women who informed that they had got money from their husbands can now earn enough money to supply their own expenses and monthly cooperative dues. Also it would be right to say that this money is not enough to save, but there are some expectations for the future.

**Table 2. The Evaluation of Women about Their Self-Development**

AFTER THE PROJECT	YES (%)	NO (%)
Is there any increase in your income?	92	8
Is there any increase in your social sensitivity?	100	0
Are there any changes about the education of your children?	50	17*
Is there a positive change in the relation with your husband?	33	8*
Has your self-confidence increased?	100	0
Is there any difference in your social role?	92*	0

<b>AFTER THE PROJECT</b>	<b>YES (%)</b>	<b>NO (%)</b>
Do you follow current events?	42	58
Do you use computer for communication and self development?	8	92
Do you read more books, magazines and newspaper now?	58	33
Is there any increase in your interest to follow current events and to discuss about them?	75	25
Do you think that there is a new job opportunity in the village?	75	25
Do you think that the migration will be prevented?	50	50
Is there a change in your life quality?	67	33
Can you now solve your problems easier?	92	8
Are there any negative sides of the project? If so what are they?	25	75

\* Some women didn't answer to these questions

When we evaluate the table as a whole, we can see that the project had too many positive results on women.

At this point in order to meet the demands of the women regarding food production in rural areas, it is clear that the particulars of their situation should be portrayed more clearly. For this reason the SWOT Analysis has been used to evaluate the situation. The consultation can be summarized as follows;

**Table 3. SWOT Analysis of Karaburun Women's food production**

<b>SWOT ANALYSIS</b>	
<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
-Women are willing and open to reforms -No raw material problem. -They are supported by the local administration and NGOs. -They have the crucial training and experience. -The goods are authentic and suitable for niche market.	-Need a proper building, equipment and production manager for production permit. -Need capital for investment. -Need production planning for marketing. -No study has been done for investment costs. -No local trademark for the goods. -Need to modify the existing buildings. Because it's a Protected Area. -No experience in trade. So, need assistance at every stage
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>
- No other similar company to compete. -Have the chance of getting subventions and credits because of being a cooperative. -Participating and presenting own products in a marketing fair. -The breakfast restaurants are quite common in and around Izmir. Making contracts with some those restaurants will be an asset. -Have the chance to benefit from rural development projects,	-Agriculture sector is supported by government in Turkey. But this support is not regular. This situation affects the farmer negatively. -Can not compete with the strong companies. -Limited sources for supporting projects in Turkey. -Making an investment and being successful in the market is a long and back breaking process.

The women discussed their status and determined the opinions regarding the topics of the SWOT Analysis. The authors only organized the opinions of the women. In this study, women were able to examine their current situation; they discussed how to overcome the weaknesses and treats. Women have decided to make an action plan related to their internal problems such as investment problems, marketing problems. However, it is not possible to solve external problems like inflation, general economic problems etc. Despite of these difficulties, women are trying to do their best to earn enough to invest in registration and marketing activities, women are still continuing production at their home. In addition to this they are also seeking local government supports and rural development investment activities supports. If they can find a convenient credit ratio, women

have decided to use this credit to fund their investment. Thus, women will be able to produce safety, tasty and healthy food on rural areas and this will also contribute to the development of the area. This situation is important not only for their progress but also for other women who are willing to attempt food production in rural areas.

## 7. Conclusions

Karaburun Women are discussed with a SWOT analysis to find out the situation of their food production as a case study. The women who have participated SWOT analysis process stated that this process helped to clarify how to reach their goals precisely. This study is important for both publicizing Karaburun Women and giving some ideas about for who wants to reinforce rural women via food production.

Continuity of producing healthy food from local products increases the incomes of the women who deal with food production in rural areas. At this point, women's potential entrepreneurship should be supported. Empowerment of rural women through food production projects is a key factor for women to take part in it easily. On the other hand, food production for markets is not a customary activity for rural women.

This activity requires multi dimensional planning before implemented. For this reason, food production oriented projects should be well planned as well. First of all, desirous, target oriented, team worker women should take part into the project. Infrastructural problems should be solved such as decent places and tools for food production, production license, fine raw material etc. Training activities should be planned carefully not only for food production but also for marketing the products. Further more, devising investment capital is a significant issue to cope with it.

As a result, the farmers; especially rural women should be encouraged for attending well prepared projects about food production and marketing. Such an effort is crucial in terms of securing both the rural development and access of city dwellers to safe, fresh food. Thus, this situation raises rural women's self confidence, enables more active in social life and contributes in forming modern and innovative generations as well.

## References

1. Afshar, H. (1998), *Women and Empowerment: Illustrations from the Third World*,: 11-34, London: MacMillan Press:11-34.
2. Akhter, F. (2001), "Seeds in women's hands: a symbol of food security and solidarity", *Journal of Development*, Vol.44, No:4 : 52-55.
3. Chang H. and W. Huang (2006), "Application of a quantification SWOT analytical method", *Mathematical and Computer Modeling*, Vol. 43, No: 1-2: 158-169.
4. Eber, C. E., and Tanski, J.M. (2001), "Obstacles facing women's grassroots development strategies in Mexico", *Journal of Radical Political Economics*, Vol.3, No:4 : 441-460.
5. EU (2007), *From farm to fork safe food for Europe's consumers*, (<http://www.ec.europa.eu/publications/booklets/move/46/en.doc>) Access: (August, 2007).
6. Fairfield University (2007), *The Urbanization of the World*, (<http://www.faculty.fairfield.edu/faculty/hodgson/Courses/so11/population/urbanization.htm>) Access: (September 2007).
7. FAO (2007), *FAO Focus: women and food security "women hold the key to food security"*, ([www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)) Access: (March 2007).
8. Kantar P. (2003), "Women's empowerment through home based work: evidence from India", *Journal of Development and Change*, Vol.3, No:3 : 425-445.
9. Kohinoor, B. (1989), "Participation of rural women in income-earning activities: a case study of a Bangladesh village", *Journal of Women Studies Int. Forum*, Vol.12, No.5 :519-528.
10. Maretzki, A.N. (2007), "Women's nutri business cooperatives in Kenya: an integrated strategy for sustaining rural livelihoods", *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior*, Vol. 39, No:6 : 327-334.
11. Marsden, T., (2004), *The quest for ecological modernisation: re-spacing rural development and agri-food studies*, *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. 44, NO: 2: 129-146(18).
12. Midgley, J. (2005), "Gendered economies: transferring private gender roles in to the public realm through rural community development", *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol: 22, No:2 : 217-273.
13. Osirim, M.J. (2001), "Making good on commitments to grassroots women Ngos and empowerment for women in contemporary Zimbabwe", *Journal of Women's Studies International Forum*, Vol. 24, No:2 :167-180.

14. Premkander, S. (2003), "NGOs and local MFI's – how to increase poverty reduction through women's small and micro-enterprise", *Journal of Futures*, Vol.35, No:4 :361-378.
15. Renting, H., et al., (2008), *New emerging roles for public intuitions at the urban-rural interface: the cases of public food procurement and urban food strategies*, *Transition Towards Sustainable Agriculture, Food Chains and Peri-Urban Areas Conference*, Wageningen, The Netherlands. Available at:  
<http://www.agricultureintransition.wur.nl/UK/Submission+Final+Abstract/Full+Papers/>
16. Vaergas, C. M. (2002), "Women in sustainable development: empowerment through partnerships for healthy living", *World Development*, Vol.30, No:9 :1539-1560.
17. Weinberger, K. (2001), "Women's Participation in local organizations: conditions and constrains", *Journal of World Development*, Vol.29, No:8 :1391-1404.