

# Radio Programme Provides Information on Food Technology to Rural Women in Pakistan

## About the Aurat Foundation

In 1986 **Aurat Publication and Information Service Foundation** was set up as an information and advisory service for women as well as a clearing-house of information on women. The organisation generates information for women's empowerment in society and disseminates it through established and alternative channels of communication. The major focus of Aurat Foundation has been the women from the low income strata who have the least access to organised information which can enable them to make decisions in their daily lives and reduce their dependence on social structures and relationships that perpetuate their suppression and subordination in society.

The strategy of Aurat Foundation is to focus at two levels:

- ◆ at the grassroots level, for facilitating and developing women's capabilities, confidence, and organisational efforts, which will also ensure that they are able to benefit from the services and opportunities provided by the government and NGOs for their development.
- ◆ at the macro decision-making level, for bringing about a positive and critical change in the policies, programmes and laws which impact on women's lives.

The work of Aurat Foundation is organised under the following areas of activities:

- ◆ collection of information
- ◆ development of information
- ◆ information dissemination
- ◆ networking
- ◆ training

For undertaking this work, the organisation has a documentation and resource centre, which consists of a library, a publications unit and an audiovisual unit. It has also established a number of information services for legal, health, financial, employment and environment information. Aurat Foundation is also networking with organisations and agencies working for women to establish an information network for women's development. Other activities which feed into its information development and dissemination objectives include research and training for NGOs and women at the grassroots level.

Women lack access to technology in rural Pakistan in three levels:

- ◆ women lack information on technologies which raise productivity in activities which are shared jointly by males and females.
- ◆ in female-specific tasks like household chores or food preparation there has been very little development of technology and where there is, very little acquiring of it by the household, reflecting the low priority given to women's work.
- ◆ where technology is introduced for female-specific operations, it is immediately taken over by males because of profitability.

Most training programmes for enhancing agricultural productivity do not take into account women's time commitments and the constraints that prevent them from taking part in the training. Without the necessary training, women are unable to utilise the new technologies and hence are replaced by the men in the activities which were once defined as female-specific. When new technology is introduced, it usually helps men with their task of ploughing and irrigation, while women continue with their back-breaking work of weeding and transplanting, either picking by hand or using primitive implements. Even when technology is introduced for tasks done traditionally by women, the machines tend to replace women completely rather than easing their work. Men take over the moment the activity becomes commercially feasible.

There is thus a definite need to reach out to women in the rural areas through the radio with information related to food production technologies, including agricultural production, crop and food processing and preservation, agro-forestry and rural energy.

Aurat Foundation has developed a project whereby a weekly, 30-minute radio programme will be run over a period of two years. It will provide rural women the information they need for technologies relevant to their roles in the food production cycle. Although the programme will reach a very large target group, its short duration needs to be accompanied by supplementary activities which are vital for a continuing impact. A follow-up action plan has therefore been formulated to main-

tain continuity in information communication, develop two-way communication channels between women and technology institutions, and respond to expressed needs.

In the current phase of this project, Aurat Foundation is doing the following:

- ◆ conducting field research from primary and secondary sources to build up activity profiles of rural women with information on indigenous technologies in the food production cycle.
- ◆ conducting research on the relevant appropriate technologies available with the government and the private sector, including information and agreement on providing training for rural women, as well as arrangement of demonstrations at accessible locations.
- ◆ conducting a survey amongst a sample of villages to determine women's listening time preference, their language preference and their information needs.

The follow-up activities to the radio programme include:

- ◆ repackaging information in the form of printed material, audio-cassettes, etc.
- ◆ dissemination of material through various channels such as mailing, or directly to the women in listening centres, or through rural-based organisations which are part of Aurat Foundation's network.
- ◆ arranging for technology demonstrations and training by relevant institutions and agencies wherever rural women express such a demand.

Any project for women's economic upliftment cannot always imply providing more work for them but must undertake to recognise their work, time and energy commitments and to decrease their workloads while increasing their productivity and income.

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