

ROLE OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE SECTOR

Dr. Raj P. Chavan

Assistant Professor

Department of Sociology

Vivekanand College, Kolhapur.

Prof. Shobhatai S. Patil

Assistant Professor

Department of Sociology

Kamala College, Kolhapur.

Abstract:

Agriculture can be an important engine of growth and poverty reduction. But the sector is underperforming in many countries in part because women, who are often a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy, face constraints that reduce their productivity. In this paper we draw on the available empirical evidence to study in which areas and to what degree women participate in agriculture. Aggregate data shows that women comprise about 43 percent of the agricultural labour force globally and in developing countries. But this figure masks considerable variation across regions and within countries according to age and social class. Time use surveys, which are more comprehensive but typically not nationally representative, add further insight into the substantial heterogeneity among countries and within countries in women's contribution to agriculture. They show that female time-use in agriculture varies also by crop, production cycle, age and ethnic group. A few time-use surveys have data by activity and these show that in general weeding and harvesting were predominantly female activities. Overall the labour burden of rural women exceeds that of men, and includes a higher proportion of unpaid household responsibilities related to preparing food and collecting fuel and water. The contribution of women to agricultural and food production is significant but it is impossible to verify empirically the share produced by women. Women's participation in rural labour markets varies considerably across regions, but invariably women are over represented in unpaid, seasonal and part-time work, and the available evidence suggests that women are often paid less than men, for the same work. This paper re-affirms that women make essential contributions to agriculture and rural enterprises across the developing world. But there is much diversity in women's roles and over-generalization undermines policy relevance and planning. The context is important and policies must be based on sound data and gender analysis.

Key words: Women, gender, agriculture, labour force, employment, production, time-use, demographics, market access.

1. Introduction:

The international development community has recognized that agriculture is an engine of growth and poverty reduction in countries where it is the main occupation of the poor. Women make essential contributions to the

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agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as –economically active employment|| in national accounts but they are essential to the wellbeing of rural households. This paper contributes to the gender debate in agriculture by assessing the empirical evidence in three areas that has received much attention in the literature: But the agricultural sector in many developing countries is underperforming, in part because women, who represent a crucial resource in agriculture and the rural economy through their roles as farmers, labourers and entrepreneurs, almost everywhere face more severe constraints than men in access to productive resources. Efforts by national governments and the international community to achieve their goals for agricultural development, economic growth and food security will be strengthened and accelerated if they build on the contributions that women make and take steps to alleviate these constraints.

2. Women do in agriculture and rural employment:

Women make important contributions to the agricultural and rural economies of all regions of the world. However, the exact contribution both in terms of magnitude and of its nature is often difficult to assess and shows a high degree of variation across countries and regions. This paper presents an overview of the evidence on the roles of women in agriculture and in rural labour markets. It also looks at demographic trends in rural areas with regard to the gender composition of rural populations.

3. Women in the agricultural labour force:

Two types of data can contribute to measuring the contribution of women in the agricultural labour force: statistics on the share of women in the economically active population in agriculture and time use surveys, which document the time spent by men and women in different activities.

4. Economically active population in agriculture:

Data on the economically active population in agriculture are available for many countries, and provide the most comprehensive measure of the participation of women in agriculture. In this measure, an individual is reported as being in the agricultural labour force if he or she reports that agriculture is his or her main economic activity. However, these data may underestimate female participation in agriculture for reasons discussed below, and caution is advised in interpreting changes over time because improvements in data

collection may be responsible for some of the observed changes. Reports weighted averages for the share of women in the agricultural labour force (or economically active in agriculture) in 5 major regions of the world. According to these data, women comprise just over 40 percent of the agricultural labour force in the developing world, a figure that has risen slightly since 1980 and ranges from about 20 percent in the Americas to almost 50 percent in Africa. Even considering these data as lower bounds for the participation of women in the agricultural labour force, they do not support estimates above 60 percent except for a few countries.

5. Women's contribution to agricultural production:

As seen above, women play a significant role in the agricultural labour force and in agricultural activities, although to a varying degree. Consequently their contribution to agricultural output is undoubtedly extremely significant, although difficult to quantify with any accuracy. It has often been claimed that women produce 60-80 percent of food. However, assigning contributions to agricultural outputs by gender is problematic because in most agricultural households both men and women are involved in crop production. It can be attempted to allocate output by gender by assuming that specific crops are grown by women and others by men and then aggregating the value of women's and men's crops to determine the share grown by women. Researchers have occasionally used this approach, especially in West Africa, where there are distinguishable cropping patterns by gender (Hoddinott and Haddad, 1995; Duflo and Udry, 2001). Yet, a careful analysis of agriculture in Ghana finds that while there are gendered patterns of cropping, the distinctions between men's and women's crops do not hold up well enough to use them to make inferences about men's and women's relative contribution to production. In addition, gendered patterns of cropping may change over time (Doss, 2002).

6. Women as livestock keepers:

Within pastoralist and mixed farming systems, livestock play an important role in supporting women and in improving their financial situation and women are heavily engaged in the sector. An estimated two-thirds of poor livestock keepers, totalling approximately 400 million people, are women (Thornton et al, 2002). They share responsibility with men and children for the care of animals, and particular species and types of activity are more associated with women than men. When tasks are divided, men are more likely to be involved in constructing housing and herding of grazing animals and in marketing of products if women's mobility is constrained. The available evidence suggests that the role of women in meeting these changing demands may diminish, for two reasons. The first is that when livestock enterprises scale up, the control of decisions and income and sometimes of the entire enterprise often shifts to men. This is not a universal phenomenon –

for example, in Viet Nam, many medium-sized duckbreeding enterprises are managed by women – but it is common and can be explained by the limited access that women have to land and credit. The second important factor is that all 15smallholders face challenges when the livestock sector intensifies and concentrates and many go out of business.

7. Women in fisheries and aquaculture:

In 2008, nearly 45 million people world-wide were directly engaged, full-time or part-time, in the fishery primary sector (FAO fishery database). In addition, about 135 million people are estimated to be employed in the secondary sector, including post-harvest activities. While comprehensive data are not available on a sex-disaggregated basis, case studies suggest that women may comprise up to 30 percent of the total employment in fisheries, including primary and secondary activities. Information provided to FAO from 86 countries indicates that in 2008, 5.4 million women worked as fishers and fish farmers in the primary sector. Women have rarely engaged in commercial offshore and long distance capture fisheries because of the vigorous work involved but also because of women’s domestic responsibilities and/or social norms. Women are more commonly occupied in subsistence and commercial fishing from small boats and canoes in coastal or inland waters. Women also contribute as entrepreneurs and provide labour before, during and after the catch in both artisanal and commercial fisheries. For example, in West Africa, the so called –Fish Mamas|| play a major role. They usually own capital and are directly and vigorously involved in the coordination of the fisheries chain, from production to sale of fish. This represents 12 percent of the total. In two major producing countries, China and India, women represented a share of 21 percent and 24 percent, respectively, of all fishers and fish farmers. Studies of women in aquaculture, especially in Asia where aquaculture has a long tradition, indicate that the contribution of women in labour is often greater than men’s although there is almost a complete absence of macro-level aquaculture-related sex- disaggregated data. Women are reported to constitute 33 percent of the rural aquaculture workforce in China, 42 percent in Indonesia and 80 percent in Viet Nam (Kusabe and Kelker, 2001). The most significant role played by women in both artisanal and industrial fisheries is at the processing and marketing stages, where they are very active in all regions. In some countries, women have become important entrepreneurs in fish processing; in fact, most fish processing is performed by women, either in their own household-level industries or as wage labourers in the large-scale processing industry

8. Female participation in rural labour markets:

8.1. Women and unpaid household responsibilities:

Women are generally less able than men to participate in economic opportunities because they face a work burden that men do not. In most

societies, women are responsible for most of the household and child-rearing activities as well rearing of small livestock, although norms differ by culture and over time. This additional work burden is unpaid and limits women's capacity to engage in income-earning activities, which often require a minimum fixed time before being profitable. Furthermore, the nature of tasks, such as caring for children and elderly household members, requires women to stay near the home, thus limiting options to work for a wage. It is estimated that women provide 85 to 90 percent of the time spent on household food processing and preparation across a wide range of countries (Fontana and Natalia, 2008; Jain, 1996; Acharya and Bennett, 1982; Wrangham, 2009). Women are also usually responsible for child care and household chores. Depending on the household structure and size, these tasks may be extremely time intensive. Time-allocation studies have shown that women work significantly more than men if care giving is included in the calculations.

8.2. Gender differences within rural labour markets:

In addition to differences in male and female labour participation rates noted earlier, there are also major gender differences in employment patterns within labour markets for several reasons which hold across cultures and regions. Most importantly, as a result of household and child-rearing, women are not only much less likely to participate in the labour force, those who do are also much more likely to engaged in self-employment activities rather than higher-paying wage employment. Due to child care responsibilities economically active women often leave the labour market and thus accumulate less work experience. As a result of time constraints women are also more likely to work in part time jobs and in informal arrangements that pay less and/or provide fewer benefits, but provide more flexibility. Women are also more concentrated in certain phases or activities of the supply chain (e.g. packaging, post-processing). Occupational segregation into low-technology occupations limits the opportunities to generate new skills and capabilities, thus hindering future professional development and reinforcing the discrimination towards these sectors as low-pay and low-status occupations. Finally, there is a well documented pay gap in urban labour markets - likely to exist in rural labour markets as well - in that women are paid less even for equivalent jobs and comparable levels of education and experience.

8.3. The gender demographics of agriculture and rural areas:

The preceding sections discussed gender differences in labour market participation and type of employment in agriculture and in rural areas, with the data available revealing a significant amount of regional diversity. This section concentrates on demographic gender imbalances in rural areas. In this respect numerous studies find that agriculture and rural areas are becoming –feminized|| (Lastarria-Cornhiel, 2006; Deere, 2005). Not all authors have the same understanding of the meaning of this word, although two concepts are

generally considered: women predominate in the agricultural sector or women are rapidly gaining a predominant position. Presents average female share of the working age population (aged 15-49) of all major regions of the world, by urban and rural areas. These patterns reflect different economic and social norms, which have produced different migration trends for men and women. We note that feminization is also frequently observed in certain sectors such as unskilled labour in the fruit, vegetable and cut-flower export sect

8.4. Agricultural transformation and access to markets:

Economic development has and will continue to transform the agricultural sector in many developing countries. The process includes greater commercialization, urbanization and integration into the global economy. These trends and changes bring with them challenges and opportunities, some with a distinct gender dimension. Economic development and rising incomes lead to greater demand for high-value commodities, processed products, and pre-prepared foods. In turn, food supply chains become increasingly vertically integrated, linking input suppliers, producers, processors, distributors and retailers. Supermarkets are part of this vertical chain because they are convenient, meet diversifying tastes, and set standards for quality and safety.

9. Conclusion:

In this paper we collate the empirical evidence on women's roles in agriculture, setting the stage for subsequent analysis on gender differences in agriculture and the potential gains from removing these gender differences. The main findings are: Women comprise about 43 percent of the global agricultural labour force and of that in developing countries, but this figure masks considerable variation across regions and within countries according age and social class. Women comprise half or more of the agricultural labour force in many African and Asian countries, but the share is much less in some. Time use surveys, which provide a more comprehensive assessment of how men and women spend their time, further emphasise the heterogeneity among countries and within countries in women's contribution to agriculture. The labour burden of rural women exceeds that of men, and includes a higher proportion of unpaid household responsibilities related to preparing food and collecting fuel and water. The contribution of women to agricultural and food production is clearly significant. However, it is impossible to verify empirically the share produced by women because agriculture is usually a venture among household members and involves a range of resources and inputs that cannot be readily assigned by gender. Women's participation in rural labour markets show much heterogeneity at the regional level, but women are over represented in unpaid, seasonal and part-time work, and the available evidence suggests that women are often paid less than men, for the same work. We conclude that accurate, current, regionally specific information and

analysis is necessary for good gender-aware agricultural policy making. Data collection has improved substantially over the last decades, as has our understanding of the complexity of women's roles and the need to collect data not only on primary activities but on all women's activities. Data are needed to better understand gender roles in agriculture and how they change over time and in response to new opportunities. We have shown that women's roles are diverse and that they vary across regions and countries. These roles cannot be understood properly, and interventions targeting cannot be designed effectively, without also understanding their differential access to land, capital, assets, human capital, and other productive resources.

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