

Gender Role in Agricultural Activities in Ethiopia: Country Review

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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. Available data on rural and agricultural feminization shows that this is not a general trend but mainly sub-Saharan Africa phenomena, as well as observed in some sectors such as unskilled labour in the fruit, vegetable and cut-flower export sector. 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.

Keywords: Gender, Gender role and Agriculture

Introduction

Background

Various socio-economic activities performed by people are characterized by a certain kind of division of labour, among which the gender dimension is more apparent. In the process of social and economic development, people specialize in particular tasks and hence it is socially accepted that there are men's tasks and women's tasks (Yaekob, 2011). Although societies divide these activities to sexes differ from one culture to another and from time to time, a gender division of labour exists in all societies (Melese, 2011).

Such division of labour is perceived to be 'natural' because it has not shown any change for generations (Boserup, 1970). According to Boserup (1970), in many societies, "...the traditional division of labour... is usually considered natural in the sense of being obviously and originally imposed by the sex differences in itself." Moreover, it has been believed for so long that any attempt to change or modify the defined gender division of labour is regarded as "inducing an upset into the accepted natural order" (Addis, 1990 cited in Yaekob, 2011).

It has been observed that women, like men make major contributions in economic, social and political development. As far as women's economic role is concerned, their agricultural contribution comes at the forefront (Boserup, 1970). Although women's contribution is critical, there is a general tendency of obscurity and inadequate recognition of their roles. This is mainly due to the wrong assumption that 'what would benefit one section of society (in most cases men) will be trickled-down to other section of society (in this case women)'. Due to this generalization, the role of women in productive activities is unusually recognized and remunerated for long (Sintayehu, 2011). This had led rural women to have a limited access to and control over resources (notably land, capital, agricultural inputs, and credit and extension services). As a result they are placed at the bottom stratum of society. What is more, in patriarchal societies, there is a traditional perception which greatly affects their place in society and economy (Charlton, 1984).

The backbone of Ethiopia's economy like many other developing countries is the agricultural sector, which absorbs significant labour force out of which women make almost half. It is documented in many literatures that, Ethiopian rural women play a significant role in crop and livestock production in addition to their reproductive and community roles. However their relative access to and control over resources is limited vis-à-vis men. This is believed to contribute its part to the sector's low performance (Yaekob, 2011).

In recognition to the above fact, gender issues, especially the case of gender and agricultural production, have drawn the attention of a good deal of academicians, development planners and practitioners. As a result, there is an increasing interest to assess and investigate women's place in society with the aim of devising a sound solution to the problems they encounter. This review shows that both women and men take part in agricultural activities in spite of some differences among different regions. Thus, the roles of both women and men in agriculture in some regions of the country will be discussed in this study.

Objectives

The general objective of the review is to assess Women Farmers' role in Agricultural Extension Services in Ethiopia

Specific objectives of the study:

- To review the level of participation of women in agriculture
- To examine determinant factors of rural women participation in agriculture

Significance of the study

Women account more than half of the total community and their contribution in securing their family food demand is of great importance. But the society gave them less attention. Therefore, this study aimed at uncovering the role of women in agriculture and how they fill the gap of Food production in the family. The output of the study could be significant for decision Makers in providing valuable information with regard to the role of women in agriculture, other activities and work load, and hence formulate gender sensitive development projects. And finally it creates awareness among the society and outsiders on the role played by women and give due respect to their contribution.

Discussion

Gender Role in Ethiopia

Ethiopia women have played a traditional role of motherhood and home maker in both rural and areas. However, their work has never been limited to the household and the family. Ethiopia women are actively involved in all aspects of their social life. Women are both producers and procreators and they are active participant in the social and cultural activities of the community. However, the important roles they play have not always been recognized. Without, equal opportunities, they have lagged behind men in all fields of self advancement. Economic development is unthinkable without women participation; however, because their participation in the economy has not been valued Ethiopian women have not received even their share of the nation wealth. Woman's productivity is predominated in the processing and marketing of food in rearing, and food processing and industries (Melese, 2011).

In rural areas, women are engaged in a wide variety of economic activities including the construction of houses, land cultivating and harvesting, and food storage and marketing (Regassa, 2009). However, women's work in the agricultural sector has often been erroneously documented as marginal and they have been considered more as consumer than producers. Women have secondary status within the family and in the society, which is why they get little credit for their productivity. Hence, women continue to be regarded as an appendage to the family and as consumer but not as producers. Important changes have taken place with the introduction of the socialist ideology, which advocate equal right for all, irrespective of sex, religious, racial or social origin. Ethiopia's women seem to have gained somewhat better experience since the 1974 socio-economic and political transportation. They have expanded their horizon with educational advancement and increased economic activity (Tadelle, 2008). Since 90% of the Ethiopia inhabit in the countryside, our focus is on rural women because women in urban a small comparison. Under changes such as the rise in the literacy an increase in school enrolment and growing competition in the employment market, have not directly affected the live of rural women. In regard to gender role in agriculture, Boserup (1970) classified it into two bases, the level of population density and the level of agricultural technology. On the basis of these variables, the gender role in agricultural production varies from place to place. According to her, female role in agricultural production is dominant in African because the continent is sparsely populated and the agricultural technology is based on simple hand tools that are hoes, sickle, axe and iron tipped digging stick. As to Boserup, women, in Africa, carry out nearly all farming activities except tree felling. This is illustrated in her own words as follow:- Africa is the region of female farming par-excellence.

In many African tribes, nearly all the tasks connected with food production continue to be left to women..... Tree felling is always done by men, most often by young boys of 15 to 18 years... (1970:16). In the places where plough cultivation prevails, men plough the land by using draught animals and women are expected to do the work by using their hands. To Boserup, the plough cultivation system exempts women from the work of agriculture and enables them to concentrate on the domestic duties.

Gender division of labor among farming communities of Ethiopia has also been common. Ethiopia is a country where more than 85% of its population depend on rain fed agriculture. Agriculture is the back bone of the national economy. Both men and women have been playing a significant role in the development of agricultural production. The role and the contribution of both male and female, in the agricultural activities, is not necessarily the same in all parts of the country. Since Ethiopia is the country of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural groups, all ethnic and cultural groups have different gender roles in agriculture.

The work of Helen (1992:78) shows that among the community of Menz, in Northern Shoa of the Amhara region of Ethiopia, women do not plough agricultural land. Rather, they assist their husbands in supportive tasks except harvesting. They feed their husbands, fetch water to men and livestock during agricultural field work, help men during threshing and make grain seeds ready for sowing. Moreover, Helen (1992) indicated that land preparation, weeding, harvesting, threshing and storing have been some of women's primary responsibilities. In Amhara Region According to her, they are also in charge of herding, tending sick animals, watering, barn cleaning, milking and milk processing. Unlike the women of the Menz community, the people in Awra Amba, Southern Gonder of the Amhara region, have no specific gender role in agricultural production. The women of the Awra Amba community equally participate with men in agricultural production. The women plough the land with oxen while men perform domestic activities at home.

The division of labor, in this area, is based on age rather than sex. Hence, both women and men are equally considered as producers and have equal position and value in both agricultural production and decision making (Tadele, 1994). In the case of Sidama, which is found in Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region, the participation of women in agricultural activities is common. According to Sintayehu (2011), manuring, harvesting, storing are exclusively the task of women. However, women are culturally prohibited from agricultural practices such as ploughing, hoeing, sowing and weeding. They are not also allowed to use farm instruments like plows, hoes and sickles. In the area men are engaged in production of both food and cash crops. Sintayehu (2011) explains that most agricultural works among the Oromos of Ethiopia are carried out by men. As he mentions, cultivation, harvesting and threshing are all the activities of men while women are confined in cooking food, milking and keeping the house.

Similarly, the findings of Regassa (2009) assert the validity of the work of Huntingford. According to Regassa, agricultural activities are predominantly men's task among the Maqi oromo, South East Shoa administrative zone of Oromia region. In this zone, women's involvement in agricultural production, like the Menz community of the Amhara region, is not much different despite variations from one household to the other. Ploughing is entirely men's activity. Women never try it. There is a belief in the community that goes, 'If women cultivate, there will be no rain fall'. They have a strong belief about it. The people in the community believe that father is analogous to God (Waqoo) and mother is to earth (lafa). God gives rain to the earth so that earth bears different kinds of plants just as mother bears off springs after receiving the father's semen. So, if a mother is similar to earth, it is shame that, by analogy, a woman cannot till the earth. It is considered like a woman having sexual intercourse with another woman. Among the Maqi oromo, clearing the farming land, removing the bush, tilling, sowing, preparing the threshing floor and farm implements are all carried out by men. Other agricultural activities like weeding, digging and storing to some extent are shared with women. However, weeding is the most common task of women. Women participation in the field of agricultural production does not seem a norm in the area though not strictly forbidden.

The average day for a rural farm, marketing, cottage production and labor exchange for different kinds of community service. In all these activities, women receive no remuneration for their labor, no monetary or material gains and no benefit in luxury time and improving their living condition (Yigremew,2011). The point is not that women should place themselves above the need of their family, or that their need and wants are similar to those of urban women with higher income. Rural women spend their time in productive activities, which directly benefits their families and society in economic term. There should be some terms (measurable means) of remunerating their productive services and of providing incentives for them to produce efficiently and use their energies meaningfully (Yigremew, 2011)

Empirical Studies on Women in the Agriculture Sector

According to FAO (2010), women's contribution to agriculture was about 60-80% in Benin, 48% in Burkina Faso, 80% in Congo, and 30% in Sudan. Women in Asia and Latin America also make a greater contribution to the food production. Almaz (2000) cited that 20-40% of agricultural labour is done by rural women in Ethiopia,

as noted by Frank (1999), it is also estimated that about 79% of rural women in Ethiopia work 13-17 hours per day almost two fold of men. Different case studies conducted on gender analysis of small-scale farms in different parts of Africa indicate that crop and livestock production are major sources of livelihood. Off-farm activities, part-time jobs, pensions and remittances are some of the means to maintain the farm family. References also indicate the heavy workload and lower productivity of women. Kalinda *et al.*, (2000) reported that in Choma, Southern district of Zambia, male-headed households tend to own larger farms and more cattle and ox plough. The use of technological packages is related to wealth (livestock), particularly cattle in rural households. Rural women in Ethiopia represent a tremendous productive resource in the agricultural sector. They are major contributors to the agricultural workforce, either as family members or in their own right as women heading households. There have been recent policy initiatives to strengthen the position of women in the agricultural sector. In 2005, the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty, 2005/06 to 2009/10 (PASDEP) was launched to safeguard rights such as access to land, credit, and other productive resources, and to protect women from other deprivations, such as longer working days, violence and discrimination(IPMS & ILRI, 2010).

However, despite these recent initiatives, a mixture of economic constraints, cultural norms and practices continue to limit women's contribution to household food security and, to a lesser extent, inhibit the commercialization of the agricultural sector. Gender roles and relationships influence the division of work, the use of resources, and the sharing of the benefits of production between women and men. In particular, the introduction of new technologies and practices, underpinned by improved service provision, often disregards the gendered-consequences of market-oriented growth and many benefits bypass women (IPMS, ILRI, 2010).

Women in Agricultural Activities

In most societies men's roles in agricultural activities is understood to be directed and clear. However women's role in agriculture is not clearly recognized. Hence a clear picture of women's participation in agriculture is needed. Although these is increasing that women are involved in the world agriculture until recently have been difficult to gain a clear picture of where, and under what circumstance women particular in the farm work (Bosrup, 1970).

Although the micro studies documenting the importance of women's roles have arisen steadily national statistics have to undercount women's agricultural labor, due to their definition of agricultural activities in their intervening producer. Women play important roles to help their family in particular and their community in general in sewing their food demand, in the world. But the most surprising thing is that the community has not significantly understood the effort that they exert in the last several years. Women are involved in agricultural and rural development representing more than half of the labor required to produce food consumed in developing countries (Helen, 2007). One problem here is reaching at common understanding as to how female farmers are perceived in society; observations indicate that a female farmer is commonly perceived as a co farmer as marginal players in agricultural development particularly by those individuals with significant influence in research, extension and development positions (Charlton, 1985).

Factors Affecting Women's Participation in Agricultural Production

There are a number of factors that affect women's participation in agricultural production activities. Demographic factors (like age of women and number and characteristics of children in the family), economic factors (such as the size of the farm land and access to key factors of production), and the socio-cultural factors (such as attitudes toward women's work and culturally ascribed roles of women) have been used to explain the levels and trends of women's labour force participation. These factors are briefly discussed below.

Demographic Factors

These factors include a multitude of interrelated issues that affect women's involvement in agricultural production activities. Since women's productive roles are undertaken side by side with household maintenance tasks and reproductive roles, their farm participation is constrained by the time requirement for such tasks and roles. It is documented in many literatures that most of women's time is spent in strenuous and tiresome domestic chores and other reproductive roles like child bearing and rearing (Yaekob, 2010). The women's work in their houses is fundamental to the survival of their families although remains unremunerated. Some household jobs must be done every day, for example cooking, fetching water, collecting firewood or cleaning; some are done occasionally like washing, preparing local drinks or grinding just to mention a few. These family responsibilities take the women's time to participate in agricultural production activities.

In addition, childbearing and rearing can have different effects on labour force participation: it prevents women from working; it can affect the quality and quantity of women's work; and it can influence the type of work performed by women (Yaekob, 2010). Factors such as age and number of children can affect women's participation. It is generally believed that the more dependent, small aged children a family has the less

probability of the women to participate in farm activities as she is responsible for childrearing. Other related factors such as availability of hired labour also affect women's involvement in agricultural production activities. According to Boserup (1970), the availability of hired labour is one factor for the release of women from agricultural activities in the plough culture areas.

Economic Factors

The other determinant of women participation in farm production activities is related to their access to and control over key factors of production. It is revealed in many studies that most African women are active actors in agricultural production. And hence their relation to factors of production such as land, agricultural inputs, labour and services like agricultural extension and credit is a critical factor in their ability to produce food and generate income for themselves and their families (Boserup, 1970). However, their access to these resources is limited. The recognition of the household through males (husbands) is one major factor usually cited for such limited access to resources. Worsen than this "...rural women's 20.

Institutional factors also affect women's participation in agricultural production activities. By ignoring women's role in production, governments targets information, training and credit programs to men in rural areas (Sachs, 1996). This male bias is reflected in the assumption that farmers are men and therefore agricultural technologies and inputs are channeled through men (Ibid). By quoting Staudt (1982), Yigremew noted that "bias against women farmers was Yigremew, 2011): apparent and commonplace in agricultural policies throughout Africa" Yigremew(2011) cited in Workwuha,(2012) reported that:

...agricultural knowledge...is noticed to be very much dependent on the cultural ideology that 'women cannot use the plough'. ...Such gender allocations of agricultural tasks and asymmetrical valuation of farm activities is the outcome of socialization in determining the way women and men should relate in production.

This has resulted, argues Yigremew (2001) "in the belief that women could not act as fully independent agents in relation to agricultural production". According to Wudenesh (2003), in traditional Ethiopian agriculture where a farmer is considered to be the male, women farmers in the small farm households are quite often left in the transfer of improved agricultural technologies.

Socio-cultural Factors

Cultural factors are the most proximate determinants of women's place and status in a given society. In many societies, women have a subordinate status. It is documented in many studies that men feel that women's work is marginal/subsidiary to what men do and consider it as wifely duty rather than work. Similarly, women as well as men consider that men are responsible to perform 'heavy' and 'important' tasks and they therefore are in charge of every privilege in the household. On the other hand, women are believed to engage in 'less important' works as a result they enjoy less privilege. This is so believed in spite the lack of a parameter that measures a given work to level it as either 'heavy' and 'important.'

According to various studies that base themselves on direct matrix ranking and pilling method, the time and labour demand of a given task is taken to differentiate the nature of the Dis advantageous position in respect to access to resources is compounded by their lack of control over the use and management of such resources" (Yigremew, 2011). Such lack is one of the reasons for women's low levels of contribution to agricultural production work done by women and men. Accordingly, it is revealed that the longer the time and the more labour a certain task requires the more heavy the activity is (Workwoha, 2012). Moreover, some activities could be performed along side with other activities. So, it can be argued that the more overlapping and repetitive the work, the heavy it is (Ibid). This is in one way or another related to the patriarchal system that favors men.

Powerful male supremacy norms dictate that a woman's status be defined only through the men who are responsible for her: father, husband, brother, son (Safilios and Rothschild, 1985). Within such a context of patriarchal values, women's work and economic contributions tend to be viewed as supplementary and auxiliary to men's work and breadwinning function (Ibid). An implicit assumption is made that the woman is basically a mother and housewife; any productive work she carries out is considered socially secondary, an extension of her primary function, and thus it has tended to remain unnoticed, more so in the case of rural women (Reddy and Rani, 1982). In societies of rigid system of patriarchy, the norms, values, and social structures, creates mechanisms that hide rural women's contribution to Third World agriculture, especially among the poor, and maintain the image of female dependency on men (Safilios-Rothschild, 1985).

Conclusion

Gender is a crosscutting issue that attracts the attention of development professionals, policy makers and politicians to mention some. It is due the fact that in any development interventions involvement of women has become Compulsory. To this end, considering the roles of men and women is very important, and gender roles vary across culture. In Ethiopia where agriculture is the backbone of the economy, the participation of women in

the field is very high. It is, however, clear that the roles men and women play in agriculture differs from region to region. Though men are taking the lion's share in agricultural production, the contribution of women has also been an undeniable fact.

The livelihoods of rural people in the study area are completely dependent on agricultural incomes. For this agricultural works women have a lion's share in the area which is performed by all able-bodied household members. Despite the fact that women have extra-load than men because they participate in all activities, these efforts do not reflect to their life quality in terms of income and social status due to cultural taboos. The division of labor in the area is quite traditional. Certain jobs are reserved for men and others for women. The traditional gender divisions of labor confine women to the domestic labor with the entire range of food preparation, fetching water, collecting fuel-wood and caring for the family.

Women in the study area involve almost all agricultural activities from land preparation to storing processes. The variations of labors between sexes exist only in the degree of works. Some activities are predominantly performed by women like storage preparation and storing processes; some by men and some labors equally share with the counterparts. The non-farming activities are not well developed in the study area due to cultural taboos, lack of awareness, shortage of transportation and marketing demands. Among the non-farm activities grass basketry, wool and cotton spinning are the most important which are performed solely by women.

Rural women lie at the heart of loath ensuring livelihood and attaining food security. They have always been made the invisible workforce and the unacknowledged backbone of the family economy. Commonly, women do most of the monetized and non-monetized economies. In order to achieve economic growth and attain food security, a modern technological approach, which systematically integrates women in development process, is a must. Balanced participation of men and women in development programs is indispensable to bring about effective agricultural production and sustainable food security. Therefore, development programs and policies should endorsed women.

Recommendations

Based on the study results and conclusion given, the following recommendations are suggested. Agricultural extension service by itself is not a panacea to improved household income and nutrition. Farm households may still continue to be food insecure and with low nutrition status unless all the stakeholders including farmers themselves make proper agricultural extension interventions. As a result, careful planning and follow up of agricultural extension services is crucial and critical by district agricultural offices and agricultural extension agents so as to bring improved household agricultural production and nutrition among women farmers of the district. The expectations that as the size of cultivated land and TLU in the household increases, the probability of farm household income and nutrition increases did not hold true for female headed households in the study area. One shouldn't think to increase cultivated lands of female headed farmers, since cultivated land in the study area is already limited and there is no possibility of land redistribution (the district agricultural office confirmed this). Thus, agricultural extension office should work on more effective extension services for female headed farmers in order to maximize their agricultural production and improved household nutrition from their limited land and livestock holdings.

The district agricultural extension office should have to plan regular contacts of extension agents to women farmers so as to increase the potentials of increased access to information, credit, inputs which are important to production. The use of improved seeds significantly increases agricultural production for both female and male headed households. Thus, special attention should be given to increase the number of female headed farmers who should use agricultural inputs and also focus on increased use of improved seeds and fertilizer by female headed households so as to increase their agricultural production and household income. Moreover, informal and formal institutions should effectively disseminate agricultural extension information forums to women households.

In the study area, high illiteracy rate of women was observed. Therefore, literacy rates may negatively influence women farmer's participation in utilization of agricultural extension service that may improve agricultural production and nutrition. Thus, an effort should be made by the district administrative and agricultural officers to improve the literacy rate of particularly female headed farmers.

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