

How to Address the Gender Issues in Agriculture and Rural Development in Ethiopia?

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Abstract

Agriculture is the dominant sector of the Ethiopian economy and its performance is the major determinant of overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which accounts for almost 41%. The role that women play and their position in meeting the challenges of agricultural production and development are quite dominant and prominent. Despite this, women have been left out of the formal agriculture extension process and the formal structures for rural development. Unless the gender issues in agriculture are addressed, rural development cannot be achieved in Ethiopia. Hence this paper examines the constraints facing by women's complete integration into the agricultural and rural development process and the mechanism to mitigate the situation. Women are invariably involved in most aspects of agricultural production including weeding, harvesting, preparing storage containers, managing all aspects of home gardens, poultry raising, transporting farm inputs to the field, procuring water for household use and some on-farm uses, marketing, food procurement, and household nutrition. Even though women contribute a lot for agricultural development, they face different constraints, mainly because of their lack of access to resources, smaller land size and tend to suffer from landlessness. Furthermore, women tend to use more labour on their plots which increases their expenses for land management and eventually reduces their income. Women are assigned the 'little' tasks such as weeding, storing and processing, hand-harvest of some cash-crops; culturally, it is not acceptable for women to sow or plant. Generally there is a division of ownership of livestock, where large animals are considered belonging to the men and small ones to the women. A serious lapse in the country's agricultural extension system had hitherto being that it was pro-male and gender-insensitive towards women farmers. Also they face risk to health such as rape, early marriage, HIV/AIDS etc. However, such issues can be addressed through making policies for equal access to and control over resources, increasing skills and knowledge, increasing participation in market oriented agriculture production, strengthening women's decision making power, increasing accessibility of technology, improving wellbeing and easing workload etc.

Key words: Gender Issues, Agriculture Development, Rural Development, Equality

1. Introduction

The bedrock of rural development in developing countries of sub-Saharan Africa is agriculture development, without which all efforts of development will be futile. Agriculture is the dominant sector

of the Ethiopian economy and its performance is the major determinant of overall Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which accounts for almost 41%. It equally accounted for 80% of export earnings, 80% of the labor force and 70% of raw material inflow into agro-based industries. The agricultural resilience

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contributing to a reduction in the number of Ethiopians threatened with starvation, the five year growth and transformation plan (GTP) that Ethiopia unveiled in October 2010 presents a government led effort to achieve the country's ambitious development goals (Ethiopia Economy Report, 2012). In some Region and throughout Ethiopia agricultural production can be characterized as extremely labor intensive and utilizing little of modern technology.

The crop sub-sector accounts for 60% of the sector output, livestock 30% and forestry 10%, respectively. Farm households are responsible for cultivating about 96% of the cropped area and producing 90 - 94% of all cereals, pulses and oilseeds. However, around half of the country's rural population is chronically food insecure, living below the food poverty level of 2,200 K/calorie equivalent per adult per day (ibid). Agriculture production in semi-arid and drought prone areas is affected by recurrent droughts and environmental degradation leading to increased poverty levels in these areas. In particular, women are disproportionately affected as their access to productive resources is limited and where they are the heads of households their ability to ensure food security for the family is negatively affected.

In Ethiopia women do almost half of the labor required for agricultural production. Despite this women have been left out of the formal agriculture extension process and the formal structures for rural development. By preventing women equal access to agriculture extension advice, inputs and financial credit, household food insecurity has been exacerbated. This paper examines the constraints facing women's complete integration into

the agricultural and rural development process and the mechanism to mitigate the situation.

The role that women play and their position in meeting the challenges of agricultural production and development are quite dominant and prominent. Findings from a study financed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) revealed that women make up some 60-80 percent of agricultural labour force in Ethiopia, depending on the region and they produce two-thirds of the food crops. In spite of these, widespread assumption that men and not women make the key farm management decisions has prevailed. Sadly, female farmers in the country are among the voiceless, especially with respect to influencing agricultural policies. Such policies, which are aimed at increasing food security and food production, tend to either under estimate and totally ignore women's role in both production and the general decision-making process within the household. Socio-economic characteristics of the farmers, among other factors, affect their decision-making in agriculture as well.

2. Role and Place of Women in Agriculture

Women are invariably involved in most aspects of agricultural production, marketing, food procurement, and household nutrition, the view is widely held that 'women do not farm'. This Cultural perception remains strong even though numerous agricultural tasks are deemed 'women's work', including weeding, harvesting, preparing storage containers, managing all aspects of home

gardens and poultry raising, transporting farm inputs to the field, and procuring water for household use and some on-farm uses (EEA/EEPRI, 2006). Following are the activities commonly performed by the women in Ethiopia.

1. Land preparation – women participate in clearing the fields, leveling and picking away unwanted plant materials. Women also bring food to the field for those engaged in plowing.
2. Sowing – women transport seeds to the field and provide required amount of seed to person planting.
3. Hoeing – this activity is performed by women almost on an equal basis with the rest of the family.
4. Weeding – weeding is almost exclusively performed by women and of the agricultural activities women do, is the most time consuming.
5. Harvesting – women harvest pulses, root crops as well as perennial crops like coffee and enset.
6. Threshing and storing – these are the most important activities in which women take part. Women are responsible for the preparation of threshing ground and transporting the harvested crop to the threshing field, and when threshing is completed, transporting crop into the storage barn. To prepare the ground for threshing activities include ground clearing, providing cow dung

and water to then be smeared on the ground.

7. Household garden - the household garden is the responsibility of the woman. She decides what is to be planted, provides the labor, and she controls the production from the garden. Most of the produce is used for household consumption but she may also sell this produce for cash, which in most cases she can spend as she chooses.
8. Livestock Production - Women in farming communities are responsible for herding, barn cleaning, hay processing, milking and milk processing, fetching drinking water for animals, tending sick animals kept at home, and trekking animals to water source and vaccination centers.

There is some variety across crop commodity type, region, and farming system in the traditional allocation of agricultural activities between men and women. For example, in a medium to high altitude area in the central Oromia region dominated by teff production, men undertake nearly all tasks in cereal production, including land preparation, planting, fertilizing, and harvesting, with the exception of weeding, which is the women's task (Bishop-Sam brook, 2004). Hence participation of women in agricultural activity is constrained by cultural norms.

Women often predominate in the cultivation of horticulture, especially vegetable crops. Such crops are commonly grown on small land plots in the vicinity of the house, or in the

compound. Crop marketing and the control over revenues from these sales are often gender differentiated, and in some cases vary by crop type. Many female farmers bring the vegetables and fruits, the production of which they manage, to the market, and may retain these incomes to pay for household needs. In contrast, the marketing and income from cash crops grown by the household in larger scale, such as coffee, teff, and khat are controlled by the household head (who is nearly always male in households where the head has a spouse in the household), though there are many cases where small quantities of these important crops may be sold by the head's spouse.

Tending to livestock is most commonly performed by boys and young men. For the livestock types kept near the home, women are frequently responsible for providing feed and water for the livestock and for dairy production, and in some areas are involved in collecting animal dung from grazing lands. The sale of cattle and other large livestock is for the most part in the male domain. Recent extension packages tailored for women have emphasized sheep and goat husbandry and poultry.

Different programmes were initiated to integrate women into development process with specific reference to agriculture since the participation of women farmers in planning and policy making as well as the beneficiaries is important. A serious lapse in the country's agricultural extension system had hitherto being that it was pro-male and gender-insensitive towards women farmers. This arises from the fact that agricultural extension services in

Ethiopia had traditionally been focused on men and their farm production needs, while neglecting the female half of the production force.

Both the federal constitution, as well as all regional land proclamations, stipulates that the existing land rights are to be granted equally to men and women. Empirical evidence, however, reveals important gender asymmetries in de facto access to and control over land. Traditionally, this inequality in land has been perpetuated later in the household's 'life cycle', upon the death of the spouses' parents. Husbands nearly always inherited land when their parents died, whereas wives very rarely inherited their parents' land. However, more recently in the northern regions of the country, women have regularly inherited their parents' land.

3. Gender based constraints in Agriculture and Rural Development

Women face different constraints in the agriculture sector, mainly because of their different access to resources. Farm sizes for female heads of households are usually smaller than those under male headed households, and moreover women tend to suffer from landlessness more than men. Furthermore, women tend to use more labour on their plots which increases their expenses for land management and eventually reduces their income.

Identification of women as household head: In polygamous marriages, the husband is available but may be currently not living with one of the wives. Thus, planning and monitoring authorities overlook women who are living under this situation, because they are not identified as heads of households as

long as the husband is alive and the couples are still officially married. Women in polygamous marriages, to a large extent, continue to live alone and care for their children and households without the physical presence of a husband at all times. This situation has implications in terms of distribution of land, technology, and contact with extension workers, and access to other support services.

Division of labor: Agriculture officers and community representatives identified that in agriculture there is a division of responsibility of tasks. Women are assigned the 'little' tasks such as weeding, storing and processing, hand-harvest of some cash-crops; culturally, it is not acceptable for women to sow or plant. Men will do the 'heavy' tasks such as clearing and preparing the land usually involving some form of technology, and they will harvest. Women are also involved in growing subsistence crops and vegetables for household consumption. Men's and women's income are shared for health and education expenses of the family.

Land Tenure: There is a wide variation on the access to and use of land in Ethiopia as there have been several attempts at reform, and to date some regions, such as Tigray and Amhara, are undertaking limited amendments in issues concerning land. Thus, women from some regions have reported to have better access to and ownership of land in their own right, especially as a result of the land reform programmes, while in other regions land is still allocated mainly to men and on a

limited basis for female headed households. Where women did not own land, upon divorce her access to her husband's land was taken away and she was forced to move to another location to seek her own survival. Furthermore, due to these constraints female heads were forced to lease their land to sharecroppers and received less produce in return.

Extension and Training Services:

Currently the ratio of female to male extension worker is about 1:15. At the grass root level, farmers are in contact with development agents (DA) of which the female to male ratio is 1:50 for DAs. Female land owners reported that they had rarely been visited by an extension worker, and only about 2% of the female had been part of a demonstration exercise. Women farmers did not proactively seek extension advice and were only knowledgeable of the credit facilities available from some local institutions. These women were also not exposed to use of training in fertilizers, pesticides, or small equipments.

Access to Credit: General complaint from women is in order to get credit and make repayments, they have to travel long distances which sometimes constrained their decision to approach credit institutions. However, the sums involved in these credit systems are too small to purchase agriculture inputs and are basically used for household needs. Agriculture credit requires some form of guarantee of repayment and since women do not own either the land, equipment, or the produce, it is more difficult for them to qualify for a loan. Some credit schemes such as solidarity groups and associations are

much more limited to petty trading and informal sector activities, or are enough to meet some personal social obligations.

Irrigation Systems: Women are generally unable to provide labour on construction of irrigation facilities due to the heavy tasks involved. However, they contribute their labour in terms of transportation of construction material and putting in place light fixtures. Due to this limited role they are also not well represented in 'Water User Associations' and are not considered to be the part of the training in operations and maintenance of the facilities.

Livestock Ownership: Generally there is a division of ownership of livestock, where large animals are considered belonging to the men and small ones to the women. However, both men and women have different priorities with regards to livestock. Both men and women agree that veterinary services and medicines are very important as it helped to maintain livestock for the whole family. Men are more concerned for the need to have adequate pasture land, especially for large animals. However, this is also concern for women because they are usually charged with collection of fodder and feeding livestock left at home, as in the case of animal fattening programmes.

Agro-processing: Currently the majority of women in rural agriculture households are involved in some form of processing of farm produce mainly for home consumption. However, women are selling these items in local markets in order to purchase other food necessities, such as cooking oil, spices, etc. Currently their major constraint is

accessibility in terms of roads and transport, equipment for processing of food, preservation and storage techniques, knowledge, and diversifying the types of food processed.

Participation in development planning and decision-making: Women's involvement in development planning and decision-making is essential to sustainable human and economic development. While the institutional structure for the implementation of the National Women's Policy has provided for gender officers up to the Kebele level, very little attention is being given to promoting women's participation within and from the community itself. Community based groups such as water user's associations and village development committees, which have an important role in deciding on available economic and production opportunities, do not generally give adequate attention to women specific constraints which in turn reduce the impact of sustainable poverty reduction measures.

Rural Infrastructure: In rural Ethiopia, women may be walking up to 2 to 6 hours one way to fetch an average of 6 litres of water per head load, which is still not enough for an average family of 6 persons. Women have fetching water consumes a lot of their time and thus they are unable to undertake other social or economic activities. Due to the time consumed in this activity women will assign children, boys and girls to fetch water sometimes and this would be at the expense of the children's schooling. Water borne diseases are also known

to occur in this activity due to the inadequate management of the water source as well as the trekking of the distance through forests and other unpaved areas.

Gender and Health – Operational

Issues: The most critical risk to women's health in Ethiopia is issues of reproductive health. According to the health ministry technical officers, rural women continue to be exposed to a number of reproductive health risks. The practice of many pregnancies has led to increased infant and maternal mortality. Women complications during pregnancy and child birth, such as: stunted birth, anemia, increased miscarriages, and uteral infections. A number of women suffer from infections and tumours caused by circumcision, and which has in some cases reported to cause infertility. The women have significant increase in diseases related to reproductive organs; this was later clarified as sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

A. Incidence of rape is found to be another major cause for increased reproductive health risks. Due to the violent nature of the crime, some women suffer from long term infections, physical disabilities, and mental trauma. These problems usually worsen due to lack of adequate medical attention. In the case of rape, women are not used to seek immediate medical attention due to taboos, and especially if the girl is yet a child or an unmarried teenager.

B. Early marriage for girls is further cause for women's poor health. Women tended to take the role of wife and family care taker from an early age which increased the pressure on

girls to have many children immediately and thus increased their long term exposure to pregnancy and delivery related risks. Due to cultural restraints and barriers, women in some regions don't seek medical attention from male health assistants. Because of this, many rural women go through unassisted childbirth. Therefore, any complications arising during childbirth are not addressed leading to sometimes fatal results.

C. HIV/ AIDS: Women are disproportionately at risk of infection because of several reasons. The practice of polygamy, especially in rural areas, increases risk of infections due to the multiple partners involved. Moreover, the risk of infection increases amongst women in the age range of 15 to 24 years due to their early marriage to older men who may already have other partners. In addition, younger women and girls are also continuously exposed to abduction and rape increasing their risk of infection. Circumcision is also increase HIV risk because of the unhygienic operating conditions and lack of facilities for sterilisation of operating instruments. Finally, poverty has also impacted on increased risk of HIV infections for women because there is an increase in women entering into commercial sex sector as a means of generating income, and they are categorised as the high risk group in order to facilitate the economic work of the sick as well as those taking care of the sick. Poverty may be linked to HIV prevalence owing to higher rates of early sexual initiation and reports of forced or traded sex (Chinsung Chung, 2012).

4. Opportunities for promoting gender equality in Agriculture and Rural Development

The opportunities for promoting gender equality through market-led initiatives, which address the major areas where gender inequalities are most pronounced in agriculture and rural development in Ethiopia.

(A) Increasing women's access to and control over resources: There should be improvement in women's access to basic economic resources such as land (as owners), labour saving machines, food processing machines, credit and agricultural innovations.

1. Equal opportunity of landholding for both men and women
2. Equal inheritance of land to both boy and girls
3. Freedom to enjoy the resources and assets around them
4. Offering decision making power to the women in utilizing the resources

(B) Increasing women's access to skills and knowledge: Activities to increase women's opportunities to strengthen their skills and knowledge base include:

1. Supporting development and extension workers to help all farmers, including those from poorer households and women, to gain access to relevant information sources to make their lives and farming activities easier.

2. Adopting different training approaches to increase women's participation (e.g. training husband and wife, providing separate training for women, ensuring the timing/venues are convenient for women).
3. Developing women's skills in areas that are not traditionally considered to be in the women's domain.
4. Supporting community initiatives to create opportunities for women farmers to access formal information sources (mini-media)

(C) Increasing women's participation in market-oriented agricultural production: Activities to increase women's participation in agricultural production need to address issues of market access such as:

- Supporting the development of crop and livestock enterprises that are in the women's domain, and taking steps to ensure they retain control of the benefits during this process of commercialization.
- Supporting the development of crop and livestock enterprises that are not traditionally in the women's domain.
- Promoting household planning for building trust and encouraging skills among household members, and promoting the fair use of earnings.
- Setting up women's self-help groups for processing and marketing, including sharing market information in order to gain economies of scale and

stronger market bargaining power.

(D) Strengthening women's decision-making role: Activities to strengthen women's role in decision-making in the household, farmer groups, local associations include:

- Training women in group formation, leadership skills, confidence building and negotiating skills.
- Designing strategies to provide women with more knowledge and information to enable them to make informed decisions.
- Conducting gender awareness training at the community level to increase general understanding about the importance of including women in rural development opportunities.

(E) Gender Equity in Access to Economic Resources: Access to markets has a significant impact on women's access to improved income and family livelihoods. Thus, programmes and projects should give full attention to ensure that market prices and other information reach men and women equally, that the location of market infrastructure and rental of market space are easily accessible and affordable by female producers as well. Moreover, market locations should have adequate security and protection for female vendors.

(F) Access to Technology: This plays an important role in determining gender differentiated improvements in income generated. Thus, proposed

interventions should consider providing improved basic tools to improve activities done by hand, and that farming technology options should consider women specific limitations, such as their physical strength, size, and time constraints.

(G) Improving wellbeing and easing workloads: Activities to ease women's workloads by facilitating access to labour saving technologies not only improves their wellbeing but also gives them more opportunity to participate in productive activities, if they wish:

1. Identifying and promoting labour saving technologies for activities performed by women in relation to marketable commodities as well as other household tasks.
2. Involving women in technology demonstrations and applications in order to understand and assess the impacts of technologies on their workloads.
3. Changing the mindsets in rural communities to move towards a more equitable distribution of workloads between women and men.
4. When promoting new enterprises, considering the labour requirements of the whole farming system, rather than individual enterprises, their distribution between

different household members, their implications for labour peaks and assessing the availability of and the capacity of households to hire additional labour to cope with labour peaks or other means of labour spreading.

(H) Operational measures for gender mainstreaming:

- Forging and strengthening the political will to achieve gender equality and equity, at the local, national, regional and global levels;
- Incorporating a gender perspective into the planning processes of all ministries and departments of government, particularly those concerned with macroeconomic and development planning, personnel policies and management, and legal affairs;
- Integrating a gender perspective into all phases of sectoral planning cycles, including the analysis development, appraisal, implementation, monitoring and evaluation policies, programmes and projects;
- Using sex-disaggregated data (data that is collected and presented separately on men and women) in statistical analysis to reveal how policies impact differently on women and men;
- Increasing the numbers of women in decision-making positions in government and the private and public sectors;
- Providing tools and training in gender awareness, gender analysis and gender planning to decision-makers, senior

managers and other key personnel.

In addition to the activities described above which address gender inequalities through strengthening project design, opportunities also exist to mainstreaming gender considerations into operational procedures:

- Setting specific targets in terms of the proportion of women participants in different activities and relevant decision-making bodies.
- Working with partners with experience of and willingness to work with women: strengthen the gender capacity of government (at all levels), service providers and implementing partners to mainstream gender into their activities

5. Conclusion

Women's productive role in agriculture and rural development continues to be underestimated in many countries as unpaid workers are frequently excluded from national statistics and/or farm women are considered housewives in agricultural statistics. Such underestimation must be addressed in order to clearly demonstrate the importance of women in agricultural production.

Creating feedback channels between all parties in the development equation would bring about the necessary equalization to the full participation of Ethiopia female farmers in the economic benefits of agriculture. Empowering women for participation in agricultural decision making and leadership in Ethiopia

represents the most appropriate and effective way forward. Gender inequality is therefore dominant in the sector and this constitutes a bottleneck for development, calling for a review of government policies on agriculture to all the elements that place women farmers at a disadvantage. While there are a number of embedded social and cultural constraints impeding women's full participation in extension training, at some point they need to be confronted if negative stereotypes about women's capabilities in agricultural production are to be overcome. Issues surrounding women's rights to land and resource access can and should be addressed through widespread education campaigns. The contribution made by women to agricultural production and rural development in Ethiopia is grossly underappreciated in spite of the dominant role women play in the sector.

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