

Policy Highlights

Gender in Agricultural Development Policies





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by the

Agricultural Policy Support Service, Policy Assistance Division, FAO, Rome, Italy

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1 INTRODUCTION

Gender refers to the social roles and relations between women and men. This includes the different responsibilities of both in a given culture or location. Unlike the sex of men or women, which is biologically determined, gender roles are socially constructed, and can change over time and vary according to geographic location.

Social justice and fairness are arguments often advanced in support of gender considerations in development. In fact documented evidence around the world (Box 1) shows that gender equity is positively linked to increased efficiency and better prospects for economic growth.

It is now clear that biases against women hinder agricultural development and reduce the nutritional status of rural households. Women play a central role in agricultural production and marketing, hence in maintaining food security at household, community and national levels.

The rationale for emphasising gender in agricultural policies and strategies is as much one of economic efficiency as social equity.

Box 1 - Gender inequalities and economic growth

In Latin America, gender inequalities in education have been shown to constrain economic growth. In countries with ratio of female to male enrolment less than 0.75, GNP levels are likely to be about 25% lower than those with greater gender equality in education (Hill and King, 1995).

Research on structural adjustment in sub Saharan Africa shows that the supply response in agriculture is strongly influenced by gender inequalities. This is attributable to insufficient incentives for women to increase export crops and through over-burdening of women's time (Brown, 1995).

Women's time burdens are an important constraint on growth and development. The benefits of reducing this gender-based constraint can be considerable. A study in Tanzania shows that reducing women's time burden in a community of smallholder coffee and banana growers increases household cash incomes by 10 percent, labour productivity by 15 percent, and capital productivity by 44 percent (Tibaijuka, 1994).

2 POLICY IS NOT GENDER NEUTRAL

Over the past two decades many developing countries have undertaken major economic reform programmes with the emphasis on liberalisation. Programmes may include:

- *Devaluation* of the exchange rate and other price changes;
- *Liberalisation* of international trade;
- *Privatisation* of marketing, input and service delivery;
- *Reductions* in government expenditure and direct activity.

Such policy changes are seldom gender neutral. Almost all create gainers and losers; very few benefit everyone equally. Where losers are women, there can be negative impacts not on the welfare of the household but also on the rural economy at large.

FAO estimates of women's contribution of labour to food production for household consumption and sale in Sub-Saharan Africa is between 60 and 80 %. They also produce more than 50% of the food grown worldwide.

3 WOMEN'S INABILITY TO RESPOND TO MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

Because of social norms and rigidities, women's ability to respond to changes in market opportunities (better prices or job openings) may be restricted. Transmission of price incentives to women may not always occur. For example:

- Reduction in export tax may provide incentives for export crop production, but at the expense to subsistence crops, often a non-tradeable good under the responsibility of women.
- Increased demand for family labour from commercialisation of agriculture can lower the perceived benefits of education relative to use of child labour, especially for girls.
- Cutback in government provision of health care and other social services may place greater demand on women's time on caring for the sick and elderly domestically, thus reducing time available for food production and income generation activities.
- Disinvestment in community infrastructure such as water supply systems can increase women's workloads and inhibit their responses to economic changes. Public spending cuts may merely represent a transfer of costs from the market to the unpaid economy.

Policy makers thus need to be aware of the misconception that women's labour has low marginal productivity.

Bias against women is sometimes embedded in legal codes that may recognise only the male head of household in various transactions or give women unequal inheritance or divorce rights. It may also be present in traditional and unwritten codes of conduct and conflict management.

4 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY FORMULATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Agricultural policy formulation and implementation can influence gender discrimination by:

- Taking account of and helping mitigate the effects of social and cultural norms which disadvantage women; or

- Reinforcing, consciously or unconsciously, existing discrimination against women.

Much scope exists for public policies that provide incentives to equalise access to productive resources by gender. Fostering a legal and regulatory framework that ‘levels the playing field’ for decision making by men and women is also predicated in such policies.

Leveling the playing field means to remove or mitigate discriminatory elements embodied in laws, institutions, market structures, and technology, which often apply differently by gender (*World Bank, 2000*).

Reducing gender bias will require fundamental reforms not only in institutions and legislation, but also in ways of designing and carrying out policies, programmes and projects, and in their monitoring and evaluation. Systematic mainstreaming of gender in policy work involves the recognition of two key points:

- that a given policy can have different impacts on men and women;
- that gender relations and gender biased institutions and norms influence policy outcomes.

5 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK FOR POLICY FORMULATION

Gender issues pervade all levels of the economy. Accordingly, policy makers need to adopt a gender sensitive approach and analyse the ways in which gender influences the agricultural sector and the overall economy at the various levels.

Effective, efficient and sustainable agricultural policies are developed on the basis of knowledge of the agricultural sector and its significance to the economy as a whole (macro), the markets, infrastructure, organisations and institutions (meso), and the nature of agricultural households (micro). A macro-meso-micro analysis (Box 2) can be used to examine:

- the structure of an economy;
- the pattern of decision making and the way an economy responds to policy changes;
- the distortions and biases which hamper effective agricultural and rural development;
- the opportunities and constraints for agricultural policy.

Box 2 - The macro-meso-micro framework

The Macro level of the economy refers to the economy as a whole. Macro policies (for instance exchange rate, interest rate, tariff and tax policies) concern aggregates such as gross domestic product (GDP), imports, exports and the balance of payments accounts and the government budget. Official statistics often underestimate women's contribution to national income. This is partly because women are concentrated in the informal and subsistence sectors, which tend to be undercounted. It is also due to the categorisation of "work" which often fails to capture what women do.

The Meso refers to the sectoral level and associated organizations and institutions which mediate between the macro and micro levels. These comprise markets and infrastructure, both economic (roads, communications, irrigation) and social (health and education). Included are the rules and norms, formal and informal, which govern individual and collective behaviour. There exist important linkages between markets and infrastructure and service: gender asymmetries and biases at this level are factors which could reduce the quality of agricultural institutions and organisations.

The Micro level of the economy consists of households and firms and the individuals that make up these organisations, who may be producers or consumers. Resource endowments, men's and women's control over resource use, decision making processes, and intra as well as inter household relationships all have profound influence on the household economy. Households are not a homogenous unit and there is a need to refine and disaggregate the micro level to permit better understanding of relationships between male, female, and children members of households.

6 PRINCIPAL QUESTIONS

Gender Sensitive Policy analysis must seek answers to the following:

Macro level: Can conventional macroeconomic concepts and definitions, such as the system of national accounts (SNA), adequately reflect women's contribution to national product and income? What is the significance and structure of unpaid domestic work and services undertaken by women on the effectiveness and sustainability of agricultural policy?

Some hints on how to address these are given in Box 3.

Box 3 - The importance of gender sensitive statistics

Gender sensitive data (see table 1), which more accurately reveals women's contribution to the economy, will better reflect the reality of women's importance as producers, traders, labourers and carers in their own right. Better sex disaggregated data and gender shares of employment provide important pieces of information needed for more effective and sustainable policy advice. The **under-recording** of women's economic participation is particularly problematic in the agricultural sector where much unpaid subsistence activity occurs and where activities tend to be highly segregated by gender.

Thus, gender-sensitive statistics should include data on women's contribution to the **unpaid domestic economy**, also known as social reproduction or unpaid caring labour. A distinguishing feature of gender analysis is the inclusion of the unpaid, domestic economy in economic analysis. Gender analysis incorporates a broader definition of "work" than is normally used in standard economic reports. This definition of work includes activities not represented in official statistics either conceptually or in practice.

Failure to account for the significance and the structure of the domestic unpaid economy can limit the sustainability and effectiveness of agricultural policy. Hence, the conventional concept of the macroeconomy needs to incorporate the unpaid domestic economy. One method for achieving this is through **Time Use Data**. More accurate reporting of men's and women's time use provides a better basis for policy interventions than one failing to take into account potential opportunities and constraints of over and under-use of men's and women's time.

Standard disaggregated economic data for the macroeconomy traditionally consider only activities for which people are generally remunerated and which are summarised in the System of National Accounts (SNA).

Initially the SNA was based on the idea that production is only carried out by firms while households merely consume. However, this is now changing and the SNA now incorporates some household-based activities, particularly subsistence production (UNIFEM, 2000).

Table 1 - Structure of macroeconomy, Uganda

	Sector Share of GDP	Sector Share of Exports	Sector Share of Employment	Gender Intensity of Production ^b	
				Female	Male
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Agriculture (of which)	49.0	99	80	75	25
Food crops	33.0		-	80	20
Traditional export crops	3.5	66	-	60	40
NTAEs ^c	1.0	34		80	20
Industry (of which)	14.3	1	3	15	85
Manufacturing	6.8	-	-	-	-
Services	36.6	-	17	32	68

Source: Elson and Evers, 1997 and sources cited therein

a Estimates based on data for 1988 – 1995.

b Estimates of female and male shares of employment in the sector/subsector.

c Non-traditional agricultural exports.

Meso level: Do institutional communication networks permit adequate information flow to women and men alike? Do marketing structures or organisations enable or inhibit women’s access and participation, to elicit the desired production responses to price and other incentives?

Micro level: Who is the responsible for what crop? Who controls resources? Who makes decisions about expenditure and investment? Who benefits from additional household income? Can women participate in new development activities given existing work schedules and domestic duties?

It is often assumed that agricultural growth will be pro-poor because it increases the demand for labour, an asset that the poor would have in surplus. Gender analysis challenges this assumption by arguing that if one looks at both paid and unpaid activities, rural women often suffer from time “poverty”.

7 GUIDELINES FOR POLICY ACTION

Analytical steps which may be taken in relation to the various levels of the economy may be summarised as:

Macro:

- Provision of gender disaggregated national statistics to identify the location of men and women in the economy.
- Integrating the unpaid “domestic economy” in macro and agricultural analysis.

Meso:

- Addressing gender-based-distortions in markets which can result in inefficient resource allocation.
- Addressing gender asymmetries and biases in institutions and organisations which can restrict women’s access to resources.

Micro:

- Taking account of gender differences in household preferences, time allocation and control over household resources.
- Understanding how such differences influence household production and investment decisions, food security and well-being within the household.

In addition to the economic sphere, action would be necessary in the legislative, institutional, and political spheres. Overall, a holistic approach of gender mainstreaming in agricultural policy planning and implementation should also be adopted. This means ensuring the consideration of gender roles and relationships in policies, strategic views, values and procedures, both administrative and consultative.

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- Analytical tools
- Applied materials
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- Agricultural and sub-sectoral policies
- Agro-industry and food chain policies
- Environment and sustainability
- Institutional and organizational development
- Investment planning and policies
- Poverty and food security
- Regional integration and international trade
- Rural Development

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