

The Changing Dynamics of Gender Relations in Cash Crop Production

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In the ongoing debate of food crop vs. cash crop production, it is interesting to note the effect of such decision making on gender relations. Studies have revealed that the conscious effort to switch from food crop to cash crop production have brought about many changes in gender relations which have not always benefitted the women. In spite of modernisation and mechanisation in agriculture, women have always been marginalized as low income food crop producers with “primitive” technologies, often unpaid or under-paid. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to evaluate gender dynamics in relation to cash crops and to explore the constraints, if any, which culturally gendered roles, impose on farming.

[Keywords: Gender, cash crops, production, women, culture.]

Introduction

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further in *practical constraints* to women's participation. Women lack access to and control over resources, most notably land but also income, agricultural inputs, extension services, education and social capital' (ALINe 2011: 7).

The subsistence technology of a society and its social and political organization have crucial consequences for (1) the sexual division of labour, (2) the differential allocation of power and recognition to men and women, and (3) the quality of the relationships between the sexes... Because the biological characteristics of men and women related to procreation have the same potentialities everywhere, the specific way, in any one society, in which the sexes are related to each other is a function of the allocation of their capability of working, a quality which men and women alike possess (Friedl 1975: 7).

Gender as a social construct is entrenched in cultures. It operates in a domain where the sexes (male and female) are active participants bringing out the social relations of both the actors within a cultural setting. "Gender can be understood as the meanings that a particular society gives to the physical or biological traits that differentiate males and females. These meanings provide members of a society with ideas about how to act, what to believe, and how to make sense of their experiences" (Mascia-Lees and Black, 1999: 1). 'Our human lives are influenced by gender differences every day, whether or not we realize it' (Miller 1993: 3). Different cultures have varied laws that exist regarding men and women's rights and controls. What we often fail to realize is that gender differences invariably influences our normal day to day activity. 'Dissatisfaction with one's gender assignment, questioning of the gender division of labour, and attempts to change gender roles can and do happen among humans' (ibid: 6). 'While human cultures have provided seemingly intractable gender roles and hierarchies, they also offer the ability to question and reject and reform them' (ibid: 7).

Men are perceived to have greater rights than women, especially because it is assumed that they are the ones who produce goods that are economically more important than what women produce. These rights confer power and prestige and facilitate in asserting male dominance over the right to distribute goods outside of the domestic group (Friedl 1975). Therefore, 'culturally grounded roles of men and women in household food and livelihood systems' (Niehof 2004: 330) often leads to the polarization of production. Doss' (2002) study in Ghana reiterates the fact that it is the men who are largely involved in cash crop production and they move into production if the crops become more profitable and the existence of a 'gender based cropping pattern in Ghana where crops meant for the market are grown by men and in plots that are owned by men. It is essential to understand the significance of gender on cash crop production since it is seen as a means to alleviate the welfare of the family as an economic unit. Increase in family income and productivity of crops depends not only on procurement capacity of the raw materials and the available credit facility but also on marketing strategies (Hill and Vigneri 2014). With

‘culturally determined economic gender roles’ (Neihof 2004: 329), it is the men who are always at an advantage.

Although men and women are likely to share a lack of access to opportunities, disadvantages are often magnified for women who tend to face additional constraints by virtue of their gender (ALINe 2011: 16). ‘Men are often viewed as being responsible for producing cash crops, while women are viewed responsible for producing subsistence crops for home consumption. Other characterizations of men’s and women’s crops are often based on cultural norms. One frequent critique of agricultural development programs has been that they have focused on men’s crops rather than women’s crops’ (Doss 2002: 1987). This improves men’s chances of gaining a better position to benefit from new market opportunities and projects funded by the Government as well as international agencies. ‘Cash crop production differs from general agricultural production in that it entails engaging in output markets to make sales. This requires reliable access to these markets, and has implications on the scale and quality of production’ (Hill and Vigneri 2014: 316). ‘In a number of contexts “cash” crops also differ from “food” crops in that social norms dictate that they traditionally imply more male involvement in some of the decision making, production and sale processes. Evidence suggests that female participation in cash crop markets is often lower than male participation’ (cited in Hill and Vigneri 2014: 316), which is often attributed to limited access to inputs and markets. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to evaluate gender dynamics in relation to cash crops and to explore the constraints, if any, which culturally gendered roles, impose on farming.

Division of Labour

Female agricultural contributions decline with agricultural intensification (Burton and White 1984: 568); hence, in order to understand gender relations in agriculture, the study of the division of labour is of vital importance. ‘The sexual division of labour in human societies today has both economic and symbolic components. Economically, it is based on a system of reciprocal exchange, and rituals reflect the behaviours which are culturally defined as appropriate to men and women. In some societies a sexual division of labour may be associated with gender inequality’ (Zihlman 1993: 3). Specific roles of men and women, assigned by society, exist and this is also true in agriculture. ‘Changes in the division of labour between men and women seem usually to have been related to changes in population density and in farming techniques’ (Boserup 2007: 6). As Boserup (2007) has pointed out while outlining the farming systems, that there are generally two farming systems: the male system (where most of the food production is done by men with little help from the women) and the female system (where food production is basically a woman’s domain with little help from men) where there is a variation in many basic features in the position of women. The basic assumption that one has while discussing agriculture is that the division of labour is based on the sex of the individual and the task that each sex performs in this activity. In cases of

shifting cultivation (where small patches of lands are cultivated for a few years only and then left fallow for as many as 5 – 10 years so as to allow the natural regeneration of vegetation and enhancement of soil fertility), it is observed that there exist multiple systems at work, one where most of the work is women centric except for the felling down of trees, in which the men help, another, where men help the women beyond the felling down of the trees and help in the preparation of the land with a hoe and yet still another system where men take active part right from the felling of the trees, clearing of ground vegetation, preparation of the land, crop planting and harvesting. However, the marketing of crops is usually done by men. In all the above mentioned systems, it is observed that women are responsible for the bulk of the work in food crop production, whereas in settled agriculture, the men take up ploughing with the help of draught animals, the preparation of land and the planting of the crops, while the women help in the harvesting of crops and post harvest activities. Nonetheless, it is the men who handle the marketing of the harvested crops. Further still, in case of cash crops, the division of labour tends to be more accentuated and pronounced and is looked upon as rather male centric. This being said, it is also important to understand the complexities in which these conditions apply, since they operate at diverse cultural settings, hence, may vary from culture to culture. ‘For livelihood research, time allocation is an essential variable that is particularly sensitive to gender differences’ (Niehof 2004: 324), hence, the division of labour in agriculture is not always static and may change with time due to several factors which includes, work load and task intensity, time allocated towards agriculture or changes in technology employed. With monetization, there is a further divide in the division of labour since the markets compel women to leave the operational level to their men and this has been further reinforced in cash cropping. The division of labour further impacts the women’s work load with household activities including fetching firewood and water often from long distances, taking care of the sick, young and old as well as food crop production. In spite of all the above, they still involve themselves in men’s production activities (cash crop production).

Patriarchy

In patrilineal settings, especially when talking about rural agrarian societies, the gender divide is very apparent and traditions and customary laws prevail. The male voice is often the “heard voice” and decision making rest with him (there may be varying degrees to this, wherein the wife is consulted and her opinions are also considered). However, the scheme of events in such societies gives way to the male voice as the deciding voice, where they have privilege of power. The women have lesser mobility and reduced social space and are often confined to the home as is evident in a study conducted by Lou (2008) among the matrilineal Moso of China. ‘Moso females were in the past respected for their ability to produce and distribute resources, but this ability has, with the encroachment of mainstream (Han, and western) values, fallen in esteem, and females are now willing to be subordinated into positions of caretakers or

housekeepers' (ibid: 52). The culturally accepted gender roles, men work outside and women operate around the house, is considered normal and traditional and even women themselves do not deviate from such social norms. The women are left to tend to the kitchen garden where the use of traditional methods of cultivation are still followed and the harvested food crops are then consumed, with surplus being sold in the markets. Since the women take care of the home, the children and the kitchen garden, they are left with little time for anything else and hence, this may probably be one of the main reasons why the nuances of cash cropping are left solely to the men folk. In commercial crop production, women often are left behind due to limited access to inputs and male oriented markets. This is especially true in traditional and conservative societies, it is the men who come out and deal with market agencies, since it is culturally tabooed for women to operate beyond the homestead. Within the market setting, due to cultural norms, men prefer to have dealings with men only and it is very difficult for a woman to operate, especially in more conservative cultures. 'The findings of a project in India show that traditional gender roles prevented women from benefiting from an income-generating scheme' (Niehof 2004: 330). 'In many societies and countries, women are excluded from more lucrative and profitable markets than men' (World Bank 2009: 173). For this reason, any attempts to change the traditional roles of the sexes have always met with resistance, since it would categorically transform the social fabric of society and consequently disturb the structure of patriarchal societies.

Modernization of Agriculture

Modernization, on the whole, has had a great impact on gender relations. This is also true in agriculture where a sea of change has benefitted men. Gurung's (1995) study in Nepal elucidates this point further by highlighting the ways in which women farmers are marginalised:

The modernization of agriculture often leaves women producers worse off. With the best land under cultivation for cash crops, women must work harder as they produce cash crops on the better land and use the smaller plots on poorer land to produce the food for their own consumption needs. The already heavy workloads of women farmers increase commensurately with the addition of market-oriented farming ventures while there is simultaneously devalued in an increasingly monetized economy. New information on inputs, techniques and machines is usually accessible only to men who generally are the targets of training and technologies for improved agricultural production. Even women of the same household are unaware of the new knowledge provided to their men folk, as it is not shared with them (ibid: 96).

More often than not, the role of women in agricultural production has been overlooked which results in failures of programs and schemes introduced in this sector 'When researchers pursued who is doing what in the production system, they discovered that initial suppositions were wrong and that both women and men were involved and needed to be considered in the technology

development process' (Poats 1991: 12). This has grave impact in policy making and increased longevity of an introduced programme with greater emphasis on men's and women's roles in production. 'The economic contribution of women to the household can be disrupted and disadvantaged by the introduction of well-intentioned technological change, particularly when biased toward male heads of households' (ibid: 17). Luo's (2008) study further reveals that,

As market economy becomes more established among the Moso, economic, political and social activities are increasingly transferred from the domestic sphere, the domain of women, to the public sphere, the domain of males. Moso females have been losing their access to these activities while the males ascend to positions of dominance. An obvious example is that males have become public officials, thus decision makers, in the process of modernization. Their decisions will naturally tend to reinforce this newly acquired dominance (ibid: 51).

'Studies have shown that female continue to have limited access to training opportunities because of gender insensitive training programs. Similarly the planning and implementation of such programs have largely ignored the multiple roles of women' (Opio 2003: 701). The notion that information is passed on to women from their men folk is often proved wrong since men tend not to discuss business with their wives, especially in matters relating to trade and commerce. Hence, it is necessary to chalk out new avenues for the dissemination of knowledge and information that can filter right through to the women so as to benefit them.

Conclusion

Literature on gender relations and agriculture suggest that women are directly responsible for household food production while men take up more lucrative, market driven cash crop production. The primary constraint that women face is mostly social and cultural in nature. 'These constraints restrict women from producing large volumes of high-quality food for sale in large, centralised markets' (ALINe 2011: 34). Cultures have pre-determined roles set for each gender and the resistance to change within the social institutions act as barriers to women's participation in cash crop production. Most programmes, time and again, are introduced with preconceived notions and restrict the role of women to subsistence cultivation which further strengthens social and cultural beliefs and subverts the success of women beyond household (ibid). Hence, it is imperative that programmes and development ventures introduced need to be more inclusive and focus on gender sensitive as well as culture sensitive issues, taking into account the women's role as primary care giver of the home and food producer. 'Therefore, in order to enhance agricultural development there is need to take into consideration the gender roles of women and men in the different communities to ensure that persistent gender disparities are not perpetuated' (Opio 2003: 701). Cash crop production has significantly improved livelihood and increased livelihood security which have had a substantial impact on the lives of farmers and their families, nevertheless, women have yet to gain

from it unless gender issues are addressed and policies implemented keeping in mind the role that women play in agriculture in general and cash crop production in particular.

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