

CONTRIBUTION OF PAKISTANI WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE: PRODUCTIVITY AND CONSTRAINTS

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ABSTRACT

Most of the Less Developed Countries (LDC's) rely on agriculture as an important component of the economy and a vigorous driver of growth. Pakistan is not an exception in this case as it is also an agro-based economy which largely depends on agriculture for national income and employment generation. The biggest portion of population is actively engaged either directly or indirectly in agriculture sector. Females overshadow men in many spheres of agricultural tasks in terms of their productive participation but usually their efforts go unrecognized at national level. The due recognition of their role is constraint by many factors but gender is on the top where she is subdued not by talent but by cultural basis of gender. This scenario is further aggravated by negligence on the part of the policy makers who did not attempted any gender segregated moves to recognize and promote women's participation in agriculture, resultantly the country is deprived to fully benefit from the productive talents and efforts of women. This research attempts to highlight the pronounced but invisible hand of women in agriculture, and come up with the findings that deprive women to get access to productive resources and considerable livelihood earning. The research also suggest that to overcome this trend Pakistan has to develop women in agriculture on preferred basis in order to fulfil the increasing population food demands, and at the same time remain competitive globally in the present milieu.

Key Words: Agriculture, Rural Women, Gender, Constraints

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INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is basically an agro-based economy in a way that the biggest chunk of economic resources is generated by agriculture sector. Agriculture sector does not only provide direct income to population but it also supports industrial sector by providing raw material to it. Butt *et al.* (2010) described that total population of Pakistan reached to 163.76 million in 2008-09, majority of which depends upon agriculture which remains the dominant sector in its capacity of labour absorption and in employment creation for 44 % of population. Pakistan Ministry of Finance (2004) in its overview of Pakistan's Economy reported that after much diversification in agriculture sector, it still remains the largest sector of economy which contributes 23.3% to GDP by engaging 42.1% of the labour force in the year 2004. Moreover it brings largest share of foreign exchange earnings by acting as a base for major industries like textile and sugar. It not only provides raw material to industrial sector but also serve as a market for its products and is therefore involved in round-about development of the country. Khan (2008) admitted the significant contribution of agriculture sector for bringing up economic growth and reducing poverty, government of Pakistan has acknowledged it as one of the major growth driver of the country's economy. Baig and Khan (2006) reported the fact that 67.5% of population living in rural areas is either directly or indirectly dependent upon agriculture for economic gains. Agriculture also has numerous linkages with other non-farm rural activities which enable the population to generate employment and earn income in adjoining areas. Brizzi (2010) signifies that inflation in prices of basic food commodities badly hit the poor population necessitates steps for increasing productivity of this sector. As for an emerging economy like Pakistan the growth achieved in agriculture sector is four times more effective in crabbing poverty than the growth achieved in non-agriculture sectors.

Women and Agriculture: The Global Perspective

Romero-Paris (2000) highlighted that majority of Southeast Asian countries lives in rural areas depends mainly upon agriculture. Pakistan derive two third of GDP from agriculture, among which women makes significant contribution which accounts 66% out of the total economically active manpower in agriculture as a percent of total population.

Prakash (2003) separated specific tasks done on farms by men and women. Generally men contribution is more pronounced in physical labour like land preparation and other distantly located jobs. While female undertake repetitious and time consuming tasks particularly close to home. The planting and weeding of plants is considered to be a women's job. But with the application of new tools may re-assign these already women assumed jobs.

Objectives of the Study

- i. To assess the role of Pakistani women in agriculture sector.
- ii. To determine the constraints faced by Pakistani women working in agriculture sector.
- iii. To determine the ways through which this role can be modified.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is of descriptive nature based on secondary data obtained from published reports of various Federal Departments, Bureau of Statistics, Survey Reports and International Published Developmental reports. Rural female of Pakistan has been focused in the study, their participation ratio and scope in agriculture has been described and compared locally as well as globally.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Women play an active role in almost every sphere of agriculture; developing countries agricultural activities are primarily performed by female labour force. In fact, female involvement in agriculture is a mushroom phenomenon, within which she performs numerous other activities that are basic or supplementary to agricultural productivity enhancement.

The proportions of economically active female population working in agriculture globally, in developing countries, low-income food deficit countries (LIFDCs) and the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) are compared (Fig.1). It is apparent from the chart that globally the ratio of women working in agriculture was nearly 50% during the last decade. But even this figure remained quite high for developing countries i.e. 61% and in LDCs where it touched the level of 79 %.

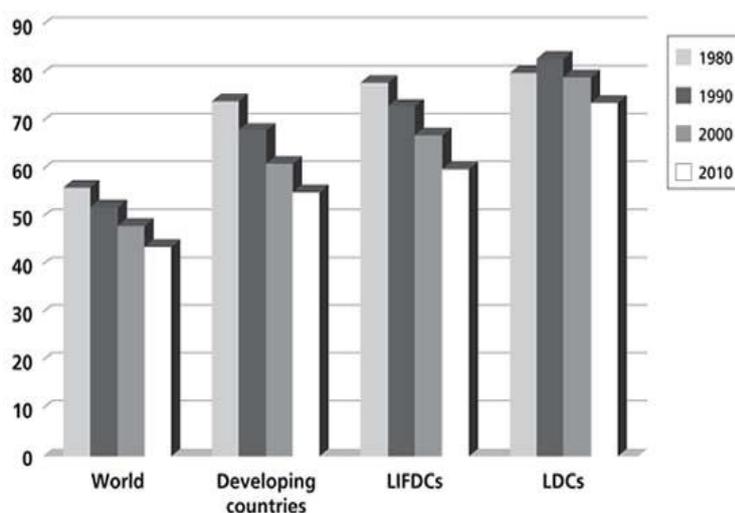


Fig.1. Percentage of Economically Active Women Working In Agriculture, 1980-2010 (Projected)

Recent data of ILO (2009) shows that if we consider region and gender wise segregated data about employment and particularly consider the case of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, we could trace the glaring dominance of female of this region in agriculture i.e. up to 65% of the total sectors employment. Whereas the situation of female employment is reverse in developed and EU where female in agriculture is about 2.9% and is more in services sector of the economy (Fig. 2).

Economic and Social Development Department of FAO, UN (2009) report also confirms that globally the female contribution to the overall economy in terms of her contribution to agriculture is high throughout Asia and the Pacific region.

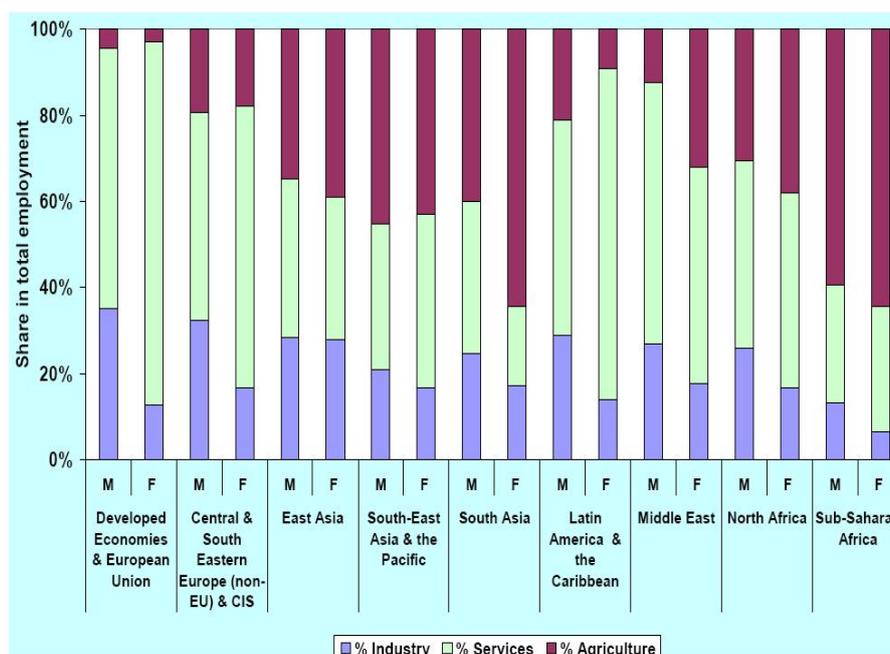


Fig.2. Global sectorial distribution of employment (As percentage of total employment), By sex and region
Source: ILO, Trends Econometric Models, January 2009

Pakistani Women and Agriculture

Since agriculture plays pivotal role in any agrarian economy, especially in Pakistan where it supports the lives of about two third of population by providing them employment, income and other life sustaining resources. Agriculture sector is believed to be the backbone of Pakistan's economy and one would not be mistaken to consider women as the gluing force of this backbone for its effective performance. Table I depicts the labour force of the country which is further segregated on area and gender basis for more vivid inferences.

Table I Pakistan's area and gender wise division of labour force participation (%)

Area	Age	Participation Percentage						Change 2000 to 2008 (Percentage points)	Average Annual Growth Rate
		2000	2002	2004	2006	2007	2008		
NATIONAL	15+								
Both Sexes		50.4	50.5	50.7	53.0	52.5	52.5	+ 2.1	+ 3.3
Males		83.2	82.7	82.7	84.0	-----	82.4	- 0.8	+ 2.6
Females		16.3	16.2	18.0	21.1	21.3	21.8	+ 5.5	+ 6.5
URBAN	15+								
Both Sexes		45.7	47.1	46.1	47.6	46.5	45.5	- 0.2	+ 3.8
Males		78.1	79.1	78.5	80.3	79.5	78.7	+ 0.6	+ 3.9
Females		10.3	11.5	11.1	12.2	10.9	9.7	- 0.6	+ 3.2
RURAL	15+								
Both Sexes		52.7	52.3	53.4	56.0	55.9	56.4	+ 3.7	+ 3.1
Males		85.7	84.8	85.2	86.1	85.1	84.5	- 1.2	+ 2.0
Females		19.1	18.7	21.7	25.9	26.8	28.3	+ 9.2	+ 7.3

Source: FBS, various years, Pakistan Labour Force Survey (2009)

Pakistan Ministry of Labour and Manpower (2009) in its employment trends for women gave a comprehensive image of gender wise labour force participation at national level in which the total available labour force for the country is 52.5% among which female is 21.8% with the average annual growth of 6.5%. This gender participation become more asymmetric in rural areas where female make 28.3% in 56.4% of aggregate labour force employed, with 7.3% of average annual growth.

Sector – base engagement of labours (Table II) illustrate women participation more vividly. For this purpose three major sectors of the country are taken under consideration to trace female share in employment.

Table II Pakistan's employment by sector

Sector	Age	Employment percentage						Change 2000 to 2008(% points)
		2000	2002	2004	2006	2007	2008	
AGRICULTURE	15+							
Both Sexes		47.8	41.1	41.8	41.6	42.0	42.8	- 5.0
Males		43.4	37.2	37.0	35.6	35.0	35.2	- 8.2
Females		73.7	64.5	66.6	67.7	71.4	73.8	+ 0.1
INDUSTRY	15+							
Both Sexes		18.2	21.0	20.6	21.2	21.4	20.6	+ 2.4
Males		19.8	22.0	21.7	22.7	23.5	22.6	+ 2.8
Females		8.4	14.8	14.9	15.1	12.6	12.2	+ 3.8
SERVICES	15+							
Both Sexes		34.0	38.0	37.6	37.1	36.6	36.6	+ 2.6
Males		36.8	40.8	41.3	41.8	41.5	42.2	+ 5.4
Females		17.8	20.7	18.4	17.3	16.0	13.9	- 3.9

Source: FBS (2009)

Pakistan Ministry of Labour and Manpower (2009) in its employment trends for women showed the employment generation capacity of agriculture, industry and services sector. In this regard agriculture is on the top by generating 42.8 % of employment for the country nationals among which the big chunk i.e. 73.8% is held by female population. The trend of percentage change could be observed negative for male while positive for females during the years of 2000-2008.

In addition the labour force employed by agriculture female surpasses men in many agricultural chores. The job of agricultural female is more demanding than men because she has to embrace dual responsibility of house-hold tasks and at the same time serve as an active or supportive labour to men in the fields.

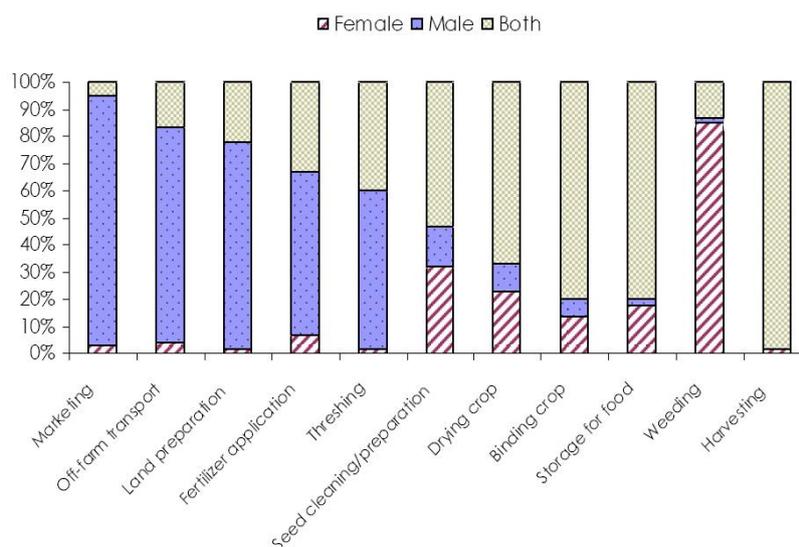


Fig. 3. Gender roles in crop related activities in Punjab, Pakistan

Source: Tibbo *et al.* (2009) Paper presented at the FAO-IFAD-ILO Workshop, Rome

Tibbo *et al.* (2009) specifically highlighted the gender involvement in various crop related activities in the province of Punjab, Pakistan. It is evident (Fig. 3) that female is involved in almost every sphere but her sole participation is much higher in the activity of weeding plants, followed by seed cleaning, drying, storage and binding of crops respectively. All these activities are cumbersome and need manual, repetitious efforts. While she is jointly engaged with men in harvesting, storage, binding etc. off-farm and distant activities such as marketing and transport and mechanized activities like threshing and land preparation are dominated by men.

Zafar (2003) reported that Pakistani women work simultaneously as mother, household labourers and social production workers, but still economic value of her contribution is undervalued. Furthermore, he criticized that in agriculture individual contributed equally to productivity but their efforts are rewarded on the basis of non-economic criteria e.g. sex which raises serious questions of equity and human justice. Therefore, the development planning must be backed by developmental objectives instead of basing decisions on physical input and outputs which ignores the perspective of human resources, and the social dimensions of agriculture.

Brohi (2003) emphasised that numerous studies conducted have confirmed the role of women in agriculture, she participate in almost every sphere of agriculture activities, in addition to her massive household responsibilities. Despite these facts women's role is still underestimated in economic development or missing altogether.

Women in Agriculture Allied Activities

Females are active labourer not only in fields and farms but they also perform such activities which supplements agriculture productivity e.g. food storage, grain cleaning, threshing, livestock, cottage industry etc. Dawn (2003) identified the nature of activities women are occupied with shows that rural Pakistani women are not only responsible for household activities but are also engaged in rural economic activities by rendering services in sub-sectors of crop production, livestock and cotton industry. Female is the prime responsible for livestock activities. Khan (2008) claimed that Livestock is supposed to be the second largest sub-sector contributed 52.2% of overall agriculture value added and 11.0% to GDP. Thus influence the lives of 30-35 million people living in rural areas. Butt *et al.* (2010) commented as rural women actively participate in agriculture, therefore it necessitates the providence of latest knowledge related to crop production and other allied activities. Jamali (2009) affirmed that women are not only active in farm activities but also in livestock and its associated chores to supplement her income as well as farm by providing cattle for ploughing and harvesting tasks. Studies reveal that by selling of animals she earns extra income of approximately Rs.8780/- Similarly she is also engaged in poultry farm activities. These two are prominent sources of her contribution to household income.

Major Constraints faced by Women in Agriculture

Globally female face certain constraints in agriculture, but Pakistani women presents a more grey picture because of unique circumstances created by social, cultural, legal, political, financial factors applied to gender discrimination. Some of the most pressing problems are:

Poor Health and Malnutrition

In rural areas where women's status is grossly neglected, health is on the top. She often does not receive proper nutritive diet in her life span which causes her low health status and prone to diseases. When she becomes economic worker in agriculture, it negatively affects her productivity that is automatically low. Romero-Paris (2000) reported that chronic malnutrition coupled with workload adversely affects women health, also results the poor health of infants and young children.

Lack or Complete Absence of Education

Rural female in Pakistan are mostly illiterate because of lack of access to educational facilities, conservative cultural codes and early marriages which deprives them to attain basic education. Therefore they relies mainly upon their informal learning, traditional knowledge most of which is outdated and their own experience from agricultural activities.

Ignorance for Using Latest Means of Agriculture

Agency for International Development (1982) criticized the fact that, whatsoever has been taught by extension workers upon the use of latest technology and other means of productivity enhancement. They mainly access to men farmers resultantly women are neglected or they get secondary knowledge of it.

Lack of Land Ownership and Access to Credit Facilities

Literature revealed that in most of the underdeveloped countries land ownership are strictly held by the male members of the society which deprives women from land ownership. She works on the land owned by her father, husband or son. This triggers the problem of access to credit facilities offered to those only who hold ownership rights to lands. As Pakistan is no exception to this, this problem is also faced by Pakistani women. Although women grow about half of the world's food, but her land ownership is hardly known so far. Consequently she faces hurdles in obtaining credit and is grossly neglected by agricultural development projects.

Lack of Segregated Economic Policy & Reforms

Developing countries in general and Pakistani traditional society in particular define gender role that has been historically specified in lack of access to productive resources because of which women and men are not proportionately reflected in various agricultural sectors. As different aspects of agriculture are variably affected by trade liberalization, hence, consequences for women and men are not the same. Moreover men and women have different set of knowledge, skills and working capacity therefore they are differently affected by any change in policy.

Natural Environment

As natural environment is unpredictable and women farmers coupled with illiteracy are unable to foresee weather trends so any unexpected change badly affect their work. Climate changes bring unexpected situations in the form of floods, disturb cropping season, and temperature fluctuation. These things create hardships for farming activities especially where women are engaged.

Migration

Recently women has been put into more complex and demanding life style influenced by the accelerated rated of males migration to urban areas in search of jobs and other earning opportunities. This trend affected rural families in terms of increased out-migration by men and by leaving behind all the family responsibilities upon women, particularly the farm work.

Replacement of Female by Technology

The introduction of latest technology to agriculture for productivity and efficiency is indispensable nowadays but somehow it produces hurdles for female farmers rather than facilitating them. Because technology needs education for getting know how of using it but in Pakistan rural female literacy rate is extremely low.

Low Skill and Low Paid Activities

Women participation is considered to be low in a country development not because of its minimum participation than men but because their contribution goes unrecognized and unrecorded mostly. In fact she is primarily responsible for cultivating and harvesting food crops needed by household livelihood but her efforts goes unpaid and unrecognized.(SSSD 2009)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Pakistan women constitute almost half of the population, contributes as productive economic labour, and even surpass men in agricultural activities in addition to her household and family responsibilities. As the socio-cultural set up of Pakistan presents an uneven picture and labour force are not equitably treated on capacity and productivity basis. This trend creates a lot of constraints for the maximum participation of female labour force among which gender factor is on the top. Secondly, the government, well-aware of the economic importance of agriculture sector devise and implement policies for its productivity but these reforms did not come up with significant results; as their policies are not backed by gender segregated data and have no provisions to facilitate agricultural female productivity. Consequently her efforts are grossly understated or missing at national level.

The following recommendations have been suggested on the basis of the study:

- i. Government of Pakistan should design an integrative system as to support women in all agriculture related sectors e.g. financial services, land reforms, tax reforms etc.
- ii. In order to provide a sound basis for policy makers, initiatives should be taken to accurately record and reflect timely data particularly gender- segregated data about female contribution in agriculture.
- iii. Make the extension system improved to cover female farmer's needs where arrangements should be made to teach them about the use of technological equipments in her farming practices to bring efficiency with technology.
- iv. Policy reforms should be introduced to encourage rural agro-based small-scale industries, which would help in diversifying agricultural resources and will generate employment for the rural women.
- v. Women should be made familiar with the methods of food processing and food preservation of various fruits, vegetables and livestock products, which would serve as a value addition to economic productivity.

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