



Global Donor Platform
for Rural Development

Platform infoNote

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OPPORTUNITIES FOR GENDER IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE RURAL SPACE

In 2015, the Platform commissioned a paper on the "[Implications of Agenda 2030 for Rural Development](#)". Previously, the Paris and Busan declarations had been the cornerstones of the Platform's objectives, but in order to find resonance within the broader scope of the SDGs, the Platform had a strategic reflection on how to best deliver for Agenda 2030 ([Strategic Initiative Agenda 2030 and analysis](#)). One of the most important issues that emerged was a need to adopt a more holistic approach to rural development, one which goes beyond framing actions for food security and economic growth only around SDG 2. The paper argued that the Platform should use related entry and influence points such as SDG 8 on jobs and **SDG 5 on gender equality**.

FEMINISATION OF AGRICULTURE

Women's share of agricultural labour is increasing in a number of countries, and surpasses half the labour force in others. It is this phenomenon which brings forth the term the 'feminisation of agriculture'.¹

The feminisation of agriculture is sometimes seen as a positive development for women's economic and social empowerment. For example, women might gain economic empowerment through increased participation in income generating activities such as wage labour and contract farming. Additionally, because of male out-migration, women may encounter more decision making opportunities in the home and on the farm.

There are however some negative considerations, for example if women have to work more due to lost labour when men out-migrate, while at the same time maintain their household duties. As such, their increased independence may not result in empowerment if their work burden is too high and male out-migration and inadequate remittances increase the financial burdens of the household.²

In order for policy makers to positively influence the transformation of rural spaces, understanding change processes such as agriculture's feminisation is fundamental, including how this can result in either the reversal or the acceleration of women's social and economic empowerment.

¹ Journal of International Development (2014) "Does the Feminisation of Agricultural Labour Empower Women? Insights from Female Labour contractors and workers in Northwest Syria?"

<http://www.fao.org/docs/eims/upload/315863/Insight%20from%20female%20labour%20contractors%20and%20workers%20in%20Northwest%20Syria.pdf>

² World Bank (2016) "Feminization of Agriculture in the Context of Rural Transformations: What is the Evidence?"

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/25099/108468.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>

TRENDS

In September 2016, the World Bank Group (WBG) and FAO released a working paper: "[Feminization of Agriculture in the Context of Rural Transformations: What is the Evidence?](#)" According to its findings, agriculture is feminised (female dominated) in majority of Sub Saharan Africa, and is feminising (share of women has increased compared to previous years) in a number of countries in Central Asia, South Asia, Latin America and in the Near East and North Africa. Changes in the definition of employment and in survey instruments may have influenced the findings, which as such are considered suggestive for most countries until more and better sex disaggregated data can confirm them. Some of the regional trends in the paper are:

Sub Saharan Africa (SSA)

Women have for a long time been the main agricultural workers in SSA. For instance their share is 62% in Sierra Leone, 67% in Lesotho, 59 % in Malawi. As such, significant increases are not found in the WBG-FAO report. Large increases were found in some cases such as Chad (from 29% to 57% (between 1980 and 2010)

Near East and North Africa (NENA)

The NENA region has seen outstanding changes in women's share in agriculture. For example Syria (pre-conflict) had doubled women's share from 30% in 1980 to 60% in 2010, Libya increased from 37% to 70%, and Iraq and Morocco increased from 30% to 50% over the

same period. Jordan and the occupied Palestinian territory surpassed 60% in women's agricultural share.

Asia

Evidence of agricultural feminisation is found in both Central and South Asia. For example, the increase between 1980 and 2010 was from 35% 50% for Nepal, 12% - 30% for Pakistan, 26% - 35% for Bhutan.

Latin America

Agriculture in Latin America is traditionally male dominated. Even so, women's share increased in the countries examined in the WBG-FAO report, namely Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Papua New Guinea.

DRIVERS

Agricultural feminisation is driven by various factors, which differ between and within countries. Two common drivers are the growth of **commercial production** and **male outmigration**, particularly as both significantly influence structural changes in rural spaces. In some regions, other factors include **climate change**, which may result in decreased farm yields and thus encourage men to out-migrate in search of

work³; and sex-selective mortality due to **HIV/AIDS**, which tends to increase the prevalence of poor female-headed households⁴.

Agribusiness

Whether through **contract farming** or **wage labour**, women are likely to be concentrated in low-status, poorly paid jobs, often of short-term nature. Market-oriented crop production has created new opportunities for some women, and is a significant rural transformation factor. Wage labour can supplement women's small scale farming activities, contributing to their financial independence. Women's wages may provide some economic empowerment, but the time spent in wage employment does not necessarily lead to decreased workload at home and on subsistence farms. This means that agribusiness can increase women's "time poverty."⁵

However agribusiness can also add to women's economic independence, especially if they have access to skills and technologies that improve their chances for better jobs. For this reason, between 1 January and 31 March 2017, the Platform gender group is undertaking a scoping analysis assessing donor's approaches to women in agribusiness. The group will share lessons for donors to consider in their efforts to enhance inclusiveness of agribusiness portfolios.

Male outmigration

Rural-urban migration (and linkages) is another important factor in discussions on rural transformation. In some cases such as Africa, youth and male outmigration to urban areas is driven by economic inequalities between the rural and urban spaces, and this migration is an effort to supplement incomes. Such migration can be temporary or permanent, and benefits such as **remittances** could reduce the financial constraints of rural households.

However if women spend all the remittances on hiring labour to compensate for the lost male labour, then the effects of migration are negative or neutral at best if there is no growth of the farm.⁶ Furthermore in many poor countries, urban labour markets may not be advanced enough to absorb rural migrants, who then have to compete for few, unsafe and even exploitative jobs⁷, reducing their capacity to send remittances back to their rural homes.

³ CGIAR (2014) "Women, Water & Leadership workshop: How to respond to the 'feminization' of agriculture in Nepal"
<http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/2014/02/how-to-respond-to-the-feminization-of-agriculture-in-nepal/>

⁴ FAO (2007) "The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Rural Households and Land Issues in Southern and Eastern Africa"
<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/nonfao/ad696e/ad696e00.pdf>

⁵ World Bank (2016) "Feminization of Agriculture in the Context of Rural Transformations: What is the Evidence?"
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/25099/108468.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>

⁶ World Bank (2016) "Feminization of Agriculture in the Context of Rural Transformations: What is the Evidence?"
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/25099/108468.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>

⁷ IFAD (2016) "Migration and transformative pathways: A rural perspective"
<https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/5eb19611-d4b5-49b0-97ed-81688cf1c6a7>

CONCLUSIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL RURAL TRANSFORMATION

Women's share in agriculture is expanding in several regions, and women are already dominating agriculture in regions such as Sub Saharan Africa. As such, **no discussion on rural transformation is complete without adequate consideration of what feminisation of agriculture means for policy, public investments, land rights, rural organisations, rural finance, etc.** This is particularly important for ensuring a successful rural transformation where women are not negatively impacted through being overworked and underpaid in the process of trying to meet the world's food needs. This may mean taking actions that:

- Enhance skills of women through trainings and improved access to technologies and productive resources, which in turn could reduce gender gaps in income and productivity. However, deeply entrenched gender inequalities bring adoption challenges, for example technologies and training can be difficult due to women's labour and access constraints.⁸
- Improve transport and communication infrastructure to reduce the travel costs and time for migrants, and the cost of sending remittances. This could also improve rural producer's access to urban markets.⁹
- Expand rural investment and create the enabling environment for responsible, inclusive private sector which could allow for better rural earning opportunities.

⁸ Zhang et al (2009) "*Feminization of agriculture in rapid changing rural China: policy implication and alternatives for an equitable growth and sustainable development*"

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.521.8027&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

⁹ IFAD (2016) "*Migration and transformative pathways: A rural perspective*"

<https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/5eb19611-d4b5-49b0-97ed-81688cf1c6a7>