



Policy Brief

WOMEN AND AGRICULTURE IN PAKISTAN

Shafaq Sohail

Executive Summary

Agriculture in Pakistan largely constitutes of female workers who participate in activities ranging from livestock to crop production. Although their input in terms of both time and activities exceeds that of men, they still lag behind in terms of recognition and compensation. This policy brief analyzes the current legal, social and technical barriers that women in this field face. It discusses the lack of policies that address these barriers and concludes with recommendations for policy makers. The approach suggested is that of gender sensitivity through the extension of services, training programs, and financial and legal aid to women.

Exploring the feminization debate within agriculture

The role of women in agriculture is globally recognized for contributing to the economy and food security. In an agrarian country like Pakistan, where the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reports agriculture to be currently employing 72.7 percent of its total female labor force, this role is even more pronounced (PBS, 2015). High levels of female employment are coupled with low male employment rates (35.1 percent) and have consequently led to the labelling of this trend as the 'feminization of agriculture' (Schutter, 2013).

However, a deeper analysis of this phenomenon proves this categorization to be problematic. The participation of women varies across activities within agriculture

itself. For instance, in Punjab, more than 80 percent of the post-harvest activities including harvesting and weeding, etc. are performed by women, whereas hardly 5 percent of marketing and off-farm transport is done by them. On the other hand, almost all the livestock activities, including marketing and selling dairy products, is done predominantly by women (Tibbo et al., 2009).

The feminization of agriculture also appears to be merely quantitative in nature. Women numerically dominate the sector and 59.9 percent of them spend excessive hours (more than 50 hours/week) in agricultural activities as compared to only 26.6 percent of their male counterparts (PBS, 2014). Despite their relatively greater inputs, the average monthly wage for women (PKR 6,345) is still

far less than that of men (PKR 9,441) (PBS, 2015).

These statistics while focusing primarily on activities done for commercial purposes, exclude the work of unpaid families and subsistence workers. Caring for livestock or cotton harvesting are often referred to as activities intrinsic to women and not as a job that requires a formal employment status or compensation (Gazdar, 2017).

The trend towards rural to urban migration further causes the asymmetrical gender representation in the sector. Male members of a family often find non-agricultural employment in cities and leave women overburdened with their household chores and additional farm activities (Yasmeen, 2011). Hence, the phenomenon of feminization is mostly a representation of the needs (*majboori*) of women rather than their economic independence.

Constraints and Barriers

Social Restrictions

Even though women are thought to dominate this sector, they are socially excluded from performing various activities that do not complement the assigned traditional gender roles. Be it driving a tractor, operating heavy machinery or selling products in markets outside their villages; they are restricted by societal norms that discourage the unaccompanied mobility of women (Balagamwala et al., 2014).

Unacknowledged Labor

The issue of the marginalization of women begins from their inadequate representation and exclusion from the national statistics. For example, women who work seasonally as cotton harvesters may not be counted in the labor force because they have not been

economically active in the reference period (7 days) (PBS, 2010). Similarly, women who engage in subsistence farming and livestock care may not be recognized as agricultural workers altogether because they are not contributing to the cash economy (Deere, 2005).

Lack of Facilities

The fields where women work do not have women-friendly environments. Issues of harassment, mobility, and lack of sanitation and child care facilities add to their difficulties (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2015).

The absence of these facilities leads to several health implications for both women and their children. Women develop various allergies and breathing problems as a result of working in hazardous conditions (Balagamwala et al., 2014). In 2014, 86.4 percent women working in agriculture acquired work related injuries as opposed to 46.3 percent men (PBS, 2014). Children also suffer similar consequences. Percentage of stunted (52 percent) and wasted (13 percent) children in agricultural households is therefore found to be greater than the national average of 44 percent and 11 percent respectively (Balagamwala et al., 2015).

Inaccessible Services

Additionally, the extension services and training programs in agriculture mostly accommodate male farmers (Yasmeen, 2011). Women, therefore, have to resort to traditional agricultural practices. Consequently, they remain unacquainted with the technology that may help them increase their productivity and decrease the burden of their work.

Lack of Land Ownership

Women are also deprived of land ownership and have to work on lands owned by their male relatives, fellow tenants or are appointed by *jamadars* seasonally for harvesting. Thus, they are barred from accessing credit that requires applicants to have the ownership of land and collateral (Yasmeen, 2011; Schutter, 2013). Therefore, hardly 4 percent of the total borrowers (58,466 of 1,394,189) in agricultural finance are women (State Bank of Pakistan, 2015).

Existing Policy Approach

Agricultural & Livestock Policy

Pakistan, despite being an agrarian country, lacks any formal agricultural policy (Zia, 2012). Rather, it consists of mere ad-hoc policies that are focused on factors such as price fixing, agricultural inputs and outputs, and market committees (Khan, 2015).

The Livestock Policy, in the same manner, is market-oriented and lacks any concrete measures pertaining to the livestock practices (Khan, 2015).

While both the livestock and agricultural policies focus on the macro-level factors like increasing productivity and food security, they completely overlook the micro-level factors underlying the on ground agricultural and livestock practices involving women.

Another issue is the gender neutrality of these policies that look at farmers as a homogenous group of people facing the same hindrances in their activities. Entirely male-centric policies are formulated due to this gender insensitive approach to policy making. As a result, realities and issues faced exclusively by women remain sidelined and unaddressed by policy makers.

Legal Provision

Additionally, the current labor laws in Pakistan are not applicable to the agricultural sector (South Asian Partnership Pakistan SAP-PK, 2014). As a result, there is no legal coverage under which the rights of agricultural workers are protected. This is especially true for seasonal workers (mostly women) as they remain barred from any legal or social protection due to their status as 'casual workers' (SAP-PK, 2014).

Extension Services

Extension services introduced at the national level include Village Agricultural and Industrial Development Programme (Village-AID), Basic Democracies System (BDS), Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and Training and Visit System (T & V). The aforementioned services have mainly been helpful to men rather than women, except V-AID that was relatively more inclusive of women than the rest (Sadaf et al., 2005). This again owes to the gender neutral way in which these programs are designed. The cultural and social restrictions such as issues of purdah, mobility and interaction with *non-mahram* men that hinder women's participation in these training programs are consequently overlooked (Schutter, 2013). In this way, women are systematically barred from availing any services and thus remain limited in their knowledge and usage of improved technology and farming methods.

Policy Recommendations

Political

Based on the aforementioned barriers, the first step towards the welfare of female agricultural workers would be to recognize and correctly document their participation.

National surveys should modify the phrasing of their questions to make it more inclusive of seasonal workers as well as the various activities women perform.

There is also a need for the propagation of unionization in rural areas. Female agricultural workers should be organized and, with the aid of activists and lawyers, have their voices and specific demands heard in order to ensure that there is adequate representation of women in the agriculture sector.

More importantly, labor laws, especially the Minimum Wage Law, need to be modified and extended to the agricultural sector. Provincial Commissions, with an equal representation of both men and women, should be made which would lobby for further formulation and implementation of agricultural laws.

Similarly, marketing committees should consist of reserved seats for women. Their job would not just be to represent but also devise strategies to boost their participation in marketing and sales. This may be achieved through workshops and networking opportunities.

Further, Pakistan needs to consider the adoption of policies similar to India's National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS). NREGS guarantees 100 days of employment to its rural citizens, especially to the marginalized populations such as the scheduled castes and women (Breitkreuz et al., 2017). A similar move in Pakistan would give women in agriculture a formal employment status and recognition in the sector, thereby, enhancing their working conditions.

Similarly, expansion of initiatives like ILO and UN Women's "Livelihood Restoration,

Protection and Sustainable Empowerment of Vulnerable Peasant Communities in Sindh province" may be beneficial for female agricultural workers. The initiative currently helps landless farmers to gain tenancy rights from their landlords (Salman, 2016). Launching such pilot programs in each province will help identify and uplift the vulnerable female populations.

Social

Another aspect of catering women in the sector is by reducing their constraints. In order to combat the issue of interaction with men, female extension agents need to be trained and given transportation to the targeted regions. Also, trainings should be delivered in the regional languages of the trainees to diminish the language barriers and make the extension services more accessible and comprehensible.

Considering the prevalence of work-related injuries among agricultural women, a budget should be allocated towards occupational safety measures. These can include first aid training, precautions while handling machinery and toxic chemicals, and warning signs in local languages.

Financial

Furthermore, financial policies can be designed in ways that facilitate female farmers. This can be achieved by further subsidizing the agricultural loans that are taken in the name of women. This may initially seem to be a futile activity, considering that the ownership of money within the household may still be in favor of men. However, in the past, the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) took a similar initiative under which cash transfers to female household members took place. This led to several women getting their National

Identity Cards made, thereby, making them eligible for voting and formal employment (Cheema et al., 2016). Likewise, the aforementioned scheme may help women at least be officially recognized in the sector and open up new opportunities for them, laying the foundation for further equitable progress in the field.

In the same way, subsidies for agricultural land that is legally owned by women may also encourage families to give women their due share in land. This can prove to be extremely beneficial for the status of women who currently work on family or tenant farms, with no assets in their own name.

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