

Note on Feminization of Agriculture and DAE / MoA

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Introduction

Feminization of agriculture is the phenomenon that the importance of women's role in agriculture is increasing, whether measured as the ratio between men and women working in this sector or whether reflected in the higher proportion of women whose main employment is agriculture. Though a global phenomenon, it is most pronounced in Africa and Asia, including in Bangladesh, but it shows important regional variations¹. Common reasons for feminization of agriculture are men taking up non-farm employment locally, male out-migration from rural areas to urban areas or abroad, poverty, and/or women's empowerment (e.g. through skill training by NGOs), see the paper of Jaim and Hossain².

The attached appendix 1 summarizes some (anecdotic) evidence of feminization of agriculture encountered in the Blue Gold polders as well as the main findings from the paper of Jaim and Hossain. The latter paper predicts that the demand for the participation of more women in agricultural operations will increase and concludes that more attention needs to be given to the development of women-friendly crop production and processing technologies.

Apart from the trend of feminization of agriculture, the phenomenon of underestimating and/or unrecognizing women's work in agriculture still continues to exist. This is partially due to women's work as unpaid family labour, which is often considered as "helping the husband" or as an extension of women's domestic tasks (especially post-harvest work) rather than being considered as genuine farming.

Consequences of feminization of agriculture

It can be concluded that the trend of increased participation of women in agricultural production in Bangladesh, including in the Blue Gold polders, is a fact. A further increase in women's participation in agriculture is highly likely, both because of the expected increased demand for women's participation in agricultural work and because women's participation in agriculture contributes to increased household incomes. It is important that this trend is recognized as well as its consequences for agricultural extension and research. Areas of attention might include:

- Women should be better recognized as farmers instead of (only) as family labour and/or being responsible for activities that traditionally fall under their domain such as poultry and homestead vegetable cultivation.
- For extension services this means that a model that targets male farmers for crop production and provides a parallel program for women on homestead production needs to be revisited. There is a need to critically evaluate current extension approaches, including the tendency to tailor extension for women along traditional gender labour division lines.

¹ See: Schutter, Olivier de. The agrarian transition and the feminization of agriculture. Conference paper #37. Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue. International Conference Yale University. September 14-15, 2013. Published in the Journal of Peasant Studies, July 2013.

² See: Jaim, W.M.H and Mahabub Hossain. Women's Participation in Agriculture in Bangladesh 1988-2008: Changes and Determinants. Paper presented at the 7th Asian Society of Agricultural Economists (ASEA) International Conference Hanoi, Vietnam, October 12, 2011.

- There is an apparent need for improved women-friendly production technologies, also for crop production, both in terms of research and in extension, i.e. demonstrating and disseminating already existing women-friendly technologies.
- In particular the (potential) role of women as farm manager (on her own or jointly with a husband) should be better recognized and strengthened, which may include strengthening their capacities as decision maker on agricultural production and supporting their market linkages (such as for buying inputs and selling produce).
- This is in line with the National Agricultural Policy of 2013, which promotes women's empowerment including women's participation in decision-making in agricultural management.
- A relatively recent document on promoting women's advancement within the Ministry of Agriculture³ also observes that women's participation in agricultural activities is increasing, including in the context of increasing productivity of food grains. This document refers to recommended activities of a previous year, also reporting on its progress, see appendix 2.
- This document also presents strategies to remove the "gender gap" (see also this appendix). Interestingly, apart from measures such as creating access to credit and to training for women involved in agricultural activities, also actions to ensure a "supportive environment" are encouraged to ensure that men and women more equally share responsibility in household affairs.

Conclusion:

It appears that there is enough evidence of feminization of agriculture in Bangladesh. The government, including MoA, recognizes such trends and the need for implementing strategies to support women in better and more effectively implementing their tasks in agricultural production, including encouraging better sharing of domestic responsibilities between husband and wife to improve the enabling environment for a stronger role of women in agricultural production. There is also adequate evidence that a more substantial involvement of women in agricultural production leads to increased household and per capita incomes.

Considering that policies and strategies for supporting women's involvement and productivity in agriculture are quite well in place, the main challenge seem to lay in a more comprehensive translation of such policies and strategies into concrete actions at field level, i.e. operationalizing all these policies and strategies into practical activities at field level. Currently a number of actions are already being implemented, e.g. supporting women in homestead production and providing input cards to women farmers. However, it seems desirable that extra efforts are being designed and implemented. These might range from creating more gender awareness among field staff to recognizing and supporting women as decision-making farmers, and from promoting more women-friendly technologies to improving the enabling environment (e.g. by reducing women's domestic workload).

³ Chapter-7 Ministry of Agriculture, retrieved from:
http://www.mof.gov.bd/en/budget/15_16/gender_budget/en/G-1_06_43_Agriculture_English.pdf

Appendix 1: Evidence of feminization of agriculture

In the **Blue Gold area** various examples of evidence of this phenomenon has been found. For example, Producer Group Facilitators (PFs), who conduct MSF sessions (market-oriented farmer field schools), observed that it is not uncommon that women participate in MFS sessions on behalf of their husbands. They explained that the women participate because the husbands are unable to attend due to other jobs, including in other parts of the country (“service or migration”). The PFs commented that these trends are different in each of the three districts in which Blue Gold is working.

The IOB baseline study found that 13% of the households of the Blue Gold beneficiary group received income from remittances, apparently from foreign countries. Though part of these households still may have another able male adult left to work in agriculture, the other trend of increased proportion of households being nuclear is likely to cause that women’s role in agriculture is increasing when male household members are away as migrant labourers.

A third indicator of this trend is the fact that the demand for women’s labour in agriculture is reported to be increasing, both because of the preference for female wage labourers due to the considerably lower wages paid to women (even if they perform like men)⁴ and because male wage labourers are less available because they find better paid off-farm work.

Evidence for Bangladesh: The 2011 paper of Jaim and Hossain (see footnote 2) uses longitudinal panel data from surveys in 1988, 2000 and 2008 in Bangladesh, finding various forms of evidence of feminization of agriculture. Relevant findings and conclusions from their paper are:

- The percentage of adult women participating in agriculture remained almost the same in 1988 and 2000 (59% and 59% respectively), but had increased considerably by 2008 (66%).
- Over the years women’s involvement in crop production decreased mainly due to the fact that post-harvest operations traditionally involving women became increasingly mechanised (i.e. winnowing, parboiling, drying, milling, etc).
- The reduced involvement of women in crop production has been substantially compensated by women’s involvement in livestock, poultry and homestead gardening. This has been significantly enhanced by NGOs and government promoting such IGA skills among women.
- Involvement of men in agriculture has sharply decreased in 2000 as compared to 1988 mainly because of mechanization, including the increased availability of power tillers replacing men and bullocks. However, the 2008 data showed again (a slight) increase in male participation in agriculture (in terms of hours per day), mainly due to the intensification of crop production and livestock production activities.
- In terms of numbers the participation of female labour in agriculture changed quite drastically as compared to male labour. During the period 1999-2000 to 2005-2006 the male labour force for agriculture decreased from 16.2 to 15.1 million, whereas the female labour force in agriculture more than doubled from 3.8 to 7.7 million.
- The analysis of data also showed that households with substantial participation of women in agriculture (i.e. at least 4 hours a day) had an increase in per capita income by about 22% (in real price) between 2000 and 2008, whereas households with no participation of women in agriculture had a decrease of about 20%.
- This paper concludes that the trend of men moving into remunerative non-farm jobs will demand the participation of more women in agriculture in the near future.
- The paper also observes that women-friendly pre-harvest and post-harvest technologies for crop production and processing technologies need to be developed for effective participation of women in agriculture, which needs the attention of researchers and planners.

⁴ See: Huq, Hamidul. Gender in Aquaculture – A study in Division of Power and Work. A study conducted by ULAB for GWAPB and SAFAL projects. May 2015.

Appendix 2: Recommendations and strategies on women's advancement within agriculture⁵:

Strategies to remove the gender gap:

- Steps have been taken to extend credit facilities to women in agriculture activities to ensure their empowerment;
- Multi-faceted training on agriculture activities is imparted to women in order to transform them into educated and skilled workforce;
- Ministry of Agriculture is supporting the establishment of agricultural farms and agro-based industries through women's participation to free the womenfolk from the curse of poverty;
- Ministry of Agriculture is appropriately rewarding women in different areas alongside men for their contribution in social and economic sphere;
- Actions are being taken to ensure a supportive environment so that men and women can share equal responsibility in household affairs and productive activities;
- Women's contribution in agriculture and their commendable entrepreneurial activities are highlighted in the media to build positive image of women. Initiatives are being taken to enhance the relationship between women groups and media organizations to make the latter more gender friendly. These are also telecast in various agriculture related programs.

Recommended activities:

1. Ensure that women are recognized as farmers.
2. Introduce input cards for female farmers (like male farmers), ensure opportunity to open an account with a minimum deposit, provision of training, access to agriculture credit, ensuring the availability of other existing facilities.
3. Provide women with training on production and storage of seeds, cultivation and preservation of mushroom, planting seedlings and saplings, horticultural seed development, homestead gardening, production of bio and compost fertilizer, preservation and marketing of vegetable and fruits. Supply women with microcredit and create employment opportunities for them.
4. Create women-friendly environment to facilitate marketing of agricultural products, and develop and expand woman-friendly environment in the existing and new markets.
5. Improve the socio-economic condition of poor and destitute women living in flood, drought, saline-prone areas and coastal regions. Support these women by supplying agricultural inputs, and providing training and credit support with low interest rates as a part of post-natural disaster rehabilitation.
6. In the aim to involve more women in agroprocessing and agri-business, provide support to develop women as entrepreneurs, provide training and loan support with low interest rates to create employment opportunities.
7. Consider gender issue in all developmental projects and programs of the Agriculture Ministry.
8. Provide all types of agricultural support services to women so that they are able to undertake homestead cultivation activities in an effective manner.

⁵ Source: Chapter-7 Ministry of Agriculture, see footnote 3.