

IDENTIFICATION OF FACTORS HAMPERING WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN AGRICULTURAL DECISION MAKING AND EXTENSION WORK IN DISTRICT OKARA, PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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The study was designed to identify rural women's constraints in decision making regarding agricultural activities and mainly how the rural women can be empowered for sustainable agricultural development in the district Okara, Punjab, Pakistan. A multistage sampling technique was used to collect the data from 480 respondents from three Tehsils of the district. The results showed that a vast majority of women were illiterate, having monthly family income less than Rs. 100,000, and having small land farms. A large proportion of the respondents reported that they had to face problems and constraints in accessing agricultural extension services in the context of social, economic, cultural, and political issues. However, by addressing these constraints effectively the situation of women empowerment can be improved in rural areas.

Keywords: Empowerment, rural women, agricultural extension, decision making

INTRODUCTION

Empowerment is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions which build both individual and collective assets, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets. Empowered people have freedom of choice and action. This in turn enables them to better influence the course of their lives and the decisions which affect them (World Bank, 2008). In Pakistan, rural women cover about half of the total Pakistani population and an enormous proportion of agricultural labor force in the rural part. About 70% of the female labor force is engaged in agriculture sector their role being the toughest of all the women folk of our culture and yet their contribution goes disregarded and undocumented. Pakistani women play a vital role in agriculture and contribute in all operations related to crop production such as sowing, transplanting, weeding and harvesting, threshing, winnowing, drying etc. and livestock works like handling of milk production, animal care, fodder cutting etc. Along the normal domestic chores of cooking, taking care of children, elderly and disabled; fetching water and fuel, cleaning and maintaining the house.

Women participate in 25 to 45% of labor input in rural economy. Pakistani women work in agriculture or agriculture related activities 68.9% compared to 38% of men are engaged in these activities. Nearly 36-38% of women work on their own family farms. Women's

participation in the labor force has risen from 9.9% in 2001-2002 to 13.5% in 2005-2006. Even labor force participation within house premises has gone up from 26% to 30.2% in 2005-06. Pakistani women today constitute only 20% of the labor force. Women spend long hours in doing laundry, preparing food, and carrying out agricultural duties (ESCAP, 1997; Rashidi, 2004).

Women's participation in agricultural production is consistently expanding and in the face of this, women continue to face traditional restraints. Women lack access to input supplies, extension advice, credit and the most important agricultural resource-land. This continues despite their increased participation rates. Women now have heavier responsibilities and perhaps a strong presence but their say is still largely unheard. Rural women still don't have ownership on land and due to this they can't take independent decisions on various agricultural aspects. Extension services in Pakistan are limited to men than women because of different reasons, first insufficient agricultural advice or the benefits, such as seeds and credit. Second extension staff professionals are male, third our custom and norms of segregation, fourth domestic responsibilities and lack of mobility and at last ignorance of actual contribution of women (Human Development Report, 2002).

By bridging the gap between the farmers practices and the new technical knowledge extension programs can increase agricultural productivity and rural incomes, but research and extension services usually assume that farmers are men. In fact, women play a critical role in a wide range of agricultural activities, and as men move

into off-farm employment, women's importance to agriculture is growing. Majority of our women reside in rural areas. There have been a number of serious obstacles, obstructing agricultural improvement, some of them are environmental constraints but others are failure to serve rural women, lack of staff and organizational experience regarding extension planning and programming for rural women and, difficulties in identifying rural women's needs.

The rural woman have lack of access in controlling their resources, an increase in the daily inclination that arise from the out migration of males into urban centers and into other professions, less education, less social set up, severe poverty and her location in a deeply patriarchal society, increasing demand of gender-sensitive policies in the agriculture sector. Policies and strategies should be developed which enable women to participate fully in social and economic activities because there is a general scarcity of intellectual and well-developed policies regarding rural women. Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Nepal all reports show the lack of policy response to rural women's needs and concerns. So the situation requires affirmative action on the part of policymakers within international agencies and NGOs (FAO, 1995; Shehzad, 2004; Ahmad, 2006).

Women contribution in the South Asian agriculture is extremely greater than men but despite this fact, their role remains unacknowledged and unappreciated. Their economic and social values of work have frequently been under recorded and underestimated. Empowerment of rural women is absolutely essential for raising their status in society. They need to be recognized and treated as workers and should be provided with safe and healthy working conditions (Syal, 2004; Shehzad, 2004; Zafar, 2005).

Therefore keeping in view the above said facts, this study was designed to identify the factors which were hampering women empowerment in agricultural decision making and extension work in the Punjab, Pakistan. It is envisaged that the results of this study would be helpful in revealing certain factors with regard to women empowerment, which would facilitate the policy makers and the extension workers to make better strategies and policies to bring improvements in the country.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was designed to identify and analyze the factors hampering women empowerment in agricultural decision making and extension work in Punjab Pakistan. The universe of the study was district Okara of the Punjab province. Three tehsils were randomly selected at the first stage of the sampling. From each tehsil, eight villages from rural areas were drawn at the second stage of sampling.

A sample of 480 rural women was interviewed. Respondents were selected by employing multi-stage random sampling technique. From each Tehsil, eight villages were taken randomly. Twenty farm families were selected from each selected village at random and one woman was further selected from each selected household. So, 480 farm families made a total of 480 respondents for the study. The data was collected through pre-tested interview schedule. Focus group discussions were also administered on the basis of study objectives. The univariate and bivariate analyses were done by using SPSS to draw the conclusions and to suggest measures for improvement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The most of the respondents (47%) belonged to young age group followed by 40% and 13% of the respondents who fall in middle and old age categories, respectively (Table 1). A study conducted on the need for agricultural extension services for rural women in Faisalabad reported that most (42%) of the respondents were in middle aged group (Sadaf, 2005). The data also show that a vast majority (79%) of the respondents were illiterate. These findings are in consonance with those of Sadaf (2005) and Hassan (2008) who reported that majority (73% and 77%) was illiterate respectively. Literacy remains higher in urban areas (72%) than in rural areas (45%) and more in men (67%) compared to woman i.e. 42% (Govt. of Pakistan, 2008).

Table 1. Background characteristics of the respondents

Background characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Age (years)		
Up to 30 (young)	227	47.29
31-50 (Middle)	193	40.21
Above 50 (Old)	60	12.50
Education		
Illiterate	382	79.58
Primary	54	11.25
Middle	33	6.88
Matric	11	2.29
Family income		
Less than 1 lac	388	80.83
Up to 1 lac	57	11.88
More than 1 lac	35	7.29
Family landholding		
<12.5 acre (Small)	397	82.71
> 12.5-25 acre (Medium)	66	13.75
Above 25 (Large)	17	3.54
Total	480	100.00

Four-fifth of the respondents reported that they secure less than 1 Lac (100,000) income annually from farm and other activities. This situation indicates that a large majority of the respondents were financially not well off. Further table illustrates that a vast majority (83%) of the respondents fall under the category of small (less than 12.5 acres) land holding whereas only 3.54% hold large farms, having 25 and above acres of land.

Table 2 indicates that the highest perceived constraints were poor economic conditions (mean 3.95), lack of social interaction (mean 3.79) and social conflicts

(mean 3.79). Economic stability is the key to make ones say more effective in any institution and state. If poor people would get proper education they would be able to make their voice heard in all sections of a society. Their say in a society would make them to make decisions for their well being for the prosperity of the society and for the welfare of their national interests. Therefore, it is necessary to alleviate poverty from a country to bring forth healthy minds with strong decision making ideas. NSO (2006) conducted a

Table 2. Percentage distribution of the respondents according to their perceived constraints in agricultural operations

Statements	To some extent (%)	Below average extent (%)	Average (%)	Above average (%)	To much extent (%)	Total (%) (N=480)
Overall low literacy level in village	2.71	2.29	2.71	4.38	87.92	100
Low literacy level among women	1.88	2.50	2.92	4.17	88.54	100
Lack of legal, economic and political literacy	2.29	2.08	2.92	4.17	88.54	100
Informal patriarchic rules	2.08	3.54	2.92	3.33	88.13	100
Lack of job opportunity for women	2.50	3.54	2.50	3.33	88.13	100
Women job in less valued disciplines and sectors	2.92	3.13	2.92	2.92	88.13	100
Lack of confidence	3.13	2.08	3.54	2.92	88.33	100
Transportation difficulties for women	1.67	2.50	2.50	2.50	90.83	100
Lack of women organization	3.75	2.08	2.50	2.08	89.58	100
Low payment of work for women	1.67	2.92	2.08	2.50	90.83	100
Women work not recognized	2.08	2.92	2.50	2.50	90.00	100
Violence against women	0.83	47.5	48.3	0.00	3.33	100
Lack of media information	2.50	2.08	1.67	4.17	89.58	100
Social conflicts	1.67	2.08	2.50	2.92	90.83	100
Poor economic conditions	0.83	0.42	1.00	0.00	98.75	101
Lack of social interaction	1.25	2.50	2.50	2.92	90.83	100

Scale: To some extent = 0, Below average extent = 1, Average = 2, Above average = 3, To much extent = 4

Table 2(a). Mean standard deviation, rank order according to their perceived constraints in agricultural operations

Operation	Mean	SD	Rank
Poor economic conditions	3.95	0.41	1
Lack of social interaction	3.79	0.72	2
Social conflicts	3.79	0.73	3
Transportation difficulties for women	3.78	0.75	4
Low payment of work for women	3.78	0.77	5
Lack of media information	3.76	0.80	6
Women work not recognized	3.75	0.81	7
Low literacy level among women	3.75	0.78	8
Lack of legal, economic and political literacy	3.75	0.81	9
Overall low literacy level in the village	3.73	0.85	10
Informal patriarchic rules	3.72	0.85	11
Lack of women organization	3.72	0.91	12
Lack of confidence	3.71	0.88	13
Lack of job opportunity for women	3.71	0.88	14
Women job in less valued disciplines and sectors	3.70	0.89	15
Violence against women	1.58	0.67	16

Scale: To some extent = 0, Below average extent = 1, Average = 2, Above average = 3, To much extent = 4

survey related to the obstacles to the participation of women at decision-making positions. According to the survey findings, major obstacles faced by women in obtaining a decision-making or managerial position, 84% of women indicated childcare responsibilities as a barrier, while 82% of women cited the lack of partner's support. More women than men stated that long working hours (76% of women, compared with 69% of men) and age (46% of women, compared with 38% of men) represent significant obstacles for women in their pursuit of posts with greater responsibilities. About 30% of the survey respondents believed that women were disadvantaged due to their sex; this reason was given more often by women than men (Katepa-Kalala, 1999; Whitehead, 2003).

Interestingly, violence against women as perceived constraints showed no association to all background variables.

This study used population-based data to identify the factors hampering women decision making power in overall activities in their rural life. This study was designed to identify participation level of rural women in decision making process regarding a number of household and agricultural affairs and their perceived hindrance in this context.

The study found that respondents had lower level of education as they have to share work at farm instead of going to school. The economic condition of women was not well and most of them had hand to mouth subsistence level. Poor economic condition was found the major hindrance in women's participation in

Table 3. Relationship between background characteristics of the respondents and their perceived constraints related to women empowerment

Constraints/statements	Age	Education	Annual income	Family land holding
Overall low literacy level in the village	5.72	84.86***	40.55***	33.92***
Low literacy level among women	10.11	89.07***	49.04***	34.78***
Lack of legal, economic and political literacy	11.90	109.93***	48.18***	35.67***
Informal patrilineal rules	17.08*	65.42***	48.29***	29.57***
Lack of job opportunity for women	14.22	76.55***	41.57***	32.64***
Women job in less valued disciplines and sectors	10.85	65.71***	34.58***	34.30***
Lack of confidence	16.13**	63.49***	33.56***	27.78**
Transportation difficulties for women	11.84*	43.66***	31.09***	24.82**
Low payment of work for women	21.92**	42.60***	34.23***	23.44**
Women work not recognized	13.57	60.07***	27.73**	23.03**
Violence against women	1.94	5.17	2.83	5.55
Lack of media information	12.74	49.89***	22.29**	29.98***
Social conflicts	12.34	45.64***	27.36**	23.44**
Poor economic conditions	18.28**	60.95***	25.80**	32.56***
Lack of social interaction	18.55**	25.77**	29.50***	26.75**

* Significant at $P = 0.05$ ** $P = 0.01$ *** $P = 0.001$

Table 3 shows the association of some selected background variables i.e. age, education, annual income, and landholding of the household with perceived constraints by the respondents in agricultural decision making process. These variables have been selected on the basis as they were considered major determinants of women's practice of power and their say in daily routine life. Age of the respondents demonstrated moderate level of significance with some variables and remained insignificant to some selected variables. On the other hand, education, annual income, and size of land holding depicted relatively strong association with selected variables.

agricultural practices. Bivariate analysis also showed that poor economic conditions and low payments to women for agricultural work depicted strong association with selected background variables. Further, education of women has a greater effect in decision making participation and on the perceived hindrances or obstacles to the empowerment of rural women.

The present data should be considered as a base study for the future studies regarding women empowerment. The policy makers should strengthen the women organizations and rural areas must be provided with work opportunities for women. Policies

should also be made to recognize women's work and offering of adequate wages for them. These policies may help to reduce the poor economic situation of the rural areas and empowerment of women particularly in agricultural decision making activities.

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