

AGRICULTURAL MARKETS AS NODAL POINTS FOR ECONOMIC ACTIVITY: ARE AGRICULTURAL MARKETS GENDER INCLUSIVE?

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ABSTRACT

It is argued that women play a vital role in food production and processing in many parts of the world such as hoeing, weeding, harvesting, storing and selling despite having limited access to agricultural inputs such as land, extension services and finance. Besides the production of food for household consumption, women also need access to markets in order to be able to sell their produce and buy other household products. Markets however are said to be male dominated and this has a negative impact on the participation of women, perpetuating female poverty and lack of financial independence. Whilst discrimination against women in terms of access to markets is not direct, the impact is felt more by women than men. Women unlike men are said to have low mobility in that they cannot travel long distances to markets due to custom or due to reproductive work done mainly by them such as taking care of children, cooking, fetching water and firewood. Most markets especially in rural areas are situated far from home and may entail a lot of travelling and that may affect taking care of domestic chores by women, as such most women prefer trading in local markets which are closer to home allowing them to carry out other household responsibilities. The drawback with the localisation of women in local markets is that there is often serious competition which lowers prices and affects profit. Arguably, this is the reason why many women are concentrated in one market place selling the same thing. Historically, women's low literacy levels are also said to hinder access to markets. This is because of the complexity of markets in terms of knowledge of market value chains, linkages with other service providers, acquiring new skills to improve production and general lack of awareness of new business opportunities. This paper is a desk top analysis of the nature of markets with regard to gender inclusiveness. The aim is to evaluate the extent of women's involvement in agricultural markets placing more emphasis on their challenges as compared to men.

Keywords: Agricultural markets, Value chains, Middlemen, Market information.

1. INTRODUCTION

Amassing a gender perspective on value chains and markets assists in the development of an integrated analysis of value chains from production, distribution, marketing and consumption. Gender perspective promotes the identification of gaps and challenges regarding access to markets by women. Markets are defined as places where producers buy agricultural inputs, sell products and use income for stuff like non-agricultural products to buy food requirements for consumption (Baden, 1998:6; IFAD, 2003:5). Access to agricultural markets by rural women has the ability to reduce poverty, malnutrition and ensure food security in rural communities. Although women play an important role in agriculture as food producers, they are said to have limited access to land. Only a few percentages of women worldwide are said to own the land they cultivate (Prakash, 2003:3; Steinzor, 2003:2; Kambarami, 2006; UN, 2008:8). This is because unlike men who have land rights, women only have use rights which make their tenure of security insecure. Patriarchal tendencies subtly dictate that women not be given prime agricultural land but reserve it for men hence women farm mostly on backyard gardens and mainly for household consumption. Patriarchal societies prescribe that husbands take care of their families hence they are regarded as head of households. They are the ones who are regarded as having the right to ownership and access to land than women. These cultural patterns according to Agarwal (1994: 1463) and Moghamad (2005: 15) help perpetuate household and community poverty since they do not allow women to own land and limit their ability to grow into commercial farming.

Markets are said to be male dominated because according to Baden (1998: 20) and UNIDO (2013),

men frame the rules regarding access to markets to suit their needs which unintentionally excludes women. The inability of women to access land makes it difficult for them to access agricultural markets as markets prefer working with farmers who have enough land to produce commodities that meet their demands and standards (Roney, Anriquez, Croppenstedt, Gerosa, Lowder, Matuscke & Skoet, 2011:33). The discrimination women face with regard to access to markets may not be direct yet on the other hand it may have direct negative results in that the conditions may unintentionally exclude them from benefiting or accessing markets. Conditions such as exorbitant membership fees and the distance of markets from rural areas make it difficult for women to access them due to the burden of balancing household and economic activities (World Bank, FAO & IFAD, 2009:185). This is the reason women prefer local markets than urban ones. Since local markets are closer to home, they make it easier for women to balance business activities with household activities such as fetching water, firewood and attending to funerals and other community activities. The drawback about local markets however is that they do not encourage competitive profit but instead women loose profit hence they are forced to sell at low prices due to stiff competition.

2. WOMEN'S LITERACY LEVELS AND AWARENESS OF MARKET INFORMATION

The involvement of women in economic activities contributes to the eradication of poverty and malnutrition by ensuring food security both at household and community levels. Literature affirms that a large number of women are poor (Agarwal, 1994:1455; Deere & Doss, 1997:137; Moghadan, 2005:2; Harrington & Chopra, 2010:4). There are various barriers that hold women back in terms of participating in the economy and the body of research list them as low literacy levels which is said to be caused by patriarchy that favours boy children to get education instead of girl children. This however seem to be gradually changing as more girl children seem to register at primary school level even though it is observed that their graduation rate at high school is less than that of boys. The change in the enrolment rate may be attributed to the fact that most countries have signed treaties that deal with women empowerment and the compulsory enrolment of children at primary school. Article 10 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) addresses the issue of equal access to education for both

men and women and most countries have ratified this convention.

The low literacy levels are hindrance since it makes it impossible for women to understand market information such as consumer preferences, marketing strategies, standards and market requirements. The knowledge of processes and legislation regarding market information acts as a barrier for most women. Technology such as computers which women use to access market information, are not easily available for rural women (Okwu & Umoru, 2009; Mehra & Rojas, 2008:7; Roney, Anriquez, Croppenstedt, Gerosa, Lowder, Matuscke & Skoet, 2011:34; World Bank, FAO, IFAD, 2009:176; AfDB, 2015:22; Mawazo & Kisangiri, 2015). The lack of access to computers which have the ability to transfer information of markets is not the sole information hub that rural women can utilise. Women can also use cell phones to inform one another about market information such as prices for the commodities they are involved in to avoid using the services of middlemen or brokers. Cell phones, unlike computers are easily accessible and women who cannot read can be assisted by family members and other women to transfer information instead of relying on the radio. It is thus important that women have access to technology that will allow them to gain access to markets (Women Thrive Worldwide, n.d: 4; Doss, Bockius & D'Souza, 2012: 15). It is important for government or other institutions to assist in improving market links to women by mediating on their behalf. Low literacy levels amongst women make them fail to negotiate contracts and thus rely on middlemen or agents or even their own husbands to do that on their behalf (Mehra & Rojas, 2008: 10; Hill & Vigneri, 2009; Okwu & Umoru, 2009; Mawazo & Kisangiri, 2015; 9). Using middlemen is very costly for women as it affects profit and has a tendency of making women vulnerable to exploitation. Women are unable to get competitive prices for their goods as the middlemen only strive to buy commodities cheaper from women but sell at high price to maximise their own profit.

3. WOMEN AND AGRICULTURAL VALUE CHAINS

Value chain is defined as a set of activities, services, products that lead to product to reach a consumer (Baden, 1998: 6; World Bank, FAO & IFAD, 2009: 174; Mawazo & Kisangiri, 2015). Value chains involve different stakeholders who play different essential roles within value chain nodes such as farmers, brokers, processors, marketers, importers,

buyers and consumers. It is argued that women play a lesser role within value chains than men (Women Thrive Worldwide, n.d: 6; World Bank, FAO & IFAD, 2009: 173). Women traditionally trade in low value commodities such as vegetables and fruits which are highly perishable, compounded by lack of storage facilities which have the ability to prolong shelf-life and prevent stock loss. Lucrative markets are arguably male dominated as men prefer contracting with other men than women. Due to the nature of commodities women trade in, compounded by the lack of access to land and other constraints, they fail to meet market demands in terms of quantity, quality, and health standards. Poor quality products are rejected by markets. Women seldom diversify their products hence you find them congregated in one area, selling the same products. This cause high competition resulting in lowering of prices as a buffer to the competition otherwise they will not sell and their commodities will waste due to their short shelf-life. Men on the other hand are said to trade mostly in commodities with high returns such as livestock and processed goods.

Identifying the role played by women within value chains calls for an analysis of value chains to identify niches where women can play a role. A gendered analysis of value chains will assist in the development of strategies to mitigate obstacles and ensuring the empowerment of women. High value procurement chains have the ability to exclude poor farmers such

as women who do not have access to resources enabling them to meet market requirements (Baden, 1998: 10; OECD, 2007: 117; Mehra & Rojas, 2008:9; Hill & Vigneri, 2009). Women's role within value chains may be labour intensive such as peeling, cutting, drying and gathering instead of using machinery. This albeit the fact that women produce high quality products cheaply. It then becomes important to regard gender within value chains as crucial especially in the analysis of value chains.

4. UTILISATION OF MIDDLEMEN OR BROKERS AS LINKS TO MARKETS

Agricultural brokers or middlemen play a role in linking farmers with markets both in urban and rural areas. Brokers and middlemen play different roles within the value chain. However, this role can also be played by spouses or organisation including government in some instance. Figure 1 below depicts an illustration of the value chain followed by a discussion indicating different nodes where brokers or middle men play a role:

Farmers appertain to both rural and urban small and large scale farmers, growers and raisers, and producers of commodities. In this value chain node, middlemen link farmers with markets by buying from producers and selling to markets. Their intention is always to buy cheap in order to make profit. Women get exploited at this node of the value chain due to

FIGURE 1: Value chain.



Source: Adapted from Mawazo *et al*, (2016)

lack of knowledge about market prices for their commodities. Collectors are middlemen/brokers, traders as well as assemblers and they collect commodities from farmers. Transport is normally needed to collect commodities from producers on their farms to markets. Women seldom own transport and utilise middlemen to broker for transport on their behalf. Middlemen normally ask for exorbitant prices so that they also make profit for themselves. Distributors are usually middlemen channelling commodities to markets. Marketing is also done by middlemen, wholesalers, importers, and buyers. They have the advantage of accessing warehousing for the storage of goods and play a role in brokering deals there as well. The last players in the value chain are consumers who buy commodities for household consumption (Aliguma, Magala, Lwasa, 2007:13; Mawazo & Kisangiri, 2015; Doss, Bickius-Suwyn & D'Souza, 2012:32). As illustrated in the discussion above, middlemen broker deals in many nodes within the value chain. In all the nodes that middlemen are involved, there are transaction costs involved that affect farmers' profit. Middlemen also have the ability to monopolise prizes in order to buy cheap and make profit. This can result in low returns for women who seldom have market information. It thus becomes important for government and other stakeholders to get involved and play a role of a mediator or advocacy roles to enable women and small farmers to save on transaction costs.

5. THE ABILITY OF WOMEN TO MOVE FROM SUBSISTENCE TO COMMERCIAL FARMING

Women mostly farm on backyard gardens and next to roads due to lack of access to land. The lack of access to prime land does not offer them the opportunity to scale up to commercial farming. Studies on poverty and development indicate that 80 million hectares of land has been leased for agricultural purposes but only one percent (1%) of the world's women own land (Lorber, 2010:6; UN, 2012:3). A study done by Moyo (2000:21) revealed that in Zimbabwe, eighty-seven percent (87%) of registered land owners are male and less than five percent (5%) are women. The notion that only a few percentages of women have access to land, unlike their male counterparts, means that wealth is in the hands of men than women as land is equated with wealth.

Another argument on the ownership of land by women is that it is culturally believed that they get married and leave their families and thus

regarded as outsiders, hence outsiders cannot own land belonging to another clan. Some cultures even practice "wife inheritance" where a woman is given to a brother of the deceased or any other male relative to make sure that land remains in the hands of the clan or family and does not fall into the hands of outsiders should she decide to get married. According to UN report (2012:10) and World Bank (2013:5), barriers in accessing land by rural women include: the exclusion of women when designing programmes, lack of awareness of rights due to low literacy levels, inability to access information on land reform programmes, gender-biased officers who come from patriarchal societies and thus treat women unequally to men, and cultural, religious, community and family dynamics that discriminate against women. The advantage of owning land is that women who own land can access capital and other resources such as extension services to assist them with their farming activities and thus be able to move from subsistence to commercial farming. Besides, the ability of access to land can elevate the status of women in communities and can help shape them as agricultural producers. When women have access to land, there is reported improvement of families' nutrition, education of children from families that own land, decrease in fertility rates and bargaining powers by women within a home environment (Kameri-Mbote, 2005:9; UNECA, 2007:1; Gomez & Tran, 2012:7; UN, 2012:7). Women who own large pieces of land are said to be able to take care of their family's nutritional needs and also sell any surplus commodity to take care of other needs within families. Women who are able to have surplus however have a challenge of attracting competitive prices due to discriminatory nature of markets. A lot of women have been owning and managing land for ages. The challenge is to direct them towards formalising their businesses and creating a conducive environment to access institutions that can assist them grow their businesses and thus access markets.

Women also need information on new technologies and systems to increase their produce (Prakash, 2003:7; Steinzor, 2003:3; Malhotra & Schuler, 2005:71; Collett & Gale, 2009:22; UN, 2012:12; World Bank, 2012:27). Technology is useful in assisting women to access markets and also network within value chains. Women struggle to move from being subsistence farmers to commercial farming because they still depend on old farming techniques and out-dated technology which do not help them increase their yields at the same level and speed as their male counterparts. Women thus need to be

empowered with new farming skills whilst in the same breath taking cognisance of their dual role of performing both productive and reproductive roles.

6. PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURAL STRUCTURES

For women to have a voice, they need to be involved in important structures such as agricultural structures that determines how resources are to be distributed, what laws to put in place in terms of policies and also changes in cultural norms that impede the progress of women in all spheres. According to literature, there is lack of representation of women in these decision-making structures. The lack of representation not only makes it difficult for women to have their needs articulated but also impacts negatively on ensuring that developmental initiatives take their needs into cognisance (UN, 2009: 23; Mutangadura, 2011:13; Rao, 2011:8; Women Thrive Worldwide, n.d:11; Baden, 1998:11). It is however important to note that these organisations may indirectly discriminate against women by requesting expensive membership fees or meetings may be held in locations and times that may not be conducive for women to travel to (Doss, Bickius-Suwyn & D'Souza, 2012: 31; UN-Women, UNDP, UNEP & World Bank, 2015:15). Culturally however, some traditional communities may not expect women to be involved in such structures, citing customary expectations and roles of women. Most of the time women who are involved in such structures are said to seldom make inputs, but become passive participants even when given the opportunity to do so. Women should thus be encouraged to form part of agricultural cooperatives or structures, especially those that deal with the commodities they are involved in. Participation in such structures has the ability to ensure that they get benefits regarding market information, are able to organise themselves and buy agricultural inputs as a collective. Adaptation to new technologies may also be discussed in these forums so women can also support one another by discussing issues that impact on them as emerging farmers. This will enable markets to source not only from established producers but also from emerging female producers.

7. TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE AND WOMEN'S ACCESS TO MARKETS

Rural women lose profit when moving agricultural products from farm gate to markets due to poor road infrastructure in rural areas (IFAD, 2003:9; World Bank, FAO & IFAD, 2009: 173; Mensah &

Yankson, 2013). Rural women farmers seldom own the means of transport, so they are forced to hire transport for their commodities to reach the markets mostly through third parties (middlemen). Transport companies are reluctant to utilise rural roads because they are often bad and impassable especially during raining seasons. The roads are usually flooded and have potholes that can damage trucks and make them costly to maintain. Unlike men, women seldom trade in processed commodities, but trade in perishable commodities such as vegetables and fruits and these have low returns compounded by lack of storage facilities. Expensive transport costs affect profit and thus have a detrimental effect on food security and the eradication of poverty. This is because women use money they get from their commodities to take care of their children's schooling and provide other necessities for their families. The distance to markets have a potential to cause uncompetitive and monopolistic markets which are detrimental to women's financial independence (Baden, 1998:48; IFAD, 2003:9; Aliguna, Magala & Lwasa; 2007:14). Transport infrastructure is crucial in decreasing women isolation from markets by increasing access. Lower costs for transportation and less time on the roads enables women to take care of other responsibilities such as taking care of their families. Good roads not only have the ability to lower transportation costs for women, they also enable investors to reach women in rural areas. This has a potential to assist women to have access to institutions that support them as they will be easily accessible.

The unequal division of household labour is seen as one area that holds women back in terms of entering into the broader economic spectrum including markets (UN, 2005:10; Lingam, 2005:9; UNRISD, 2010:108; Bosch, 2011:20; World Bank, 2012:219; Kabeer, 2012:21; Orr & Meelis, 2014:33). The reproductive role played by women is crucial since it creates and nurtures a society. It is thus imperative to note that the fact that social responsibilities are entrenched and defined along gender lines as such women's household responsibilities act as a barrier for women to be involved in market activities (Hill & Vigneri, 2009; Baden, 1998:19; OECD, 2007:113; World Bank, FAO, IFAD, 2009:175; Women Thrive Worldwide, n.d: 7; AfDB, 2015:22). Accessing markets is difficult for women when markets are situated far from rural areas and involves travelling because women's movement is culturally controlled by men and household activities. Household activities can be a barrier as they have the potential to can be

used by men to control women's movement unless women have better bargaining powers within the household (Baden, 1998:13; Hill & Vigneri, 2009; UNIDO, 2013:7). Interestingly, as soon as women's farming businesses become successful, men take over. It is however important to note that women are not a homogeneous group. There are women who are supported by their spouses who do not necessarily take over when business becomes successful.

8. AGRICULTURAL INPUTS AND ACCESS TO MARKETS

Women produce half or more of the food grown in the world, which is an indication that they play a crucial role in the economy. They are however not visible as they are not involved in decision-making (Prakash, 2003:5-11; UN, 2008:7; World Bank, 2012:224; Rao, 2012:2). Land is an economic asset which can help women generate income, women deserve to have equal access just as men. It is thus important that women be capacitated with skills and an increase in their knowledge to better manage their production on the land. Women also need new updates on information regarding new agricultural technologies and systems (Prakash, 2003:7; Steinzor, 2003:3; Malhotra & Schuler, 2005:71; Collett & Gale, 2009:22; UN, 2012:12; World Bank, 2012:2 27). More often than not women struggle to move from being subsistence farmers to commercial farming because they still depend on old farming techniques and out-dated technology which do not help them increase their yields at the same pace as their male counterparts. The lack of access to agricultural inputs makes it impossible for women to meet the requirements of producing good quality products fit for the market (Okwu & Umoru, 2009; World Bank, FAO, IFAD, 2009:175; OECD, 2007:16; Grass, Landberg & Huyer, 2015:18). On the contrary, since women produce fewer quantities in agricultural production due to having less access to land as compared to men, they also use less or no fertilizers which render their production to be regarded as organic due to lack of contamination from pesticides and fertilizers. Presently there is a niche in the market for organic food, a niche that can be exploited to benefit women (World Bank, FAO, IFAD, 2009: 176; UN-Women, UNDP, UNEA & World Bank, 2015:16). This niche can give women an opportunity to sell their organic commodities at higher prices. However, this comes with knowledge of markets coupled with some level education. In order to benefit from this niche in the value chain, women's commodities can be marketed by indicating that they are produced

by women. All in all, ensuring that women receive and have access to technical and agricultural inputs will increase women's productivity and assist them in accessing and benefiting from markets.

9. CONCLUSION

This paper mainly dwelled on document study to probe barriers to women's participation in agricultural markets. Males are said to dominate access to markets than women. The exclusion of women is said to be unintentional but caused by rules and regulations that unintentionally exclude women due to lack of gender analysis of value chains. Issues such as the location of markets, lack of transport infrastructure and the utilisation of middlemen to broker deals for women act as barriers for women to access markets on equal footing with men. The lack of access to market information by women, compounded by lack of technology, poor access to land and agricultural inputs assist in exacerbating the inability of women to access markets.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the literature surveyed in this paper on barriers to women's access to agricultural markets, the following recommendations are put forward for consideration to enable women to participate in agricultural markets on equal footing with men.

10.1 Promote Access to Extension Services to Assist Women to Move from Subsistence to Commercial Farming

Extension services are important for women since they also need to learn new skills and techniques to improve their yields. Women often have problems attending trainings that take them away from home for long periods because that creates problems in their households. Husbands would often not be happy if women are away from home for long periods to attend trainings. The unequal division of household labour has been attested as having a negative impact on women participating in the economic sphere because they have to divide their time between productive and reproductive work.

10.2 Promote Gender Equitable Market Information Systems to Benefit Both Men and Women

Women should be empowered with market information and technology to enable them to

control production, processing and marketing. Training should concentrate on matters such as marketing, pricing, reading market needs and financial management. Women should be specifically targeted for inclusion in lucrative markets. It thus necessitates for the establishment of special markets that target what most women produce.

10.3 Monitoring and Evaluation of Sex Desegregated Data in Value Chains

Analysis of value chains should include sex desegregated data and identification of the different niches within value chains where women participate or do not participate. The analysis will promote the closing of gaps and development of plans to empower women.

10.4 Formalisation of Women's Informal Businesses

Encourage female farmer co-operatives or collectives for them to gain access to markets. The advantage is that women will be able to buy agricultural inputs and sell their commodities as a collective which also gives them bargaining powers. This will also assist them in meeting market demands in terms of quantities needed by markets.

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