FACTORS LEADING TO LOW PRODUCTIVITY AMONG RURAL WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

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Abstract

Women in rural areas of less developed areas of Southern Africa are involved in many agricultural production activities especially the production of food. These areas are known to be characterised by low agricultural productivity. Research was conducted to determine factors which lead to low productivity among women farmers. The hypothesis put forward was that low productivity amongst this class of farmers could be due to problems they encounter in the production process. The research was undertaken in the rural areas of Lebowa. Five schemes not linked to a development agency were selected at random. The reasons for excluding schemes attached to development agencies was to ensure that only farms on which management is solely by farmers themselves are included. Data was collected by means of a questionnaire survey. Major constraints towards increased production were identified as: shortage of land, inadequate irrigation water, lack of management abilities, limited control over factors of production, limited education, unavailability of credit and inefficient production of food. These areas are known to be characterised by low agricultural productivity. Research was conducted to determine how to alleviate those problems.

1. Introduction

In recent years much has been said and written about the role women play in rural and agricultural development. The issues addressed mainly concentrated on the nature and practice of women as farm labourers; sexual division of work; time spent in agricultural production; women’s earnings, their status and roles in the household (see Ord 1980). Women’s participation in agriculture has been restricted by a number of socio-economic factors, which include: lack of management abilities; limited control over factors of production; limited education; unavailability of credit and inefficient production of food. These areas are known to be characterised by low agricultural productivity. Research was conducted to determine how to alleviate those problems.

2. Rural women in agricultural production

Rural women play an important role in agriculture. In Southern Africa because of the migratory system where men have to work in urban areas, the majority of women live and earn livelihoods for themselves and their families in rural areas. They are involved in many activities involving the agricultural processes, in mining of minerals and in commercial activities. In the sample of 61 female farmers taken, 50,32 percent were involved with both crop and animal production activities, while 49,48 percent specialized in crop production. None of the farmers interviewed specialized in stock farming.

The size of land holdings is not the only limiting factor for women to actively participate in agricultural production. Shortage of land and irrigation water are important problems which women encounter in their farming activities such as ownership and control of productive resources and land, difficulty in obtaining credit, access to market outlets and other services, have already been ignored (Tshatsinde, 1985:9). It is interesting to note that 83,67 percent of married women are involved in agriculture and household activities take more than 5 hours a day. In terms of employment, 90 percent of women in rural areas are employed in the agricultural sector (Bosket and Sirimane, 1988:38).

3. Demographic information

Some knowledge of personal characteristics of female farmers is important in the analysis of the problems they encounter in production. Few of the most important characteristics will thus be outlined.

3.1 Age

In the sample taken the majority of female farmers, 75,41 percent, are still in the child bearing stage, that is, between the age of 21 and 46 years. This might have a negative impact on productivity as some of their time will be tied down by children. It is interesting to note that the smallest group of female farmers, 1,64 percent, were in the age category of 25-25 years. The reasons behind this may be the negative attitude of young generations on agriculture rehabilitation which are regarded as being inferior (Marethe, 1990:10). Figure 1 indicates other details regarding age distribution.

3.2 Marital Status

Majority of women in this sample, 83,61 percent, are married, 13,11 percent widowed and 3,28 percent single.

4. Some major factors affecting productivity

4.1 Shortage of land and irrigation water

Land is a major factor of production in agriculture, especially in agrarian societies. Shortage of land is regarded as one limiting factor to increased production (Ghatak & Ingeorn, 1984:7). In this study, female farmers identified the size of their land holdings to be a limiting factor to increased production because they are too small. Correlated with inadequate supply of irrigation water, it is not possible to form a commercial basis. Table 2 indicates farm sizes according to locality.

According to Steckel and Sirimane (1988:34) acquisition of enough land is expected to provide greater opportunities for female farmers to actively participate in agricultural production and thus increase productivity and their incomes.

4.2 Ownership, Control and access to land

The size of land holdings is the only limiting factor for female farmers but also ownership, control and access to land is critical for the Black people. These issues are more serious among female farmers who can not own land because they are Black.
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1. Introduction

In recent years much has been said about the role women play in rural and agricultural development. The issues addressed mainly concentrated on the extent and nature of participation of women as farm labourers; sexual division of work and legal rights and other related matters (See Ordonez and Johnson, 1985; Warren, 1985; Gladwin and McMillan, 1989; Goldey, 1985; Ageruwa, 1985; Munnik, 1986; Benchoff, 1988; Late, 1986 and Johnson et al., 1987). All along social scientists have tended to avoid issues concerning women per se and concentrated on men's activities that were considered worthy of research and study in terms of their relationship to those activities (Munnik, 1986;1989). The important issues relating to the problems women encounter in their farming activities such as the extent and nature of productive resources and land, difficulty in obtaining credit, access to market outlets and other services have been ignored (Jiggins, 1985;9).

Today, the roles men and women in development and agricultural production are no longer single simple issues (Heber, 1985:3). There is a need to conduct a thorough analysis of the nature of problems women face such as involving women in development projects not only as labourers but as planners and implementers; and also involving them in matters that concern decision making. Women have been ignored in such issues when they are there and have been an important part of production in most economies (Heber, 1985:4).

In South Africa, the dual nature of the South African economy is always referred to (Haussens, 1990:24), that is, formal and informal economies, with advanced market oriented "White" farming coexisting with backward subsistence oriented "Black" farming system (Hougham, 1964:45). It is important to realize that "Black" farming is mostly practiced by women and elderly men. Thus low productivity among group of farmers contribute to low productivity among Black farmers and backwardness of "Black" agriculture as a whole, which eventually will lead to poverty related issues.

Factors affecting women in agricultural and rural development need to be identified if the programme is to develop the rural areas and increasing productivity. As Gladwin and McMillan (1989:348) have observed, there are just too many women farmers to ignore. This implies that a terrained in African agricultural production would be impossible without including women as explicit targets of an agricultural development project. "Little progress can be made in rural areas of Africa, if we continue to ignore all women in our research and action projects" (Gladwin and McMillan, 1989:359).

In the sample taken the majority of female farmers, 75,41 percent, are single. It is interesting to note that the smallest group of female farmers, 1,64 percent, were in the age category of 25-25 years. The reasons behind this may be the negative attitude towards young generation on agricultural related activities which are regarded as being inferior (Marethe, 1990:10). Figure 1 indicates other details regarding age distribution.

Figure 1: Age distribution

3.2 Marital Status

Majority of women in this sample, 83,61 percent, are married, 13,11 percent widowed and 3,28 percent single.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SINGLE</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MARRIED</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WIDOWED</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The contribution of women in agricultural production is not easy to quantify in statistical terms as most of the work done is unpaid and thus "invisible". But according to Ordonez and Goldey (1985) women contributes more than 20 percent to the average family income and sometimes their daily activities involving agriculture and household activities take more than 18 hours a day. In terms of employment, 90 percent of women in rural areas are employed in the agricultural sector (Sioketz and Sioketz, 1988:38).

This indicates a major factor affecting productivity

3.3 Level of Education

Education and training is an important tool which can create awareness among farmers to participate in agricultural production and still increase productivity and their incomes. According to Steckel and Sinisena (1988:34) the acquisition of enough land is expected to provide greater opportunities for female farmers to participate actively in agricultural production and thus increase productivity and their incomes.

4. Ownership, Control and access to land

The size of land holdings is not the only limiting factor for female farmers but also ownership, control and access to land. In South Africa, access and ownership of land are crucial issues for the Black people. These issues are more serious among female farmers who can not own land because they are Black.

It is interesting to note that 83,67 percent of the married women indicated that their husbands were not farmers but make decisions involving farming activities. Most of the husbands 83,29 percent were employed in the urban areas. It was also indicated that 87,75 percent of the husbands contributed some money towards farming. Exclusion from farm management decision-making by husbands is one other factor which reduces efficiency in farming amongst female farmers.
Access to cultivable agricultural land, according to Agarwal (1985,33) can take various forms: individual ownership, joint-family ownership, usufructuary right to communal or private land and tenancy right. In this sample the cultivated plots were mainly rented (60.66 percent, 31.14 percent were communally owned and allotted by people involved in the production of food and other agricultural products. Although the female farmers indicated management inadequacy as one of the major constraints to increased production, 71.77 percent of these farmers have no other assistance in running their farms. Only 26.23 percent of these farmers have assistance in management from their husbands.

The other factor which contributes to management inadequacy is low standard of education female farmers attain. One possible solution to alleviate this problem could be the provision of qualified extension officers. This area has been neglected despite the widespread dependency of traditional production systems upon female labour. According to Daniel et al., (1984:11) very little extension effort or addition to infrastructure has been specifically directed towards women. Part of the problem mentioned is due to the lack of female extension workers. In this study female farmers have indicated this problem and they are of the opinion that female extension officers could be more useful than men extension workers. The efficiency and acceptability of female agricultural extension workers could not be established as there are no female agricultural extension workers in the area.

5. Recommendations

Although most of the problems outlined could be solved over a long-term, there is an urgent need for female farmers to be included in decision-making regarding production activities they are involved in. This would serve as an incentive to increase production. Farmers should be treated as farmers irrespective of sex.

Sufficient land holdings, irrigation water and markets are important in providing incentives to increase production and thus should be made available to female farmers, as they are important for commercial farming. Extension service needs to be in such a way that it can be able to help most farmers, especially those with lower educational standards, in understanding the new and more efficient methods of production.

6. Summary and conclusions

Women in rural areas of less developed countries are the main people involved in the production of food and other agricultural products. In their production process they are faced with a number of problems which tend to be constraints towards production.

The majority of female farmers are married and on average have five children. Their husbands work in urban areas and through remittances help in financing many family activities.

The majority of these farmers have attained a low level of education and are neglected in extension thus limiting their managerial abilities. Men who are normally not available to physically take part in production, make decisions and direct productive resources. Control of productive resources and decision-making by men only retarded progress of female farmers.

The system of land ownership is communal, allocated by chiefs to men, but more of the cultivated plots were rented. Most farmers prefer a system of freehold ownership.

Major problems female farmers experience in their production activities can be summarized as follows:

- insufficient land holdings and irrigation water
- lack of markets and unavailability of credit
- lack of control and decision-making on production resources
- lack of managerial know-how and inadequate extension services

References


HEBERT, M. (1985). ‘More than an extra meet or two’. Thoughts on how and why women’s roles and needs have become a key issue in rural development. RRDC Bulletin 19:4-8.


and can not have access to communally owned land because they are women. In African cultures, a woman is a minor. She cannot own land or property or means of production no matter how much she has invested in them (Gumede, 1985,21). Women rely on lands allocated to their husbands or male relatives for their farming activities. Another alternative is to hire some plots to turn as the landlord can withdraw tenancy anytime he wishes.

Access to cultivable agricultural land, according to private land and tenancy right.

 chiefs and 8,2 percent were inherited. Most farmers preferred as tomatoes and beans. Crops are marketed locally to people distance to the nearest market, for example a cooperative, is not easy to obtain Credit is also not easy to obtain .

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