

Agricultural Advisory Service Access Among Rural Women in Male-headed Households: Constraints and Prospects in Ethiopia

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Abstract

Without doubt Ethiopian rural women are taking part in agricultural production system even though there are cultural variations in here and there. Their part is high in caring for livestock in addition to weeding, harvesting, marketing and garden cultivation in crop production. However, their productivity in average is less than their potential and proportion of their population. This is because of socio-economic and cultural factors. In addition to these, less access to agricultural extension advisory service also limiting them from becoming more efficient in using their potential in agricultural sector.

Keywords: advisory service, male-headed, household, prospects

Introduction

Women are key asset in agricultural development worldwide and, on average, their labour comprises 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries ranging from about 20% in Latin America to almost 50% in East and South-east Asia and in Sub-Saharan Africa (GFRAS 2012). Now a day, many farming households in Sub-Saharan Africa are becoming female-headed due to male labour migration or loss of husbands in conflicts and other economic and social factors.

Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2011), based on its worldwide experiments, assert that women could increase yields in agricultural sector on their farms by 20–30% if they had the same access to productive resources and training as men. And this would raise the total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4% and consequently reduce the number of malnourished people worldwide by 12–17%. Clearly these statistics prove that women fundamentally contribute to food security through agricultural sector. Men and women farmers alike need to have access to information, skills and tools they need to improve their agricultural yields. This necessitates reforming the institutions involved in the delivery of those services and specifically the processes of providing effective extension or advisory services needs considerations and adjustment (Asrat and Getnet, 2014).

It is an established fact that the women participation in agricultural sector depends on their economic status. Regardless of the level of development achieved by economies, women play a key role in agriculture and in rural development (Fredrik *et al.* 2005). However, there are serious constraints which hold back the promotion of an effective role for women in development in those societies which were bounded by age-old traditions and beliefs. Patriarchal modes and practices motivated by cultures and/or interpretations of religious sanctions and illiteracy hinder women's freedom to opt for various choices to assert greater mobility in social interactions. Resulting from these situations, women's contribution to agriculture and other sectors in the economy remain concealed and unaccounted for in monitoring economic performance measurement. In Ethiopia also women offer labour to agricultural sector, but they do not enjoy the decision-making power (Asrat and Getnet, 2014; Berhanu, 2006).

The past efforts Ethiopia to support agricultural sector have failed in part because they overlooked women's role in the sector and the role of gender inequalities in reducing agricultural productivity. The factors for less access to women in general and women in male-headed household to access agricultural advisory service is socio-economic by its nature (Dereje, 2013). Hence, maximizing the benefits from agricultural growth for smallholder farmers and the economy at large depends on understanding these influences and designing programs that take them into account.

Gender related constraints reflect gender inequalities in access to resources and development opportunities. It also impedes the attainment of food security. Despite the significant roles women play in agriculture and food security, they continue to have a poorer command over a range of productive resources, including education, land, information and financial resources. Women are economically and socially disadvantaged (Gurmesa U., 2013). Hence, maximizing the impact of agricultural development on food security entails enhancing women's roles as agricultural producers as well as the primary care-takers of their families.

For Ethiopia, food security is a primary goal of sustainable agricultural development and a cornerstone for economic and social development. Accordingly, agricultural advisory service, as one of supporting program, designed and being implemented since a long period of time to support agricultural production. However, the gender gap in access to extension services and technology adoption is become great problem. Development workers tend to work with better-off farmers and male farmers. Based on the cultural taboo and societal values

targeting only on male members of the farming community to extension services put the women in lower access status (World Bank, 2010; Gurmesa U., 2013; Dereje, 2013).

The agricultural extension service is one of the institutional support services that has a central role to play in the agricultural production transformation process. However, this agricultural extension service at grassroot level overlooked the contribution of women agricultural productivity and the service not targeted to them (Azanaw and Merkuz, 2014). Hence, this review work intends to see how the rural women in male-headed household targeted in deferent packages of agricultural extension and suggest modification if there is less involving of them.

Women in Agriculture in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia farming system, women play an indispensable role in farming and in improving the quality of life in rural areas. The particular tasks done on farms by men and women have certain common patterns. Men undertake the heavy physical labour like land preparation, plowing and livestock herding, while women carry out the time-consuming tasks like weeding and those which are located close to home, such as care of the kitchen garden and in part in small ruminants herding. Though, most of times, selling and controlling of the products of agricultural products is often seen as a male task (Mengistie, 2015; Catherine, 2013). This has implication on using and adopting new technologies among the women farmers in comparison with male farmers in male-headed farmers.

However, their contributions often remain hold-back due to some social barriers and gender bias. In some cases, the government programmes often fail to focus on women in agriculture. In spite of social, political and economic constraints, women farmers have proved extremely resourceful and hardworking in their attempt to ensure household food security. Because of patriarchal household head trend in the country, social constraints place barriers around their access to scientific and technological information (Ethiopian Economic policy Research Institute, 2006).

To avoid this and ensure benefits to rural women by taking into consideration their share, equitable access in all socio-economic elements would certainly be improved so that it can liberate them from their marginalized status in the society. Other areas where women's potential could be effectively harnessed are agricultural extension, farming systems development, land reform and rural welfare (Schneider and Gugerty, 2010). Accordingly, the agriculture sector policies and new dimensions in development programmes are already emerging as new values (Mengistie, 2015).

Overview of Agricultural Advisory service in Ethiopia

Agricultural extension service in Ethiopia is said to have started in 1953 with the establishment of Imperial Ethiopian College of Agriculture and Mechanical Arts (IECAMA), currently known as Haramaya University (Biratu, G., 2008). The mandate IECAMA at that time was teaching, research and extension. In relation to extension, the college included transferring local research outputs and technologies to farmers, and importing technologies and improved practices from abroad and introducing them to farmers (Kassa and Degnet, 2004).

Accordingly, since the 1960s Ethiopia has been experimenting with different agricultural extension programs (such as the Maximum and Minimum Package approaches of the CADU and WADU varieties of the 1960s and early 1970s and the Peasant Agriculture Development and Extension Project of the 1980s) (Biratu, G., 2008, Gezahegn *et al*, 2005). All these extension approaches have been pushing in one way or another for increased use of chemical fertilizers and associated extension inputs to increase crop yield. Again, Agriculture Development-led Industrialization (ADLI) in mid 1990s was introduced many agricultural extension package programs as the main development strategy of the country and has become a pillar for government efforts to simultaneously develop the two economic twins of agriculture and industry underpinning the government's agriculture and industrial development policy (Anandajayasekeram, 2008).

However, the greater limitations of implementation related problems hindered extension advisory services from effectiveness of agricultural production enhancement and technology adoption keeping other factors constant. Some of the past problems were: different extension packages benefited the large and wealthy farmers with the neglect of smallholders; focus was also given to high potential areas for the most part; the bias of the extension service towards crop production, particularly cereals, persisted throughout all the extension programs; the approach in the past has been the top-down and non-participatory approach, and technologies were supply driven instead of being demand driven. Again, most of the extension programs were also focused on production, without adequate attention given to the marketing of produce and other routine activities of rural women. The extension service is now being given with some improvements in some aspects even though still the approach and target related limitations persist. This is an encouraging development. (Daman P., 2003; Mengistie, 2015; Catherine *et al* 2012).

Women in agricultural Development Policies in Ethiopia

Different development policies in Ethiopia, even though not implemented as intended, given space to women to enhance their socio-economic status. Agricultural extension system, particularly encourages access of services to rural youth and women. Among the recent policy approaches, to improve women farmers' access to extension services, the Plan for Accelerated and Sustainable Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) targeted to reach all female headed households and 30% married women in agricultural extension program (Tiruneh et al, 2001; Cristina M, et al, 2014). In order to achieve the above mentioned targets, the Women Affairs Department in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MoARD) have been engaged in different activities which help to address properly the implementation of the program (Gezahegn et al, 2005). Gender mainstreaming guideline also has been developed in order to mainstream women needs in different development program and projects which has been taking in agricultural sector (Gurumsa U., 2013).

Recently, Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP I and GTP II) of the country also focused to work with rural women in delivery of agricultural extension services so that production among smallholder farmers enhanced. Taking into consideration that half of the population are females, there have been efforts to increase the participation of women in political, social and economical activities. The Government has taken strong measures in the economic sphere to ensure women's equal access to economic resources including land, credit, science and technology (Mengistie, 2015). However, because of implementation problem, extension approach below the kebele and household level targets the male. Women in male-headed household are bypassed by development agents and the target to participate in extension training and related concern is very less.

Considering this, the GTP-II (2015-2020) lays emphasis on women's active participation in the country's economic development and equal benefit from the economic growth; increasing participation in the social sector empowerment of women by discouraging harmful traditional practices and encouraging women's participation in politics.

Rural Women and Agricultural Advisory service access

In developing countries, farming is considered as a family activity and the head of household is considered as the 'farmer'. The extension system too considers the head of the farm household as the appropriate recipient of agricultural extension information. However, many institutions continue to operate under the perception that "women are not farmers" (World Bank 2010). In African countries like Ethiopia, women are at best, considered as 'helpers' of male members in the farm households. Consequent to this bias, women are underserved as clients of extension services. This biased approach ignores women's contributions to the production and harvesting of cash crops.

In Ethiopian context, most of the times rural male are considered as farmers and women are considered as those who support men with food preparation and childbearing. This cultural bias poses huge challenge for providing equitable extension or advisory services (Azanaw and Merku. 2014; EARO, 2000).

Empirical studies on gender and access to advisory services show relatively lower levels of contact between farmers and extension agents, with disproportionately lower levels of access for women. Systematic review of evidences from Ethiopia, India, and Ghana revealed that the levels of access to agricultural extension varied by region and by type of crop or livestock. It further revealed that women farmers received inadequate service from extension system compared to their male counterparts. In Ethiopia, 20 percent of women had access to extension compared to 27 percent among men. In India; levels were 18 percent for women-headed households and 29 percent of men-headed households (World Bank 2011; Cristina M., et al, 2013).

At the level of national governments, the potential of public extension delivery systems to reach women farmers is not fully achieved. Key reason for this is the socio-cultural bias which has often hindered women's active participation in farmer training centers, extension meetings and most importantly, services and economic resources such as credit (Catherine et al, 2012). As a result, extension services have hardly targeted women farmers as many advisory services programs tend to be mostly concentrated on productive activities dominated by rural men farmers (Beintema and Marcantonio, 2009)

Agricultural Advisory service as tool for Rural Development

Increasing food production in a sustainable manner, ensuring and enhancing food security and improving livelihoods in rural areas is the main goal of both sustainable agriculture and rural development. To realize this goal, efforts should be made towards educational programs, efficient utilization of economic incentives and the development of appropriate and new technologies (Mbo'o M. and Colverson, K. 2014). Therefore, agricultural advisory services could be considered as a main instrument to expand scientific technologies and scientific knowledge which could help agricultural production. In addition, by launching strong extension programs and by adopting participatory approach, crop yields, profit margins and income levels can be enhanced. Such practices will result in the development of rural areas depend upon sustainable agriculture (Berhanu, Hoekstra D and Azage, 2006).

To support sustainable agriculture which is one aspect of sustainable development, agricultural extension service is one key element and being implemented in Ethiopia. In Ethiopia, agricultural extension not only focuses on increasing agricultural production and transferring modern agricultural technologies, but also undertakes many activities leading to rural development. Agricultural Extension exploits and explores all possible opportunities and resources and the potential of natural and human resources, delivers educational and awareness-raising programs and evaluates development capabilities to improve skills and ways of thinking (Anandajayasekeram, 2008). To this end, Extension enables rural people to take full advantage of scientific and technological advances in agriculture.

Agricultural Extension is expected achieve sustainable rural development by: providing the solutions to field-based problems by linking agricultural research; creating awareness, educating farmers to change their old traditional trends with friendly persuasion; developing community resources to reduce agricultural preservation by preventing destruction and degradation; enhancing agricultural productivity through increased efficiency the productive process on the basis of scientific economic lines and improving the income of rural families which rely on local products (Ethiopian Economic policy Research Institute, 2006).

Rural women's Challenges in Agricultural Advisory service Access in Ethiopia

Women play a greater role in the farming operations by their extensive participation in livestock production, crop cultivation and harvesting and pest control. But, capacity building programs are not available for rural women. Additionally, there is a lack of orientation to agricultural production practices by targeting gender related constraints to improve their technical knowledge so that enhancing their communication skills. Participatory approach which targeted both men and women farmers are missing in Extension method while introducing new innovative farming technologies and training on different issue (Tiruneh et al, 2001).

As a discipline, extension services rely on a number of techniques and methods to deliver advisory service like individual or group visits, organized meetings, use of model farmers, demonstration plots and farmers field day. Accordingly, the plurality of modes of service delivery offers the opportunity to reach various types of farmers with different needs in various settings. However, individual method of farm visit and training through collective meeting are common. Cultural taboos of sexual issues are not allowing male development agents to discuss freely with women all areas of the country for individual method case. For group method, home responsibility of cooking, child care and other social factors are hindering them from participating on discussion.

Generally, women farmers have more difficulty than men to get access to agricultural extension services. Almost all women, rather than some model women farmers, have less access to and higher effective costs for information, technology, inputs and credit. Hence, their productivity is thereby depressed (Asrat and Getnet, 2014). The underlying factors or barriers relate to agricultural extension service access are child-bearing, time, mobility, education and an array of socio-cultural characteristics. To design effective extension services which help rural women farmers, it is essential to understand the nature of the special constraints women face and the implications of these constraints for extension.

Methodology

This paper focused its review based on papers from journals, conference papers, government policy documents and thesis works.

Conclusion and Ideas Forward

Agricultural sector in Ethiopia is in need of support with scientific information, advice and technologies to those who engaged in the sector. Accordingly, the half proportion of the population, women, have to get considered as a right farmers and their equal access to agricultural advisory service has to be targeted. Rural women, particularly the women within male-headed household, are less in sight of extension workers to reach with agricultural advisory services. Hence, I suggest some recommendations so that advisory service will be utilized by the rural women in farming community.

- ❖ Adult education has to be given more attention
- ❖ More female extension workers o break cultural obstacles
- ❖ Strong collaboration among the relevant stakeholder
- ❖ More commitment among extension workers

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