

Gendering Enset (*Ensete Ventricosum*) Research and Innovation to Empowering Women: A Papers Review Based Sociological Glance

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Abstract

The concept of gender is inextricably related with socio-cultural and economic structures of society. It basically relates to socio-culturally determined characteristics, statuses and social roles given for being biologically male or female. Women in developing countries like Ethiopia suffer from various forms of gender bias and discrimination. Especially, in rural areas, in women's role and participation in decision making, resource management and their access to privileges is very poor. The purpose of this review paper was exposing various stakeholders both at national and international level, to the socio-cultural dimensions relating to gender empowerment and *Enset* research and innovation on the "International Conference and Workshop on *Research on Enset and its Agri-system*" hosted by Wolkite University in collaboration with Addis Ababa University, Ethiopian Bio-diversity Institute, Hawassa University, Roal Botanical Garden Kew and Leicester University, February 10-11, 2020. The literature on the association between *Enset* production and gender empowerment shows that women could benefit in this type of agricultural system, since they have better decision making power and control over the resource and its products.

Keywords: Gender empowerment, Enset, Decision making, Gurage women and Gender

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Introduction

Gender refers to socially-determined ideas, practices and attributes of men and women, including female or male roles. Gender is about what men and women do; their degree of access, control and authority to resources and decision-making; and the abilities to discharge these duties effectively (Kingiri, 2010). Since the 1990's women's equality and empowerment has been at the forefront of governmental initiatives to secure sustainable development while alleviating the miseries of backwardness, poverty and social exclusion experienced by women in urban and rural environs (Linda et al., 2018). Gender empowerment is basically related to avoiding the differences between men and women in terms of economic privileges, social facilities and opportunities and political participation.

The concept of empowerment can be explored through three closely interrelated dimensions: agency, resources, and achievements. Agency represents the processes by which choices are made and put into effect. It is hence central to the concept of empowerment. Resources are the medium through which agency is exercised; and achievements refer to the outcomes of agency (Kabeer, 2003). Promoting women and youth empowerment ensure their participation in the development process and enable them equitably benefit from the outcomes of development was one of the pillar strategies in Ethiopia's GTP II (FDRE National Planning Commission, 2016). Promoting gender equality and empower women was the 3rd Millennium Development Goal (MDG) and achieving gender equality and empower all women and girls is the 5th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) (Michael, 2015). Despite improving concern to women's issues, many Ethiopian women are still under serious socio-political and economic influences. Ethiopia women have played a traditional role of motherhood and home maker in both rural and areas. However, their work has never been limited to the household and the family. Ethiopia women are actively involved in all aspects of their social life. Women are both producers and procreators and they are active participant in the social and cultural activities of the community. However, the important roles they play have not always been recognized (Messay, 2012). Women in Ethiopia comprise almost more than half of the total population in the country. Women in Gurage society play important role and enjoy a relatively better economic independence. A Gurage proverb that goes "the harvest from her farmyard worth what her husband supplies her" (Fekede, 2014), shows how rural Gurage women are taking part in the local economic life of the community. However, their participation especially in decision making and the social sphere is still limited as compared to men. Gurage society comprises an oppressive culture that constructs and sustains male dominance in many social endeavors, especially in marital institution (Tigist, 2009). Men are the ones who become mediators of social matters in general. Elder women can have the title but are not allowed to be judges, or even to participate in decision making (Tigist, 2009).

Farm Women Decision Making Role in Agricultural Production:

Developing country rural areas like in Ethiopia, the role of women in making decisions pertaining to agricultural

activities is inconsequential. In major agricultural activities such as sowing practices, nutrient management, crop protection and harvesting and post harvest activities women had negligible decisions (Chaundhari et al, 2018). Similarly, in a study conducted in India by Mittal et al, (2018) on decisions related with wheat production activities such as the selection of type variety, women had almost zero decision power, while the husband enjoys greater autonomy.

Table 1: Decision Making Pattern of Farm Women in Crop Production (n=150).

Activity	Decision maker (in %)		
	Male	Female	Joint
Crop selection	66	2.67	31.33
Land selection	43.33	0.83	55.83
Application of pesticide	83.33	2.67	14
Sale of output in market	80.83	1.67	17.5
Purchase or sale of land	24.17	3.33	72.5
Land tenancy	31.67	5	63.33

Source: Narayan, P et al, (2016).

Table 2: Decision Making Pattern of Farm Women in Livestock Activities (n=150).

Activity	Decision maker (in %)		
	Male	Female	Joint
Purchase/sale of animals	9.16	9.16	81.67
Selection of animal breed	37.4	9.16	53.44
Arrangement of fodder	0.76	57.25	41.2
Sale of milk in market/self-consumption	0.76	54.96	44.27

Source: Narayan, P et al. (2016).

The data in the tables above show that woman's decision making roles are very low. In the same way, Mihiret et al, (2014), concluded that the role of rural women in decision making related to animal husbandry and household activities was very low. In the study which was conducted at Yelmana Densa district of Amhara Region, Ethiopia, decision role related to livestock activities was limited to less important things such as the selling/purchase of poultry and egg. However, the above finding contrasts with the role of women in *enset* cultivation and ownership. Even some call it 'women's crop'. A Gurage proverb that goes "the harvest from her farmyard worth what her husband supplies her" (Fekede, 2014), shows how rural Gurage women are taking part in the local economic life of the community. *Enset* is an important crop, especially for women who maintain control over outputs. Women depend on the crop to feed their families, and access money in times of financial strain (Katie, et al. 2013).

Integrating *Enset* Research and Innovation and Women Empowerment:

From innovation studies research, it is now clear that both social and technological processes are important for putting research into use. What is important to point out is the highly-gendered nature of these processes. The dynamics around different activities and roles that poor communities engage in towards addressing their social and economic needs through agricultural production systems epitomizes the gender dimension of agricultural innovation, diffusion and adoption. Social structure and cultural norms that dictate the gender roles and division of labor affect the success and failures of agricultural innovation and extension services. The decisions pertaining to innovation processes have a bearing on social notions and are also value-laden (Kingiri, 2010). The gender dimension of innovation is slowly gaining importance but the topic in the field of agriculture still remains unexplored (Thomas, 2003). The available literature seems to indicate certain possible sources of gender bias in studies measuring innovation (Kingiri, 2010).

Hence, research and innovation on *Enset* should be considerate of the social positions that women in Gurage society hold; the socially constructed gender roles both in the home and agricultural field, the indigenous skills and knowledge the women have acquired for centuries (particularly relating to *Enset* cultivation and *Enset* food processing); and improving the social and economic standing of women and girls. Moreover, *Enset* is more than its nutritional value; it has socio-cultural significances. The resilience of the crop along with the durability of the food products derived from *enset* have led some people calling it 'tree against hunger'. However, ethnographic research on local communities shows that the importance of *enset* goes well beyond the staving off hunger and is rather understood as 'a tree for living well'. *Enset* is thus not just nutritionally but culturally central to local understandings of wellbeing (University of Oxford School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography, 2018).

Conclusion and Recommendation:

The literature on the association between *Enset* production and gender empowerment shows that women could benefit in this type of agricultural system, since they have better decision making power and control over the resource and its products. From a gender empowerment perspective, further research and innovation on *Enset*

should pay due attention to:

1. Incorporating women's felt needs, their local knowledge and perspectives;
2. Improving their income and/or economic conditions through agricultural innovation and extension services and market value-chain creations;
3. Creating a platform where women can participate in the identification and implementation of *Enset* related projects;
4. Using women as role-models and change agents in agricultural innovation adoption and diffusion; with an aim to improve their social participation, decision making capacity and for a better outcome; and
5. Easing the burden of traditional practices of *Enset* cultivation and *Enset* food preparation

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