

# Gender and Other Social Differences: Implications for FAC

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## **Table of Contents**

<b>Part 1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Part 2. Gender in agriculture and rural development.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Conventional perspectives .....	3
Alternative perspectives .....	4
Households.....	4
Land.....	5
Operating principles: bringing in men and gender relations .....	5
<b>Conclusions.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Endnotes.....</b>	<b>7</b>

## Part 1. Introduction

This paper addresses the challenge of integrating learning from four decades of gender and feminist research in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) into the research of the Future Agricultures Consortium of the Institute of Development Studies. Specifically it explores what this now extensive body of work on gender relations, farm household decision-making, social and accumulation strategies implies for the research taking place under FAC.

In addressing this challenge we are acutely aware of the limitations of a structured and formulaic process of gender analysis inherent in the gender frameworks<sup>2</sup> that have been so closely associated with gender research in development. Two of these, the Moser and Harvard frameworks, have been central to gender planning since the 1980s and continue to shape gender analysis. The Harvard Framework has been particularly influential in natural resources research whether the focus has been on crop production, forestry or livestock. As an approach to gender analysis it provides a detailed guide for sex disaggregated data collection on work and resource allocations at the level of households, and focuses on differences in workloads, access to and control over a fixed set of similar assets by women and men. Although not necessarily intended in its design, differences between women and men have frequently been used to argue the case for closing what are often referred to as 'gender gaps'. In contrast, the body of research on gender relations contains detailed analytical work from which emerge more complex and more nuanced understandings of the relations between women and men as spouses, parents, community leaders, farmers and farm labourers etc. Here the dynamic nature of these relations is often highlighted. The term 'nuanced' implies that lessons for intervention or policy are less obvious and straightforward, which may make them inherently unattractive to policy makers.

Gender planning frameworks have been used to produce and support narratives that frame much of gender policy in agricultural development today. They have also been used in research. This paper first brings together a number of the most common narratives. It then uses selected results and understandings from the gender relations literature to question these narratives, and their assumptions about the behaviour of women and men, especially as spouses, in the context of small-scale household or family farming.

In considering the narratives and the implications of gender research for FAC three conceptual points are critical. First, that gender relations are dynamic, with women and men seeking to maintain or change their situations in response to their day-to-day realities and to changes at the macro level. Second, women and men must be understood as diverse social groupings with multiple identities, e.g. as spouses, co-workers, parents, siblings and so on. Third, that women and men as household members have both separate and joint interests while remaining engaged in what is essentially a cooperative enterprise.

From the outset, the paper highlights the need for research touching on gender relations to be very clear about frames of reference, and the specificity of locations

and situations. Equally, it is necessary to question framing assumptions about the nature of social reality.

As indicated, this paper is concerned with learning from gender analysis, and one key lesson is that social relations of different kinds (i.e. gender, class, age, marital status) often act together in the production and reproduction of disadvantage. It follows that gender needs to be considered along with other social divisions and categories, especially age and class, and may not be the most important source of disadvantage. While these understandings may be frequently acknowledged, they are rarely considered in practice. On the other hand, treating gender simply as social difference is problematic because it focuses attention on the separate characteristics of women and men rather than on the way that social institutions work together to create and maintain advantage and disadvantage.

In highlighting these principles we are acutely aware of the irony that while the need for 'disaggregation' has been a central rallying cry within gender and development, here we argue for a level of 're-integration'. Specifically, the approach taken here is to move away from models built around isolated, atomised individuals, and towards an explicit acknowledgment of the centrality of social relations within households, families, kin groups and so on. These social relations must be integral to our understanding of agriculture and its alternative development pathways.

The paper begins with an overview of gender in agricultural and rural development policy, within which women are most often considered a disadvantaged group. It then moves on to examine some of the learning from feminist research in SSA, and presents a list of key points from this literature that touch on gender and social analysis. The paper then explores the implications of all this for the individual FAC themes.

## Part 2. Gender in agriculture and rural development

### Conventional perspectives

In terms of agricultural policy and policy processes, since the publication of *Women in Development* by Esther Boserup in 1970, women have been the core subject of 'gender', and the term 'gender issues' has been widely used to refer to the disadvantages faced by women in their work in agricultural production. The picture of women tirelessly working in the fields is used by many organisations to justify their commitment to gender, and to support their visions of the future of agriculture in SSA. These representations of women and men are central to much of what is said and done about 'gender and development'.

The following statements typify the representations that continue to frame gender in agricultural policy and to support particular types of women-targeted interventions.<sup>3</sup> It can also be argued that over the last two decades they have framed most of the research on gender and agriculture (as opposed to gender relations) in SSA.

Rural women working in agriculture are overburdened, under-rewarded and vulnerable:

- Women undertake the majority of agricultural work in addition to domestic or reproductive work.

- Women engage in food crop production for subsistence using unimproved technology.
- Women are risk averse.
- Women are altruistic, putting their children and household food security first.
- Women's work burdens have increased following the out-migration of men seeking other income earning opportunities, and as access to water and fuel has deteriorated with environmental change.
- Women lack secure access to land for their independent farming activities.
- Women lack sufficient collateral to secure access to adequate credit for their independent agricultural activities.
- Women are ignored by service providers.
- Women have limited control over their own labour and the output from their labour.
- Women are constrained in taking advantage of new opportunities, including new markets in the agricultural sector, by their limited educational background, their poor networks and mobility restrictions.

The notion of the rural household is central to conventional framing of gender in agriculture. Given the pervasiveness of small-scale, family-based economic enterprises in SSA – farming but also home-based production and processing – models of the household have been very influential. The claim, of course, is that these models help us to understand everyday dynamics within households and predict policy outcomes.

The most conventional household model is based on a stereotypical, functionally discrete, nuclear family unit, consisting of husband, wife and offspring. Within this unit, women as wives are presented as primarily family workers whose economic interests are congruent with those of their husbands, and whose work is subsumed under that of the husband.<sup>4</sup> A variation of this is a model that presents the conjugal relationship as weak, with husbands and wives having separate activities, interests, rights and decision-making power, and holding separate purses (i.e. there is little if any resource pooling).<sup>5</sup> These households are modelled as sites of contestation and conflict within which wives operate at a considerable disadvantage. Here the ability of a wife to accumulate is constrained because she has less capacity to act than her husband, for whom everything is presented as being elective.<sup>6</sup> The following oft-repeated statements are rooted in such an understanding of household dynamics:

- Married women are vulnerable to loss of resource access when husbands die, or upon separation or divorce.
- Husbands will reduce their household contributions as the production and/or income of their wives increase.
- Husbands will take over the enterprises of women if they are commercially successful.
- Local and family norms limit women's ability to operate in the public sphere.

Within policy processes, simplistic framing assumptions that help identify clear entry points for intervention carry much weight. The conventional framing outlined above plays this role. However, this picture is increasingly being critiqued on the basis of findings from feminist analytical research on gender relations. Specifically it is

faulted for conflating gender and women and for reliance on:

- essentialisms, suggesting that gender and other social categories are fixed in time and space, and
- universalisms, suggesting homogeneity.

### Alternative perspectives

The central argument of this paper is that the richness and relevance of FAC research will be significantly enhanced if it can move toward an understanding of gender relations as varying over time, in different situations, and in different locations; and an appreciation of the nuance and complexity that underpins the relations of the women and men living and working in dynamic situations.

This section draws on literature from the disciplines of anthropology, political science and economics to highlight alternative understandings about agricultural work roles and their meaning in the context of rural households and household production systems.

### Households

The discussion of households is relevant because it is within these (and the kin groups within which households exist and operate) that a large proportion of economic activity takes place, and productive resources, including land and labour are allocated.<sup>7</sup> While alternative household models continue to be debated, the search for a single, universal model has been largely abandoned. Households are increasingly understood as composed of self-interested individuals amongst whom negotiation of individual interests takes place within a general framework of cooperation in order to secure the survival of the household. Thus, households are not automatically sites of conflict and inequity. At the same time, the ability to successfully negotiate individual interests will vary with age, gender and marital status. The opportunity to bargain is also affected by external processes such as policy shifts and the emergence of new economic opportunities.<sup>8</sup>

Both men and women are social agents and their respective work contributions need to be placed in the context of wider exchanges.<sup>9</sup> These exchanges can include a range of goods and services and are not necessarily direct in the sense of being bounded within the conjugal unit (such as a wife caring for a husband's young relative or paying school fees for a cousin); they may encompass services performed at different points in time.<sup>10</sup>

Women and men both work in various capacities, i.e., as:<sup>11</sup>

- independent operators (possibly as household heads or as household members working on their own account), producing for consumption and/or for sale;
- workers on the farms or in the enterprise of another (as labour remunerated in kind or cash for a spouse and/or others, or as 'unremunerated' labour);

It is important to distinguish between cultural constructions of gender roles and actual roles. These may vary substantially in specific circumstances, and in the case of husbands and wives, their ability to call on the labour of one another (for 'unremunerated' labour for

example) is not open-ended. The 'conjugal contract' describes 'the terms on which husbands and wives exchange goods, income, services including labour, within the household'<sup>12</sup> and long-term household survival is a critical objective of this contract.<sup>13</sup>

The key point here is that labour exchange within marriage is not the same as work exchanges within the labour market.<sup>14</sup> Households are not simply economic enterprises, and marriage is not a contract legitimising the exploitation of women.<sup>15</sup>

Alternative framings highlight the limitations of conceptualising rural households as isolated units of production and reproduction. Wider kinship units are important for at least two reasons. First, they significantly expand the realm of 'gender relations' to include those between siblings, parents and others. Second, not only do they provide support to households (e.g. child care, finance for health and education of children, capital for investment), but in many situations they continue to play a central role in the allocation of key agricultural resources such as land.

### Land

In what are referred to as 'customary land tenure regimes' (interpreted and sometimes created by colonial regimes and reinterpreted constantly since), women's land rights are often less secure than men's, even though – and this is absolutely critical – men's rights may not be very strong, and not all men have equivalent land rights. Explaining women's particular disadvantage, Whitehead points out that married women's claims through the spouse are residual, and may disappear if a marriage through which they have been acquired is dissolved.<sup>16</sup> In contexts where land is allocated through families, women's claims are generally weak, because of the practice of patrilocality<sup>17</sup> at marriage, and the practical problems of managing land from a distance. At the same time, new or modern land tenure relations have also been shown to disadvantage women.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, the last decade has seen something of a consensus emerge around the ability of customary systems to meet the needs of all land users and claimants.<sup>19</sup> While customary systems continue to evolve and change, the argument is that they leave room for manoeuvre and options for anyone who can gain a seat at the negotiating table.<sup>20</sup> There are however dissenting voices, especially among African women lawyers who favour rights enshrined in statutory law, and who warn that depending on the flexibility of customary systems is too risky in the context of large acquisitions of land by powerful groups.<sup>21</sup> Their concern is whether customary systems are able to deliver justice to local groups who are not well represented in local level power structures.

With or without an emerging consensus, given the importance of land for independent production, rights acquired and claims made are continually contested – between household members, between households, and between households and kin groups. The following titles of publications on gender and land point to the extent of this contestation: 'tensions in gender relations', 'unequal partners', 'shady practice', 'popular justice', 'the struggle over resources'.

### Operating principles: bringing in men and gender relations

Detailed analytical research on gender relations points to the blind spots created by equating gender and women, and the focus on women as a bounded group. However, the call for a focus on the relations between women and men – to 'bring men in' – is not simply about repeating the work already done on women<sup>22</sup>, as is suggested by the common responses of:

- disaggregation that focuses on the separate characteristics of men and women
- simplistic dualisms starting with roles, access and control comparisons between men and women

Rather the call points to the need to:

- resist framing the rural population as a collection of isolated, atomised individuals with only individual and separate interests, and place them within their wider social contexts with gender, age, class and other identities that influence their relations with others
- remember that gender relations are not always fraught and cannot be read off from sex differentiated data
- focus on identifying how women and men experience and value ongoing changes and use this to both meet their own interests while addressing concerns about short and long term household survival
- focus on processes of change, identifying the circumstances which allow structures that limit or support access to opportunities, and learning more about the kinds of support both women and men will need if they are to benefit from and/or adapt to change (in policy, technology, markets, climate etc.)
- avoid privileging an individualistic and production-oriented view of development over a relational and well-being oriented one

### Conclusions

In taking on this task of documenting changes in perspectives on gender and social difference and the implications of these for future agricultures, this paper has centred substantially on gender. At the beginning, it was argued that this reflected the quantity of work that had already been undertaken on gender as against other areas of social difference. The paper also argues that it is now time to seriously address the continued absence of work on gender within mainstream agricultural research.

Finally, the suggestions made here on operational principles for moving forward should be viewed as the beginning of a conversation rather than an end point. For those who feel that this all might be too much work, it has long been argued that research on gender and gender relations is not about a new method of undertaking research, but rather about the research questions we ask.

The proposed operational principles should lead to a different set of research and policy questions that reflect the specifics of particular locations, situations and disadvantaged groups. They also take into account the fact

that rural people are active social agents. At one level therefore this is a call for a 'scaling down' of policy. At another level it is a call for policy to be more explicitly framed by an understanding of the wider social relations within which individuals take decisions, manoeuvre for change and seek support. This paper argues that all this is necessary if the implications of social disadvantage for future agricultures in sub-Saharan Africa are to be taken seriously.

## End Notes

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the frameworks and a practical guide to their use see: March, C., Smith, I. and M Mukhopadhyay. 1999. *A Guide to Gender-Analysis Frameworks*, Oxford: Oxfam.

<sup>3</sup> Each of these statements appear throughout the *Women in Agriculture Sourcebook* produced by World Bank (World Bank, FAO and IFAD 2008). This 800 page volume covers all agricultural sectors and includes special sections on food security, finance, land, governance and climate change.

<sup>4</sup> Hart, G. 1997 'Rotten Wives' to 'Good Mothers'. *Household Models and the Limits of Economism*. *IDS Bulletin*, 28(3):14-25; Chiappori, P-A., Haddad L., Hoddinott, J. and Ravi Kanbur. 1993. *Unitary versus Collective Models of the Household. Time to Shift the Burden of Proof?* Policy Research Working Paper 1217, Ghana: The World Bank.

<sup>5</sup> Oppong, C. 1994. Introduction in *Gender, Work & Population in Sub-Saharan Africa* edited by Aderanti Adepoju and Christine Oppong: 3.

<sup>6</sup> Jackson, C. 2000. *Men at Work*. *The European Journal of Development Research*, 12(2):1-22.

<sup>7</sup> Oppong 1994.

<sup>8</sup> Hart 1997. Others remind us that the acknowledgement of joint interests within households, and bargaining, should not lead us to automatically conclude that the family based household is not a critical area of gender inequity (Whitehead, A and N Kabeer. 2001. *Living with uncertainty: Gender, livelihoods and pro-poor growth in rural sub-Saharan Africa*. *IDS Working Paper 134*.)

<sup>9</sup> Jackson. 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Okali, C. 1983. *Cocoa and Kinship in Ghana: The Matrilineal Akan of Ghana*. London: Kegan Paul International.

<sup>11</sup> Whitehead, A. 1994. *Wives & Mothers: Female farmers in Africa*, in A Adepoju & C. Oppong (eds.) *Gender, Work & Population in Sub-Saharan Africa*: London: James Currey: pp35-53.

<sup>12</sup> Whitehead, A. 1981. "I'm hungry, mum": The politics of domestic budgeting, in K. Young, C. Wolkowitz, and R. McCullagh (eds.) *Of Marriage and the Market: Women's subordination internationally and its lessons*, London, Routledge: p88; Locke, C. and C. Okali. 1999. *Analysing changing gender relations: Methodological challenges for gender planning*, *Development in Practice*, 9(3): 274-286).

<sup>13</sup> Jackson, C. 2007. *Resolving Risk? Marriage and Creative Conjuality*. *Development and Change*, 38(1): 107-129.

<sup>14</sup> Harris-White, B. 1998. *Female and Male Grain Marketing Systems: Analytical and Policy Issues for West Africa and India*, in Cecile Jackson and Ruth Pearson (eds.), *Feminist Visions of Development: Gender analysis and policy*: London, Routledge: 189-213.

<sup>15</sup> Jackson. 2007.

<sup>16</sup> Whitehead, A. 1985. *Effects of technological change on rural women: A review, analysis and concepts*, in A. Iftikhar (ed.) *Technology and Rural Women: Conceptual and Empirical Issues*: London: George Allen and Unwin: pp27-84.

<sup>17</sup> *Patrilocal residence or patrilocality* refers to the situation where married persons live in the same village or clan area as the husband's parents.

<sup>18</sup> Details of the processes involved and the narratives underpinning even the loss of rights to farm for women, can be found in Boserup, E. 1970. Palmer, I. 1985. *The impact of agrarian reform on women*, West Hartford, Conn: Kumarian Press, and Dey, J. 1981. *Gambian Women: Unequal Partners in Rice Development Projects*, *Journal of Development Studies*, Vol 17(3): 109-122. The Gambia case is probably the most renowned. For more recent cases in Ghana see Berry, S. 2009. *Building for the Future? Investment, land reform and the contingencies of ownership in contemporary Ghana*, *World Development*, 37(8):1370-1378.

<sup>19</sup> See a range of articles in *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 2003, 3(1,2 & 4).

<sup>20</sup> Berry, S. 1997. *Tomatoes, land and hearsay: Property and history in Asante in the time of structural adjustment*, *World Development*, 25(8): 1225-1241.

<sup>21</sup> Whitehead, A. and D Tsikata. 2003. *Policy Discourses on Women's Land Rights in Sub-Saharan Africa* *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 3(1-2): 67-112. Also see Peters, P. 2004. *Inequality and social conflict over land in Africa*, *Journal of Agrarian Change* 4(3):269-314) who has long argued against relying on what are reputed to be 'open, negotiable and adaptable customary systems' of landholding and land use for supporting women's claims/ needs, especially in locations where there is intense competition between different land uses such as state forestry, small-scale family farming, agribusiness, out-grower schemes.

<sup>22</sup> Cornwall, A. 2000. *Missing Men? Reflections on men, masculinities and gender in GAD*, *IDS Bulletin*, 31(2): 18-27.

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