

Gender Roles in Agriculture: The Case of Afghanistan

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Abstract

Technological interventions aiming to improve livelihoods that bring gender equity can become successful only when the prevailing gender roles in society and access to different livelihood opportunities are fully understood. This article analyses gender roles in agriculture in the conservative patriarchal society of Afghanistan. Rapid appraisal was conducted through focus group interviews, participatory resource mapping, and so on, in seven villages each from Nangarhar and Baghlan provinces of Afghanistan. Educated women coordinators, facilitators and activists and well established womens' groups were used to reach and target key women informants as they are not allowed to interact directly with male researchers. Their participation was more in livestock related activities. The study indicated that women's involvement was less than men's in both livestock and crop related activities. Age, social stigmas, poverty and shortage of labour influence the gender division of labour, decision-making ability and participation in Afghanistan's farm and non-farm activities. This indicates that any agricultural development programme intending to involve women will be effective only if it has a large component of livestock related activities.

Keywords

Agriculture, livestock, labour, decision-making, Afghanistan, Muslim women, Afghan women

Introduction

Before introducing technologies with the aim of improving gender equity in conservative patriarchal societies like Afghanistan, it is necessary to have information on gender roles in different income generating activities. In such societies, opportunities of every kind favour men, who are generally recognised as the head of the family and have a major role in decision-making within the family. Men are dominant in production and community activities. Women, who play a major role in the household economy, have limited economic options and less access to social services. Cultural restrictions such as *pardah*,¹ seclusion, veiling² and proscriptions against interactions between the sexes outside the *mahrammat*³ limit mobility,

education and employment⁴ opportunities for women outside the home. Women are allowed to visit only the homes of village elders. Many women are largely confined to their homes. However, a greater level of mobility can be seen amongst the Shi'as than among Sunnis, with variations according to the location of the village (Lewis, 1997). Only elderly widows without sons can go to the bazaar (Grace, 2004). Thus, women remain in a disadvantaged position compared to men.

There is growing evidence that gender plays an important role in economic growth, poverty reduction and development effectiveness (Taj, 2001). To help women it is necessary in the first place to make them more visible in productive work. That is possible only if we fully understand the mechanism of gender roles prevailing in the society and the extent to which men and women are able to access different livelihood opportunities. Then alone can planned technology interventions be successful in improving women's economic position. An exercise to explore the gender division of labour in crop and livestock production activities and non-farm activities in Afghanistan was undertaken by the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) before the implementation of the project 'Rehabilitation of agricultural livelihoods of women in marginal and post conflict areas of Afghanistan: Participatory Research, dissemination and adoption of improved dairy goat production systems' in association with the National Agricultural Research System (NARS), NGOs and Ministries in Baghlan and Nangarhar provinces of Afghanistan. The results obtained from this exercise constitute the basis of this article. This exploration was carried out with the following objectives:

- (a) To understand the division of labour in carrying out different activities in agriculture and animal husbandry.
- (b) To study gender differences in farm as well as non-farm activities, labour and in decision-making.

The Background

Agriculture is the main source of national income, as more than 85 per cent of the population depends on agriculture for their livelihood.

Only about 12 per cent of the country's total land is arable, with 3 per cent under forest cover; about 46 per cent is used as permanent pasture; the rest of the country (39 per cent) is mountainous. About half of the 12 per cent cultivable area is irrigated, while the other half is arid or rain-fed. The availability of land suitable for grazing has traditionally made animal husbandry (sedentary and nomadic types) an important part of the economy. As many as 55 per cent of households are engaged in farming, while 68 per cent have some type of livestock (about 2.3 million out of 3.4 million Afghan households) (ICON-Institute, 2009). Afghanistan's economy has been shattered by prolonged war since the 1980s. Industry, much of which depended on agricultural output, suffered as well.

The population of Afghanistan is around 30.4 million as of the year 2012 and is growing at 2.22 per cent per annum. About 55 per cent of the population is in the productive age group of 15 to 64.⁵ Women constitute roughly 49 per cent of the population and the sex ratio is 953:1000. The infant (129 per 1000 live births) and maternal mortality rates (1600 per 1,00,000 live births)⁶ still remain amongst the highest in the world as a consequence of long-term conditions of war, women's very low socio-economic status, shortage of female health personnel and difficult access to health care services, particularly for women. The average Afghan woman has a life span of 44 years, around 20 years short of the global average.

According to the *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment* (NRVA 2007/8),⁷ the estimated national adult (aged 15 and above) literacy rate is 26 per cent, with 12 per cent for women and 39 per cent for men. In rural areas where approximately 74 per cent of all Afghans reside, the situation is more acute, with an estimated 93 per cent of women and 65 per cent of men lacking basic reading and writing skills. In many provinces of Afghanistan, less than 15 per cent of girls at school age attend primary school and this figure drops dramatically as girls progress towards higher grades (Strand and Olesen, 2005).

Marriage in Afghanistan is regulated by civil law, various interpretations of Shariah law, and traditional and customary practices. As per civil law and Shariah law, the minimum marriage age for females is 16 and 15 respectively. Customary practices approve marriage at earlier ages also. According to UNICEF,⁸ 57 per cent of Afghan marriages involve girls under 16. Most of the marriages (70 to 80 per cent) in the

country are either forced or arranged. The problem is particularly acute in poverty stricken rural areas where many girls are forced into marriage at the age of nine or 10. There are more than half a million widows with an average age of 35 years, which is an immediate consequence of large age differences between spouses, coupled with high male mortality in the last three decades of conflict (ICON-Institute, 2009; UNIFEM, 2008).

Gender in Afghan Society

Knowledge of Afghan society is essential to better understand gender roles in different farm and non-farm activities. Afghanistan is a patriarchal male-dominated conservative society and the domination of men is visible in each and every aspect of life. Afghanistan is a signatory to both the 'Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women' and the 'Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights' and has ratified the latter. Yet, years of conflict and the resulting massive displacement of the Afghan population have disrupted family structures and further increased the burden on women. The burden of work on the shoulders of rural women is very heavy and this is severe in the case of women-headed households (2.2 per cent of about 3.4 million Afghan households). In addition to taking care of the family, women are visible in three sectors—agriculture, animal husbandry and handicraft works. In a family having several female members of different ages, the older women often carry out the household tasks and look after the children. Unmarried women, especially if close to the age of marriage, are less likely to be allowed to perform agricultural tasks outside the house.

Predictably, women have been denied rights, such as the right to inherit land or livestock and the right to work by official government decree or by their own husbands, fathers and brothers, according to traditional practice. The 'culture' does not allow daughters to inherit land, especially if they have brothers, because of a ruling made long before. Though unmarried and married women may have access to the produce from the land for consumption, they rarely own this very valuable asset. Widows only inherit moveable property. Widows without children are not allowed to inherit a share of their husband's property despite legal

provisions under Islamic Shariah law for widows without children. Though most women and men are aware of the basic laws that grant women rights to inherit property, women do not normally claim land ownership due to social pressure.⁹

Less than half (47 per cent) of females of working age are currently active in the labour market, against 86 per cent of males, a gap of 39 percentage points (UNIFEM, 2008). The number of agricultural/livestock activities to be carried out by women depends on the land/livestock ownership of her family. Poorer women tend to be more involved in agricultural tasks than wealthier women. Culture and tradition, lack of credit, land and shelter for livestock, and poverty are some of the constraints that women face in accessing land and livestock. Poor women, elderly women and in particular elderly widows from landless households work as labourers on the land of others. Women from sharecropping families may work alongside people other than their husband if he is a sharecropper. However, if the men of the family do not own land or do not work as sharecroppers, it is highly unlikely that women will have any physical access to agricultural land (Grace, 2005). Women in female-headed households carry out different agricultural activities by themselves, hire labourers or give their land to a sharecropper to work. If the sons are old enough they may work on the land instead of labourers. Members of the community or relatives also work on a widow's land, sometimes without any form of compensation. Many women are married to men in their natal village in order to make it easier for them to control any property they do own through inheritance. However, they can utilise the land by renting it out or giving it to a sharecropper to work even if they are married to a man in another village. Women's participation in non-farm work is largely in carpet weaving, sewing and tailoring. These activities differ from village to village. Among Pashtun women, carpet weaving has not been a traditional activity (Grace, 2004).

Farming Systems in Afghanistan

Three farming systems have been identified in Afghanistan: mixed crop-livestock, agro-pastoral and pastoral or nomadic systems. Poverty, worsened by climate change (drought, low and erratic rainfall), has forced

many people to rely largely on livestock rearing in the mixed crop–livestock farming system. Wheat is the main food crop, accounting for more than three quarters of foodgrain production. Livestock includes cattle, goats, sheep, donkeys, poultry, horses and camels. Goats are an essential element in the mixed crop–livestock farming under irrigated and rain-fed production systems. Rural communities with a total number of 6.4 million goats produced 41,600 metric tonnes (Mt) of meat and 112,800 Mt of fresh milk (FAO, 2008). The rangelands, uncultivated wastelands and cultivated fallow lands are the main grazing sources.

Methodology

Nangarhar and Baghlan provinces were purposively selected for ICARDA's project which is being implemented in these two provinces since 2011. Informal rapid appraisal was conducted for a qualitative understanding of the farming systems, during 2006–2009; the second phase of the project began in 2010 and will run till 2013. Focus group interviews were conducted in seven villages each in Dar-e-Noor (Suttan, Bakedai Kandi, Babur Khil Kandi, Janhan Khan Kandi, Bakhshi Kandi, Fatti Khan Kandi and Saragalk villages) and Baghlan-e-Sannhati (Ghurbadian, Sarah Saya-e-Hatiq Khan, Khalazai ah, Sallam Khil, Arabah, Mallang and Qull-e-Naw Abad villages) in the districts of Nangarhar and Baghlan respectively. Each Focus Group included eight to ten key informants (farmers) from each village and two to three interdisciplinary scientists (with at least one woman scientist). In these groups participants discussed ideas, issues, insights and experiences with facilitation by a moderator. Group dynamics helped to elicit useful and detailed information on each topic. The main findings of each village group discussion were written on charts with the help and endorsement of the participants of each group.

The approach used in pursuing gender-sensitive data collection in Afghanistan was very different from the conventional approach. As women are not allowed to directly interact with male researchers, educated women coordinators, facilitators and activists were used to reach and target key women informants. All members of local communities and well established women's groups were consulted before initiating

Focus Group interviews. Issues covered included village (demographic and socio-economic) characteristics, gender division of labour in different crop and livestock related activities, hiring of labour, involvement in farm and non-farm activities and decision-making. Percentages, charts and frequency distribution have been used for analysing the data.

Survey of Villages

Background information on demographic and socio-economic characteristics of villages surveyed and the current farming systems there enabled the research team to understand the environment in which men and women perform different farm and non-farm activities (See Table 1).

In the villages surveyed, all men and women were illiterate. All the villages in both the provinces contained both landed and landless families. The proportions of each differed from village to village, but in general there were more landless than landed families. On an average 15 to 20 per cent of households were cultivating either their own land or leased land and almost all of them were subsistence farmers. Irrigation facilities available were negligible and cultivation was mostly rain-fed, resulting in low productivity. Wheat, cotton, maize, rice, melon, potato and vegetables are the crops cultivated in these villages. With limited land and water resources, the male labour force tends to migrate to urban areas in search of a livelihood. Landless families maintained a few animals (cows, sheep and goats) for their livelihood (Thomson, 2007).

Gender Division of Labour

The results from this survey indicated that men's participation was higher than women's in livestock and crop related activities in both the provinces. Though overall women's participation was less than men's, their participation was higher in livestock related activities compared to crop production activities, a finding similar to that of other studies conducted in the past by Taj, Akmal, Sharif and Abbas (2007) and Grace (2004) in Pakistan and Afghanistan respectively. Almost equal participation of men and women in livestock related activities is seen in Baghlan, while men have more responsibilities than women in Nangarhar.

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Table 1. Demographic and Socio-economic Characteristics of Villages Surveyed in Baghlan and Nangarhar Provinces

| Name of Village | District and Province | No. of households | Population | Literacy | Major occupation | Facilities available |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Ghurbandian | Baghlan-e-sanhati, Baghlan | 120 | 500 | 100 per cent illiterate | Majority landless and do labour outside their village. Some cultivate crops (wheat, cotton, onion and rice) and a few maintain animals (cow, sheep and goat) for their livelihood | One primary boys and girls school. Access to pond and well |
| 2. Sarah Saye-Hatiq Khan | Baghlan-e-sanhati, Baghlan | 61 | NA* | 100 per cent illiterate | 70 per cent families don't have land and work as labour in farms. 20–30 per cent people cultivate (vegetables, potatoes, onions, wheat, maize, cotton and melons) and a few maintain animals (cow, sheep and goat) for their livelihood | Pond and well |
| 3. Khalzai ah | Baghlan-e-sanhati, Baghlan | 40 | 400 Pashtun | 100 per cent illiterate | Majority landless labour. Some cultivate crops like wheat, barley and sesame and a few maintain animals (cow, sheep and goat) for their livelihood. | Pond and well |
| 4. Sallam Khil | Baghlan-e-sanhati, Baghlan | 70 | 450 Pashtun and Tajeik | 100 per cent illiterate | Majority landless labour. Some cultivate crops like cotton, wheat, bean and potato and a few maintain animals (cow, sheep and goat) for their livelihood. | Pond |
| 5. Arabah | Baghlan-e-sanhati, Baghlan | 70 | 300 | 100 per cent illiterate | Majority landless labour. Some cultivate crops like wheat, rice, cotton, onion and potato and a few maintain animals (cow, sheep and goat) for their livelihood. | Pond |

(Table 1 Continued)

(Table 1 Continued)

| Name of Village | District and Province | No. of households | Population | Literacy | Major occupation | Facilities available |
|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|------------|-------------------------|---|--|
| 6. Mallang | Baghlan-e-sanhati, Baghlan | NA | Pashtun | Low literacy level | Majority are landless and do wage labour daily. Some cultivate crops like wheat, rice, cotton, onion and potato and a few maintain animals (cow, sheep and goat) for their livelihood. | (National Solidarity Programme) male community organisation and pond |
| 7. Qull-e-Naw Abad | Baghlan-e-sanhati, Baghlan | 20 | Pashtun | 100 per cent illiterate | Majority are landless and do wage labour daily. Some cultivate crops like wheat, rice, cotton, onion and potato and a few maintain animals (cow, sheep and goat) for their livelihood. | (National Solidarity Programme) male community organisation and pond |
| 8. Sheeram Kandi | Dar-e-Noor, Nangarhar | 600 | 4800 | 100 per cent illiterate | 10–15 per cent have leased land, the remaining work as labour and sell wood. Wheat, maize, bean, rice, vegetables, onion and clover are cultivated and a few maintain animals (cow, sheep, goat and buffalo) as livelihood. | Drinking water tap available |
| 9. Bakedai Kandi | Dar-e-Noor, Nangarhar | 160 | 1120 | 100 per cent illiterate | Majority are landless and do daily labour. Some cultivate crops like wheat, maize, bean, rice, vegetables, onion and potato and a few maintain animals (cow, sheep and goat) as their livelihood. | Drinking water tap available |
| 10. Babur Khil Kandi | Dar-e-Noor, Nangarhar | 350 | 2450 | 100 per cent illiterate | Majority are landless and do daily wage labour. Some cultivate crops like wheat, maize, bean, vegetables, onion and potato and a few maintain animals (cow, sheep and goat) as their livelihood. | Drinking water tap available |

| | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----|------|-------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| 11. Janhan Khan Kandi | Dar-e-Noor, Nangarhar | 150 | 1050 | 100 per cent illiterate | Majority are landless and work as daily labour. Some cultivate crops like wheat, maize, bean, vegetables, onion and potato and a few maintain animals (cow, sheep and goat) as their livelihood. | Drinking water tap available |
| 12. Bakhshi Kandi | Dar-e-Noor, Nangarhar | 200 | 1200 | 100 per cent illiterate | Majority are landless and do labour daily. Some cultivate crops like wheat, maize, bean, onion and potato and a few maintain animals (cow, sheep and goat) as their livelihood. | Drinking water tap available |
| 13. Fatti Khan Kandi | Dar-e-Noor, Nangarhar | 420 | 2940 | 100 per cent illiterate | Majority are landless and work as daily labour. Some cultivate crops like wheat, rice, cotton, onion and potato and a few maintain animals (cow, sheep and goat) as their livelihood. | Drinking water tap available |
| 14. Saragalk | Dar-e-Noor, Nangarhar | 100 | NA | 100 per cent illiterate | Majority are landless and labour daily for wages. Some cultivate crops like wheat, maize, bean, vegetables, onion and clover and a few maintain animals (cow, sheep and goat) as their livelihood. | Drinking water tap available |

Source: Based on field data collected by the authors.

Note: *indicates data not available.

Men, women, children and a combination of these three groups are involved in different activities related to livestock and crop production. There are a total of 14 activities related to livestock production. Of these, eight activities are carried out within the premises of the household (putting up the animal shelter, preparing feed, tethering, feeding, watering, cleaning the shelter and animal and waste disposal), while six activities—grazing/herding, gathering forage, buying animals and feeds, taking the animal to market and selling products such as eggs and meat—can be carried out only outside the house. Of the 17 activities related to producing crops, five are off-farm activities (buying seeds, fertilisers and chemicals, marketing, selling products and other post-harvest activities) and 12 are on-farm activities (land and seed preparation, pulling, transplanting, broadcasting, weeding, fertilisation, spraying, harvesting, threshing, hauling and cleaning). In most cases, children are associated with women in performing different crop and livestock production tasks.

Livestock Related Activities

Cattle, sheep, goats and buffaloes are the livestock most commonly reared in both the provinces.

Baghlan province

Overall, in the seven villages of Baghlan province, men (44 per cent) and women (43 per cent) shared the labour in carrying out livestock production activities almost equally. Men were exclusively responsible for buying feed, while women were exclusively associated with tethering. All other activities were carried out by men along with women or children, or both. Grazing, selling products, cleaning the animals and watering were the activities with which children were associated. Men, women and children were involved in animal grazing, putting up shelters, preparing the feed, watering and taking the animals to the market (Table 2).

In Ghurbandian and Arabah villages, children were not involved in the case of livestock. In different villages of Baghlan, both men and women together were involved in 21 per cent of the total number of activities.

Table 2. Gender Division of Labour in Livestock Related Activities in Baghlan (in per cent)

| Activity | Men | Women | Children |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-------|----------|
| Putting up shelter | 59 | 31 | 10 |
| Preparing feed | 68 | 22 | 10 |
| Grazing/herding | 47 | 16 | 37 |
| Tethering | 0 | 100 | 0 |
| Feeding | 33 | 67 | 0 |
| Watering | 22 | 56 | 22 |
| Cleaning Shelter | 13 | 68 | 19 |
| Cleaning animal | 14 | 59 | 27 |
| Waste disposal | 22 | 64 | 14 |
| Gathering forage | 54 | 33 | 13 |
| Buying animal | 87 | 13 | 0 |
| Buying feed | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| Taking animal to market | 78 | 18 | 4 |
| Selling products (eggs, meat, etc.) | 21 | 50 | 29 |
| Average of all activities | 44 | 43 | 13 |

Source: Based on field data collected by the authors.

Nangarhar Province

Men were responsible for 52 per cent of labour in different livestock related activities while the share of women was 39 per cent (Table 3).

Men's participation was greater in buying animals, taking animals to the market, putting up shelters and buying feed, while women had greater participation in waste disposal, cleaning the shelter, tethering, cleaning animals and feeding them. Grazing, watering, gathering forage and cleaning animals were children's tasks. About 37 per cent of livestock production tasks were undertaken jointly by men and women in Suttan and Saragalk villages, men and women did not work together and children were not engaged in any livestock related activities.

Overall, in both the provinces division of labour by gender was almost equal: men did 48 per cent of the work and women 41 per cent, while children performed 11 per cent of tasks in animal husbandry. In 30 per cent of livestock related tasks, men and women worked together. Fattori (2004) reported similar results, indicating that women and children are the main tenders of animals—women are responsible for tethering, feeding and cleaning animals and boys for grazing.

Table 3. Gender division of labour in livestock related activities in Nangarhar (in per cent)

| Activity | Men | Women | Children |
|-------------------------------------|-----|-------|----------|
| Putting up shelter | 88 | 12 | 0 |
| Preparing feed | 59 | 33 | 8 |
| Grazing/herding | 56 | 8 | 36 |
| Tethering | 29 | 71 | 0 |
| Feeding | 35 | 61 | 3 |
| Watering | 26 | 57 | 17 |
| Cleaning Shelter | 15 | 74 | 11 |
| Cleaning animal | 16 | 68 | 16 |
| Waste disposal | 17 | 83 | 0 |
| Gathering forage | 57 | 26 | 17 |
| Buying animal | 95 | 5 | 0 |
| Buying feed | 86 | 14 | 0 |
| Taking animal to market | 92 | 8 | 0 |
| Selling products (eggs, meat, etc.) | 60 | 30 | 10 |
| Average of all activities | 52 | 39 | 9 |

Source: Based on field data collected by the authors.

Crop Related Activities

Wheat, rice, cotton, maize, onion, potato, melon, barley, sesame, vegetables, clover and bean are the important crops grown in Baghlan and Nangarhar provinces.

Baghlan Province

Overall, in seven villages of Baghlan province, men put in 79 per cent of the labour in carrying out different agricultural activities, while women and children contributed 12 per cent and 9 per cent of labour respectively (Table 4).

In only 7 per cent of activities did men and women work together. All the off-farm crop production tasks were performed by men exclusively, except in some post-harvest activities where women were also engaged. Women were mainly associated with threshing, hauling and cleaning operations in all crops. Nearly all workers (men, women and children)

Table 4. Gender Division of Labour in Crop Related Activities in Baghlan (in per cent)

| Activity | Men | Women | Children |
|----------------------------------|-----|-------|----------|
| Seed preparation | 80 | 9 | 11 |
| Land preparation | 90 | 0 | 10 |
| Pulling | 90 | 0 | 10 |
| Transplanting | 53 | 21 | 26 |
| Broadcasting | 71 | 13 | 16 |
| Weeding | 88 | 12 | 0 |
| Fertilisation | 92 | 4 | 4 |
| Spraying | 87 | 3 | 10 |
| Harvesting | 80 | 8 | 12 |
| Threshing | 36 | 52 | 12 |
| Hauling | 41 | 48 | 11 |
| Cleaning | 54 | 33 | 13 |
| Other post-harvest | 80 | 4 | 16 |
| Marketing | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| Buying seeds | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| Buying fertilisers and chemicals | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| Selling products and by-products | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| Average of all activities | 79 | 12 | 9 |

Source: Based on field data collected by the authors.

were engaged in transplanting, seed preparation, harvesting, broadcasting and threshing operations. Children were not involved in any of the crop production activities in Khalazaiah village.

Nangarhar Province

Overall, in the seven villages of Nangarhar province, men, women and children contributed 82 per cent, 14 per cent and 4 per cent respectively to agricultural labour (Table 5).

Men and women working together performed 16 per cent of crop related activities. Children were not involved in crop production in Suttan and Bakshi Kandi villages. Men were exclusively responsible for buying fertilisers and chemicals, for marketing, fertiliser application and other post-harvest operations. Women were involved in activities like threshing, cleaning, hauling and also in selling farm products and by-products.

Table 5. Gender Division of Labour in Crop Related Activities in Nangarhar (in per cent)

| Activity | Men | Women | Children |
|----------------------------------|-----|-------|----------|
| Seed preparation | 86 | 14 | 0 |
| Land preparation | 88 | 12 | 0 |
| Pulling | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| Collecting | 65 | 21 | 14 |
| Broadcasting | 90 | 7 | 3 |
| Weeding | 54 | 26 | 20 |
| Fertilisation | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| Spraying | 79 | 4 | 17 |
| Harvesting | 84 | 12 | 4 |
| Threshing | 62 | 35 | 3 |
| Hauling | 70 | 30 | 0 |
| Cleaning | 57 | 33 | 10 |
| Other post-harvest work | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| Marketing | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| Buying seeds | 87 | 10 | 3 |
| Buying fertilisers and chemicals | 100 | 0 | 0 |
| Selling products and by-products | 71 | 29 | 0 |
| Average of all activities | 82 | 14 | 4 |

Source: Based on field data collected by the authors.

Overall, in both the provinces, men (80 per cent) provided the maximum labour in crop production and women only contributed 13 per cent. When working together, men and women together were involved in 11 per cent of crop related activities. Most of the off-farm activities like buying fertilisers and chemicals, selling products and by-products, buying seeds, marketing and other post-harvest activities were the responsibility of men. In some villages of both the provinces, children were not involved at all in crop production. Women were largely associated with threshing, hauling and cleaning. The types of agricultural activities in which women were involved were similar in the villages in Baghlan and Nangarhar provinces. Most of the livestock related activities where women are predominant were carried out inside the acceptable workspace of the compound.

Many factors seem to influence the gender division of labour. Prevailing social restrictions or stigmas limit the involvement of women

in agriculture. Women's participation depends on how strongly social norms operate against women and/or favour men's involvement in certain activities, as well as on how strongly individuals or households adhere to local norms and practices. In her study, Grace (2004) indicated that the richer the household, the less the women work on land. A family is considered poor if women work on land and there appears to be a stigma attached to it. Grace also reported that increasing labour shortage in the villages compelled women's entry into agriculture. Though their culture does not permit or encourage women to work on the land, extreme poverty in rural areas forces some women to do so. If the men of the family do not own land or do not work as sharecroppers, it is highly unlikely that women will be working on agricultural land, sharing the work with their men.

The marital status of women also affects the activities they may be involved in. Unmarried girls, especially those regarded as marriageable, are less likely to be allowed to carry out agricultural tasks outside the house. Women in female-headed households on the other hand are likely to have more of a role in managing and participating in activities relating to land as well as livestock. Social stigmas, age or life stage women (young/married/widow), shortage of labour and poverty of households are the factors which influence the gender division of labour.

On and Off-farm Activities

In Afghanistan, women are not allowed to go out alone, but are allowed to go to a village elder's home; this is acceptable to both men and the community. No women, except for elderly widows (usually those who have no male children), travel to the bazaar to sell or buy goods, as the idea of women travelling alone to the bazaar is culturally unacceptable. As women are not allowed to move outside of their homestead unaccompanied, men's work burden is greater. In some areas, however, old women, widows and children are permitted to engage in on-farm activities alongside men (Table 6).

Gender-wise performance of farm and non-farm activities in Baghlan and Nangarhar provinces is shown in Table 6. On an average,

Table 6. Gender wise Performance of Off-farm and On-farm Activities

| Gender | Baghlan (%) | | Nangarhar (%) | | Livestock ^{**} (%) | | Crop Production (%) | | Total (%) | |
|----------|-------------|---------|---------------|---------|-----------------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|-----------|---------|
| | Off-farm | On-farm | Off-farm | On-farm | Off-farm | On-farm | Off-farm | On-farm | Off-farm | On-farm |
| | Men | 78 | 55 | 75 | 57 | 62 | 20 | 94 | 75 | 77 |
| Women | 4 | 22 | 1 | 16 | 5 | 44 | 0 | 7 | 3 | 19 |
| Children | 5 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 9 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 1 |
| Jointly* | 13 | 21 | 18 | 26 | 24 | 32 | 6 | 19 | 16 | 23 |

Source: Based on field data collected by the authors.

Notes: *indicates different gender combinations (all three; men and women; men and children; women and children).

**off-farm livestock activities are those activities that can be carried out outside the premises of the house (for example, grazing) and on-farm activities include only those that can be carried out within the compound of the farm.

94 per cent of non-farm work was done exclusively by men. Women did not participate in such work on their own. However 7 per cent of crop related activities on the farm were performed by women only, the figure indicating their negligible involvement.

In terms of livestock care, women worked more at tasks that are carried out within the premises of the household (44 per cent), while men carried out 62 per cent and 20 per cent of the off and on-farm activities respectively. Also, women's participation was less in off-farm activities in both provinces and they participated only to the extent of 16 to 22 per cent in Nangarhar and Baghlan respectively in on-farm activities.

Overall, men were burdened more than women in carrying out both off and on-farm activities in both crop production and animal husbandry. On average, 77 per cent and 56 per cent of the off and on-farm activities respectively were carried out by men. Higher participation of women was seen mainly in livestock related tasks conducted within the acceptable workspace of the compound. Men along with women or children or both carried out 16 and 23 per cent of the off and on-farm activities respectively. Children's involvement was very little in both off-farm and on-farm activities; they generally assisted their male and female elders in different activities.

Family and Hired Labour

Family labour was preferred for most operations but in a few, hired labour was used. Landless people sell their labour outside their village (up to 80 per cent of the households were landless in some villages). Overall, 21 per cent of the labour was hired for carrying out different tasks in animal and crop husbandry (Table 7).

Hired males were involved mainly in cropping activities such as post-harvest operations, weeding, pulling, fertilisation, broadcasting, harvesting, seed and land preparation; and in animal related activities, they were hired for putting up shelters, grazing, preparation of animal feed and sale of products. The use of hired female labour is limited and when this happens they are hired for crop activities (the range is from 2 to 18 per cent) such as threshing, cleaning, hauling and transplanting, while very few women labourers (3 per cent) were hired for carrying out animal related activities such as preparation of feed, putting up shelters and grazing/herding. Old women and widows were hired for different operations such as transplanting, weeding, harvesting, threshing and cleaning, grazing/herding animals and so on. Child labour was used for operations such as transplanting, broadcasting and other post-harvest crop related work and for grazing animals. Women's participation as hired labour was limited in both the provinces.

Decision-making

Although men discuss issues with women, decision-making was done by men only, whether it was related to agriculture, livestock or any other family matter. Incomes were largely controlled by men and decisions for the whole household were made entirely by men. During focus group interviews, it became clear that incomes from goats were largely used by women and children for purchasing shoes and clothes. Grace (2005) indicated that women appear to be able to sell livestock produce and sometimes make decisions over how to use the income thus generated. In the patriarchal family system, particularly in Afghanistan, men are mostly involved in formal economic and social affairs and decision-making processes in the community and family. Men are not in favour of women owning property as it would increase their role in decision making (Grace, 2005). Increasing contribution of women's income in a male headed

Table 7. Family and Hired Labour Participation in Livestock and Crop Related Activities (per cent)

| Category | Family | | | Hired | | | Family | Hired | Total |
|-----------|--------|-------|----------|-------|-------|----------|--------|-------|-------|
| | Men | Women | Children | Men | Women | Children | | | |
| Livestock | 44 | 40 | 11 | 5 | 0 | 0 | 95 | 5 | 100 |
| Crop | 52 | 9 | 3 | 28 | 4 | 4 | 64 | 36 | 100 |
| Baghlan | 45 | 25 | 8 | 17 | 3 | 3 | 77 | 23 | 100 |
| Nangarhar | 51 | 24 | 5 | 17 | 2 | 2 | 80 | 20 | 100 |
| Total | 48 | 24 | 7 | 17 | 2 | 2 | 79 | 21 | 100 |

Source: Based on field data collected by the authors.

household or joint family will not always improve a woman's position within the household or in decision-making. Education is also perceived as increasing a person's ability to participate in decision-making at both the household and community level; and in any case the lower literacy levels of Afghan women limit their role in decision-making. This is the general picture, with deviations varying from household to household.

Grace (2005) also indicated that women in general do not own any property though Shariah law and the Civil Code dictate that only one-third of family property can be willed away, with the rest being divided among the rightful legal heirs. Thus women do not control any wealth and cannot have any role in decision-making.

Daily Activities of Rural Women

Female roles stress motherhood, child socialisation and family nurturing. Even among professional career women, family responsibilities remain a top priority. Among the majority of urban and rural women, their own perception of their roles contributes to the perpetuation of patriarchal values. A quick look at time spent on different activities indicates that rural women perform multiple roles and are over-burdened. They prepare food, wash clothes, keep the house clean, take care of animals, milk animals, provide feed and water to animals, while men take animals out for grazing, labour on the farm, sell their farm products, take animals to the market and buy necessary materials for farm and house.

Conclusions

Gender analysis has revealed that women and men have different roles in agricultural and livestock activities in rural areas. Women were relatively less involved in both crop and livestock farming activities compared to men. Age, social restrictions, poverty and shortage of labour influence the gender division of labour in Afghanistan in on-farm and off-farm activities. Women's involvement was greater in livestock than in crop related activities. This indicates that any agricultural development programme intending to involve women will be effective only if it has a large component of livestock related activities. The establishment

of income generating activities for women should begin with an assessment of those economic opportunities that have multiplier effects on the welfare of their immediate and extended families.

Restrictions on women's involvement in many income generating activities has increased the burden on men, who have to put in more effort to earn monetary benefits for the family, a burden that could be shared with women if only women are allowed to widen their work participation. In terms of access to and control over agriculture-derived incomes and decision-making, males have more access and control than women over incomes and resources. It can be seen from this that rural society has lost half of its human resource through cultural restrictions which prohibit the free movement of women.

Women often have no surnames and are barely counted in the national census. This may mean that they can easily be ignored by development plans, further worsening their situation.

Gender equity should be the aim of any development programme in Afghanistan. Such programmes should include and support women through understanding their specific but different needs, interests and roles. Simultaneously, inroads have to be made on their behalf against the tight controls of patriarchy. The status and economic development of Afghan women depends on equal realisation of rights in the long run and greater mobility and economic participation right now in the present.

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Notes

1. *Pardah* is a social norm according to which women are allowed to talk with men only from behind a curtain.

2. Veiling includes the insistence on separate spaces for men and women.
3. The circle of acceptable male guardians such as father, brother, son and any other male with whom women may not marry.
4. See the article by Najibullah (2008) for a brief description of how child marriages in Afghanistan limit young girls' opportunities.
5. Figures taken from the Wikipedia article on the demography of Afghanistan: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demography_of_Afghanistan
6. Details from MoPH, Afghanistan (2008). Also see, [http://gis.emro.who.int/HealthSystemObservatory/PDF/Afghanistan/Health status and demographics.pdf](http://gis.emro.who.int/HealthSystemObservatory/PDF/Afghanistan/Health%20status%20and%20demographics.pdf)
7. Published by the ICON-Institute (2009). The National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA), was financially supported by the European Commission (EC) under the National Surveillance System (NSS) project. It was a joint project of the EU and the Government of Afghanistan.
8. As per the UNIFEM (2008) report on the situation of women in Afghanistan: <http://Afghanistan.unifem.org/media/pubs/08/factsheet/html>
9. See Macdonald (2011) in Refugee Cooperation; www.refugeecooperation.org/publications/Afghanistan/04

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