



Global Donor Platform  
for Rural Development

# Platform infoNote

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## OPPORTUNITIES FOR GENDER IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE RURAL SPACE

In 2015, the Platform commissioned a paper on the "[Implications of Agenda 2030 for Rural Development](#)". Previously, the Paris and Busan declarations had been the cornerstones of the Platform's objectives, but in order to find resonance within the broader scope of the SDGs, the Platform had a strategic soul searching ([Strategic Initiative Agenda 2030 and analysis](#)) on how best to deliver for Agenda 2030. One of the most important issues that emerged was a need to apply a more holistic approach to rural development, one which goes beyond framing actions for food security and economic growth only around SDG 2. The paper argued that the Platform should use related entry and influence points such as SDG 8 on jobs and **SDG 5 on gender equality**.

### FEMINIZATION OF AGRICULTURE

"Women's share of agricultural labour is rising in a number of countries, and exceeds half the labour force in others, giving rise to the term 'feminisation of agricultural labour.'"<sup>1</sup>

Women's expanding roles in agriculture may bring improvements to their financial empowerment through income generating activities such as wage labour in contract farming. They may also have increased decision making opportunities because of male outmigration. It is however not assured that wages or even remittances which may be sent by migrant men ease constraints on rural households. Women may have to work more or hire labour to compensate for lost workforce, and at the same time maintain their household duties. Furthermore, their increased independence may not result in empowerment, for instance if they cannot participate in income generating activities because of more responsibilities on subsistence farms.<sup>2</sup>

In order for policy makers to positively influence the transformation of rural spaces, understanding changing dynamics such as agriculture's feminisation is fundamental, including how this can result in either the reversal or progression of women's social and economic empowerment.

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<sup>1</sup> Journal of International Development J. Int. Dev. (2014) "Does the Feminisation of Agricultural Labour Empower Women? Insights from Female Labour contractors and workers in Northwest Syria?"  
<http://www.fao.org/docs/eims/upload/315863/Insight%20from%20female%20labour%20contractors%20and%20workers%20in%20Northwest%20Syria.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> World Bank (2016) "Feminization of Agriculture in the Context of Rural Transformations: What is the Evidence?"  
<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/25099/108468.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>

## TRENDS

In September 2016, the World Bank Group (WBG) released a working paper: "[Feminization of Agriculture in the Context of Rural Transformations: What is the Evidence?](#)" According to its findings, agriculture is feminised (female dominated) in majority of Sub Saharan Africa, and is feminising (share of women has increased compared to previous years) in Central Asia, South Asia, Latin America and in the Near East and North Africa regions. Some of the regional trends (figures have been rounded) in the paper are:

### Sub Saharan Africa (SSA)

Women have for a long time been the main agricultural workers in SSA. For instance their share is 62% in Sierra Leone, 67% in Lesotho, 59 % in Malawi. As such, significant increases are not found in the WBG report. Large increases were found in some cases such as Chad 28.9% - 56.9% (between 1980 and 2010)

### Near East and North Africa (NENA)

The NENA region has outstanding changes in women's share in agriculture. For example Syria (pre-conflict) had doubled women's share from 30% in 1980 to 60% in 2010, Libya increased from 37.2 – 69.9 and Iraq and Morocco increased from 30% to 50% over the same

period. Jordan and the occupied Palestinian territory surpassed 60% in women's agricultural share.

### Asia

Evidence of agricultural feminisation is found in both Central and South Asia. For example the increase between 1980 and 2010 was from 15% - 50% for Nepal, 12% - 30% for Pakistan, 26% - 35% for Bhutan to name a few.

### Latin America

Agriculture in Latin America is traditionally male dominated. Even so, women's share increased in the countries examined in the report, namely Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Papua New Guinea.

## DRIVERS

Agricultural feminisation is driven by various and compounding factors, which differ between and within countries. Two commonly discussed drivers are the growth of **commercial production** and **male outmigration**, particularly as both significantly influence structural changes in rural spaces. Other factors influencing feminization which apply more strongly in some regions than others are **climate change** which may result in decreased farm yields which encourages men to out-migrate in search of work<sup>3</sup> and **HIV/AIDS** which can result in the increased prevalence of poor female-headed households<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup>CGIAR (2014) "Women, Water & Leadership workshop: How to respond to the 'feminization' of agriculture in Nepal" <http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/2014/02/how-to-respond-to-the-feminization-of-agriculture-in-nepal/>

<sup>4</sup>FAO (2007) "The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Rural Households and Land Issues in Southern and Eastern Africa" <ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/nonfao/ad696e/ad696e00.pdf>

## Agribusiness

Whether through **contract farming** or **wage labour**, women often take on short term roles, normally only participating in the lowest work levels. Market oriented crop production has created new opportunities for some women, and is a significant factor in the transformation of rural spaces. Wage labour can be offered supplementary to women's small scale farming activities, bringing in the prospect for partial financial independence. These wages may provide some monetary empowerment, but the time spent in wage employment is not often offset by a decreased workload at home and on subsistence farms. This means that agribusiness can result in more precarious women's roles, adding to their "time poverty."<sup>5</sup>

However agribusiness can also add to women's economic independence where their work is remunerated, especially if they are skilled in technologies which can improve their chances for better paid opportunities. For this reason, between Jan 1 2017 – March 31 2017, the Platform gender group is undertaking a scoping analysis assessing donor's approaches to women in agribusiness. The group will share lessons for donors to consider in their efforts to enhance inclusiveness within agribusiness portfolios.

## Male outmigration

Rural – Urban migration (and linkages) are another important factor in discussions on rural transformation. In some cases such as Africa, youth and male outmigration to urban areas is driven by economic inequalities between the rural and urban space, and this migration is an effort to supplement incomes. Such migration can be temporary or permanent, and benefits such as **remittances** could reduce the financial constraints of rural households. However if the outmigration is permanent or takes place during the agricultural season, remittances might be used by women to compensate for the lost labour.<sup>6</sup> In many poor countries, urban non-farm sectors may not be advanced enough to absorb rural migrants into **jobs**, meaning few, unsafe and even exploitative job opportunities are what are available to migrants.<sup>7</sup> This in turn means remittances sent to their rural homes can be low or at worst non-existing.

## CONCLUSIONS: IMPLICATIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL RURAL TRANSFORMATION

Women's share in agriculture is expanding in several regions, and women are already dominating agriculture in regions such as Sub Saharan Africa. As such, **no discussion on rural transformation is complete without adequate consideration of what this feminisation means for policy – public investments, land rights, cooperatives, rural finance etc.** This is particularly in ensuring a successful rural transformation where women are not negatively impacted through being overworked and underpaid in the process of trying to meet the world's food needs. This may mean taking actions that:

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<sup>5</sup>World Bank (2016) "Feminization of Agriculture in the Context of Rural Transformations: What is the Evidence?" <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/25099/108468.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>

<sup>6</sup>World Bank (2016) "Feminization of Agriculture in the Context of Rural Transformations: What is the Evidence?" <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/25099/108468.pdf?sequence=4&isAllowed=y>

<sup>7</sup> IFAD (2016) "Migration and transformative pathways: A rural perspective" <https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/5eb19611-d4b5-49b0-97ed-81688cf1c6a7>

- Enhance skills of women through trainings, technologies and productive resources which in turn could improve women's opportunities for better pay and reduce gender gaps in productivity. However, deeply entrenched gender inequalities bring adoption challenges, for example technologies and training can be difficult due to women's labour and access constraints.<sup>8</sup>
- Improved transport and communications infrastructure can reduce the travel costs and time for the migrants, and possibly the cost of sending remittances. This could also improve rural producer's access to urban markets.<sup>9</sup>
- Expand rural investment and create the enabling environment for responsible, inclusive private sector which could allow for better rural earning opportunities.

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<sup>8</sup> Zhang et al (2009) "*Feminization of agriculture in rapid changing rural China: policy implication and alternatives for an equitable growth and sustainable development*"

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.521.8027&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

<sup>9</sup> IFAD (2016) "*Migration and transformative pathways: A rural perspective*"

<https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/5eb19611-d4b5-49b0-97ed-81688cf1c6a7>