



Review

Poultry Based Intervention as a Tool for Rural Women Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: A Review

Kiros Abebe* and Etalem Tesfaye

¹Wollega University College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, P.O. Box 38, Shambu, Ethiopia.

²Debre Zeit Agricultural Research Center, P.O. Box 32, Debre Zeit, Ethiopia.

*Corresponding author E-mail: kabebe52@gmail.com.

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Gender analysis reveals that while women play critical roles in agriculture, they face greater barriers than men to increasing their productivity and income. Furthermore, around the world, women are the primary agents in providing for the wellbeing of their families and communities. Barriers to access in agriculture, the sector that forms the foundation of the economy for the rural poor, have severely limited women's ability to foster sustainable agricultural growth. The global economic crisis has exacerbated these inequities, diminishing many of the previous gains women farmers had experienced in this sector. It is crucial to address the needs of both women and men farmers through gender integration in all aspects of agricultural development and each link of the agricultural value chain. This will ensure the people

who are tasked with growing food have the essential capabilities needed to improve nutritional status, food security and economic sustainability around the world. Poverty is more prevalent in rural areas where, for many people, village poultry plays a significant income generating role. They are more portable than land and crops and are a "living savings bank" that may be used throughout the year. Poultry can also be an appropriate means of promoting gender equality and empowerment, since women tend to have more control over poultry production and marketing without needing to seek their husband's permission (than in other activities).

Key words: Empowerment, poultry, poverty, women

INTRODUCTION

Poverty is widespread in developing countries and more prevalent in rural areas. Indeed, most of the poor in developing countries (75%) live in rural areas, with agriculture being the centre of their lives (Meyer, 2009). The important position of agriculture in poorer economies suggests that strong growth in agriculture is critical for poverty reduction and for fostering overall economic growth (World Bank, 2007).

There is wide agreement that the greater part of extreme poverty in the global South is a rural phenomenon. The role of poultry as a potential tool to escape extreme poverty has frequently been claimed (Dolberg, 2001; Peacock, 2005). Impact on poverty is likely to be achieved through approaches that directly

focus on the poorest groups of livestock keepers (Ashley *et al.*, 1999). Poultry have been seen as particularly significant for women's self-reliance (Devendra and Chantalakhana, 2002). Village poultry keeping has attracted attention as a vehicle for rural development. For many decades' development agencies, international agencies, government and non-government organizations have been interested in helping to develop village poultry production. The pace and scope of such support have expanded over the last 20 years and some major initiatives have been undertaken (Mack *et al.*, 2005). These development-oriented interventions range from attempts to replicate commercial poultry innovation and support networks at international level.

Women play important roles as producers of food, managers of natural resources, income earners, and caretakers of household food and nutrition security. Giving women the same access to physical and human resources as men could increase agricultural productivity, just as increases in women's education and improvements in women's status over the past quarter century have contributed to more than half of the reduction in the rate of child malnutrition. In many countries, increasing assets that women control also has a positive impact on the next generation, particularly on education and health. Rural poultry production is being recognized as important component of socio economic improvement among the weaker section of society; especially landless labor, small and marginal farm women's. Village poultry generates self employment, provides supplementary income with protein rich food at relatively low cost. Poultry share is quite sizable in total meat consumption as it is cheaper than sheep and goat meat. There are some enterprises existing in the present situation which gives some assured income like backyard poultry, small unit of goat keeping etc. in the hands of farm women. Thus, the objective of this paper is to assess the role of village poultry intervention on poverty reduction and women empowerment.

POULTRY PRODUCTION IN ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia is representative of countries where village poultry plays a dominant role in total poultry production. The sector represents an important part of the national economy in general and the rural economy in particular. According to Alemu (1995), Ethiopian poultry production systems comprise both traditional and modern production systems. The estimated chicken population in Ethiopia is over 50 million out of which indigenous chicken comprises over 96%, the rest being hybrid and exotic breeds (CSA, 2013), and play a significant role in human nutrition and as a source of income. Village birds are owned by individual households and are maintained under a scavenging system, with few or no inputs for housing, feeding and health care. Poultry meat and eggs have been recommended to bridge the protein gap more than other species of livestock because of short generation interval, high rate of productivity, quick turnover rate, higher feed efficiency, and low labor and land requirements (Ojedapo *et al.*, 2008).

Village poultry

Village chickens comprise the major part of the poultry industry in many developing countries (Spradbrow, 1997). The term "village or family poultry" refers to small flocks raised by individual farm families in order to increase their food security, obtain income and provide

women and children with employment (Sonaiya, 1999). Village poultry is kept by nearly all rural, many peri-urban and some urban households, and provides protein and generates extra cash (Branckaert and Gueye, 1999). The population of scavenging village chickens in the developing world is estimated to be around three billion (Roberts, 1997). In Ethiopia, the village chicken population is estimated to be over 48 million (CSA, 2013). Women, assisted in some cases by children, are the main owners and managers of village chickens (Branckaert and Gueye, 1999; Fattah, 1999).

The rearing of chickens is popular in rural villages of most resource-poor countries, as a means of providing supplementary food in the form of proteins, extra income and employment for family members (Bagnol, 2000). Chickens are regarded as valuable gifts and are eaten as a delicacy on special occasions (Gueye and Bessei, 1997; Kemp 1998). They act as "recyclers", processing waste food into valuable protein in the form of meat and eggs. They also play a role in traditional healing rituals and religion (Alders, 1996). For instance, in Viet Nam one type is used for making traditional tonics for use by old and sick people (Tu, 2000). The manure is used to improve the fertility of the soil (Østergaard, 1995). Village chickens are therefore an important vehicle in rural development and play a significant role in the nutrition of the rural poor (Nwosu, 1990; Chitukuro and Foster, 1997).

According to Nel (1996), the absence of a backyard chicken in a rural household is a sure sign of poverty. Future prospects for rearing village chickens are believed to be good, because of traditionally high demand for their meat, which is perceived to be flavorful and of higher quality than that of exotic breeds (Crawford, 1992). Birds are sold or bartered to meet household needs.

Village poultry as a tool for poverty reduction

Village poultry can be a useful tool for poverty alleviation and food security mainly in poor countries like Ethiopia for various reasons. First, village poultry not only has a high share of the meat supply in developing countries, but is also a widespread traditional activity in most of these countries. Indeed, more than 80% of the poultry population of the world is found in traditional poultry production systems, contributing up to 90% of poultry products in some countries (Alabi *et al.*, 2006). Mack *et al.* (2005) showed that nearly all families living in rural areas of developing countries, including the poor and landless, are owners of poultry. Gueye (2005) supports this when stating that more than 90% of rural families in most developing countries keep at least one poultry species (i.e. chickens, ducks, guinea fowl, geese and pigeons). Second, village poultry production plays a significant role in income generation and poverty alleviation in a condition where many people are landless

or have no formal skills to participate in income earning activities (Fattah, 1999; Aklilu *et al.*, 2008). According to Alders and Pym (2009), various impact studies in South Asia have demonstrated that income from the sale of poultry products is used to finance children's schooling and begin the process of asset accumulation.

In Jos South Local Government in Nigeria, Fasina *et al.* (2007) showed that poultry alone contributes over 83% of the cash income of sampled families, proving that poultry is a major economic activity for these families. Income from the sale of poultry products also allows for investment in other business enterprises (e.g. food processing, crop production), and in other livestock such as small ruminants and cattle production (Clarke, 2004). Third, village poultry is not only a useful tool to help poor rural households to recover from disasters, but also a practical and effective first step in abject rural poverty reduction (Mack *et al.*, 2005). Indeed, several studies (Dossa *et al.*, 2003; Aklilu *et al.*, 2008) claim that if the poor can acquire poultry it can help them to move out of poverty.

According to Clarke (2004), a study in the southern province of Zambia, hit by drought and cattle diseases, families with chickens were able to survive drought and recover the following year better than families without chickens. In Benin, village poultry enables farmers to achieve the annual cycle of family economy by selling poultry during periods of slender means, when the granaries are empty, in order to afford cereal for family consumption (Gbaguidi, 2001).

Village poultry have a short production cycle and do not require much investment when compared to larger livestock (Copland and Alders, 2005; Kryger *et al.*, 2010). Thus, traditional poultry production is feasible in rural areas where only low cost technology is needed to considerably improve production (Mack *et al.*, 2005). As they are usually left to scavenge for their feed during daytime, poultry only require a little supplementary feeding (depending on the season of the year), a night shelter and, occasionally, some veterinary treatment and vaccination (Kryger *et al.*, 2010).

Moreover, most of the conditions required by the industrial poultry sub-sector are not met in rural areas (Branckaret and Gueye, 2000). These conditions include the ability to purchase the most efficient inputs (improved bird breeds, feeds, vaccines, drugs and equipment), the availability of highly skilled manpower and strict disease control (Clarke, 2004; Alabi *et al.*, 2006).

Furthermore, village poultry is a cheap source of protein and generally covers part of the rural family's nutritional needs by providing scarce animal protein, in the form of meat and eggs (Copland and Alders, 2005; Mack *et al.*, 2005).

Poultry eggs, for example, offer an important source of nutrition containing about 315 kilojoules of digestible energy and are one of the best sources of quality protein known (Alders and Pym, 2009).

Socio-cultural importance of poultry and women empowerment

Poultry has a socio-cultural importance in developing countries. Following Clarke (2004), in many developing countries, social goodwill is created by offering guests a meal containing meat, which is usually poultry. Village poultry is also an appropriate means of promoting gender equality in developing countries. Indeed, poultry is almost a universal exception; around the world, women tend to have more control over the poultry they produce and market, and they can also sell or exchange their poultry without seeking their husband's permission (World Bank/FAO/IFAD, 2009). In the south of Mozambique, women have been able to sell excess poultry in order to buy goats and eventually cattle, thus giving them access to resources previously denied to them, as ruminants have been traditionally raised by men (Alders and Pym, 2009). In a study carried out in the Niger Delta (Nigeria), Alabi *et al.* (2006) showed that family poultry husbandry (35%) contributes more to the household income of women than business activities (30%) and paid employment (18%). In Ethiopia, Aklilu *et al.* (2008) reported that farmers described poultry as a source of self-reliance for women. Poultry and egg sales are decided by women (Aklilu *et al.*, 2007) and therefore provide them with an immediate income to meet household expenses (e.g. food items) instead of expecting men to provide the cash (Aklilu *et al.*, 2008).

Poultry production is the most important livestock activities for many poor rural families worldwide, providing a source of income and a tool for poverty alleviation. Poultry farming generates cash income and employment opportunities, while increasing production of valuable protein foods (i.e. meat and eggs) that improve nutritional standards. Rural women traditionally play an important role in this sector and are often in control of the whole process from feeding to marketing, which is not the case in production systems for other livestock species. For women who stay at home, poultry enables them to (a) help the family in times of need, and have cash for emergencies; (b) save money for future investments; (c) obtain an income to provide for the needs of their children and the household; and (d) supplement the family's protein intake.

According to Aklilu, (2007) women are more likely to share the benefits gained with others members of their household. Furthermore, in addition to the economic benefits, women's increasing role in the household economy can lead to their empowerment (Garikipati, 2008). The United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (UN-INSTRAW, 2010) argues that empowerment is both a process and an outcome. It implies that women, but also men, are taking control of their lives: setting their own agendas, gaining skills, increasing self-confidence, solving problems, and developing self-reliance (UN-

INSTRAW, 2010). Ranjani *et al.* (2008) note that the process of a woman's empowerment involves making changes so that she can exercise more power to shape her life, notably control of resources, access to markets, and the opportunity to shape institutional norms and practices. The process by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such ability (Kabeer, 1999, 2002). In contrast, to be disempowered means to be denied choice (Kabeer, 2005).

Women and agriculture in sub-saharan africa

Women shoulder the primary responsibility for food security in Africa yet development agencies have devoted minimal resources to researching the impact of their agricultural policies and new techniques on the wellbeing of Africa's women farmers (Grieco and Apt, 1998). Now is the time to push for a paradigm shift: the urgent need for a gendered approach to agricultural policy in Africa. The supporting argument is that women are an integral part of the African farming structure and that the dominant agricultural policies developed for Africa, with the disproportionate involvement and influence of external experts, have ignored this gender dimension at a very real cost to African agriculture and to gender equity within the continent (Boserup, 1970; Saito and Spurling, 1992; Gladwin, 1997). The institutional reality remains that of operational inattention to gender issues in agriculture and related areas such as transport and microfinance. A disturbing feature of this inattention is that it coexists with public statements that actively promote participation and consultation as part of the development agenda. The participatory protocol and measures necessary to ensure that gender is integrated into this process have not been put in place. In the absence of a willingness to begin to set up precise measures around gender split in benefits within a gender mainstreaming paradigm and in the absence of a willingness to directly target gender inequalities within operational development agenda, then the paradigm which disregards women's problems and contributions in relation to the agricultural economy of Africa is likely to stay in place. This should not be allowed as its consequences are likely to be unfavorable to all concerned. African women have begun to make major demands for their participation and inclusion in the policy and economic processes relevant to agriculture. Indeed, they have started to develop and promote local expert materials in the field of agriculture (Duncan, 1997). Through these materials, being those which emerge out of consultation with women farmers on their needs and opportunities, we now know from existing evidence that there are gender differentiations of immense dimension within African agriculture. The position and capability of women meeting the challenges of agricultural develop-

ment cannot be overemphasized (Rahman, 2008). Women make significant contribution to food production and processing, but men seem to take more of the farm decisions and control the productive resources.

Reasons for women's involvement in agricultural activities and barriers to achievement

Women embark on agricultural activities for a variety of reasons. Prominent among such reasons is that of being able to earn financial resources, as well as being a family tradition and personal interest.

The scenario whereby more and more of men either temporarily or permanently migrate has caused shortage of labour in rural areas. As a result, more women are left behind to do much of the farm work as paid or unpaid family labour (Abdullahi, undated).

Other reasons that have been identified include ease of handling; lack of other alternative occupations; acquisition of technical know-how; and husband's influence. It has been observed that religion and availability of funds or farming facility also influence degree of women's involvement in crop production. Apart from providing employment and income for resource-poor small farmers, especially women, family poultry also serves as a means of capital acquisition and accumulation (Gueye, 2003).

Role of women in household economy, food production and food security

In sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture accounts for approximately 21% of the continent's GDP and women contribute 60-80% of the labour used to produce food (FAO, 1995). Estimate of women's contribution to the production of food crops range from 30% in the Sudan to 80% in the Congo, while their proportion of the economically active labour force in agriculture ranges from 48% in Burkina Faso to 73% in the Congo and 80% in the traditional sector in Sudan. Available data support a common trend throughout Africa: smallholder subsistence farmers and especially women farmers substantially contribute to national agricultural production and food security and women farmers are primarily responsible for food crops.

Given the critical importance of the agricultural sector to the national economies and in view of the important productive role of women within the sector, economic development and food security are affected by the degree of commitment shown by governments to the sector and rural women (FAO, 1995). In most of SSA, women are exclusively responsible for the production of food for household consumption. As providers of food and nurturers of children, women should play a determining role in any attempt to increase food production

and food security (Kotze, 2003). Besides performing household duties, women carry out a variety of agricultural labour. They perform almost all tasks and activities associated with subsistence production and produce more than 74% of household food in African countries and up to 70% of food consumed by families in rural areas (Todaro, 1994; Geier, 1995 and Melamed, 1996). The gender division of labour and social responsibilities in the household constitutes the deciding factor in women's commitment to subsistence production to fulfill their responsibility to feed the family and ensure food security for the household. As a result, most women in low-income food-deficit countries (LIFDCs), especially in rural areas, are over-burdened with a wide range of activities and tasks in agriculture, animal husbandry and in the household (Gueye, 2003). They contribute to national agricultural output, maintenance of the environment and family food security. Unfortunately, women belong to disadvantaged groups in most rural communities in LIFDCs. Women are the main poultry owners in LIFDCs, though there are variations within and between countries. According to Gueye (1998) more than the 70% of chicken owners in rural areas of SSA are women. On the whole, women's involvement in poultry farming tends to decrease with increased levels of intensification. Family poultry constitutes an important component of the agricultural and household economy. Given that women are responsible for the bulk of food production as providers of food security and meaningful contributors to family incomes, any attempt to eradicate poverty should acknowledge their role as producers of food and income-earners and ensure that they have a say in policy and decision-making (Al-Sultan, 2000). Any programme that aims to increase food security among the poor, particularly the rural poor, warrants the full participation of women. Kotze (2003) concluded that the role of women in the household economy and their contribution towards food production and food security would need to be acknowledged in any policy, programme and project aimed at promoting food security and rural and agricultural development.

CONCLUSION

Poverty is more prevalent in rural areas, where village poultry plays a significant role in generating income for many people. Village poultry can be a useful tool for alleviating abject rural poverty and promoting women empowerment. Poultry are particularly associated with the self-reliance of women. In an effort to reach and engage the poor, it is important to recognize that some issues and constraints related to participation are gender-specific and stem from the fact that men and women play different roles, have different needs and face different challenges on a number of issues and at different levels. We cannot therefore assume that women will automati-

cally benefit from efforts involving poor people in project design and implementation. Experience has also shown that unless specific steps are taken to ensure that women participate and benefit, they usually do not. A number of barriers to women's participation in agricultural activities have been identified. Some of the very important ones has been noted that systemic gender biases may exist in the form of (a) customs, beliefs and attitudes that confine women mostly to the domestic sphere, (b) women's economic and domestic workloads that impose severe time burdens on them and (c) laws and customs that impede women's access to credit, production inputs, employment, education, or medical care. A careful examination alludes to the fact that there is definitely need for sensitivity on the social and cultural barriers that may inhibit women's participation in agricultural activities. Rural women's productive role in agriculture continues to be underestimated in many countries as unpaid workers are frequently excluded from national statistics and/or farm women are considered housewives in agricultural statistics. Such underestimation must be addressed in order to clearly demonstrate the importance of rural women-in-agricultural production. Creating feedback channels between all parties in the development equation would bring about the necessary equalization to the full participation of African female farmers in the economic benefits of African agriculture. Empowering African women for participation in agricultural decision-making and leadership in Africa represents the most appropriate and effective way forward. Support systems for women farmers within a holistic gender-sensitive framework are urgently needed to form a policy development, project design and implementation agenda. Women must be directly involved with the development and implementation of the new technologies.

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