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Full Length Research Paper

Extent of Rural Women Participation and Decision Making in Seed Production Activities

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Rural women play a pivotal role in agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. They play key roles by working with full passion in production of crops right from the soil preparation till post harvest activities. The study focused on role of rural women in seed production and their decision making in Northwest of Amhara region, Ethiopia. Five villages were selected on the basis of their experiences in seed production and marketing. Fifty married women farmers, ten from each village, were selected by using simple random sampling technique. Interview schedule was used to obtain information from rural women on their socio-economic characteristics, their participation in seed production activities and their role in various decision making areas. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data collected. Result showed that only 14% of the respondents accessed formal trainings on seed production and management indicated the male domination in benefiting from trainings and extension services. The result depicted that 98%, 92%, 84%, 82% and 80% of the respondents participated and engaged in weeding, organic fertilizers preparation, inputs transport to farm, fertilizer applications and harvesting, respectively. However, their participation was limited on ploughing (14%) and crop protection activities (34%). The roles of women in final decision making on purchase/sell of farm implements (6%) was quite minimal. Their extent of participation in decision making for most of seed production activities is limited only on consultation. Therefore, serious attention and integrated support should be given for rural women to improve their position in decision making.

Keywords: Decision making, participation, rural women, seed production,

INTRODUCTION

Women play a pivotal role in agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. The roles that rural women play and their position in meeting the challenges of agricultural production and development are quite dominant and prominent (Ogunlela and Mukhtar, 2009). Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes (SOFA Team and Cheryl Doss, 2011; Arshad et al., 2010). Rural women play key roles in agriculture sector production by working with full passion in production of crops right from the soil preparation till post harvest activities (Ahmed and Hussain, 2004). They

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are integrated into the rural economy. However, their relevance and significance in agriculture cannot be overemphasized (Rahman, 2008).

Rural women in Ethiopia represent a tremendous productive resource in the agricultural sector which is the main sector of the economy. The role of women in the dominant agricultural sector of the country is very crucial in production, processing and marketing. They are major contributors to the agricultural workforce, either as family members or in their own right as women heading households. According to Senait (2000) women in Ethiopia play multiple and overlapping roles, which have increasingly put pressure on their health, food security, productivity and potential contribution to improved human welfare and economic development. The major portion of women's labor force invested in production system including weeding, harvesting, household management, animal husbandry, marketing and post harvest handling.

In most parts of the country, rural women are intimately involved in most aspects of agricultural production activities including seed production which is an intensive farming practice. However, various constraints in relation to economic, cultural norms and practices limit women's participation in seed production activities. Bishop-Sambrook (2004) reported that rural women mostly involved in weeding activities in medium and high altitude area of the central Oromia region of the country. In some Southern parts of the country rural women even do not allow engaging in ploughing, sowing and hoeing activities due to cultural norms, and they restricted on cultivation of vegetable crops (Mogues et al., 2009). Despite some investigations were done by different researchers about the roles of women in agricultural production in other parts of the country (Bishop-Sambrook, 2004; Mogues et al., 2009), little is known about the participation of rural women and their decision making in seed production in the Northwest parts of Amhara region. Therefore, the study was carried out to assess the role of rural women participation in seed production activities and their involvement in decision making in Northwest parts of Amhara region, Ethiopia.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Northwest parts of Amhara region, Ethiopia. Five villages viz Marwoled, Gusha Shinkurta, Gosheye, Woken and Bete Yohannes were selected from Womberema, Guagusa Shikudad, Yilmana Densa, Dabat and Tach Gayint districts, respectively, on the basis their experience in seed production and marketing. Farmers in Marwoled area have experience on hybrid maize and bread wheat seed production and marketing; Gusha Shinkurta on bread wheat and potato; Gosheye on hybrid maize, tef and potato; Woken on malt barley and bread wheat; and Bete Yohannes on potato seed production and marketing. The population of the study consists of married women farmers involved in seed production activities. Fifty married women farmers, ten from each village, were selected through simple random sampling technique. The data were collected with the help of structured questionnaire which includes demographic information of the respondents, the extent of rural women participation in seed production activities and their role in various decision making areas. The data thus collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics by using Statistical Package for Social Science software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

The socio-economic characteristics of the respondents for various variables are presented in Table 1. The majority of the respondents' age (83%) was fall between 20-40 years implying that they are in active productive age. Most of the respondents (76%) were illiterate. However, only 8% of the respondents were having primary education and 16% of them read and write. Formal education is prominent, has the potential for making up some of the deficiencies in rural women and assists them to get more benefit from existing extension services. It was also reported that 38% of the respondents had more than five children which is actually above the average children per family of the region. The farmland size of 70.8% of the respondents was only one and below one ha of land, and only 6.3% had above 2ha. The overwhelming majority of the respondents (83.3%) have more than one year of seed production experience showing their familiarity with seed production procedures and activities. Eighty six percent of the respondents reported that they did not receive formal trainings on seed production and management by supporting government or non-government organizations. Previous studies indicate about the male domination in benefiting from trainings and extension services provided by supporting organizations (Habtemariam, 1996; Ngatwa, 2006; Ogunlela and Mukhtar, 2009). This may be related to the illiteracy and less educational level of most of the respondents which often unable them to attend or continue formal training courses, social and economic services provided by supporting organizations (Aazami et al., 2011).

Rural women participation on seed production activities

The data presented in Table 2 depicts that 98%, 92%, 84%, 82% and 80% of the respondents participated and engaged in weeding, organic fertilizers preparation, inputs transport to farm, fertilizer applications and harvesting, respectively. This shows that the significant participation of rural women

Table 1. Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age (years)		
20-30	17	36.2
31-40	22	46.8
41-50	6	12.8
Above 50	2	4.2
Educational level		
Illiterate	38	76.0
Read and write	8	16.0
Primary	4	8.0
No of children		
1 to 2	9	18.0
3 to 5	22	44.0
Above 5	19	38.0
Farmland size (ha)		
0.25-1	34	70.8
1-2	11	22.9
Above 2	3	6.3
Seed production experience (years)		
One	8	16.7
Two	14	29.1
Three	18	37.5
More than three	8	16.7
Access to formal training		
Yes	7	14.0
No	43	86.0

Source: Field survey, 2011

Table 2. Distribution of the respondents according to their participation in various seed production activities

Activities	Number	Percentage
Ploughing	7	14
Land preparation	30	60
Input transport to farm	42	84
Organic fertilizers preparation	46	92
Sowing	28	56
Fertilizers application	41	82
Weeding	49	98
Crop protection	17	34
Harvesting	40	80
Threshing	35	70
Seed marketing	39	78

Figure in parenthesis are the percentages
Field survey, 2011

in most of the seed production activities. On the other hand, ploughing and crop protection activities are performed by 14% and 34% of the respondents, respectively. These farming activities by their nature are laborious and

Table 3. Extent of rural women participation in decision making on seed production and marketing

Decision making areas	No consideration	Only consulted	Opinion considered	Roles in final decision
Land size for seed production	6(12)	23(46)	13(26)	8(16)
Time for land preparation	14(28)	26(52)	6(12)	4(8)
Time of sowing	5(10)	34(68)	7(14)	4(8)
Time of weeding	2(4)	19(38)	23(46)	6(12)
No of hired laborers and their wages	7(14)	21(42)	11(22)	11(22)
Land rent for seed production	5(10)	25(50)	9(18)	11(22)
Time of harvesting	4(8)	19(38)	23(46)	4(8)
Amount of seed to be sold	4(8)	16(32)	12(24)	18(36)
Farm credit	7(14)	14(28)	18(36)	11(22)
Saving	2(4)	13(26)	13(26)	22(44)
Purchase/sell of farm implements	13(26)	24(48)	10(20)	3(6)

Figures in parenthesis are the percentages
Source: Field survey, 2011

considered by the community as works performed by men. Lemlem et al. (2010) reported that men are typically responsible for the heavier manual tasks such as land preparation and tillage with oxen. More or less similar results were also presented by Nazar (2004) and Luqman et al. (2007). Almost all rural women were participated in weeding activities indicating their significant contribution for better and vigor growth and development of the crop at early growth stage. Moreover, traditionally in most areas of the country weeding is considered as women's task (Bishop-Sambrook, 2004; Lemlem et al., 2010). Rural women play key roles in most of the seed production activities which usually performed by men (Amri and Kimaro, 2010). Almaz (2000) reported that up to 60% of farming activities in Ethiopia are done by rural women, especially in food production and processing. Rural women in Ethiopia are increasingly managing and operating farms on a regular and full-time basis, as men leave farms in search of paid employment in urban areas (Edlu, 2006).

Rural women involvement in decision making

The extent of rural women participation in various decisions making areas of seed production and marketing is presented in Table 3. The roles of rural women in final decision making on purchase/sell of farm implements was quite minimal which reported by 6% of the respondents. Whereas, on the other hand 44% and 36% of the respondents had key roles in the final decision on saving and amount of seed to be sold, respectively. The results also showed that 68%, 52%, 50%, and 48% of the respondents were only consulted on time of sowing, time for land preparation, land rent for seed production, and purchase/sale of farm implements, respectively. In each of the farm operation, less than 30% of the respondents' opinions were considered except for time of weeding and time of harvesting which reported by 46% of the respondents. In general, the overwhelming majority of the respondents reported about their participation in most decision making areas although the degree of participation varies. These findings are more or less similar with the work of Damsia and Yohanna (2007).

CONCLUSION

Rural women are more involved in seed production activities besides their major responsibility of household care. They have significant roles in some most farm operations of seed management, although their competence in making decisions has been questioned. Their position in decision making is still not appreciated and considered. Therefore, awareness should be created for the community for the benefits of providing opportunity to rural women to participate actively in making decisions in all aspects of seed management activities. Moreover, serious attention and integrated support should be given for rural women to improve their position in decision making.

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