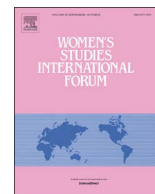




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Review

Literature on gendered agriculture in Pakistan: Neglect of women's contributions

Kristie Druzca^{a,*}, Valentina Peveri^b^a *The International Wheat and Maize Improvement Centre (CIMMYT), Mexico*^b *Adjunct Faculty, M.A. Food Studies, The American University of Rome*

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ABSTRACT

Women's role in agriculture is widely reported to be essential; despite this, women's role in the wheat-sector is under-researched. Feminist standpoint theory is applied in analyzing 73 documents on women's role in agriculture from 1990 until 2016 to answer the following questions: How does the world look, and operate, for males and females in wheat growing households? What do we know about social relationships and mediating processes (i.e., social factors mediating men's and women's access to resources and activities) that exist in the prime wheat growing regions in Pakistan? The paper highlights a knowledge gap in relation to the life histories, local experiences, as well as unofficial and informal networks of small farmers in general, and of poor and marginalized women in particular. This neglect of rural subjects is a missed opportunity to learn and to engage in improved program design that contributes to enhanced food security and resilience in rural communities. The paper is relevant to development professionals and agriculture researchers and proposes further research questions on topics that appear to have an influence on women's role in wheat farming and food systems and women's ability to be successful in securing a wheat-based livelihood.

1. Introduction

Wheat is an important staple crop that contributes to food security: it provides 21% of the food calories and 20% of the protein for more than 4.5 billion people in 94 countries; and sustains 1.2 billion wheat dependent poor, who live on less than US\$ 2 per day. Climate change is expected to reduce wheat production by 20–30%.¹ This literature review focuses on Pakistani males and females living and working in wheat-based food systems and generating a livelihood from wheat. While this review focuses on Pakistan's Punjab and Sindh provinces as the prime wheat growing regions, it is important to point out that other areas of the country grow wheat but are neglected in the literature due to their low yields.

The role of Pakistani women in producing wheat and the way wheat products are used, valued and shared by them is grossly under-researched. The initial search around the basic key words 'rural women', 'agriculture', and 'wheat' did not produce any significant outcome, identifying not so much a paucity of current published literature pertaining to gender in wheat producing regions, but rather a more fundamental and widespread inconsistency about the connection between women and grain crops. Moreover, the crop sector of the small farm

economy remains to a certain degree unexplored by economists and anthropologists alike.

The Pakistan State has historically suppressed women's rights. Consequently, "studies on women in Pakistan have largely been written in the context of the struggle of elite and urban women against the anti-women laws and structural changes that have adversely affected women's lives" (Ali, 2004:129). This important literature has "ignored the experiences of the majority of poor and rural women and women's domestic experiences" (ivi:130). This neglect of rural subject's results in a missed opportunity to learn and, consequently, to engage in improved program design that would contribute to enhanced food security and resilience in rural communities. Rouse (1996) further argues that women's rights have been framed in a teleological grid as histories of progress and setbacks and to overcome these shortcomings we must "return to sources where we find women speaking in nonpublic spaces" (Ali, 2004:129–130).

The review is feminist in nature by the way it is rooted in the realities of daily life; it takes into account gender differences in the division of labor, property rights, and power; and examines how the processes of resource use and their structuring by gender relations manifest themselves in aspects of agrarian society, in the literature, and in agricultural

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: k.druzca@cgiar.org (K. Druzca).¹ <http://www.cgiar.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Wheat-flyer-light.pdf><https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2018.02.007>

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development practice. At the same time the authors reject a focus on women alone as being too narrow and obscuring the male role. They endorse the hypothesis that an exclusive focus on agricultural production would make women fade away into invisibility/illegibility, and they therefore aim at providing alternative entry points into the lives, feelings, concerns and unofficial and informal networks of rural Pakistani women.

Likewise, mediating processes are highly relevant to the way more traditional societies are organized and can illuminate the rationale behind gender norms. Mediating processes are “formal and informal organizations and institutions with regularized practices or patterns of behavior that are structured by rules and norms of societies which have persistent use” (Scoones, 1998:12). The portfolio of resources and activities used by a given household in a given community in pursuit of viable livelihoods is complex to unravel as not only it would include measurable assets and visible outputs, but would also and concurrently be mediated by a great number of social, economic, and policy considerations. Contexts matter; and contexts are laden with political and environmental history, economic trends, demography, social differentiation, and gender inequality. To this end, the review focuses on anthropological literature to highlight the human dynamics, mediating processes (or conditioning factors), norms and values of communities where wheat is grown. A more general knowledge emerges in relation to the life histories and local experiences of small farmers in general, and of poor and marginalized women in particular.

The review finds that despite the dogmatic insistence of the strictness of *pardah* (the code of honor and modesty resulting in the seclusion of women) in public fora, women and men's actual participation in various activities points to the flexibility of the concept. It provides substantial evidence that the spheres of men and women do overlap much more than they are likely to admit. A meaningful relationship emerges from the literature linking women's energies, goals, and interests with home gardens (harvesting vegetables), storage of cereals (post-harvest activities) and natural resources management, especially with livestock tending and animal production. The reasons for these deep connections will be explored, along with observations of the so-called male dominance (patriarchy) and in general of cultural values that are widely held as hindering women's agency in the eyes of Western observers and developers.

The structure of this review is as follows: Theory; Methodology; Review Results - articulated in the sections *The Legibility of Grain Crops; Veiled Work; The Illegibility of Rural Women; Men and Women in the Shadow of Purdah; Beyond the Curtain (on Tiptoe)*; and the Conclusion that the agricultural literature reviewed tends to accept cultural norms and gender roles, rather than question their persistence or attempt to examine them. The agricultural literature tends to focus on yield, crops or climate, rather than people, history and culture. Conversely, the anthropological literature reviewed questions the traditional view of gender and the nature of *pardah* and thus highlights the need for further feminist agriculture research.

2. Theoretical framing

In line with Hawkesworth (2006) gender is used as an analytical category to foster greater equality between the sexes. The intention is to understand how gender operates in the agricultural literature and try to avoid more universal claims about why gender performs a particular social function. Thus, the review analyzes what is typically portrayed as men's greater and women's lesser powers of action and how these gender demarcations manifest in wheat (and in more general agricultural) literature.

A feminist standpoint theory is applied to the review to disclose alternative stances and stakes in the literature. This analysis “affords greater awareness of potential sources of error and a commitment to heightened interrogation of precisely that which is taken as unproblematic in competing accounts” (Hawkesworth, 2006:206). A feminist

standpoint analysis involves several steps (ivi:173–5):

- Step 1 - Construct alternative standpoints by collecting and synthesizing as many competing views of the subject under investigation as time allows;
- Step 2 - Acknowledge the partiality and contentiousness of comparing competing claims and methods.

In line with step 2, and Haraway (1988:193) who argues that ‘unlocatable’ knowledge claims are irresponsible, the situated knowledge of the reviewers is acknowledged. One reviewer is Australian with a background in political economy and women's economic empowerment research in Asia and the Pacific and currently works for CIMMYT based in Ethiopia. The other Italian reviewer was a consultant for the institute; an anthropologist academic with experience in African food systems from a gender perspective. Both are self-declared feminists. It is from this position that they review this work.

- Step 3 - Compare theoretical assumptions and empirical claims in conflicting accounts;
- Step 4 - Present the alternative views fairly while avoiding caricatures.

According to Clough (1994) a feminist standpoint analysis proposes to make women's experiences the point of departure. Originating from Marxist class relations, “(s)andpoint theory is an epistemology, an account of the evolution of knowledge and strategies of action by particular collectivities in specific social relations in given periods” (Cockburn, 2015:331). Hartsock (1985:231) explores the idea that women's life activity, including housework and reproduction, might be considered the source of a specific feminist standpoint. Drawing on Marx, she argues that material life sets limits on the understanding of social relations for a given class or a given sex, and can (re)structure social life. Therefore, women's lives “make available a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy, a vantage point that can ground a powerful critique of the phallographic institutions and ideology that constitute the capitalist form of patriarchy” (ibid.). ‘Subjugated’ standpoints are preferred because they are the one's missing from dominant discourse and knowledge, and promise more transforming accounts of the world (Haraway 1988:191).

A feminist standpoint analysis should help to confront and critique “problematic assumptions that impair an objective grasp of the complex issues confronting contemporary political life” (Hawkesworth, 2006:206) as well as to increase the reader's understanding of “women's experience, both in the past and present, and promote our appreciation of women's value in the world” (Tyson, 2015:119). The review aims to apply such militant theoretical perspective to the case of rural women in contemporary Pakistan, whose invisibility mainly persist because of a very limited understanding of the rural household economy. Gender plays in this entity a highly functional role by splitting the livelihood strategies into extra-verted and intro-verted modes respectively; one dominated by men who seek to gain income and prestige through market relations, and the other by women who rely more on familial relationships in maintaining non-market reciprocal exchanges to ensure survival and improve livelihood security.

This neglected and gendered nuance of the rural household economy draws attention to the concept of ‘legibility’ as outlined in *Seeing Like a State* by James Scott (1998). According to the author, the State “sees” the country through the eyes (and interests) of the ruling elites who develop policies and dominate the State apparatus. In doing so, the State chooses to “see” those it considers full citizens and structures societies to make their human and economic fabric legible. In the quest for legibility, the population is arranged in ways that simplify State functions (e.g., via taxation, conscription, and the prevention of rebellion). As such ‘seeing like a State’ or ‘legibility’ is often achieved by geographical concentration of the population; increasing uniformity in

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