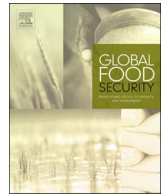




Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

## Global Food Security

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/gfs](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/gfs)

## Women in agriculture: Four myths

Cheryl Doss<sup>a,b</sup>, Ruth Meinzen-Dick<sup>a,\*</sup>, Agnes Quisumbing<sup>a</sup>, Sophie Theis<sup>a</sup><sup>a</sup> International Food Policy Research Institute, IFPRI, 2033 K St Nw, 20036 Washington, DC, United States<sup>b</sup> Oxford Department of International Development, University of Oxford, 3 Mansfield Drive, Oxford, United Kingdom

## A B S T R A C T

Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG) on gender equality and women's rights and at least 11 of the 17 SDGs require indicators related to gender dynamics. Despite the need for reliable indicators, stylized facts on women, agriculture, and the environment persist. This paper analyzes four gender myths: 1) 70% of the world's poor are women; 2) Women produce 60 to 80% of the world's food; 3) Women own 1% of the world's land; and 4) Women are better stewards of the environment. After reviewing the conceptual and empirical literature, the paper presents the kernel of truth underlying each myth, questions its underlying assumptions and implications, and examines how it hinders us from developing effective food security policies.

## 1. Introduction

As the global community mobilizes in support of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality and women's rights, at least 11 of the 17 SDGs require indicators related to gender dynamics. Goal 2, ending world hunger, explicitly mentions addressing the constraints for women small-scale food producers and the nutritional needs of women and adolescent girls. This has contributed to a growing demand for nuanced and accurate data on women's contributions to food security. Despite this emerging global movement for reliable indicators, well-intentioned but statistically unfounded stylized facts on women, agriculture, and the environment continue to circulate. This paper inspects four pervasive gender myths: 1) Women account for 70% of the world's poor; 2) Women produce 60–80% of the world's food; 3) Women own 1% of the world's land; and 4) Women are better stewards of the environment.

These claims are myths. Like all myths, they embody an important truth, in this case that women control fewer resources than those required to fulfill their responsibilities to ensure food and nutrition security for themselves and their families. However, none of these myths are based on sound empirical evidence. While intended to highlight rural women's contributions to food security and natural resource management despite inequality and discrimination, these stylized facts promote stereotypes of women as either victims or saviors; treat women as a monolithic group; ignore the role of men, communities, and institutions; and provide a simplistic and even misleading basis for the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies and programs to

promote food security and advance gender equality.

These stylized facts give the impression that they are based on data that are conceptually sound, adequately measured, and statistically representative, when the reality is the reverse. Not only are the underlying data not available, but it is also unclear what data would be needed to support these claims, because the concepts behind the statements are not straightforward. To develop effective policies to promote food security, it is necessary to have appropriate data on women's and men's roles in food production and natural resource management and the gendered constraints that they face. By evaluating the data and assumptions behind these myths, we contribute to both the academic and policy conversations on gender and rural development, making the case for collecting and using better data to capture the variation—over space and time—in the roles and status of women.

## 2. Myth 1: 70% of the world's poor are women

One of the most enduring myths about gender is that 70% of the world's poor are women (UNDP, 1995). Although it is well-documented that women (and girls) worldwide are disadvantaged in terms of schooling, command fewer resources such as land and assets, have earnings and productivity gaps relative to men, and are disadvantaged in terms of voice in their households and society (World Bank, 2012; FAO, 2011), the assertion that women comprise 70% of the world's poor has been challenged as far back as the late 1990s.<sup>1</sup> One needs to question the data on which this myth is based. The most commonly used poverty measures are calculated from income and expenditure

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [r.meinzen-dick@cgiar.org](mailto:r.meinzen-dick@cgiar.org) (R. Meinzen-Dick).<sup>1</sup> Chant (2006) traces the origin of this myth to the 1990s, catalyzed by the Fourth United Nations Conference on Women in 1995, and which this figure was asserted, and eliminating the “burden of poverty on women: was adopted as one of the 12 critical areas of the Beijing Platform for Action (Chant, 2006, p. 202).<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2017.10.001>

Received 31 July 2017; Received in revised form 11 October 2017; Accepted 14 October 2017

2211-9124/ © 2017 The Authors. Published by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

data. Incomes and expenditures are flow variables, measured at a point in time, and thereby provide only a snapshot of poverty levels. In contrast, assets are accumulated over time, provide a more holistic picture, and give a better capacity of people to manage their vulnerability to poverty (Deere et al., 2012). Income, expenditure, and asset data are usually collected at the household level, rather than the individual level.

With household level data, there are two options, both unsatisfactory, for calculating gendered poverty rates. The first is to use the sex of the household head and compare male and female headed households. But this ignores women living in male headed households and men living in female headed households. The second option is to allocate household income, expenditures, or assets across household members. To impute consumption expenditures of individuals, it is necessary to make assumptions about the distribution of consumption expenditures within the household, which are implicit in the use of per capita or per adult equivalent measures (Quisumbing et al., 2001a). The use of per capita measures assumes that all members of a household benefit equally from all the inputs received by a household (Alvarado Merino and Lara, 2016); using adult-equivalent measures adjusts for age and sex composition, but still involves assumptions regarding the distribution of resources within a household.

In contrast, a gendered analysis would calculate poverty by using data on the income, consumption, or assets of individuals, rather than households. (Deere et al., 2012).<sup>2</sup> The main justification for this myth is the alleged predominance of poor, female-headed households, which supposedly contain significantly more female than male members (Marcoux, 1998). But it is not based on individual level data or analysis.

In addition to the flaws of the data on which the myth is based, the myth itself has demographically implausible implications. This assertion implies that men and children make up only 30% of the world's poor, vastly underestimating the number of children in poverty. While “female” includes girls and women, “women” as a demographic category excludes girls (female infants, children, and adolescents), ignoring the different experiences through the lifecycle. Even if this myth were taken to refer to women and girls, the demographic implausibility of this assertion was challenged by Marcoux (1998), who pointed out that, if women accounted for 70% of the world's poor, the global population of the poor in the 1990s would comprise 900 million women and girls and 400 million men and boys, or an excess of about 500 million female poor.

There is some evidence that a larger proportion of female-headed households than male-headed households have incomes (or consumption expenditures) below the poverty line. An early review by Buvinic and Gupta (1997), for example, found that 62% of 61 studies that examined the relationship between headship and poverty concluded that woman-headed households are overrepresented among the poor. However, studies that compare poverty incidence based on headship do not tell us who is living in poverty. Because female-headed households account for a much smaller proportion of the population than male headed households, and female-headed households also tend to be smaller households, there are many more women in absolute terms living in male-headed households than there are women living in female-headed households.

Why does debunking this myth matter for food security? Aside from casting women as victims, rather than as contributors to food security, the focus both on women as disproportionately poor and on female-headed households as more vulnerable to poverty can distort the design

<sup>2</sup> There are, however, practical difficulties to individual-based measures. While some components of income are easy to assign to individuals (for example, wages, salaries, and pensions), there are other income components that are difficult to assign owing to the prevalence of joint production within households, such as agricultural production (Doss, 2014) and family-owned enterprises. Although asset-based approaches are more suitable amenable to assessing individual poverty based on individually-owned assets (Deere et al., 2012), many statistical systems still do not collect sex-disaggregated assets data.

and implementation of programs and policies. First, this view disregards the heterogeneity among women: there are wealthy women as well as poor women, and characteristics other than gender may be more important for program design and targeting. Second, the focus on female headship may mask important differences among female-headed households (Chant, 2008). For example, female heads of households who receive remittances from a migrant husband, maintain social connections to the husband's family, and expect to have their husband return face fundamentally different opportunities and challenges than a widowed female household head.

The challenge of identifying the poor—both women and men—continues to be important for effective food security and anti-poverty programs. We see three challenges for research and practice. First, the discussion above has all focused on monetary indicators (income, consumption) of poverty and do not capture non-monetary aspects of well-being. Differences in such non-monetary measures of wellbeing as power, nutrition, health, and time allocation may be more important indicators of differences in well-being along gender lines. Some social indicators, notably adult and infant mortality rates, may differ more widely across males and females (Sen, 1998).

As Agbodji et al. (2013) state, poverty measures based on income or consumption remain critically important, but they are insufficient to capture the multidimensional aspects of poverty, especially in poor countries. The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative has developed a cross-national methodology for assessing well-being using the Multidimensional Poverty Index, based on additive and decomposable Alkire and Foster (2011). Agbodji et al. (2013) use nationally representative household surveys from Burkina Faso and Togo to examine inter-country differences in gender inequality. The dimensions of wellbeing considered include some shared by household members, including housing, basic utilities, and assets, and individual-specific aspects, such as education, employment and access to credit. They find both disparities between women and men in terms of multidimensional poverty and sources of inequality that vary across countries and regions. Inequalities in education and employment largely explain gender inequality in Burkina Faso, while those in assets, access to credit and employment are the main sources in Togo.

Second, we need to pay more attention to the measurement of individual incomes, consumption, and assets. The Gender Asset Gap project, the Gender, Agriculture, and Asset Project (GAAP), the LSMS-ISA surveys, Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) and the Evidence and Data for Gender Equality (EDGE) project are examples of a few efforts to capture information on use, ownership, and control of assets both individually and jointly.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, better measurement and identification of the areas where deprivations are greatest for both men and women should be used to guide the design and implementation of programs that aim to improve food security for the poor.

### 3. Myth 2: Women produce 60–80% of the food

The second myth is that women are the primary food producers in the world. Variations on this claim that women produce 60–80% of food are common. This claim is often made to demonstrate the importance of women's role in agriculture and thus the need to direct policies towards women farmers.

It is well documented that women farmers have less access to land, information, capital and credit, and other inputs than men farmers (see

<sup>3</sup> See <http://genderassetgap.org/>, <http://gaap.ifpri.info>, and <https://unstats.un.org/edge/>. The LSMS-ISA surveys (<http://go.worldbank.org/IU0DQRK6G0>), in particular, are now available for a range of countries in Africa. Some of the more recent ones collect sex-disaggregated information on land ownership, land management and control of harvest. In addition, LSMS-ISA surveys collect information on individual incomes and some even collect individual-level information on various assets, though those are often reported by a proxy rather than by the owner/holder himself/herself.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7454473>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7454473>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)