

# **The Economic Empowerment of Women in Agriculture in Africa and South Asia**

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## **Executive Summary**

### **1. THE CONCEPT**

The male bias in the gender mix in Africa's agricultural institutions is sobering. In ten countries in Africa, 90 percent or more of the agricultural scientists are male (Figure 1). Moreover, the research and knowledge base on how to help increase the economic empowerment of women in Africa is patchy even though women are major producers of food crops, important traders in local markets and diligent workers in non farm employment. Part of this reason for the gender gap is a carry over from early gender research that focused on whether women worked longer hours than men and whether they gained or lost in the commercialization of farming. For example, when Ester Boserup published her path-breaking book *Woman's Role in Economic Development* (1970), she charged that women "lose in the development process" because agricultural development projects can lead to an increase in women's work load and a reduction in the workload of men. But Boserup's assertion was not supported by rigorous empirical research. To test the Boserup hypothesis, Spencer (1976) carried out a study of an agricultural development project in Sierra Leone and found that the new technology increased women's work load slightly but the increase was much less than the increase in the workload of adult males and children. Spencer rejected Boserup's emphasis on the number of hours worked and called for research on the returns per hour of work and the profitability of farming. But after decades of research, there is a lack of understanding on how to help rural women gain economic empowerment through three pathways out of poverty: farming, rural nonfarm employment and migration to market towns and cities.

### **2. RATIONALE AND EVIDENCE THAT THE PROJECT CAN BE SUCCESSFUL**

. There is currently a lack of information about policies and strategies on how to address gender issues within Africa and between Africa and South Asia. This project is a study of the three economic empowerment pathways for women (farming, rural non farm employment and migration) in two countries in Asia and two in Africa. It is complex and time consuming because, as Boettiger has pointed out, there is an array of subtle and complex questions that have to be addressed in studies of female farmers etc. The four country studies will take two to four years to complete but we believe that the payoff would be high. Agriculture is the most important pathway out of poverty and it will be the centerpiece of the four country study. We now turn to some of the issues to be studied in the agricultural pathway option:

\* The economic empowerment of rural women in farming hinges on their ability to garner access to resources (e.g. land, credit, education) and timely information about

prices and markets. The task is to study the ability of female farmers to generate new income streams from higher yielding food crops and higher value export crops through the use of improved varieties and agronomic and market information diets, higher value foods and export crops and access to global supply chains. For example, a study in southern Ghana found that because women had lower soil fertility on their food plots (food grown around their compounds for their families) and less access to credit, they were less likely to plant pineapples, a profitable export crop. But as Boettiger points out, farm management and marketing studies of female farmers are far more complex than those for male farmers because in studies of female pathways out of poverty, special attention in rural surveys must be given to local knowledge, and how to make content relevant locally.. Finally content must be studied in depth because research has shown that different types of content varies in value when it is created in a global setting (eg CGIAR research), or in a sub region or an individual country or a village. Other issues to study are why do males often fail to pass on new extension advice to female farmers.

\*The second pathway is non farm employment that accounts for about 25 percent of the hours worked by women in rural areas in Africa. Here the emphasis is on the need for skill training for local off farm firms.

\*the thirds pathways is migration and the critical role of education in teaching new skills for more complex markets.

Clearly the most promising pathway out of poverty for women is wage labor and high value agriculture (vegetable, fruit and flowers) because these jobs provide about twice as much labor input per hectare of cereal production and additional off farm jobs in processing, packaging and marketing(/World Bank 2008).

### **3. EXPECTED BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT INCLUDING COMMENTS ON SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALE**

Concentrating on designing and executing a four country comparative study of the economic empowerment of women in agriculture can pay large dividends because the current research and donor funded action programs for women are poorly designed and poorly evaluated. For example, the World Bank' issued an Operational Policy on Gender dimensions in 1994 and cranked out a string of recent books on mainstreaming women but they rely heavily on secondary data.

#### **4. HOW THE PROJECT WILL TARGET THE NEEDS AND BE OF SPECIFIC BENEFIT TO WOMEN SMALLHOLDERS**

SEE ABOVE

#### **5. PROJECTED COSTS OF THE PROJECT**

#### **6. MEASURES OF SUCCESS**

1. Generation of primary data sets on the economic empowerment of women in agriculture will help the governments of developing countries and donor agencies have access to more accurate information on a range of issues that are crucial to the success of women's projects:

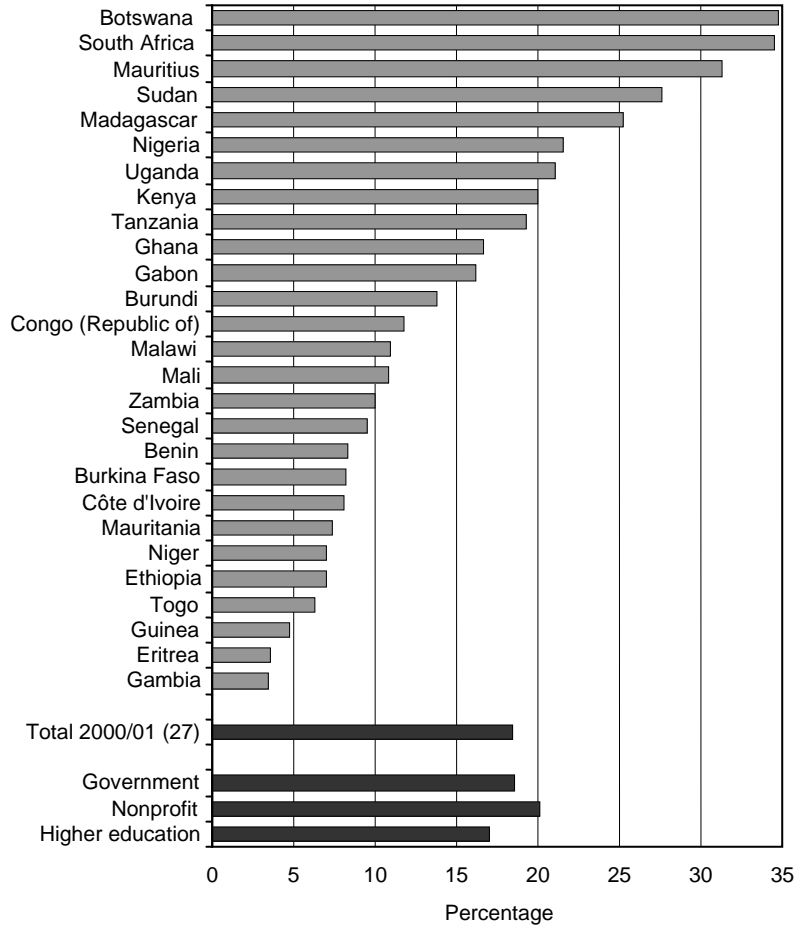
- \*inventory of information needs
- \*localization and ensuring content, by, for, and about women's' issues
- \*gender
- \*.farmers' voice
- \*.credibility
- \*technology adoption
- \*accreditation
- \*time sensitivity
- \*Value of networks
- \*integration of ICT with existing information systems

#### **7. RISKS**

#### **REFERENCES**

1. Boserup, Ester. 1972. *Women's Role in Economic Development*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
2. Spencer, D. 1976. *African Women In Agricultural Development: A Case Study In Sierra Leone*. Washington DC: Overseas Liaison Committee, American Council on Education.
3. World Bank. 2008. *World Development Report 2008: Agriculture for Development*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.
4. Sara Boettiger. 2008.

**Figure 1—Africa: Share of female agricultural research staff by country, 2000**



Source: Beintema and Gert-Jan Stads (2006)  
 Compiled by authors from datasets underlying the ASTI Country Briefs.