Gender Inequalities and Rural Development – Plugging the Gap

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ABSTRACT
Rural development mean all round integrated development of rural areas to include human development, social development, eco-development, economic development, physical development and to reduce vulnerabilities and uncertainties. Women are playing, can play and should play an important in all aspects and dimensions of rural development. The yawning gender gaps in resource endowment and control over family income undermines their role and contribution. Achieving gender equality requires institutional changes that address interlocking deprivations. Thus women’s access to better paid, more secure jobs is not only beneficial to them and their families, but also to the growth of the wider economy. By plugging gender gaps their potentials could be effectively, efficiently and productively utilized. Government initiatives directed at closing gender gaps in human endowments, promoting women’s access to economic opportunities, closing gender gaps in voice and agency, preventing intergenerational reproduction of gender inequality and supporting evidence-based public action can bridge gender gaps and accelerate rural development.

KEYWORDS: Rural Development, Gender Equality, Gender Gaps, Agricultural Development

1. INTRODUCTION
Rural development has traditionally centered on nature based activities such as agriculture and forestry but it is not synonymous with agricultural development. Task Force of the Planning Commission observed however noted that “we have chosen to equate it(rural development) with agricultural development in the widest sense so as to embrace, besides crop husbandry, all the allied activities”(Government of India, 1972:4). The Report of the Committee on Restructuring of District Rural Development Authority(DRDA) suggested that strategy for rural development would have to include (Government of India, 2012:24-25) (i) Human development focusing on the wellbeing of the individual, family and the community through adequate provisioning of health and education. (ii) Social Development ensuring gender justice, social justice and proactive inclusion of the differently abled and the destitute. (iii) Eco-development trying to regenerate natural resources and attempting their sustainable utilization. (iv) Economic development focusing on livelihoods to generate employment and
income covering agriculture, both traditional and commercial, and development of appropriate manufacturing and services. (v) Physical development including housing, sanitation, water supply, power and mobility and (vi) To reduce vulnerabilities and uncertainties a robust social protection umbrella. All dimensions of rural development is closely related to gender issues directly or indirectly.

The empowerment of women by providing them equal opportunities is fundamental to poverty reduction, hunger and malnutrition. Economically and socially empowered women could be catalytic force for change. Men are innately integrated into development process by virtue of greater prominence given to their work in comparison to women. Women farmers are viewed only as a family labour with no decision-making power and are overlooked in every planning and decision making process. The policy and planning view farming system from as a household affair where every member of household follow decisions of the male head. One of the key reasons for underperformance of agriculture in many developing countries is the unequal access to the resources and opportunities. If rural women are given access to the same resources and opportunities as men, women can produce more and better. Experiences from India show that with government intervention and encouragement poor women were able to assert their rights to resources and increase their income through self employment activities in informal sector.In rural areas women make significant contributions to agricultural production besides playing an important role in running households. But the inequalities between women and men make it difficult for women to fulfill their potential (IFAD:1).

Kabeer (2007) recognized gender-specific constraints on women’s ability to control and decide the manner in which their earnings are spent. Though women’s earnings can make a critical difference in pulling their households out of poverty, the adverse conditions that characterize informal rural labour markets impact their capacity to exchange the wages and earnings for a decent standard of living, including an adequate and sustainable supply of food. FAO (2011a) presents gender-specific gap in access to resources and opportunities and empirical evidences on the role of women in agriculture and rural development. FAO (2011a) highlighted that reducing the gap between male and female farmers in access to productive resources, assets and inputs could raise farm production on women farms by 20-30 percent. This would generate significant gains in agricultural production and could reduce the number of undernourished people in the world by 12-17 percent. Given that an estimated 925 million people in the world were undernourished in 2010 (FAO, 2010a) gains of this magnitude could mean 100 to 150 million fewer people living in hunger. The gains could be even greater for countries where women play a major role in the agricultural sector and hunger is more common.

In their seminal paper Budlender et. al. (2002:5) argues that national budgets generally underestimate women’s contribution to the macro economy, discount the unpaid economy in which women perform most of the work of caring.
for and maintaining the labour force and the social framework, and disregard the effect that gender relations and the gender distribution of resources have on total production, savings, investment, etc. King and Mason (2001:xii) emphasized that gender inequalities undermine the effectiveness of development policies in fundamental ways. Yet, this issue is given marginal importance at policy dialogue and decision-making, both at national and international level. Research on economic growth and education shows that failing to invest in female education lowers the gross national product (GNP). Everything else being equal, countries in which the ratio of female-to-male enrolment in primary or secondary education is less than 0.75 can expect levels of GNP that are roughly 25 per cent lower than countries in which there is less gender disparity in education (Hill and King, 1995).

2. DEFICITS FOR WOMEN

Women all over the world face economic and social inequalities and restructuring programs had increased these inequalities. In spite of increasing representation in paid labour jobs they face inequalities in wages and earnings. The voices and concerns of rural women are little heard at national and global levels for two reasons. First, rural women are less represented than men in governance processes and in rural organizations and second, participation expose them to increased risk of a social backlash or even violence. This is despite the fact that rural women are very active mobilizers and in a wide range of social, economic and financial functions. Gender inequality is present in access to or control over land, financial services, productive resources, and extension or marketing services.

Government of India Report titled ‘Men and Women in India-16th issue’ highlighted that the workforce participation rate for females is 25.51% against 53.26% for males. Rural sector has a better female workforce participation rate of 30.02% compared with 53.03% for males in urban sector. The participation rate of females trails at 15.44% against 53.76% for males. 41.1% of female main and marginal workers are agricultural laborers, 24.0% are cultivators, 5.7% are household industry workers and 29.2% are engaged in other works. Report further highlighted inequalities as women occupied only 7 out of 45 Ministerial positions in the Central Council of Ministers, which is a little more than 15%. 62 females have been elected in 2014 Elections constituting more than 11% share in the Lower House. In the states, women share is only 8% in assemblies and only 4% in State Councils. Similarly there were 2 women judges out of 30 judges in the Supreme Court and there were only 58 women judges out of 609 judges in different High Courts with maximum 25% in Delhi High Court and no women judge in 6 High Courts. Only 20.5% women were employed in the organized sector in 2011 with 18.1% working in the public sector and 24.3% in the private. During 2011-12, the average wage/salary received by regular wage/salaried employees of economically active age group was Rs. 428.66 per day for females compared with Rs. 550.23 per day for males in rural areas. For urban areas, it was Rs. 609.7 and Rs. 805.52 per day for females and males respectively. There were 76 female teachers per 100 male teachers in primary schools,
80 in middle schools and 65 in secondary schools during 2010-11.

Noble laureate Amartya Sen (2001) takes a comprehensive and deeply concerned look at the "many faces of gender inequality." and emphasized the need to "take a plural view of gender inequality." Sen highlighted that gender inequality is not one homogeneous phenomenon, but a collection of disparate and interlinked problems and inequalities between women and men can take very many different forms. Sen underlined seven types of inequalities - mortality inequality, natality inequality, basic facility inequality, special opportunity inequality, professional inequality, ownership inequality and household inequality. Achieving gender equality requires questioning, changing or realigning social institutions is crucial to address interlocking deprivations for women. Women’s access to better paid secure jobs is beneficial not only to them but to the growth of the economy. There are cases where governments have taken important initiatives to change norms and institutions contributing to poverty through gender inequalities, for instance, by reforming family codes regulating marriage and inheritance matters (e.g. in Tunisia) and by promoting gender-equalizing land legislation (e.g. in China, Mozambique). However, at the local level gender norms tend to change slowly, even in the presence of progressive policy changes. Change at this level occurs usually as a result of a combination of: women’s economic empowerment; women’s growing awareness of their rights as individuals and citizens (including through better access to education); capacity building for women and women’s organizations; and sensitization and debate involving women, men and local authorities. In other words, policy change is very important, but it also needs to be accompanied by efforts to strengthen individual and collective capabilities on the ground. Poor women, in particular, may initially need to build separate organisations to take care of the double burden of being women and being poor.

3. GENDER EQUALITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The relationship between gender equality and economic development has gained importance in a decade or two. There are a growing number of studies exploring these relationships, generally using cross-country regression analysis. Kabeer and Natali (2013) provides a comprehensive review of the literature exploring this relationship and concluded that ‘They (the studies reviewed) are characterised by varying degrees of methodological rigour to take account of the problems associated with econometric analysis at this highly aggregated level, including the problems of reverse causality. Bearing these problems in mind, a review of this literature suggests that the relationship between gender equality and economic growth is an asymmetrical one. The evidence that gender equality, particularly in education and employment, contributes to economic growth is far more consistent and robust than the relationship that economic growth contributes to gender equality in terms of health, wellbeing and rights.’ In 1975, when the World Conference of the International Women’s Year was held at Mexico City, the
discourse on women’s advancement and its relation with the development process has evolved. Essentially, it has shifted in focus from the intellectual and political approach of “women in development” (WID) to the new approach of “gender and development” (GAD). More recently “gender mainstreaming” has emerged as a strategy to promote gender equality [UN 1999: 5]. Recent United Nations (2014: 12) report ‘World Survey on the Role of Women in Development 2014’ recognized centrality of gender equality, women’s empowerment and the realization of women’s rights in achieving sustainable development.

4. WOMEN AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Women play a decisive role in the rural economies of both developed and developing countries. World over they participate in many agriculture and village based activities such as crop production, livestock care, preparing food, collecting fuels, carrying water for families and carryout important reproductive functions in caring for children, older persons and the sick (United Nations, 2008:1). Food and Agriculture Organisation Report (FAO, 2011a) highlighted the contribution of women to the agricultural sector in many developing countries. Many rural women are not only food producers but they also have the primary responsibility for food distribution at the household level. Women’s contribution to food production and food security, however, continues to be constrained by their unequal access to essential resources and technologies, tools, assets and services, including land ownership and access to extension services (UN, 2008: 10). Women living in rural areas play an essential role to effectively mitigate and adapt to climate change and ensure more sustainable rural development. Rural women often depend on access to natural resources for food and fuel, and they are often more aware of the urgency to manage resources in a sustainable manner and to preserve biological diversity. Rural women often have specific forms of knowledge and social capital, and they play crucial roles in the rural economy – both on- and off-farm [IFAD, 2011, p.60]. Their working hours are longer than men’s, and they often include considerable drudgery – for instance, in many areas women spend significant time and great energy fetching water and fuel for their households, with important consequences for women’s time-poor health [Carr and Hartl, 2010). The experience of SGSY and other schemes also shows that women can be effective, efficient and successful entrepreneurs. It was observed that women groups are found to be very inventive and keep on generating new ideas based on their field experiences. What is required is to put in place proper institutions to make the new ideas operational. Evidence of inventiveness was displayed in some parts of the country (Report on Credit related issues under SGSY, 2009:97).

Rural communities, where some 70 percent of the world’s rural poor are concentrated, generally rely on agriculture, forestry, fisheries and livestock for their livelihoods. Within those communities, the poorest of the poor are often women and are involved more in agricultural and informal activities than man. Rural women face constraints such as lack of control over productive resources, lack of social or
economic power, lack of education and training, poor health and lack of time. FAO(2010b: 11) highlighted some of the factors that may push women into a disadvantaged economic position relative to men in terms of the returns to their labour are: (a) women are disproportionately employed in low-quality jobs, including jobs in which their rights are not adequately respected and social protection is limited (b) the gender gap in earnings (partly as a consequence of high segmentation; women earn less for a given type of work than do men – usually for both wage employment and self-employment); and (c) fewer hours of paid work but overall larger work burdens (due to competing demands of care responsibilities and non-market work, women spend less time on average in remunerated work, which lowers their total labour income and is likely to increase stress and fatigue). Gender equality enhance the potential for women to contribute to the overall development and well-being.

Plugging the gender gap can enhance productivity of the rural households. Removing gender gap need to be given highest priority. FAO(2011: 10) conference on ‘The Vital Role of Women in Agriculture and Rural Development’ presents specific recommendations for closing the gender gap in access to land, rural labour markets, financial services, social capital and technology, include the following steps:

**A. Closing the Gap in Access to Land**

- Eliminate Discrimination under the Law:
- Recognize the Importance and Power of Customary Land Rights:
- Educate Officials and Evaluate them on Gender Targets
- Educate Women Regarding Land Rights:
- Ensure that Women’s Voices are Heard
- Gather Sex-Disaggregated Data for Policy Design and Monitoring:
- Gathering sex-disaggregated data can help improve the design and effectiveness of land-titling programmes.

**B. Closing the Gap in Rural Labour Markets**

- Target Women’s Multiple Trade-Offs
- Reduce Gender Inequalities in Human Capital
- Capitalize on Public Works Programmes
- Strengthen Women’s Rights and Voice

**C. Closing the Financial Service Gap**

- Promote Financial Literacy
- Design Products that Meet the Needs of Women

**D. Closing the Gap in Social Capital through Women's Groups**

- Building women’s social capital
- Promoting Self-help groups

**E. Closing the Technology Gap**

- Inventing Farm tools predominantly used by women
Promoting Farmer-field schools  
Extension services for diffusing technology

The efforts should be prioritized for maximizing effectiveness. World Development Report (2012) observed that for prioritizing and identification of gap the following three criteria can be used for evaluating (i) Identifying gender gaps that are most significant for enhancing welfare and sustaining development and where the likely payoffs for development are likely to be the largest. (ii) Locating the gaps which persist even as countries get richer, that is, where higher incomes by themselves do little to reduce disparities and (iii) for the

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<td>Providing financial support</td>
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<td>Increasing access to clean water</td>
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<td>Increasing access to specialized maternal services</td>
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<td>Strengthening support for prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS</td>
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<td>Promoting women’s access to economic opportunities</td>
<td>Increasing access to child care and early childhood development</td>
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<td>Investing in rural women</td>
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<td>Closing gender gaps in voice and agency</td>
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<td>Shifting norms regarding violence against women</td>
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The Agenda for Global Action at a Glance

Priority areas where there has been a) Reducing gender gaps in human capital endowments (addressing excess female mortality and eliminating pockets of
gender disadvantage in education where they persist)

b) Closing earnings and productivity gaps between women and men

c) Shrinking gender differences in voice

d) Limiting the reproduction of gender inequality over time, whether it is through endowments, economic opportunities, or agency.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Women are playing, can play and should play an important in all aspects and dimensions of rural development. The yawning gender gaps in resource endowment and control over family income undermines their role and contribution. Achieving gender equality requires institutional changes that address interlocking deprivations. Thus women’s access to better paid, more secure jobs is not only beneficial to them and their families, but also to the growth of the wider economy. By plugging gender gaps their potentials could be effectively, efficiently and productively utilized. Government initiatives directed at closing gender gaps in human endowments, promoting women’s access to economic opportunities, closing gender gaps in voice and agency, preventing intergenerational reproduction of gender inequality and supporting evidence-based public action can bridge gender gaps and accelerate rural development.

REFERENCES


