



Association of Nepalese Agricultural Professionals of Americas (NAPA)

Email : napa2072@gmail.com

Website : www.napaamericas.org

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Gender Assessment in Agriculture Sector: Policy and Plans of Nepal

Milan Adhikary, Ph.D.*

Abstract

Agriculture contributes to about one-third of the national economy in Nepal and is still the source of livelihood for majority of the population. Out of the total labor force in agriculture, women constitute a significant proportion. Over the years, Nepal has reckoned the importance of women's empowerment and mainstreaming gender in the agriculture sector for overall agricultural development. Accordingly, the Government of Nepal (GoN) has made efforts to reflect gender equality and concerns around women's empowerment in various legislations, plans and agricultural policies. However, at the same time, an adequate level of improvement in legal provisions, development programs, and budget for gender equality were not translated into agriculture development process. As a consequence, gender inequalities which persist in agriculture sector has affected its development. The Government needs to address gender equality concerns in agriculture sector through strengthening responsive mechanisms and providing adequate resources for achieving gender equality at both the macro and micro levels if it is to meet Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

*Country Coordinator
Winrock International-CLEAR II project
Jhamsikhel-3, Lalitpur, Kathmandu Nepal
Cell: +977-9841577396
Phone: +977-1-4015175
Email: milan.adhikary@gmail.com

Introduction

Agriculture is still the mainstay and livelihood for 64% of the total population in Nepal. Women account for nearly 77 % of the labor force in agriculture, contributing about one-third of the economy (CBS, 2014). Human Development Report (2015) reveals that 41.4% of Nepal's population are multidimensional poor which is attributed to the decline in agriculture growth from 2.84% in the last decade to 1.14% in 2014/15. The year 2015/16 experienced a sharp fall in the crop and livestock productivity in comparison to the previous years (GoN, 2016). Consequently, Nepal lags behind many countries in South Asia. In 2017 female Human Development Index for Nepal was 0.552 in contrast with 0.598 for males, resulting in a GDI value of 0.925. Nepal had a Gender Inequality Index (GII) value of 0.480, ranking it 118 out of 160 countries in the 2017 index.

Mainstreaming gender concerns in national development policies, strategies, plans and programs is vital not only for achieving gender equality but also for graduating the country from least developed status by 2022 (NPC, 2013). Recognizing this fact, the Government of Nepal (GoN) has promoted gender equity and social inclusion (GESI) as an important mechanism to enhance the contribution of agriculture to poverty and vulnerability reduction initiatives. This is increasingly making its way into policies and strategies in keeping up with Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) recommendations (CEDAW, 2011). Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development (MoALD) has also adopted GESI approaches to reduce gender, ethnic and caste-related disparities in the agriculture sector. The GoN has launched various policies, strategies, plans and programs aimed at mainstreaming gender in agriculture and to promote gender equality. The MoALD has recently approved the twenty-year Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS) for the overall advancement of agricultural

sector emphasizing to the integration of GESI throughout the ADS design process.

Problem Statement

The new constitution promotes policies for agricultural land reforms and discourages absentee land ownership. However, women's ownership of land is still constrained (UN Women, 2015). The absence of legislation supporting women's property rights and the prevalence of traditional practices restrict women's rights upheld in the new constitution.

Much of the workforce employed in agriculture are subsistence producers (70%). Among them women have a very significant share, i.e., 84% vs. 62% for men. The proportion of girls (5-14 years) in agricultural occupations has also increased from 63% in 2001 to 69% in 2011, which is about 15% higher than that of boys in 2011 (CBS, 2014). All this has caused a shift of women into the agriculture labor force that could be correlated with higher male migration rates, indicating an increasing feminization of agriculture (CBS, 2014). In general, government policy is limited to meeting targets of women's participation in programs and projects rather than in addressing the root causes of gender inequalities in the agriculture sector. Despite legal provisions to pay equal wages for both men and women, studies have shown a persistent gender-biased wage gap throughout the country, which is especially visible in agriculture. Women receive wages about 50% lower than that of men (UNESCO, 2015). Evidence shows poor performance of farms managed by women compared to men. This difference is attributed to the gender inequalities, particularly in accessing, adopting and using technologies, weak decision-making and bargaining power, triple-work burden, limited knowledge about market demand and supply, as well as restricted opportunities for micro-enterprises and agriculture businesses.

With the advent of democracy, Nepal has amended several discriminatory legal acts and enacted gender parity laws. However, challenges and obstacles remain in putting these laws into practice. Efforts to advance gender equality are often limited to policy papers. An in-depth analysis of the agricultural sector from a gender perspective at both macro (policy) and micro (community and household) levels to attain sustainable agricultural development of the country has been urgent.

Gender Concerns in National Plans, Policies and Institutions in Agriculture Sector

National Constitution (2015)

Nepal's new constitution promulgated in 2015 upheld the rights of farmers to access land. The constitution pursues state policies of reforming agricultural lands and discourages absentee land ownership while women's ownership of land is still constrained (UN Women, 2015). In the absence of supporting legislation and the prevalence of traditional practices, women cannot enjoy the rights provided by the constitution in the given context. Besides women, the poor and the excluded ethnic groups lack assets that could serve as collateral to acquire credits for agriculture or related businesses. Therefore, new fundamental rights and directive principles of the constitution require new policies and strategies for their implementation, which will manifestly complement the efforts achieving of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Sustainable Development Goal (2015-2030)

As a member of the global initiatives, Nepal too, has taken responsibility on SDG, endorsed and adopted by UN General Assembly in September 2015. Nepal is aspiring to graduate from the least developed country (LDC) by 2022 and SDG indicators set by GoN will help in accomplishing this objective. Although the Government has set targets and strategies to achieve the SDGs by

2030, under the present context, most of the targets defined under SDG-5 "Gender Equality", such as rights to land and property, universal access to sexual and reproductive health, have still a long way to go before they are realized. Therefore, targets and strategies need reviewing, refining and reorienting. Likewise, it is also true that the SDG-2 "Ending hunger and achieve food security, improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture," is very challenging in view of low investment in the sector mainly due to less priority of donors.

Agricultural Policies

In addition to agricultural policy (2004), several policies have been developed over the years for mainstreaming gender and women empowerment in agriculture sector. The Government of Nepal has approved Agriculture Development Strategy (ADS) (2015-35), for overall advancement of agriculture in 2014. The ADS is an overarching policy adopted by the government aiming for food sufficiency, sustainability, competitiveness, and inclusion (MoAD, 2014). It has given emphasis on the integration of GESI component throughout the ADS process, that is more explicitly integrated into the 'Governance' pillar of the ADS though the GESI inclusion is equally important in other three pillars of productivity, profitable commercialization and competitiveness as well. Nevertheless, the 10-years Plan of Action of ADS, specifies the development of a GESI strategy in agriculture and it recognizes and establishes women farmers' role as an independent farmer and ensures adequate budget provision, women's access to and control over productive resources, and women's leadership, among others.

National Periodic Plans and Gender/Women Focus Program in Agriculture

Until the early 1980's virtually all agricultural policies gave more emphasis on men than women. As a consequence, women farmers were left behind the mainstream of

development. Later, United Nations named the period 1975-85 as the Decade of Women, which coincided with Nepal's sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-85), which recognized the productive role of women for the first time in Nepal's development plans. Since then, Nepal's periodic plan has initiated for women and/or gender integration in agricultural sector. Table 1 illustrates a gender analysis in agricultural sector in various national periodic plan.

Table 1: National Period Plans and gender integration in agriculture sector.

Plans	Integration of women and gender in agricultural sector
Sixth plan (1980-85)	The plan aimed at increasing participation of women in agriculture development through training and marketing facilities through cooperatives. However, the plan could not succeed due to the lack of operational strategy to integrate women.
Seventh plan (1985-90)	Women participation was enhanced with adopting policy of offering 10% quota for women in agriculture training program. Lack of mechanism and strategies to translate policy into action remained to be the major gap.
Eighth plan (1992-97)	Women Farmers' Development Division (WFDD), under the Ministry of Agriculture (MOA) was established in 1992 with mandate of mainstreaming gender issues in all agricultural policies and programs. Equal and meaningful participation of women farmers became the priority. The 'farmers' group' concept was introduced to deliver technological packages, including agricultural inputs. Program implementation through women groups got a priority. The achievement was not satisfactory because women's involvement in the program, including central level training program was not spelled out. These programs were less accessible to rural women.

Ninth plan (1998-2002)	The Government strategized to alleviate poverty through implementation of Agriculture Perspective Plan (1995-2014). To alleviate poverty, the plan emphasized on location specific income generating activities for marginal women through their groups. The achievement was not satisfactory as it missed in-built gender main-streaming mechanism and gender relations. Not mentioning the importance of gender sensitivity to the implementing machineries, rules, and regulations; and lack of monitoring and evaluation procedures, guidelines and indicators for monitoring agricultural programs from gender perspective also affected the outcomes.
Tenth plan (2002-07)	The plan known by Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan (PRSP), endorsed the APP with renewing government's commitment to it. The plan emphasized on social inclusion, by addressing gender and ethnic/caste related disparities as one of the four pillars of the PRSP. The plan set the target of 40-60% women participation in the agricultural programs and also sought to empower women by removing social, legal, economic, and other constraints, which hampered women's access to and use of productive resources. Inadequate legal provisions and budget limitations affected the outcomes.
Eleventh TYIP (2007-10)	The plan envisioned broad-based, gender inclusive and sustainable agricultural growth giving priority to employment in rural agriculture. Opportunities for self-employment through entrepreneurship trainings and service provider trainings and issuing of joint land ownership certificate for men and women were availed. However, the plan failed to

	ensure equitable access of women on land.
Twelfth TYIP (2010-13)	The plan emphasized development and use of agricultural tools that reduce women's workload, save labor and add value. This program did not go well as women are still doing most of the agricultural activities such as weeding, grading and packaging as technology has been limited to household appliances such as improved cooking stoves and use of bio-gas. Besides much of the technologies were targeted for men and ultimate decision-making rested on men.
Thirteenth TYIP (2013-16)	Women groups were promoted in order to enhance their access to agricultural land, technologies and tools through group collateral. However, the financial institution still demands the signatory of husband, which restricts women from effective implementation of their enterprises. Additionally, the high cost for technologies and poor information and dissemination strategy at local as well as national level hindered in adoption. In many cases such technologies were not verified by research and tested among women farmers.
Fourteenth plan approach paper (2016-19)	The plan has provision of access to subsidized loan and credit for entrepreneurship development; supporting business for income generation through self-employment; and quality promotion and market access for the products produced by women's groups or organizations. However, women could not benefit much from this program as they could not transition from production to marketing, and they remain limited to their role as producers. Rather, men were generally engaged in marketing as most of value chain development efforts focused on economic aspects without considering social dimension and gender perspective.

Institutional Machinery and Mechanism

In recent years, efforts have been made by government agencies, civil society organizations and various bilateral and multi-lateral development partners for gender equality, especially on women's right and empowerment to address the various international commitments of Nepal including Sustainable Development Goal, which has envisioned "no one left behind by 2030" (NPC, 2015). Gender concerns in few agencies is discussed below.

Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development (MoALD)

MoALD is the key institution for the advancement of women and gender equality in agriculture. The ministry established "Women Farmer Development Division" within it in 1993. Ever since, the Ministry started integrating women into its training programs. Later, in 2004 the Ministry established Gender Equity and Environmental Division (GEED) which was replaced by Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) section within the Division of Food Security, Agribusiness Promotion and Environment in 2013 with a view to ensure the participation of disadvantaged and marginal groups of women and to support their livelihood (ADB, 2010). Since then, the GESI section acts as a focal point for the gender disaggregated database management and implementation of GESI responsive budget through various programme and projects of MoAD. However, the GESI has limited authority, and inadequate mandate, which is further compounded with limited human resources. In 2014, the MoALD established a five-member Gender Responsive Budget Committee (GRBC) chaired by the Joint Secretary of Planning for the promotion of gender equality (MoALD, 2017), to implement GESI policies, plans and programs. However, the GRBC is not functioning as expected because of the resource constraints and lack of gender auditing.

Agriculture Cooperative

Cooperatives play a significant role in sustaining the country's economic growth and provide opportunity for poor farmers to raise their incomes. Therefore, the ADS emphasized agriculture cooperatives as a fundamental element for the promotion of farmer and women organizations to achieve economies of scale in technology dissemination, marketing and finance. The reason is that agriculture cooperatives help provide access to finance in promotion of agricultural production and business along with providing a platform for the farmers to acquire necessary knowledge and skills in agricultural production and promotion. Although a large number of women are members in agricultural cooperatives, leadership positions, regardless of the nature of cooperatives have a low number of females (Providing opportunity to lead agriculture cooperative by women could be a vital tool for enhancing the socio- economic as well as political status of women and disadvantaged groups in rural Nepal.

Agricultural Extension

The importance of agriculture extension services was recognized by the Government for a very long time and implemented through various models and approaches in the country to support the farmers. However, most of these extension delivery models were top-down, so they could not meet the needs of farmers. The ADS has a vision for effective agriculture research and extension through result-oriented decentralized extension education and research system responsive to farmers and agro-enterprises. The ADS aims to build capacity of government human resources and transform their role from delivery of extension services to facilitator of agricultural extension services through establishing Community Agricultural Extension Service Centers (CAESC) (MoAD, 2014). Agricultural extension services is still weak due to inadequate staff for extension services in the country that accounts one staff for 3,000 population (ADB, 2012). Besides

this, Agriculture Education and Training is focused more on theory than in application. Extension workers lack process skills such as leadership development, and gender equality in farming and extension services. The limited number of women as front-line extension workers are other reasons that cause gender biases in delivering extension messages and information, including agriculture inputs and technologies, to women farmers.

Conclusion

Despite significant contributions of women to agriculture, neither have they been established as autonomous farmers, nor have their skills, knowledge and contributions been well-recognized. Where the Government is concerned, gender equality is often limited to laws and policies, which are not translated into reality for women's empowerment. The new Constitution guarantees the right to access to land for agricultural purpose as farmers' fundamental right, however, women's absolute ownership over land is still constrained. This hinders them to utilize land as collateral to acquire credit for agriculture or business purposes. Even though given the strategic importance of GESI component in ADS, little attention has been given by the concerned Ministry for allocation of budget towards women's empowerment and strengthening the GESI section. Women in leadership positions, whether it is in farmers' organizations, cooperatives, or extension services remain low, reflecting gender inequality in agriculture sector.

Recommendations

- The Gender Responsive Coordination Committee of MoALD needs to advocate with the Ministry of Finance for allocating additional budget to agriculture in view of its contribution to the national GDP and perform regular auditing of gender budget expenses;
- MoALD needs to mobilize the agriculture budget for women empowerment such as entrepreneurship development activities by

involving women in agribusiness related activities;

- MoALD needs to reinforce equal wages policy for both men and women in agriculture and non-agriculture sectors;
- MoALD needs to support in implementing the GESI strategy of the ADS by strengthening the GESI section with proper authority, human capital and adequate financial resources; and
- Incorporate GESI sensitization component in annual agriculture programs for building confidence of women farmer's group, cooperative members and to staffs for GESI-friendly extension services.

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