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Employment, work and time use in agricultural contexts: what data do we need for gender analysis?



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This information brief reviews indicators of work and employment in agriculture from a gender perspective. It highlights the fact that traditional employment indicators, important as they are, underestimate the extent of rural women's activities because they exclude non-employment work. The brief provides examples of gender-disaggregated time-use data that can give a more complete picture of women's and men's workload in agricultural contexts. The brief also offers recommendations for the way forward.

Key messages

- ➔ Globally, women make up more than 40 percent of all of those employed in agriculture. This proportion ranges from 20 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean to around 50 percent in sub-Saharan Africa, and Central, West and East Asia.
- ➔ Typically, agricultural households in developing countries sustain themselves through a combination of employment activities and non-employment activities.
- ➔ In many rural settings, women work considerably longer hours than men when own-use production work and other non-employment work activities are taken into account.
- ➔ Data sources that neglect work outside of employment activities seriously underestimate rural women's contributions.
- ➔ Efforts need to be strengthened to collect reliable sex- and age-disaggregated data on rural people's time spent in employment and non-employment work activities.

Introduction

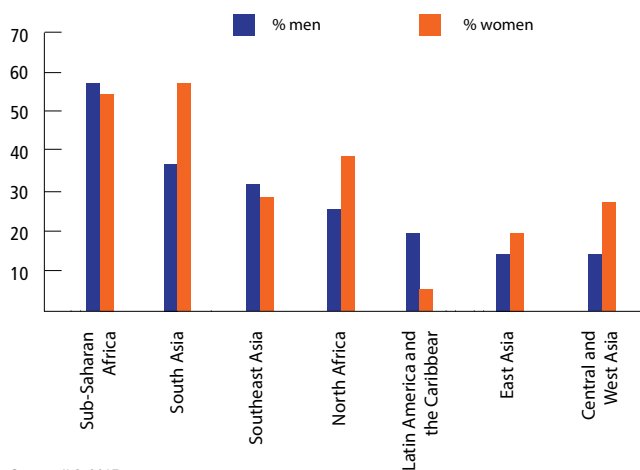
All over the world, women contribute enormously to rural development through their work in agriculture. As a result of male outmigration from rural areas and the growth of commercial farming, women's roles in agriculture are expanding in many countries (FAO, 2017), with significant consequences for food systems and rural societies at large.

Reliable sex-disaggregated indicators are crucial for understanding the differences in men's and women's work within the rural economy. Employment indicators are useful for identifying gaps in men's and women's participation in market-oriented activities. Beyond employment measures, indicators capturing other types of work – particularly own-use production of goods and services – can also shed light on gender differences in work patterns.

Traditional indicators of employment in agriculture

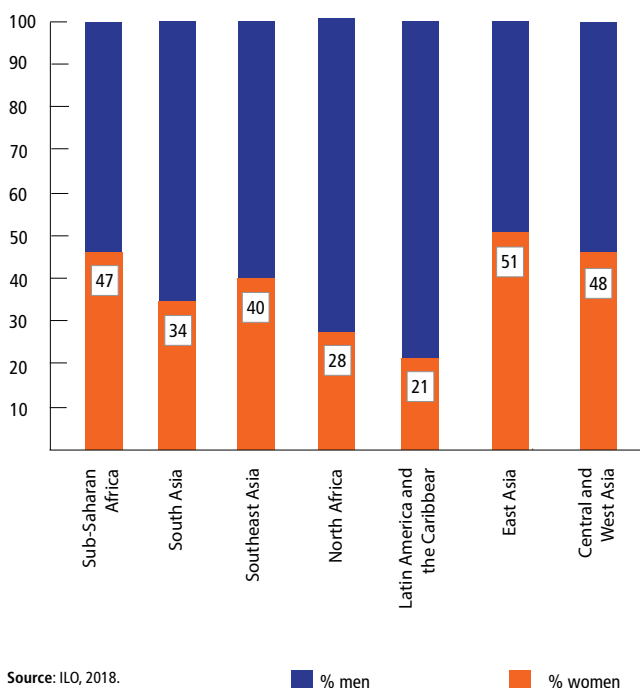
The traditional labour force indicators emphasize employment work, where employment is defined with reference to activities that generate goods or provides services in exchange for cash, other goods or services, or for profit or gain. Employment includes formal and informal wage employment; self-employment activities, including agricultural production for profit; piece rate work; paid domestic work; paid caregiving; and unpaid family labour that contributes to a household or family business, or to a family member's wage employment. In 2017, one-quarter of employed people were employed in the agricultural sector (ILO, 2017). The importance of agriculture as a source of employment, and the share of female employment in agriculture, vary across regions (Figures 1 and 2).

Fig 1. Employment in agriculture (% of employed), 2017 estimates



Source: ILO, 2017.

Fig 2. Women's share of employment in agriculture (%), 2017 estimates

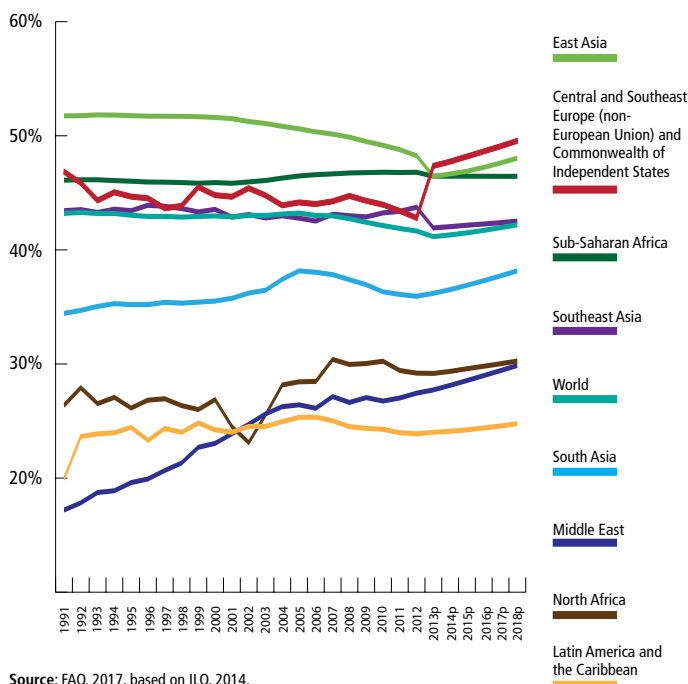


Source: ILO, 2018.

- Globally, approximately 27 percent of employed women are engaged in agricultural activities as their main employment activity. Women make up more than 40 percent of all of those employed in agriculture worldwide.
- In Sub-Saharan Africa, more than half of employed men and women are engaged in agriculture as their main employment activity. Women make up nearly half of agricultural employment.
- In South Asia, fewer women than men are engaged in employment activities in general. However, women make up one-third of agricultural employment, and more than half of employed women are engaged in agriculture as their main employment activity.
- In Latin America and the Caribbean, less than ten percent of employed women are engaged in agriculture as their main employment activity. Women make up one-fifth of agricultural employment.
- In North Africa and Asia, agriculture is more important for women than it is for men in terms of employment.

Figure 3 shows that the share of women in agricultural employment is growing in all developing regions. Exceptions in this regard are East and Southeast Asia where the lack of an upward trend reflects the fact that women already make up about half of the agricultural workforce. Male outmigration from rural areas and the growth of commercial farming are among the key factors driving women's increasing employment in agriculture. The resulting "feminization of agriculture" is evident in a number of countries. However, this phenomenon is hard to assess accurately because existing statistics likely underestimate rural people's multiple work activities, particularly women's non-employment work.

Fig 3. Trends in female share of agricultural employment, 1991-2017



Source: FAO, 2017, based on ILO, 2014.

Measuring non-employment activities

Employment indicators, such as those presented in Figures 1 to 3, capture only market-oriented employment. However, agricultural households in developing countries are usually sustained through a combination of the income earned from employment and the outputs from non-employment activities (Box 1).

Box 1: Defining employment and non-employment activities

Employment includes:

- formal and informal wage work
- self-employment activities, paid domestic work and paid caregiving
- unpaid contributing family labour
- work that contributes to a family member's wage work

Non-employment work includes:

- own-use production of goods and service, which includes subsistence agriculture and household management (e.g. fetching water and fuel materials, weaving and producing textiles for household use, processing food and preparing meals for household consumption, and caring for children and other dependent household members)
- formal and informal types of volunteer work, unpaid trainee work and unpaid activities to third parties

Non-employment work can represent a substantial share of rural people's workload, especially in developing countries with large impoverished rural populations that depend on agriculture for their livelihood.

- In many rural communities, activities such as subsistence agriculture and the processing and preparation of food for home consumption are predominantly a women's responsibility.
- Women often rely more than men on own-use production work and are less likely to have access to labour-saving technologies and tools.
- In times of economic hardship, women may not be able to pay for a good or service, forcing them to spend more time than men on finding alternatives.
- Poor or lacking infrastructure in rural areas often means that women may need to spend longer hours than men on own-use production of goods and services (e.g. collecting clean water and gathering materials for fuel).

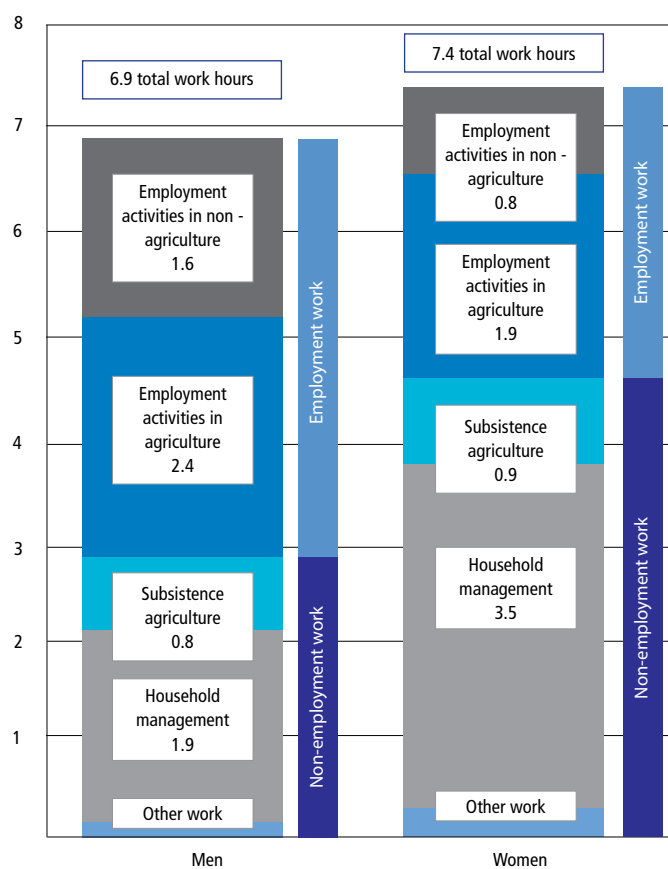
To fully understand the extent of men's and women's activities in agricultural contexts, indicators are needed that capture both employment and non-employment work.

Using time-use data to capture non-employment work

Figure 4 illustrates how much work is overlooked when the focus is only on employment activities. It presents data from a survey using a 24-hour recall period that was administered to men and women with agricultural holdings in eastern Uganda in July 2016. In the population surveyed, the findings show that:

- both men and women are heavily engaged in non-employment own-use production work;
- on average, women spend 4 hours 36 minutes per day on these activities, while men spend only 3 hours per day;
- the gender difference in employment activities is only slightly less pronounced – 4 hours for men, and 2 hours 40 minutes for women; and
- women's overall workday is 30 minutes longer than men's, and women spend a much larger share of their work time in non-employment work (nearly two-thirds) than men do (one-third).

Fig 4. Average time men and women spent in the last 24 hours by employment and non-employment work activity (in hours)



Household management: care of children, adults, or elderly; preparing meals; cleaning; collecting water and natural fuels for household use; shopping or buying food, clothes, or other goods for the household; construction or repair of the household premises; and weaving, sewing, textile care for household use.

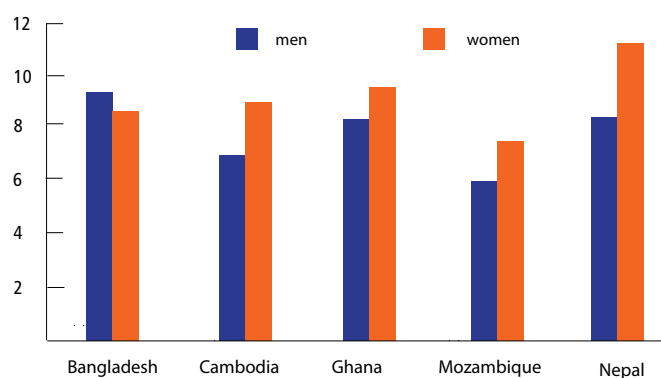
Other work: helping a neighbour, friend, or other individual who is not family; volunteer work for an enterprise, group or organization; and exchange agricultural work for another household.

Source: Calculated by the authors using data from household survey administered by Global Strategy for Improving Agricultural and Rural Statistics in partnership with Uganda Bureau of Statistics in Bukedea, Kamelina and Buikwe districts in the Eastern Region of Uganda in July 2016.

Data that can measure own-use production work are not collected as broadly as employment statistics. For developing countries, the data that has been collected on own-use production work are not often nationally representative. Recently, a number of 24-hour recall time-use modules have been implemented as part of the Women Employment in Agriculture Index (WEAI). The WEAI measures gender inequalities in five different domains, one of which covers control over a person's own use of time and satisfaction with time available for leisure activities. Figure 5 presents men's and women's workloads in five countries using data from WEAI surveys. Although not nationally representative, the findings seem to suggest that:

- while both men and women invest considerable time in own-use production work, in many settings women's workload associated with these activities is substantially greater than men's;
- in four of the five countries, women on average have greater workloads than men;
- in Cambodia, Mozambique and Nepal, the difference between women's and men's daily workload approaches or surpasses 2 hours; and
- women are more likely to face severe time constraints and greater obstacles than men when endeavouring to engage in gainful employment and non-employment activities (e.g education, community life and leisure).

Fig 5. Average time men and women spent working in the last 24 hours (in hours)



Source: Komatsu, Malapit, and Theis, 2015.

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Conclusions

Reliable sex-disaggregated statistics on work, employment and use of time are crucial for understanding gender inequalities in rural areas, raising awareness about gender-based differences in access to economic resources and opportunities, and stimulating public debate on these issues. Gender statistics also serve to monitor and evaluate the outcomes of policies and programmes, and inform policy adaptations to achieve gender equality.

Conventional employment indicators alone overlook the large amount of work done, particularly by women, to meet household consumption. Comprehensive measurements of rural people's workloads are data-demanding. However, they enable a more complete assessment of the differences in men's and women's involvement in various work activities than employment indicators alone can provide. Accurate statistics on rural women's and men's use of time can shed light on gender differences in work patterns and the specific contributions women and men make to the rural economy. They also can assist in identifying the constraints men and women face in obtaining gainful employment.

Recommendations

- ➔ Efforts need to be intensified to collect reliable national-level data on the time men and women spend in employment and non-employment work activities.
- ➔ To capture the work burden of men and women and monitor progress in the SDGs, work time ought to be disaggregated by employment and non-employment activities, in addition to disaggregating by paid and unpaid work activities.
- ➔ When possible, systematically disaggregating the data by age would enhance the utility of the data for formulating responsive policies to address the challenges to sustainable development in rural areas.

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