

National Network of the Rural Women of Senegal

International workshop « Rural Women and Land »

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« Rural Women's Access to Land: key factor for Food Security »

Introduction

Considered as a sub-sector creator of wealth creation, agriculture contributes to GDP and plays a major role in the economy and in national food security.

60% of the Senegalese population are involved in this sector. This important group has a strong female input as women make up 52% of this population and 60% of them live in rural areas where they constitute 70% of the workforce.

The reality shows that women are also responsible for the food chain (from production to consumption). It's therefore fair to note that there is a direct link between women, agriculture and food security.

Besides this, land is the most important agricultural resource in rural areas, representing both future potential and a definite asset for the sub-sector. On the quantitative side, there is a good deal of availability but this poses crucial problems among which:

- demand superior to availability
- management shortcomings
- discrimination linked to the distribution of this resource;
- the progressive impoverishment of land

This is reason enough to justify the pressing need to discuss the relationship between agriculture – land – food security, and to reconsider the links between actors in the sub-sector.

Within this context, this presentation will endeavour to develop the theme « Rural Women's Access to Land: a key factor in food security » in two parts

- the first part concerns the theme's key element: the rural woman;
- the other evokes the questions of accessibility to land and its impact on food security.

FIRST PART: Rural Women, key elements of the theme

The statistical importance of the Senegalese women (52% of the population), the number of rural women (60% of women), the roles they play in agriculture and in family management, are all sufficient to place them at the centre of the theme.

I. Review of the characteristics and roles of rural women in agriculture

According to PANAF, rural women, constitute 60% of the workforce, they cover about 70% of subsistence production, mostly in the rice production industry.

They are also active in marketing and processing of fruit production. These traditional roles originated from the division of work reinforced by other roles that have an effect on the sub-sector. It concerns:

1. Women heads of family: 22% of rural households are headed by women (ESP – 2001): all the family responsibility is theirs
2. Women home managers (domestic tasks occupy between 5 and 8 hours each day).

The analysis of these different roles clearly shows the irreplaceable roles that rural women play in production and food security.

II. Social position of the rural women

In our traditional society, the rural woman was a harsh victim of traditional practices:

- division of work based on sex that confers several types of activities on rural woman (domestic, procreation, care and education of the children) judged intense. This social set-up is reinforced by the various economic and community activities to be managed. This is what poses the difficulty of productivity and availability;
- discrimination noted in the distribution of control over living and production space and other resources;
- on the matter of land, women always have inferior rights to those of men who are considered exclusively as the chiefs;
- rules of basic education that nurture feelings of inferiority in little girls and an obligation to submit to the will of the man. The passivity and the resignation which result from this impede the awareness and commitment needed to insist on their rights. E.g.: a rural councillor said that in villages, people are not used to seeing women in decision-making posts;
- illiteracy, the low level of information of the women.

This very precarious social position is a factor to take into account in women's access to land and in the quest for food security.

SECOND PART: Rural women's access to land: the impact on food security?

This question raises the issue of land and its accessibility on one hand and food security on the other and brings out a hypothesis to be confirmed or invalidated. It is whether rural women's access to land is a key factor for food security.

I. Land: statistical data, characteristics and management

At a quantitative level, there are 3.8 million cultivable hectares in Senegal of which on average 2,4 million are effectively cultivated (Study on wealth creation DSRP S.2001). At the legal level, law n° 64 – 46 of June 17 1964 on the national domain organises the land. The decrees of application n°64 – 573 of July 30 1964 and 72 – 1288 of October 27 1972 fix the conditions of management by the rural council. The allocation and use of land are the responsibility of the President of the rural council. Senegal does not dispose of good quality

pedagogical resources. Looking at the five existing categories of soils, it is clear that close to half of them are mediocre or not adapted for agriculture (47%), the percentage of poor soils represents 36%. These five categories of soils are as follows:

- a) coastal sandy soils of the long coast;
- b) clay grounds of the valley and low grounds: delta of Senegal, low valley of Saloum and Casamance;
- c) sub-arid soils of the forest-pastoral zones: peanut-growing area;
- d) ferruginous leached soils from the south of the forest– pastoral zone: Tambacounda;
- e) ferralitic soils of the Casamance that constitute the country's better soils (document being prepared by the PNAE – CONSERE).

These lands are used either for rainwater, irrigated or 'décrues' farming. Certain parts are not cultivated and the remainder is non cultivable. This situation demonstrates the rarity of quality soils and their unequal geographical distribution.

In certain regions, the soils are leached, contain saline etc. The issue of land resource management, in particular its availability and accessibility depend on several factors notably:

- the existence of land reserves destined for agriculture in quantity and quality;
- indiscriminatory management rules;
- the presence of women leaders in decision making;
- the recognition of the status of women as chiefs of pieces of land and or as managers of households;
- the increase of the level education and information of the women.
- taking into account the strategic interests of women in the agricultural programmes

II. The rural women THERE do they have access?

In a general manner, the legal texts recognise the same rights for women and men. The law on the national domain and the one concerning the local groups doesn't address discrimination between sexes. Despite that the accessibility remains preoccupying for:

- Traditional methods of distribution of land at the family level predominate again.
- The needs of women increase while availabilities lessen.
- Discriminatory agricultural policies weakened the possibilities of the women to access land.
- Certain development societies always preserve their attribution methods to land.
- Women do not know the texts on the national law.
- The individual search of land by women maybe perceived as an offense to family honour and, especially, to the honour of the spouse.
- Marginal lands occupied by women are poor lands or are for dwellings. A woman of Kolda is obliged walk 7KM to go her field.
- Male owners of land often exploit women.
- Rural women do not claim their rights because they do not perceive the necessity or they are not equipped enough to convince and apply pressure (absence of lobbying techniques)
- Rural women, in certain cases, prefer to invest their funds in ceremonies or in other consumer domains than investing in the purchase of land (market gardening, orchards)
- Messages of sensitisation and the arguments used for lobbying are not pertinent.
- In cases of heritage, the bad interpretation of the religious perceptions causes discriminations linked to sex.

All these factors blocking access of women to land are not without consequences to the agricultural production therefore increasing the rural exodus and migration that in a sensitive way reduces the number of masculine arms in the work force, operationally leaving only women in the rural areas. For long, these questions are raised everywhere but the results remain timid.

If nothing is done, these constructions can generate diverse harmful social consequences among which are:

- a decrease of the productivity and agricultural production;
- a decrease of the cultivated surfaces
- poverty
- famine
- etc.

III. Accesses to land, an essential factor to food security

Food security is a finality, an objective to attain. Land, which is a resource, constitutes one of the realisation conditions, of this objective. It's why, to ensure food security, land must be available in quality and in sufficient quantity. The woman has to be owner, so she can at any moment have the capacity to manage the land, and entirely completely engage in all means to fully exploit it. The lifting/ discarding of discriminations is a factor favouring access of women to land. In this context, the woman widow, divorced, unmarried, the spouses of a polygamous household become heads of family therefore land holders of good land.

Senegalese women work together on the same ideal of having accessibility of the women to land be a reality to ensure effective food security. Recommendations to the workshop to raise the level of information of rural women on land questions and their importance in the production and food security; elaborate a pertinent argumentative talk for engage in a lobbying program with the local groups, authorities taking into account the strategic interests of women in agricultural programs. The talk will take into account the ethnic, social realities of the rural areas; the organisations of rural women must be mobilised to carry out mobilisation activities on land to benefit their members; to devise and put in place a communication plan of proximity at the level of rural women organisations to sensitise members on their rights to land; that the women organisations organise themselves into pressure groups to easily have their voices heard and make access to land an objective essential investment destined mechanisms to reduce the risks of rural dispossession of land of the women in case of divorces, separation or widowhood should be created. Rural women must change behaviours in the definition of the development priorities.

Conclusion

Food security that is essential for the survival of the populations cannot be attained without the woman who is at the beginning and at the end. The rural woman cannot ensure this without land. Consequently access to land becomes, for the rural women, a challenge to raise with the peasants, the local groups, the religious leaders, the decision-makers, the civil society and the development partners for which the disposals of our constitution doesn't put in vain words.