

**Gender Issues in Agricultural and Rural Household Well-Being**  
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## **Introduction**

Women allocate their work time and manage risk differently than do men for a complex set of reasons. Partly, this is related to the unique child-rearing responsibilities of women, differences in life expectancy, and the result of cultural gender roles and differences in access to agricultural productive resources. In many countries, family roles, responsibilities, and rights are gender-related and extend beyond biological differences. The basic decision-making unit in society is a household; therefore, intrahousehold relationships, such as bargaining power, must be understood to fully understand incentives and behaviors. For example, in many African societies husbands and wives maintain separate budgets and, in some cultures, girls are restricted from attending school. Gender-specific information that can be included in national data collection efforts as proxies for bargaining power include education, shares of family income earned, unearned income, inherited assets, assets at marriage, and the extent of involvement in agricultural labor and management activities. In societies where the majority of the population depends on agriculture and where food security may especially be a critical issue, it is important to have gender-specific data on access to and control over productive resources, including individual's labor and access to family labor.

Research and development experiences have shown the importance of considering the gender of farm and rural people in efforts to understand and influence their behavior and improve the conditions of those in extreme poverty and hunger. Certainly, some statistics indicate that the well-being of women and girls is lower than the well-being of men and boys; however, for many indicators the rural-urban divide is a greater factor in determining well-being. Consequently, information on the unique role played by women in their family and homes is important to understanding and improving the well-being of all rural and agricultural people, regardless of gender.

Gender continues to lack significant visibility in statistics for agriculture and rural areas. The extent of visibility varies by country, making it difficult to generalize. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the issues: why gender-specific data are important to measuring household well-being, the current state of gender relevant data, and recommendations for improving sex-specific data reflecting gender differences.

## **Evidence that Gender Matters**

Women's roles in home production and income generating-activities, both farm based and non-farm, differ from men's. In the developing world, women dominate agriculture, and increasingly

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<sup>1</sup> The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to ERS, USDA or FAO.

so as a result of a trend known as the *feminization of agriculture*. Moreover, it is evident from the most basic of indicators that gender plays a role in well-being and a tendency known as the *feminization of food insecurity and poverty* becomes more and more apparent.

### *Feminization of Agriculture*

In developing countries, women and girls play a significant role in market and nonmarket related provision of goods and services, especially in agriculture. Traditionally, women have provided the majority of food production in many developing countries (UN, ECOSOC, 2003). For example, in South East Asia, women provide up to 90 percent of labor in rice cultivation. In Pakistan, 80 percent of livestock is managed by women and two-thirds of women are employed in agriculture. In Kenya, women are 75-89 percent of the agricultural labor force. In Tanzania, women are 80 percent of unpaid family labor in agriculture. In the poorest regions, most women who work outside the home have agricultural jobs, mainly as unpaid family workers (Table 1). In developed countries, the share of both women and men employed in agriculture is quite low, but significantly lower for women.

Depending on the country, feminization of agriculture can result from both increasing numbers of female-headed agricultural households, like in Cameroon, or age-specific male-dominated rural out-migration as is occurring in Guinea in West Africa

Table 2 reflects trends in the sex of heads of agricultural household taking place in Cameroon, Central Africa, where the percentage of women heads increased from 14.6 percent to 20.6 percent in just 6 years during the 1980s (Tempelman and Keita, 2005; UN, FAO, 1997; UN, FAO1998).

The overall percentage of female heads of agricultural households is much lower in Guinea, West Africa, as shown in Table 3. Still, *feminization of the agriculture sector* is an important phenomenon in Guinea, likely the result of male-dominated rural out-migration. There are considerable fewer men than women in the 20 to 49 age brackets of the national agricultural population while the agricultural population by age and sex of the country's Labé region indicates 4 times more women than men farmers in the 30 to 34 age category.

### *Feminization of food insecurity and poverty*

Low-incomes and food insecurity are generally measured at the household level, with significant differences occurring by the gender of the household head. In its 2002/2003 National sample census of agriculture, Tanzania attempted to obtain data on prevailing food insecurity by asking the following questions in its national sample census of agriculture:

- Number of meals the household normally has per day
- Number of days the household consumed meat last week
- How often did the household have problems in satisfying the food needs of the household last year (never, seldom, sometimes, other, and always)

Female headed agricultural households were found to consume less meat and were more likely to be found in the categories of households experiencing ‘often’ or ‘always’ food shortages (Figures 1 and 2). The data show these results to be consistent across all regions in Tanzania.

### *Gender in the Developed World*

Gender differences in well-being are evident in developed countries, as well, with women-headed households generally having higher poverty rates and lower food security than men. For example, in the U.S., the highest poverty rate is for rural female-headed families (USDA, ERS). In 2008, for families with a single head, 38 percent of rural persons in female-headed families in the U.S. were designated as poor, compared to 18 percent of persons living in rural male-headed families (Figure 3). In addition, the poverty rate of rural female-headed families is much higher than urban female-headed families.

In sharp contrast to the developing world, agriculture is a male-dominated activity in the developed world. Also, in the developed world, farming families generally have higher standards of living than their nonfarming counterparts when measured by income and wealth. In the U.S., women principal operators generally operate smaller farms and are more likely to lose money farming and less likely to receive government farm subsidies than male principal operators. The U.S. supports a large extension service designed to extend research and sound risk management practices from universities to farm producers. An expanding program in that system is one designed to meet the unique needs of women farmers, called *Annie’s Project* (Iowa State University). *Annie’s Project*, funded by USDA, is now in 22 of the 50 U.S. states.

## **Current State of Gender Analysis**

### *In Development Research*

The current state of development economics has a microeconomic orientation, compared to an earlier time. Often this takes a household production approach based on foundational work of Becker (1981). The applied microeconomic approach requires household level data sets, such as the World Bank’s Living Standards Measurement Survey (LSMS). At the same time that national statistics have deteriorated in quality (UNSC, 2009), there has been greater availability of detailed data for selected small areas for research purposes and policy analysis. A major theme of the literature is that income-generating opportunities for women are changing the bargaining power of women, leading to many changes in household formation and marriage markets (Fafchamps and Quisumbing, 2008; Quisumbing, 2003). The literature has also documented (using these small area data sets, mostly from Sub-Saharan Africa) that when women are able to control resources on a basis equal to men, agricultural productivity is increased. There is less sex disaggregated data on men and women’s agricultural output in Asia. One critical issue is that in-depth gender analysis requires sex-disaggregated data at sub-household level to reflect relevant intra-household gender-based differences in agricultural

production and decision-making. It is only in recent years that such data are becoming available and just for selected countries.

In the developed world, research is explicitly focusing on the value of the multifunctionality of agriculture, especially for family farms. Multifunctionality recognizes the social attributes and environmental services provided by agriculture, as well as the community implications of particular structures of agriculture (van Huylenbroeck and Durand, 2003). Nontraditional agricultural activities, such as organic production, agritourism or value-added farm products may imply different gender roles for the farm family. For example, Brandth and Haugen (2010) studied 5 case studies of family farms in Germany providing agritourism and conclude that there is evidence that this farming specialty leads to less gender segregation in roles and responsibilities. Before being appointed to serve as USDA's Deputy Secretary, Kathleen Merrigan commenting on the higher share of women organic farmers stated, "Clearly there's something that differentiates conventional and organic and sustainable agriculture in terms of women in leadership roles that's worth thinking about. If you're interested in agriculture and working on the land, traditional doors are kind of closed to you. The alternative was organic. [The presence of more women] may not all be from some deepseated views on ecology and nutrition, but from 'I wanted to get into this field and this was open to me.'" (Lipson, 2004)

An understudied, but perhaps growing, area of the literature concerns the significant changes in agricultural structure and international supply chains as they relate to migrant farm workers. For example, in North America, Mexican men and women have an increasing presence in agricultural production and processing (e.g., Preibisch Grez, 2010). Employment gender relations are further complicated by race and temporary migrant status.

### *In Rural Development Programs*

Advancing the quality of life through development projects is a complex process involving many institutions and sectors. Progress requires that productive policies be adopted, rural development programs established, and the resources available to households, including necessary assets and markets. The focus for women in development programs has been the challenge of understanding and ameliorating the lack of productive assets available to women and the lack of services provided to them by institutions. Given prevailing gender-based differences in accessing productive resources and aiming to achieve sustainable progress for all members of society, it is of utmost importance to have gender relevant information.

In 2000, world leaders from 192 member states of the United Nations adopted the United Nations Millennium Declaration, committing their nations to a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty and other development goals by 2015. One of the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDG) is to *Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women*, focusing on improving the education of girls, increasing the wage employment of women in non-agricultural sectors, and increasing the political representation of women. Some countries are on track to meet their MDGs by the year 2015, while others are not.

### **Availability of Gender Statistics**

Donors, private and public, are increasingly asking for evidence that programs are attaining their goals. Monitoring and evaluating goals, of course, requires accurate data for the development of indicators at every stage of the development process (Figure 4). High level policy makers require information for policy design and rural development program managers require information for successful implementation and targeting to meet country and program goals. In addition, more detailed information is required by local government officials and those engaged in market activities. In particular, gender data are necessary to monitor the progress toward the MDGs. The UN has provided country information on the availability of each of the indicators being tracked to monitor the progress in the MDGs. Figure 5 indicates the availability of data for 5 gender or rural indicators by region. Surprisingly, a small share of the 48 developed nations has data available to measure the share of women employed in non-agricultural wage jobs. For the other selected indicators, a higher share of developed countries has appropriate data than the share of developing countries, although this varies by region.

At the same time there is a greater demand for data, it is widely recognized that there has been deterioration in the amount and quality of data on agriculture and rural areas, especially in developing countries (e.g., UN, FAO Independent Evaluation on Data). Because women are heavily engaged in agricultural activities and three-quarters of the population in the developing world live in rural areas, this erosion in data translates into an erosion in gender-relevant data. In response to this deterioration, a working group of the UN Statistics Division, including the World Bank, FAO, Eurostat, the US Department of Agriculture, and the International Statistical Institute, has developed a strategy for data improvement which identifies core data to be collected, including data on gender of the farm holder (UN, SC, 2009). Agreement on core data will facilitate cross-country comparisons. The strategy was developed by more than 200 participants from over 45 countries as well as regional and international organizations. The extensive participation should help increase the likelihood that the plan will be fulfilled and supported by donors.

### *Developing World*

In the developing world, in addition to the general recognition of the need for improved agricultural and rural data, there has been an increased recognition of the need for gender-relevant data. For example, the African Commission on Agricultural Statistics has recognized the need to integrate gender into agricultural surveys and censuses and several African countries have made progress in doing so, e.g., Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Senegal, Tanzania and Togo.

Progress has been observed in the production of gender-relevant agricultural statistics (UN, FAO, 2005). Multilateral, bilateral and national institutions made concerted efforts to identify and improve upon gender biases existing in statistical data collection methodologies, concepts and definitions that contributed to the statistical “invisibility” of women’s involvement in agriculture data. Governments in developing countries have shown increasing commitment to address gender concerns in their agricultural development programs and policies. Statisticians in these countries have become more aware of the importance of producing sex-disaggregated agriculture data for the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of effective and sustainable agricultural development policies and programmes. As a result of these changes,

requests from development planners and gender advocates for more gender specific information can increasingly be met with data from improved gender relevant agricultural census programs.

Previously, policies for agricultural development often narrowly focused on agricultural production growth, overlooking the importance of human resources and the social welfare aspects of agricultural development. As a result, agricultural statistics focused mainly on economic activities, large-scale production units and the use of production factors, collecting data on variables like area cropped, and yield and production achieved. Data on the human resources involved to obtain this production were often limited to a few variables relating to the heads of agricultural holdings/households and demographic characteristics of the agricultural population (UN, FAO, 1999, 2000; Tempelman and Keita, 2005).

The need for data on the social and human aspects of agricultural development became more pronounced during the late 1980s as evidence became available that human capital was a crucial factor to agricultural development and rural-household well-being. Agricultural plans and policies formulated on the basis of inadequate information had contributed to a low impact of many policy and planning efforts and contributed to waste of scarce human, financial and environmental resources. Increasingly agricultural planners and statisticians started to recognize the critical need for accurate and reliable agricultural statistical data on both human and production factors involved.

Several factors contributed to an increasing understanding of the broader need for data concerning all human resources involved in agricultural production as reflected in: the 1995 Beijing Plan of Action (adopted by the IVth Global Conference on Women), the Millennium Development Goals and other international agreements. This resulted in greater attention to the identification of possible shortcomings in current data collection methods and greater efforts to obtain reliable sex-disaggregated data reflecting the socio-economic positions specific to men and women involved in agriculture. In Africa, such awareness was further fuelled by greater insight in the underlying factors of the *feminization of agriculture, food insecurity and poverty*. Several African countries have been featured in the work of FAO, including the 2005 FAO report *Agricultural censuses and gender: Lessons learned in Africa* (UN, FAO, 2005) and its *Agri-gender database: a statistical toolkit for the production of sex-disaggregated agricultural data* (UN, FAO, 2009).

Important gender differences have been documented in access to productive resources in many countries, for example:

- Access to land in Niger
- Access to credit in Tanzania and Niger
- Access to extension services in Senegal
- Access to unpaid family labor in Tanzania

Another bright spot on the horizon in advancing the understanding of the important role of gender in development is the forthcoming 2010 State of Food and Agriculture which is dedicated to the topic of women in agriculture and rural development.

*Developed Countries*

In the developed world, household well-being indicators are generally available for both male and female headed households. Data on agricultural holdings/farms in developed countries generally include information about the gender of the principal farmer. This is true for European Union countries, Brazil, Canada, and the U.S. In the U.S., collection of data on the gender of the principal operator began with the 1978 quinquennial Census of Agriculture. Oftentimes, there are additional operators besides the principal operator. In particular, a common organizational arrangement is for a husband and wife team to jointly operate a farm. Since the principal operator identified is generally a male, the narrowness in data collection tended to understate the role of women in U.S. agriculture. This was first documented in the USDA-funded 1980 Farm Women's Survey (Rosenfeld, 1985). Recommendations were made to incorporate the collection of gender data for all operators in order to provide a more complete picture of the characteristics of households operating U.S. farms (Ahearn, 1991). Beginning with the 2002 Census of Agriculture, up to 3 operators per farm were identified, including indications of their gender.

In the developed world, farming is a male-dominated profession. However, women play a more significant role than traditional statistics portray. In the U.S., collection of data during the last Census, only 306,209 principal operators out of 2.1 million operators were women, and more likely than men to be elderly, likely having inherited the farm when their husbands passed away. However, when we consider all of the roles that women play in U.S. agriculture—secondary operators, hired farm workers and farmland owners—there are about 2.8 million women involved in U.S. agriculture. A 2001 USDA-funded survey of U.S. farm women collected information on the farm activities and the farm decision-making in which women engage and compared the results to the 1980 survey (Findeis 2002). Among the results they reported are that, compared to 1980:

- More women considered themselves to be the principal farm operator
- More farm women are engaged in off-farm work
- Women are taking a greater role in farm decision-making

The most extensive datasets and analyses of gender in agriculture in the developed country world are for Canada. Canada has had a linked micro database for the agricultural and household censuses since 1971. The Canadian data allow researchers to consider the gender implications of the linkages of up to 3 households to farm operations, the linkages that farm household members have to their farm and off-farm occupations, and the share of farm labor provided by various household members (Bollman, 2005). In 2001, while the majority of Canadian farm households (57 percent) indicated that only one household and one male operator are involved in managing the farm, another 26 percent reported that the farm is managed jointly by a male-female team. Some of the Canadian analyses have been presented at previous Wye meetings (e.g., Bollman, 2009). Similarly, a well-developed literature exists on the economic status of rural women in Canada.

### **Promoting the Collection and Use of Gender Relevant Sex-disaggregated Data**

Gender statistics is a relatively new area. It has been developing along the increasing understanding that gender relations and gender-based challenges and constraints matter in the development for progress of an individual, his/her family and a country as a whole. As mentioned, this increased understanding has already lead to a greater demand for these statistics.

But collecting data that accurately reflect rural and agricultural men and women's situation remains a complex matter. Established socio-cultural norms, desired behaviour and decision-making patterns influencing male and female farm operators' resources and actions are difficult to capture in the collection of mainly quantitative data. This poses challenges for:

- **Statisticians** who need to identify indicators and data variables that, as close as possible to reality, reflect men and women's involvement in agricultural production, farm and non-farm activities and assets. This may entail the need to sensitize and train statisticians enhancing their skills to look at rural societies through a gender analysis lens to find out what data exactly needs to be collected and may require technical assistance in identifying and correcting gender biases in existing data collection methods, concepts and definitions;
- **Planners and decision-makers**, maybe more so in the developing world, who are not used to having the required statistical data at their disposal for planning and monitoring of the impact of development support programs. In the past, data may not have been available and now as data become available, it may not be available freely or may be disseminated and published in a format that is not suitable to planning in a particular area. Though a considerable amount of data are collected disaggregated by sex (individual level), it may be published in an aggregated form (household level for example), meaning that the gender relevant information of such data gets lost in the data dissemination; and
- Lastly, **gender experts / advocates**, are seldom conversant with statistical data collection methods and options available. Requests like "we need all data disaggregated by sex", are too broad for statisticians to respond to especially in view of human and financial constraints impacting data collection. They would benefit from training in the kind of data that could be collected in response to their needs for information.

## Conclusions

Many in the development field, as well as national and international organizations, have made a convincing case for the importance of understanding the role of gender and that understanding is reflected in the MDGs. These include policies directed at strengthening the education of girls, eliminating workplace discrimination against women, developing and encouraging the adoption of agricultural technologies that increase productivity, and reforming property rights to provide equitable control over assets between men and women.

Monitoring and evaluating these goals requires quality data. Gender-relevant data extends beyond collection of the gender of the household head or the principal farm operator. In order to understand the barriers to an improved quality of life and design solutions to removing those barriers, it is necessary to collect information on intrahousehold and social gender issues, such as access to productive resources and credit, especially as they affect the issues of the day, such as food security and climate change. These improvements in data collection will require direct technical support to develop statisticians' capacity to collect relevant and reliable sex-disaggregated data reflecting gender concerns in agricultural production and rural areas. The UN, FAO (2009) has provided guidance in its statistical toolkit and identified important data items, not only relating to agricultural production, poverty, and food security but also labor and time-use data by gender and membership in farmer organizations.



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Table 1. Share of women in agricultural employment and unpaid family work, 2007

	Agricultural	Unpaid family
Region	<i>percent</i>	
Oceania	75	67
Sub-Saharan Africa	62	43
Southern Asia	57	47
South-Eastern Asia	44	37
Northern Africa	43	27
Eastern Asia	36	26
Western Asia	34	21
CIS, Asia	30	9
Latin America & the Caribbean	11	7
CIS, Europe	9	0

Source: UN, MDG: Gender Equality and Women's Employment, Progress Chart, 2008.

Table 2. Heads of agricultural holdings by sex and province, percent, Cameroon

Province	Head of holding Agricultural Census 1984		Head of holding Agricultural Survey '85/- '86 *		Head of holding Agricultural Survey '89 - '90 *	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Extreme – North	91,8	8.2	91,8	8.2	92,6	7.4
North	93,2	6.8	94,7	5.3	93,6	6.4
Adamaoua	91,0	9.0	91,5	8.5	88,1	11.9
East	91,6	8.4	90,8	9.2	85,6	14.4
Central	77,8	22.2	78,5	21.5	71,8	28.2
South	84,9	15.1	81,1	18.9	71,2	28.8
Littoral	79,1	20.9	79,9	20.1	63,2	36.8
South-West	83,9	16.1	83,1	16.9	84,6	15.4
North – West	85,4	14.6	89,1	10.9	75,4	24.6
West	75,8	24.2	73,6	26.4	66,0	34.0
<b>National</b>	<b>85.4</b>	<b>14.6</b>	<b>85.2</b>	<b>14.8</b>	<b>79,4</b>	<b>20.6</b>

\* Direction des Enquêtes Agro - Economiques et de la Planification Agricole

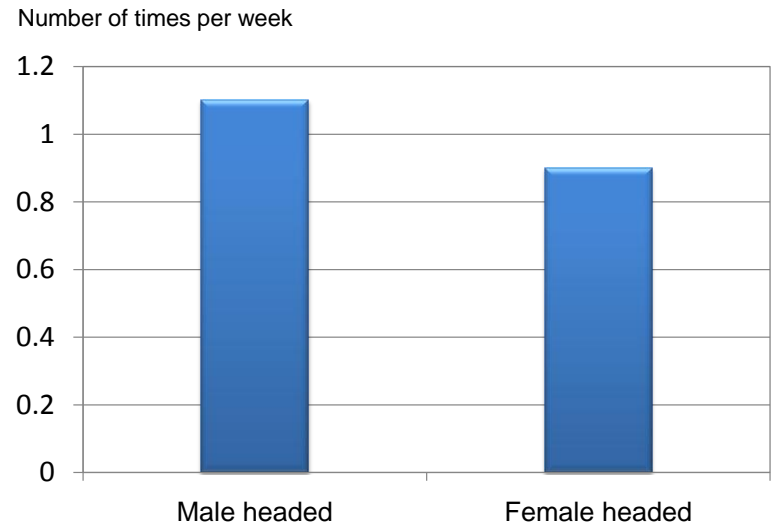
Source: Agricultural census 1984; Agricultural surveys, 1985 – 86 and 1989 – '90

Table 3. Distribution of rural agricultural holdings by number of agriculturally active persons and sex of the head of the holding, Guinea

Number of agr. active persons	Male head of holding			Female head of holding			Total (N)
	N	%	% / Total per category	N	%	% / Total per category	
1	6 337	0.9	32.5	13 179	33.5	67.5	19 516
2	151 058	21.1	92.9	11 626	29.5	7.1	162 684
3 -4	307 113	42.9	96.5	11 248	28.6	3.5	318 361
5 – 9	228 296	31.8	98.7	3 029	7.7	1.3	231 325
10 –14	20 345	2.8	98.6	285	0.7	1.4	20 630
≥ 15	3 668	0.5	100	-	-	-	3 668
<b>National</b>	<b>716 817</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>94.8</b>	<b>39 367</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>5.2</b>	<b>756 184</b>

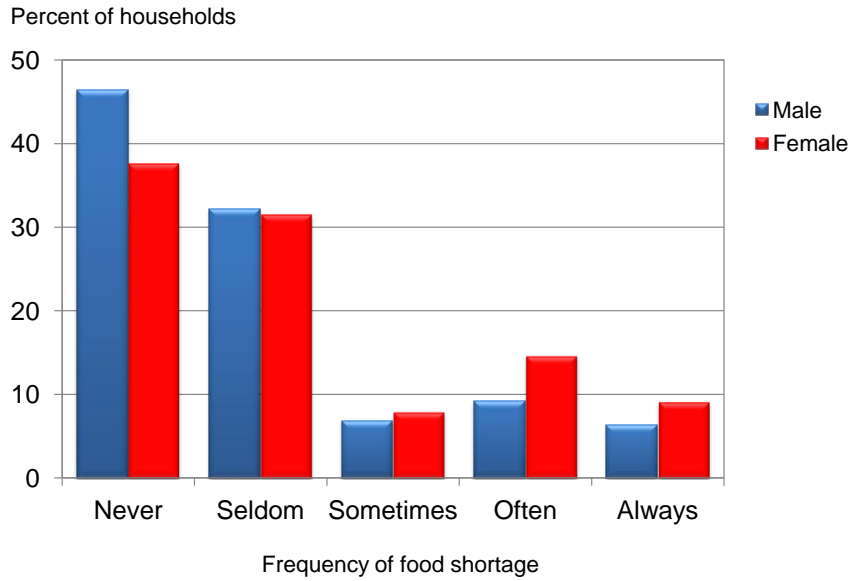
Source: 2000/2001 National Agricultural Census, Guinea.

**Figure 1. Average number of times a Tanzania household eats meat in one week**



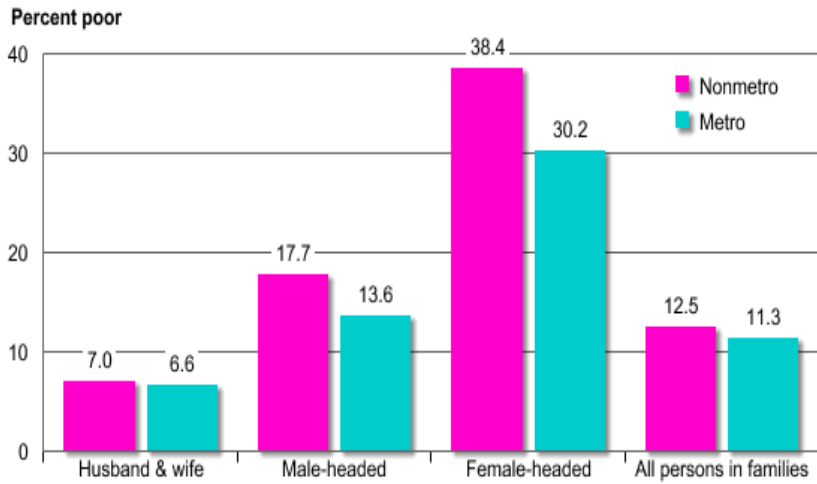
Source: Tanzania Agriculture Sample Census 2003, National Gender Report.

**Figure 2. Percent of male and female headed households by frequency of facing food shortages in Tanzania**



Source: Tanzania Agriculture Sample Census 2003, National Gender Report.

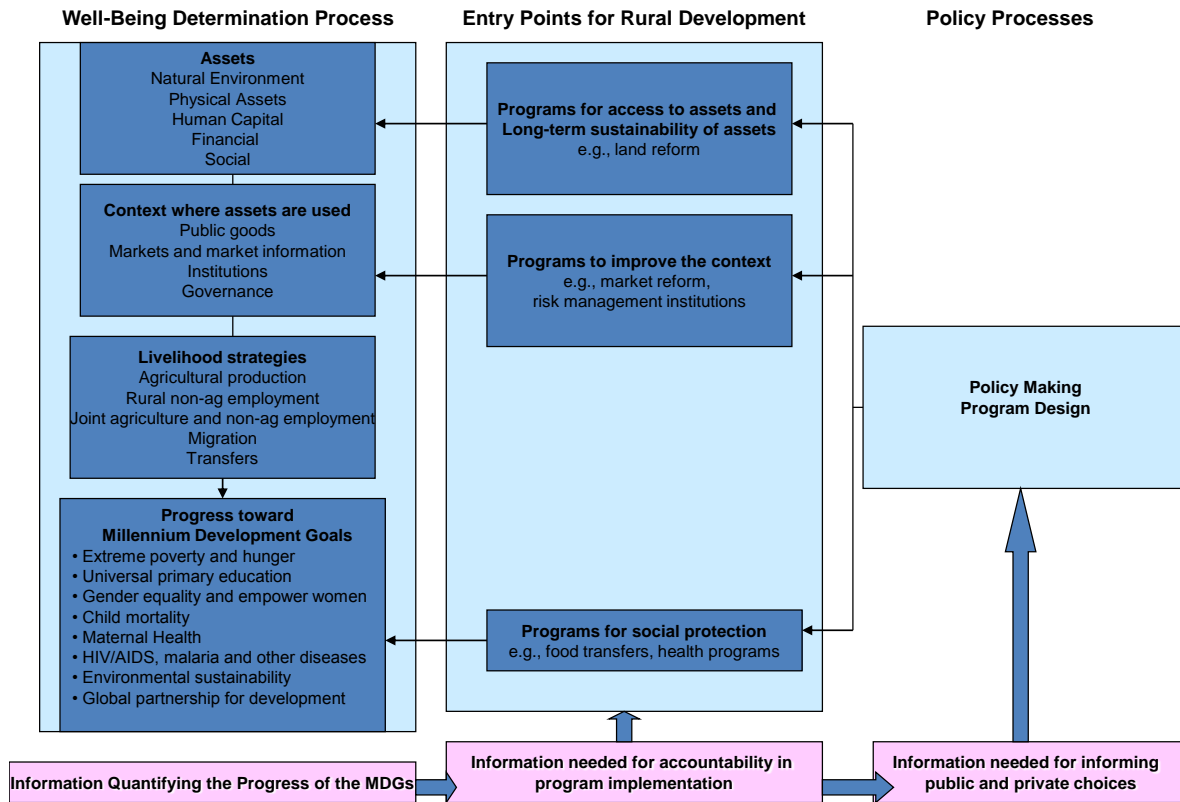
**Figure 3. U.S. poverty rates by family type and residence, 2008**



Note: Percent of people in families, either primary or related subfamilies, who are poor.  
Source: Prepared by the Economic Research Service using data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2009 Annual Social and Economic (ASEC) Supplement .

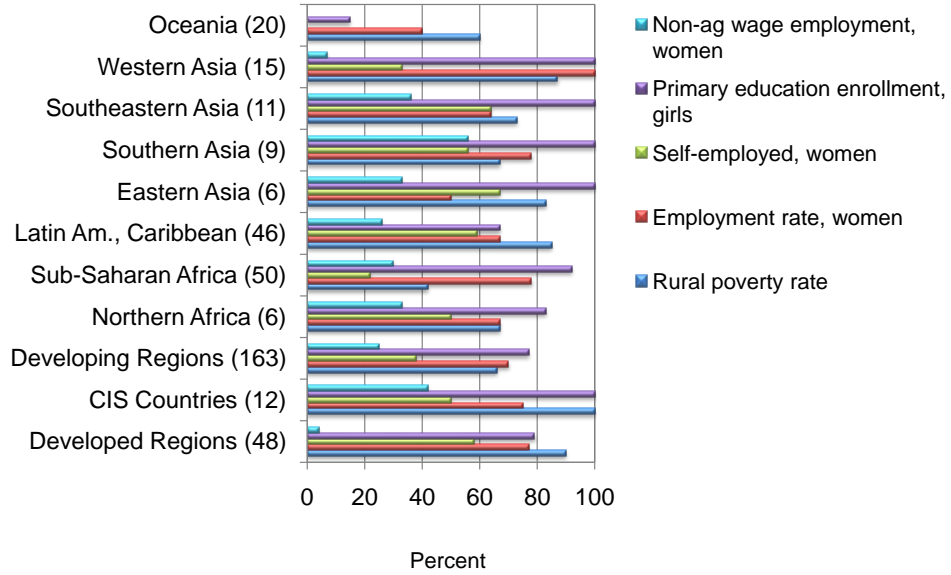


**Figure 4. Framework for Agriculture and Rural Development Activities: Data Requirements**



Source: Adapted from de Janvry, Alain.

**Figure 5. Share of countries in region with at least 2 data points for selected MDG indicator**



Source: UN MDG Indicators, <http://mdgs.un.org/unsd/mdg/DataAvailability.aspx#Capacity>.  
 Note: Number of countries in each region in parentheses. Data points exclude modeled data.  
 CIS countries are Commonwealth of Independent States.