

ROLE OF WOMEN IN SUBSIDIARY FOOD CROPS PRODUCTION

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The impact of technological changes on rural employment has received considerable attention in the past. However, attention for women oriented roles in technology development and transfer as well as designing technologies for women specific occupations remained inadequate. Rarely, studies were designed to determine what women knew about farming and the impact of recommended technologies on women. Now, there is an increasing concern to consider specific issues that lead to efficient technology transfer in those instances where the users were women. Otherwise new technologies may have negative consequences on women (Dey, 1985).

Many Past studies had underestimated the impact of new technologies on women in general, and on women labourers in particular (Agarwal, 1983). A high proportion of total agricultural

labour for rice production is hired with 58, 45 and 28 percent of the total hired labour force consisting of women in Andra Pradesh (India), Java (Indonesia) and the Phillippines, respectively. In the above mentioned countries, women supplied the bulk of the labour needed for transplanting, weeding and harvesting. Sometimes they provided 50 - 100% of the labour for these specific operations (Unnevehr and Stanford, 1983).

Sri Lanka is one of the countries where women labour is used extensively in agricultural production. However, there is a lack of quantitative information on this aspect. Therefore, this study was conducted to assess the contribution of women labour for the production of red onion and chilli in Jaffna and Kilinochchi districts. These districts provide employment to a fairly large number of rural women.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To identify the contribution of women labour in the production of red onion and chilli, and to estimate their participation in different farming operations.

METHODOLOGY

Raw data gathered for estimating the cost of cultivation by the Department of Agriculture for red onion and chilli from 1982 to 1990 were used in this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The total labour use and the percentage labour utilized from male and female labour in the production of red onion and chilli are presented in Table 1.

The total labour use in irrigated red onion and chilli productions were 257 and 263 man days, respectively. In both cases more hired labour was used than family labour. When considering the family labour, participation of female labour is less than male labour; in the red onions it was 45 percent. In red onion and chilli production, 53 and 73 percent of total hired labour force consisted of women, respectively. The overall use of female labour force was higher than the use of male labour force for both crops. The use of high percentage of women labour may be due to the low wages paid to the female labour. The wage rate pattern for the period for 1982 to 1990 is given in Table 2.

Table 1: Total, family, and hired labour use and percentage contribution of female labour force in red onion & chilli production (1982 and 1990)

| Category of Labour | Red onion (Man days) | | Chilli (Man days) | |
|------------------------|----------------------|---------|-------------------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Total labour | 257 | | 293 | |
| Family labour | 120 | 46 | 117 | 40 |
| Hired labour | 137 | 53 | 175 | 60 |
| Family labour * | | | | |
| a. female | 54 | 44 | 23 | 20 |
| b. male | 66 | 55 | 93 | 80 |
| Hired labour ** | | | | |
| a. female | 72 | 52 | 128 | 72 |
| b. male | 64 | 47 | 47 | 27 |
| Total female | 168 | 65 | 151 | 51 |
| Total male | 89 | 34 | 141 | 48 |

* Average of 1982 & 1983 *yala* seasons - Jaffna

** Average of 1982 & 1985 *yala* seasons - Kilinochchi

Table 2 indicates that the wage rates for female labourers ranged from 46% to 63% of the wage rates paid to the male labourers. It is generally argued that the efficiency of women is comparatively less than that of men. This may be true for some specific operations such as ploughing and spraying. Perhaps it may be because the technology and techniques are not familiar to women. However, out put of the women may not be less than that of the males in operations such as planting, manual weed control and harvesting.

The percentage participation of female labour in planting, weeding, harvesting and processing of red onion and chilli is presented in Table 3.

The female labour participation for planting, weeding and harvesting was

more than 90 percent in red onion and more than 50 percent in chilli production (Table 3). The above calculations were made after converting female labour into mandays (1 W.D = 0.7 M.D). Therefore, the actual women labour participation was higher than what is indicated by these figures. The heavy use of female labour for these operations may not only be due to lower wage rate for females but also due to the time consuming nature of these operations.

CONCLUSION

The results of the above analysis clearly indicate that the contribution of women for subsidiary food crop production in Jaffna and Kilinochchi districts was higher than that of males. The reasons for this situation may be that the lower wage rate paid to female labourers and time consuming

Table 2: Wage rates for hired male and female labourers for the period from 1982 to 1990, in the Jaffna District.

| Year | Wage per day (Rs) | |
|------|-------------------|--------|
| | Male | Female |
| 1982 | 35 | 20 |
| 1983 | 35 | 20 |
| 1984 | 40 | 25 |
| 1985 | 45 | 25 |
| 1986 | 50 | 30 |
| 1987 | 50 | 30 |
| 1988 | 60 | 35 |
| 1989 | 75 | 35 |
| 1990 | 80 | 40 |

Table 3: Percentage participation of female labour in planting, weeding, harvesting and procession of red onion and chilli production (1982 - 1990)

| Operations | Red Onion | | Chilli | |
|------------|------------|-----|------------|----|
| | Mandays/Ac | % | Mandays/Ac | % |
| Planting | 19 | 100 | 4 | 53 |
| Weeding | 33 | 90 | 18 | 53 |
| Harvesting | 33 | 94 | 68 | 80 |
| Processing | 24 | 47 | - | - |

nature of these operations. It also may be due to the simplicity of technologies adopted for planting, harvesting and manual weeding. Any change in the technology of these operations such as chemical weed control,

mechanical planting or harvesting may have negative consequences on employment of females. Therefore, these aspects must be considered in the future when developing technologies for these crops.

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