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# Journal of Agricultural Extension and Rural Development

# Full Length Research Paper

# Gender division of labor and rural women's control over productive resources: The case of Dita and Mirab Abaya districts, Gamo Gofa zone, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR), Ethiopia

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This study aimed to identify the existing gender division of labor, rural women's control over productive resources and its effect on the stated poverty reduction strategy. Group discussion with key informants, field observation and interview with rural women was done to obtain primary data. The analysis was done by using SPSS software. Man biased division of labor, particularly on productive activities and limited control over, of rural women on productive resources are identified in the study area. This was the main challenge they face in the society. These make their contribution to development and poverty reduction very minimal.

Key words: Rural women, productive activities, control over, division of labor, poverty reduction.

# INTRODUCTION

Since 1993, the government of Ethiopia has committed itself to promote gender empowerment through the implementation of the Beijing platform of action. Institutional mechanisms for advancing the course of women involves capacity-building financed by a proper institutional development fund; increasing the access of women/girls to education; improving participation in decision-making and in local and national elections; and other measures taken by the government of Ethiopia to improve the employment situation of women are indicative

of the country's commitment to improving gender roles in national development (Skied, 2007; United Nations, 2002).

The labor division of farm tasks between rural women and men in Ethiopia varies according to the enterprise, cultural settings, the farming system, the technology used, location and the wealth of the household. Control over the benefits of production also varies between women and men, partly reflecting their labor input, but also reflecting the use of produce in the home or for sale,

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cultural norms regarding 'women's' and 'men's' enterprises, and the dominance of men as the household head and, consequently, are entitled to the most important resources like land (Abera et al., 2006; Lemlem et al., 2010).

Rural women constitute a substantial proportion of the nation's farmers and provide about 60 to 80% of the rural labor input (MOFED, 2006). Poverty is hitting increasing number of rural women and it is hitting harder. They are the most disempowered, experiencing inadequate right to control over different productive resources like land and decision-making about its productive use, to decision about water sources and other resources they require. Decision-making is related to different level of control over, of different agricultural products and their outcomes including incomes earned from sales of productive resources and decisions on transfer through bequeath inheritance, sale or rent (Sida, 2003).

Generally, men are the key role players in labor division of crop and livestock production, and are also the principal beneficiaries in terms of control over the income generated from these products. Men also control the income from several enterprises in which the workload is shared (Lemlem et al., 2010).

Gender is a way in which, culture in a society prescribes rights, roles, responsibilities and identities of women and men in relation to one another.

# Control over productive resources

Control over resources implies the ability to use and even dispose a resource or benefit. Women's control over productive resource means that women can own productive resource (can be legal title-holders) and can make decisions on selling or leasing out the productive resource (Akuna, 2004).

It is mostly difficult to realize women's equal control over productive resources even in cases where different policy demonstrates gender equality (Lemlem et al., 2010).

The case of Gamo Gofa in relation to this present work is not yet studied. Identifying the gap and planning to fulfill it is very important to countries plan in this regard. Development initiatives should be designed with a gender perspective to ensure they are relevant to their context. So, this study aimed to examine and identify the productive activities of rural women and men and find out the existing rural women's control over productive resources and its implication on poverty reduction.

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Gamo Gofa Zone has 15 districts mainly in two agro-ecological zones. This study was carried out in two Districts, namely Dita and Mirab Abaya representing two different agro-ecologies of highland and low land District of Gamo Gofa Zone. Both sample districts were selected using stratified simple random selection technique.

The three Kebeles (lower government administrative unit below district) from each district totally six kebeles was selected using lottery method of random sampling technique.

Finally, 30 respondents per kebele, with a total of 180 rural women were selected in the same method to respond to the structured interview questionnaire of the study.

# Types and sources of data

Both primary and secondary data sources were used for this study. Qualitative data were obtained by discussion and field observation and quantitative data were obtained from interview questionnaire. To get background information on the study area, secondary data sources like reports, records of rural women and unpublished documents of districts concerned offices were reviewed. The other related information and primary data were obtained using appropriate data collection instruments including focus group discussions with key informants of six men, six women and six development agents; one from each sample kebele of both districts.

# Methods of data collection and analysis

Productive activities of the area were listed and qualitative data were gathered from group discussion that were held for one day in each district with key informants in the presence of four experts selected from district women's affairs office and agricultural development office. In addition, the group discussion was used to identify different productive resources found in the rural area. Home and farm observation were also used to observe different productive resources owned by female farmers in the research

The case history of the woman who has owned the productive resource was listed carefully. The main interview questionnaire for quantitative data was prepared based on the sources. The main data of the study was collected from the selected 180 respondent using the pre tested survey questionnaire. Control over, of a rural woman to productive resources was measured using the 'yes' or 'no'. Data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) and some descriptive statistics, such as percentage and mean.

# **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

# Basic activities for production in rural areas

There are many activities in the society which leads to production and productivity. The data on main activities in the society which leads to production and productivities are listed and responsibilities are examined.

# Credit

As indicated in gender-desegregated data, rural women's control on credit appears limited (only 6.1%) (Table 1). A variety of legal, socio-cultural and institutional constraints continue to restrict rural women's control over money taken by credit. These are low educational levels, lack of knowledge regarding financial management, bias in lending institutions and fiscal regulations which do not take into account the special characteristics of rural

S/N	Productive and related activities —	Men		Women	
		f	%	f	%
1	Bay different farm machines	158	87.7	22	12.3
2	Take credit from different sources	169	93.9	11	6.1
3	Participate in different meetings	153	85	27	15
4	Participate in different trainings	156	86.6	24	13.4
5	Continuously contact with DAs	180	100.0	0	0
6	Member of different association	174	96.7	6	3.3
7	Receiving technical assistance	160	88.9	20	11.1
	Total	1150	638.8	110	61.3
	Average	164.3	91.2	15.7	8.8

**Table 1.** Gender based division of labor on agriculture support productive activities.

businesses and their small-scale nature and lack of transportation to credit institutions which are often located in urban areas or more populated rural towns and villages.

In addition to the above problems, the men do not give the chance and right for his partners. One reason for this is hesitation of wives from taking money from credit providing organization and the fear to payback if she loses that money (Abera et al., 2006).

# Contact with development agents (DA)

The data indicates that the contact of rural women with the DAs is almost zero. This gap of contact is caused by the problem raised from both sides which are DAs and rural women's sides.

The first one is deep-rooted, erroneous beliefs on the part of extension workers making them to overlook women. They may claim that it is difficult to establish dialogue with women (who are, in any case, of only minor importance in agricultural production), that women have little say in farm decisions or a poor grasp of what extensionists are teaching, or that they are too shy or reluctant to accept new technology.

Women get information from neighbors while participating in indigenous self-help and social network associations, as well as through their husbands, school children and friends. The sources are mostly informal, indirect and sometimes provide incomplete information. This limits their role for the future in the community and development.

Other factors hindering women's participation in agricultural extension training are their lack of formal schooling, mobility and time for extension activities. However, women are good at finding ways of balancing domestic responsibilities with farm duties.

Their inclusion in extension programs would make their work more productive, helping to boost agricultural production. Extension programs would be more likely to succeed if they were tailored to women's special circumstances (Samuel et al., 2009).

# Member of different associations

Women rarely belong to cooperatives and other similar association. The data shows that their membership in different organization is only 3.3%, but cooperative membership is often a necessary qualification for government-subsidized inputs for small farmers. The lack of extension service provision and not being a member of different association of women restricts their control over inputs such as improved seed, fertilizer and pesticides.

# Participation in different meetings

Rural women's participation in different meetings, trainings, experience sharing visits, etc. is crucial to enable them to increase the level of consciousness, acquire the knowledge and improve skills required to expand the range of their income-generating activities in a changing rural economy. Men are expected to participate in such events and pass on the information and knowledge gained to their wives.

However, in practice, there is often little 'trickle across'. Women participate directly in women's associations but the activities are dominated by social or political discourse, whereas topics relating to farming skills, technologies, land use rights, water and natural resource use and management are peripheral (Berhanu et al., 2006). The level of rural women's participation in different trainings, meetings, discussions and in any other forum of exchanging idea is about 15%. In general, however, women in rural areas tend to be less educated than both urban women and rural men.

According the discussant information, young, educated (and often single) women are more likely to migrate to urban areas, which reduces the overall education levels of women remaining in rural communities and, over time, could eventually lead to the total abandonment of rural areas. In many instances, for young people to increase their consciousness about relatively civilized life, they are often required to leave their rural community and their chance of return is very low. Moreover, ack of available

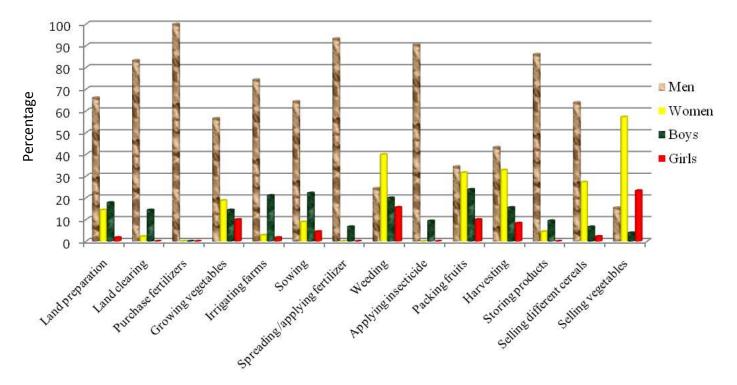


Figure 1. Gender based division of labor with regards to productive activities.

time acts as a further constraint, due to rural women's double and often triple workloads, as discussed above (MOFED, 2006).

When women do participate even in little trainings, the subject matter trained usually deals with activities of such limited nature, scope and profitability and the result is often further marginalization rather than mainstreaming of rural women into the changing economic base of rural communities (Abera et al., 2006).

# Gender based division of labor on productive activities

In the study area, the traditional division of labor most often situates women in roles based on providing emotional support and maintenance, while men are primarily responsible for economic support and contact with the world outside the home. Women's participation is in activities such as cooking, fetching water and food processing, all of which are outside the cash economy and concentrated around the household. Women are not given the opportunity to compete with men for certain jobs, even if women may do the jobs better than some men. Because of socio-cultural socialization and their biology, women in the study area have tended to dominate non-market activities (UNICEF, 2007).

Unfortunately, most women do not consider their chores as 'work' and thereby do not rate these activities

as entitled to any form of recognition. This is a perception most often reflected in the inequalities that women suffer, and reveals why it is unlikely that they will be active in decision-making. The above data (Figure 1) reflects how much the rural women are neglected from productive activities and how much these activities are controlled by rural men.

The gender division of labor in the agricultural sector in the rural area is one of the problems in fighting poverty with full social power. In this sector, rural women could contribute a lot but because of labor division, they are forced to remain in reproductive activities whereas men are engaged in productive activities (Ngome, 2003). Despite women being the main farmers or producers, their roles are largely unrecognized because of the fact that they are given mainly domestic activities which almost do not generate income. The research result in Figure 1 reflects this fact. The gender division of labor found in Table 1 can be shown in the graphic form to recognize the difference easily. It shows how gender division of labor is biased to men and the productive works are controlled by men.

The particular tasks done on farms by men and women have certain common patterns. In general, men undertake the heavy physical labor like land clearing or preparation and jobs which are specific to distant locations, such as livestock herding, while women carry out the repetitious, time-consuming tasks like weeding and those which are located close to home, such as care

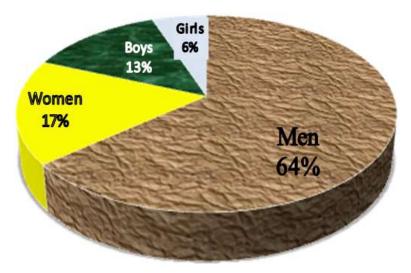


Figure 2. Average gender based division of labor with regards to productive activities.

of the kitchen garden. In most cases, the application of pesticides is considered a male task, even though women are not aware of the danger of exposure to chemicals to their unborn children. Women do a major part of the weeding of crops. Purchasing fertilizer fully and applying modern fertilizer mostly are among the duties left of men only. Packing fruits is one of the agricultural activities relatively neutral to gender division of labor. Care of livestock is shared, with men looking after the larger animals and children especially boys, and the smaller ones. Vegetable marketing is often seen as a female task, whereas marketing cereals are among the tasks men are responsible for. Women have often been excluded from agrarian reform and training programs in new agricultural methods.

The pie chart (Figure 2) indicates that about 64% of productive activities are carried out by men. Only 17% of productive activities are carried out by women. Similarly, girls have less proportion than boys (14 and 6%). This indicates that productive activities are mainly men's work than women's (Adereti, 2005).

# Rural women's control over productive resources

As it is indicated on Table 2 another focus of this research was rural women's control over different productive recourses. The previous roles on productive resourses are used to examine the control over, of rural women on these resources. The data of these types of resourses and their control over is analyzed and the disaggregated data are presented in Figure 3.

# Land

As shown in Figure 3, rural women exercises only 7%

control over the land. They have no significant control over land and there is no historical background to bequeath land to daughters by their fathers.

In the area where this research was done, women do not own the land they cultivate. Discriminatory culture and practices for inheritance of ownership to land are still widespread. Land that women do own tends to be considered as transfer to another clan, probably as a result of the woman's marriage.

Even if she had married and her partner died at any age the right of land passes to their eldest son or in the case where there is no boy, the nearest related person will own or control the land. High and intolerable pressure will be exerted from the society on females as they is going to neutralize their culture in the cases where she claims to inherit the land. If a women partner does not have a boy and only girls, she feels as she has no one who will inherit the fixed property that they have owned.

There was a case in Mirab Abaya District where a woman tried to register the land that they had before her partner passed away. The kebele administrators was afraid to reject her registration because of her legal right, but the whole community mobilized to exclude her from different social activities (social sanction). She was threatened by the mobs of the community towards her and finally gave her registration license to the concerned body of kebele which decided on her land was to be administered according to the interest of the society. This kind of social or cultural barrier to inherit land is relatively loose in urban area than rural area where it is very strong and deep rooted (World Survey, 2009).

# Labor

The data shown in Figure 3 indicates that 74.1% of the

**Table 2.** Distribution of respondents with regards to control of productive resources.

No.	Productive activities —		Men		Women	
	Productive activities —	f	%	f	%	
		Farm	175	97.2	5	2.8
1	Land	Communal land	175	97.2	5	2.8
		Home garden	112	62.2	68	37.8
		Grass land	180	100.0	0	0
		Forest lands	175	97.2	5	2.8
		Contracted land	180	100.0	0	0
		Wet lands	175	97.2	5	2.8
		Average land	167.4	93	12.6	7
2	Labor	House hold's labor	179	99.4	1	0.6
		Wife's labor	71	39.4	109	60.6
		Boy's labor	179	99.4	1	0.6
		Social labor	180	100.0	0	0
		Girl's labor	12	6.7	168	93.3
		Dependents' labor	180	100.0	0	0
		Average labor	133.5	74.1	46.5	25.9
	Water	Water for irrigation	175	97.2	5	2.8
		Potable water	34	18.9	146	81.1
2		Livestock's water	179	99.4	1	0.6
3		Spring water	144	80.0	36	20.0
		Sanitation water	49	27.2	131	72.8
		Average water	116.2	64.5	63.6	35.5
		Oxen	162	90.0	17	9.4
	Livestock	Cows	78	43.3	102	56.7
		donkey	180	100.0	0	0
4		Mules	180	100.0	0	0
		Poultry	67	37.2	113	62.8
		Sheep's	180	100.0	0	0
		Goats	180	100.0	0	0
		Average livestock	146.7	81.5	33.3	18.5
	Inputs	Fertilizer	180	100	0	0
		Improved seeds	170	94.4	10	5.6
5		Improved poultry	110	61.1	70	38.9
		Pesticide	180	100.0	0	0
		Average Inputs	160	88.9	20	11.1
6	Finance	Equb	180	100.0	0	0
		Micro-finance	180	100.0	0	0
		Edir	180	100.0	0	0
		Bank	180	100.0	0	0
		Safety net	179	99.4	1	0.6
		credit from persons	179	99.4	1	0.6
		Average finance	179.7	99.8	0.3	0.2

right to control labor is reserved for men and women's right to control labor is only 25.9%. This one fourth right to control labor is only her labor and girls' labor. Mostly, the girls' labor is controlled by women, whereas the boys' labor is controlled by fathers. If mothers want to order

young boys, she had to have permission from the father who controls their labor. The reason why men have no control over girls' labor and full control over boys' labor is based on the labor division where girls exercise reproductive role and boys' productive role.

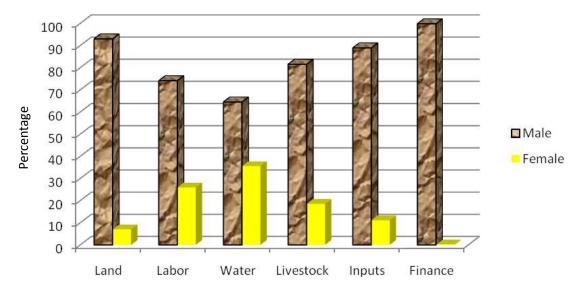


Figure 3. Rural women's control over main productive resources.

In the case where there is no husband because of different reasons, the chance of leading the whole family lies on the eldest male child of the family. If the eldest child is very young or there is no male child, the house may be headed by the female, but it is under the patronage of the nearest male relative. In this case, she cannot sell or exchange any permanent assets without the approval of that person.

# Water

The power of rural women to control water resources varies based on purpose of water. In a case where water is for irrigation and livestock, it is controlled by men. In another way, if it is for home consumption or for sanitation, it is under the control of women. This indicates the way resources are divided. If it is for productive purpose, it goes to men's control and the opposite will be applied if it is for reproductive purpose. When it generalized, 64.5% of water resource is controlled by men and 35.5% by women.

# Livestock

The above data also revealed that 81.5% of the right to control livestock is for the men. Only 18.5% is reserved for rural women. From this data, one can conclude that rural women have almost no control over livestock and their production. The right to control livestock is almost reserved for men. The decision related to livestock is solely controlled by men except few men who want to discuss some issues simply for the sake of discussion. Even some men claim to control milk and milk products in which rural women considered as where they have

control right in comparison with other products (Berhanu et al., 2006).

In some houses, poultry can be owned by different members of the family. Except that in some cases, the production of poultry is controlled by men just like other livestock and their product.

# Inputs

Rural women have 11.1% of control over different inputs related to productive activities. In contrary, men have 88.9% of control over different resourse related to productive activities. They have better control only in poultry inputs when compared with male counterparts.

# Financial resources

The control over financial resources of rural women is only 0.2%, whereas the control of men on financial resources is 99.8%. This is the data in researches which is highly surprising. With this, almost zero control over financial resourse, their contribution to economic growth is almost insignificant. This means their role is bounded on reproductive role only (Lemlem et al., 2010). Though much efforts has been made, rural women farmers have no control over finances to purchase even impertinent inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides and veterinary medicines which are critical to increase production and productivity.

Difficulties in gaining control over credit restrict womens' use of inputs, and this has consequences on productivity. The obstacles that women face in gaining both control over credit has not correctly been addressed by some recent innovations developed by lending

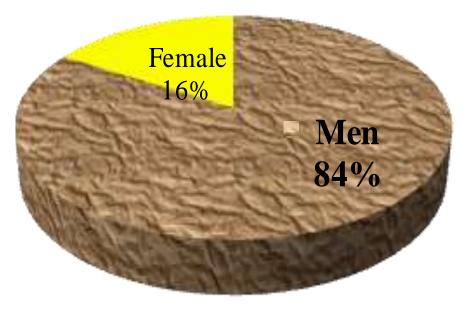


Figure 4. Rural women average control over productive resources.

institutions to overcome these problems (Pitt et al., 2006). Men have 84% of control over total productive resource when all control of productive resources is summed up (Figure 4). Whereas, only 16% of control over the productive resources are left for rural the women. This indicates that the lion's share of control over productive resources is taken by men.

# Implication of the result to poverty reduction

Poverty can be defined as the combination of uncertain or non-existent income and a lack of control over economic resources needed to ensure sustainable living conditions. It often goes hand-in-hand with hunger, malnourishment, poor health, high mortality and morbidity rates, insufficient education and precarious and unhealthy housing (MOFED, 2006).

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) provides a comprehensive framework for the guarantee of women's full rights to economic and social benefits. Article 14 specifically addresses the situation of rural women, stipulating that "States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure that such rural women have the right to control productive resources like agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology, equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as extension services and participation in different social affairs to empower rural women (Adereti, 2005; Ngome, 2003; Skied, 2007).

Control over productive resources strongly influences

efforts to achieve entire development and reduce poverty; thereby to realize the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). For instance, control over the land is closely tied to efforts to achieve Goal 1 on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger due to the link between food security and utilization of land. In terms of achieving Goal 3 to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, use of land, own and control economic resources, property and inheritance rights are important indicators of women's empowerment and human development (MOFED, 2006; Skied, 2007).

Whereas, this study shows that the rural women's control over productive resources is very little. Without fair control over the productive resources, the equitability of gender is unlikely and by the same token, their contributions towards poverty alleviation endeavor are negligible. They do not have frequently contact with extension agents and do not participate in development oriented trainings. They have no first hand or new information about economic development. Instead, they have to rely on information being passed on to them from men or her husband, or ideas gleaned through their informal networks. In turn, this will affect their ability to control resources, to increase productivity and their ability to innovate and fulfill their productive potential.

In general, these can decrease women's contribution to poverty reduction and thereby attributed to the absence of economic opportunities and autonomy, lack of control over economic resources, including credit, land ownership and inheritance and support services and their minimal participation in the decision making process (MOFED, 2006). In the area where this research is carried out, rural women contribute minor effort to the Reduction of poverty. This is a very alarming result for different stockholders who engage in women empowerment.

# Conclusion

Female farmers in the two surveyed districts have limited control over major productive resources such as irrigation water, credit, extension services and rural institutions. These are further aggravated by the cultural barriers, low infrastructure and educational level. Moreover, they face various constraints which hamper their efforts to uplift their lives and those around them.

However, facilitating control over productive resources by poor rural female farmers is not a one-time event, but an institutional process requiring permanent adaptation to changing circumstances of power, economics and culture. Therefore, empowering women is essential not only for the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities, but also for overall economic productivity and thereby to reduce poverty.

# Recommendations

Ensuring women's economic empowerment and control over resources requires an integrated approach to growth development, focused on gender-responsive employment promotion and informed by interdependency between economic and social development. Social objectives need to be incorporated into economic policies. A participatory, continuous, gender-differentiated database is imperative in identifying target groups for extension services, extension programs, maximizing experience, ensuring feedback and monitoring and evaluating extension activities.

Empowerment helps rural women gain control over their own lives, communities and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important. Hence, empowerment of rural women should be viewed as a means of creating fertile ground for them to exercise their right and protest men to have equal control over productive resources either individually or collectively for social transformation. Empowerment should include multi-dimensional social process, sociological. psychological economic spheres and at various levels, such as individual, group and community and challenges assumptions about status quo, asymmetrical power relationship and social dynamics.

Empowering women puts the spotlight on education and employment which are an essential element to sustainable development. Working with partners to facilitate women's access to extension advice, credit and inputs, especially for crop and livestock enterprises that are mainly in the women's domain can increase their role in controlling economic resources. Targeting women and female-headed households to participate in technology development, transfer and adoption is taken with great attention by different development actors.

# Conflict of interests

Authors have not declared any conflict of interest

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