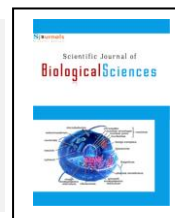


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Review article

Ensuring equitable resource allocation and gender sensitive policies in supporting food production and security in Southern Africa

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ABSTRACT

Gender disparities in resource allocation and non gender responsive policies are important constraint to increasing food production and security in Southern Africa. The discussion attempt to explore the role of equitable resource allocation and development of gender sensitive policies and their implications for improving food production and security in Southern Africa. Gender responsive policies are meant to catalyze a change process for ending gender discrimination and securing women's access to key productive resources. It is believed that without specific attention to gender issues in food production and security strategies, unknowingly policy may reinforce inequalities between women and men, and may even increase productive resources imbalances. It must be emphasized that addressing gender resource allocation disparities and development of gender sensitive policies is an integral part of enabling women to guarantee their families'—and their own—well-being. Little attention has been paid to the differential impacts of resource allocation disparities and development of gender sensitive policies on food production and security, or to which delivery mechanisms may be more effective in addressing women needs and concerns in food production and security. It is assumed that traditional food production policies are not gender-responsive and typically do not consult women who are the majority end-users, improved varieties and technologies do not take into account

women's needs, preferences, and resources, as a result the high rate of failure of intervention food production and security strategies. However, policy makers should be aware that development and implementation of gender responsive policies and equitable gender resource allocation are likely to be mistaken for violation of social norms or adversely affect gender relations within the household, leading to less successful adoption and potential backlash against women. Thus, interventions that seek to remove obstacles in gender resource allocation need to consider the trade-offs inherent in challenging and respecting gender norms.

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1. Introduction

The role women play in food production and the rural society is fundamental to agricultural and rural development in Southern Africa. Focusing on closing the gap in opportunities between women and men through availing productive resources, and prioritizing women's empowerment as a central component of sustainable food production strategy will end the nightmare of food insecurity in Southern Africa. Most of the time women face gender discrimination in access to and control over productive resources and other services. This is despite the fact that women take part actively in most food production and security activities. However, elsewhere it has been acknowledged that women are responsible for more than half the world's food production overall and produce up to 60 to 80% of basic foodstuff in Africa (Fresco, 1998). Boserup (1970) concluded that nearly all the tasks connected with food production are performed by Africa rural women. It is assumed that policies should be made to support efforts to strengthen governmental capacities and legal frameworks to guarantee women full legal rights to own property and to inherit as a critical issue for the economic empowerment of women. The situation of women in Southern Africa is characterized by overwork, low productivity, little access to credit, land, training, and the use of rudimentary technology which has resulted in diminishing capacity of food production to provide for household subsistence. The general gender sensitive policies from responsible authorities means that women's needs and potentials are always not given adequate attention in the development of national strategies and plans. In Southern Africa, gender disparities emanate from the fact that few women hold policy making positions at the national level, and those that do tend to be concentrated in non influential ministries. Development of gender responsive policies and enhancing equitable productive resources are promising approaches to empower women in specific settings which involve tailoring food production and security interventions to suite specific socio-cultural context in which gender relations unfold. The contribution of women to food production and security should be maximized by implementing gender responsive policies and equitable distribution of productive resources and other multifaceted specific problems they encounter as economic and social stakeholders in their efforts to participate fully in food production. Gender responsive policies and equitable gender resource allocation are likely to improve food production and security in Southern Africa.

2. Strengthening the role of women in food production and security

The food situation in its current state in Southern Africa, has a wide spread implications which need urgent solutions. Ensuring adequate food supply to the growing population ought to be a major priority, where majority of the population is estimated to be absolutely poor and malnourished. This can only be possible by understanding the indispensable role of women in improving food production and enhancing food security in communities. Acknowledging the crucial role of women in food production is the first step in formulating gender sensitive policies in response to food shortages. Integrating gender dimensions in food production becomes fundamental to achieving food security, because it seeks to minimize social, economic and political barriers to women participation in agricultural production. Existing policies that intentionally and unintentionally reinforce gender discrimination must be addressed. Continued marginalization of women who are the majority and the

custodians of food production provide the explanation for the food capacity decline in the region. To address embedded gender barriers, there is need to close the gender gap in terms of access to productive resources, education and training, provision of extension services, credit facilities and appropriate technology for women to maximize production. These factors through negative social values and attitudes on gender have derailed participation of women in food production. An attempt to address the aforementioned will pave way for ensuring improved food production and security. On the other hand, high priority to be attached to education and training for women in food production should not be overemphasized. Public investment in education and training should be tailor made to empower women ensuring their full participation in the mainstream food production systems. The need to set up women's community based food production training programs with well defined goals should be one of the future priorities to achieve food security. Women's training programs should be remodeled so as to involve them into the agricultural developmental agenda and make such training more relevant to their needs and society. Relevant training which respond to women farmers' unique needs can make a difference for entire communities – as well as for implementing food production programs. The role of research and extension in order to accrue maximum benefit in food production is crucial in this regard. Realign extension services to make them gender sensitive for example establishing pro-female community based training and increasing the number of female extension workers. This will be a step in the right direction enabling the communities to build up a strong food production base-so necessary if food insecurity is to be avoided.

Food production displays a duality, in that activities can be grouped into food production as a commercial activity on the other hand, and food aimed at household needs and food security on the other hand. While both activities are economically rational responses to the prevailing conditions in household food needs, different incentives and support actions may be required to target women to fully participate in these sectors. The planning for future priorities on improved food production should be based on premise that women farmers are the majority in Southern Africa, and can also make rational and effectively use of available resources. There is a tendency of men and women participating unevenly in food production activities, have unequal access to productive resources and exhibit different levels of engagement in food production decision making processes. If gender based discrimination in food production is not adequately addressed, food insecurity will be a perpetual problem.

Economic viability through greater engagement in national collaborative networking of public and private sector to enhance women's potential to produce food is unquestionable. Food production efficiency will improve when technical, institutional and economic opportunities for women are supported by both public and private sector. Involvement of women in food production programs can contribute to reduced vulnerability, increased food security and accelerated economic growth in Southern Africa, if both public and private sectors are involved. On the other hand investment in market-oriented interventions that facilitate women's market access while addressing gender norms is imperative. Food production interventions with specific gender objectives can be better understood by acknowledging the history of incorporating gender policies into food production initiatives. If women are to be effective in contributing to food production and security, discrimination against them should be eliminated and the value of their participation promoted. This can only be achieved by creation of awareness of the critical role of women in agriculture and food production. The fact that women empowerment is necessary for bringing about sustainable food development at a faster pace should not be overlooked. Gender sensitive policies in the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of food production initiatives are integral to understanding the complex social, cultural, economic, and environmental factors that may inhibit women from fully participating in helping their communities to become more self-sufficient and improve food security. Gender blind planning has forced women into a subordinate role to the detriment of their own development, and that of the societies at large. The majority of women are particularly vulnerable in resource allocation in this situations targeted gender sensitive policies are needed to minimize inequalities that impede greater development efforts and food production. Simultaneously, planning for women's involvement and access to productive resources does, in fact, improve the likelihood of women capacity to contribute effectively to food production and security.

Micro livestock farming has diverse economic and social functions in Southern Africa. Unfortunately, have had untapped potential for poverty reduction and enhancing food security. Involvement of women in micro livestock farming towards food production will compensate for the experienced convectional livestock decline in production. This is possible only by pursuing essential forms of management conducive to sustainable exploitation of micro livestock to meet the target of poverty reduction and food security. Women engagement in micro livestock farming will improve animal protein supply side for local communities. This may translate to adequate

protein for household consumption and communities at large. On the other hand, micro livestock farming may give a relief to continued challenges of human growth outpacing the ability to meet the predicted animal protein demand in Southern Africa. Research focusing on improving women's ability to manage micro livestock species will go a long way in enhancing food security. Maximum benefits can be accrued if micro livestock farming becomes a major component of the food production system. Due to women numerical strength in local communities, their full engagement in micro livestock farming will have a profound implication on protein availability. On contrary, non involvement of women in all food production activities will continue to be an important impediment to achieving food security in Southern Africa. Focusing on closing the gap in opportunity between women and men in Southern Africa and prioritizes women's empowerment as a central component of any food production strategy will end the nightmare of food insecurity. Countries need to put in place easily controllable practical mechanisms to help detect, control, and prevent discriminatory action between the sexes that may occur in a society. Overcoming gender inequalities can have powerful social and economic impacts, resulting in improving the status of women within the household and the community at large. This will have a cascading effects in delivering significant improvements to food production and security.

3. The dynamics of productive resources as a gender issue and their implications for food production and security

Discrimination against women on productive resources has a far reaching implications for food production and security. Women face gender disparities in access to and control over land, as well as lack of access to other productive resources and services. Projects that do not recognize women's customary rights to land risk jeopardizing those rights and alienating women, who often withdraw their labor in response (Quisumbing and Pandolfelli, 2003). The absence of law and security for women concerning land is one of the most serious obstacles to increased farm production and higher incomes for rural women. Unequal access to land is also an obstacle to increasing food production and incomes of rural women. FAO (1994) cites limited access to resources as one of the main reasons that women are unable to better contribute to food security, and recognize that the causes of this stem from a series of inter—related social, economic and cultural factors. As the amount of land cultivated per person declined in the face of increased population pressure and decreased areas of growth for arable and permanent crops, women's access to land was only rarely addressed and thus their benefits from land reforms were few (FAO, 1988). Without land, women were generally excluded from agricultural cooperatives as membership was often based on land ownership. Women are often marginalized and have minimal control over access to factors of production like land, inputs such as seed and fertilizer, credit and technology. This is on the background that women play a central role in food production in Southern Africa. Their contributions to agricultural productivity at the household, community and national levels are limited by a diverse range of social and economic constraints. Women continue to face many specific barriers preventing them to fulfill their potential as food producers and this has undermined food security. This is despite the fact that women are the majority, contributing significantly to food production in meeting the nutritional household needs in Southern African. The majority of labor in agricultural production is provided by women and children. However, their access and control over productive resources is greatly hampered and undervalued due to inequalities constructed by patriarchal norms (Doss, 1999). Given that women constitute 60-70% of all agricultural producers, any service or program that excludes women is bound to have a very limited and temporary impact on overall development and productivity (IFPRI, 2004). This underscores the importance of including women farmers in all agricultural programs. Limited access to, and control over, productive resources and services has emanated from the perceived cultural, traditional and sociological roles which are discriminatory. To a large extent, constraints in access to land cannot be dissociated from access to other productive resources that can augment women's productivity—i.e., credit, inputs such as high-quality varieties of seeds can augment farmers', farming equipment, and extension services. The failure to acknowledge that women are already engaged in farming and seeking ways in which to increase their production and earnings has made the situation worse. Closing the gender gap in access to productive resources such as land, credit, machinery or chemicals could eliminate yield gaps of 20% to 30% among women and men, increase domestic agricultural output by 2.5% to 4%, and mean up to 100 million fewer people living in hunger (FAO, 1994). Observation has been made that when women obtain the same farm inputs as average male farmers, they increase their yields for maize, beans and cowpeas by 22 percent (IFPRI, 2004), which may mean that gender constitutes the most profound differentiating division in food production. When women received the same

education and similar inputs and assistance as men, overall farm yields could rise by as much as 22 percent (FAO, 2011).

Overcoming gender-related barriers requires innovative and practical solutions informed by a context-specific understanding of how to initiate and sustain gender transformative change in food production. Gender inequalities has constrained women's roles in agriculture and food production, and in the long run undermines achievement of food and nutrition security in the region. Furthermore, women's productive capacity or opportunities are limited by entrenched customs and legal barriers in many parts of Southern Africa, which may result in restriction on their ownership of land (McFerson 2008). Corrective measures on legal barriers and customary norms will have a profound implication on food production. Land provides financial security, food security, and can be an important asset in the case of emergency (Denton 2002). In many cases, women have access to land, but limited control over it, since they do not own it and cannot make decisions on its use. Limited land ownership means diminished rights to productive means, limited access to safety nets and reduced economic security.

Gender often acts as a determinant for resource allocation, and directly impacts decisions about saving and risk aversion (World Bank, 2002). One way to improve women's decision-making power within the home is to increase women's access to control over material and non-material resources (Boden and Zoe, 1997). Women clearly do the majority of the work related to food security, yet their capacity to make independent decisions about such issues is limited. This has resulted in food capacity decline. Women's potential as food producers can only be realized if productive resources are made available to them, and also involving women in decision making in food production related issues. Lack of independent decision making for women who are responsible for food production has social consequences. Due to the fact that women do not own productive resources such as land and livestock, this makes a critical difference to whether they can produce enough food for themselves and families or for sale. If afforded the opportunity to own land, women are likely to invest in land management and produce food and have stable incomes. The lack of credit for women because they do not possess collateral to access bank loans has worsened an already fragile situation. Food insecurity will persist in the midst of adequate aggregate supplies because of lack of credit opportunities for the resource poor women and the absence of effective social safety nets. There is greater need to provide support and access to credit facilities to women so that they compete on a more equal footing in food production with men. National governments should sought policies to improve women access to productive resources such as land, agricultural inputs and credits. Investing in women to have equal access to inputs and other productive resources is cheap and will take a shorter time to achieve more wide-reaching, multiple, and long-lasting developmental outcomes. In addition to productive resources, access to markets has continued to be another huddle which women need to overcome in food production. Women's roles are generally undervalued and constrained by limitations on their access to resources and market availability. This compounded with poor roads which limit access to markets, women can not profitably take their produce to markets due to increasing transportation costs. Women have failed to sell their produce to high end markets due to bad state of roads.

The different forms of discrimination women face makes it difficult to disaggregate the various obstacles women encounter when seeking to improve food production in local communities. However, removing obstacles women face in accessing productive resources in food production may translate into increased food production. "Removing the barriers women face in their roles as food producers, farm workers, and primary caregivers is achievable and inexpensive," said Lourdes Adriano, Practice Leader for Agriculture, Food Security & Rural Development in the Regional and Sustainable Development Department at ADB. Challenging the constraints women face must therefore be treated as a key component in the fight against food insecurity. Removal of these obstacles through gender-sensitive approach would result in significant productivity gains benefiting not only the women concerned, but their households, communities, and the region as a whole. Adoption of policies and enacting laws that would ensure equal access to economic resources by women and men will improve food production and security. Due to a convergence of appropriate logistical, cultural and economic factors, women are able to benefit fully from food programs and services. Food insecurity can be prevented if food programs are more focused, strategic, and aligned with the challenges and capacities of women. Women's equal access to and control over productive resources is critical for the achievement of gender equality and empowerment of women, and for equitable and sustainable food production and security. Gender equality in the resource allocation and services, has positive multiplier effects for a range of key development goals, including food insecurity reduction and the welfare of household food needs. Allocation of necessary productive resources to strengthen gender sensitive

food security, accompanied by gender responsive services can help to enhance food production. There is without question, a need to address issues related to women's low status that is evident in their minimal access to resources like land, inputs, credits etc, and the fact that productive resources are essential to ensure that women can participate in sustainable development and contribute to food security.

4. Gender sensitive policies will recognize the potential of women multiple roles as food producers

Misguided agricultural and trade policies have contributed to the current food crisis, including the failure to recognize women's crucial roles in food production and household food security(Karl, 2009).. Women constraints to food production emanate from unfriendly policies which have compromised their effective participation in food production. Public policies and investment are biased against women, inequitable access to land and critical resources and this has perpetuated food insecurity. Growth originating in agriculture, in particular the smallholder sector is at least twice as effective if more women are involved. Policy should emphasize the importance of fostering knowledge exchange amongst women for the maximization of tangible and intangible benefits in food production and enhance food security. Creating a more enabling environment for women and improve food outcomes requires gender sensitive policies that recognize the potential of women multiple roles as food producers and providers. Appreciation of gender differences can be enhanced with improved information about the range of inequalities and specific constraints facing women in food production. Despite clear evidence that tackling the gender gap can lead to improved food security, many countries in Southern Africa are failing to promote gender sensitive interventions. A simultaneous and integrated pursuit of such information and transformation is essential for elimination of gender blind strategies, while complementing men and women efforts and maximize their synergy in food production. Policies should be put in place that help relieve women of their burdens and recognize their largely undervalued contributions to food production systems and enhance food security. Policy formulation based on the understanding how the concept of gender in development has evolved over time is crucial in analyzing current development initiatives aimed at improving the capacities of those most marginalized in communities, typically women in patriarchal societies. Improving household food production and distribution can be overcome by increasing the number of women that undertake productive agriculture for themselves and for trade, which can done appropriate policies. Such policies should influence and empower women in increasing their access to small scale irrigation systems, training of small scale women farmers on green and sustainable technologies. Such new technologies would enable them to continuously produce food even in lean times. Access to credit and finance is also to be improved through deliberate policies. Marginalized groups especially women are to be harnessed in this drive to commercialize food production in both rural and urban areas. Women themselves may also address some of the problems they face by moving towards commercialization through collective farming for example by forming farming cooperatives to gain access to inputs, markets or other services. If women are involved in commercial oriented food enterprises it means significant gain in income which in turn improves household welfare. In order to craft appropriate policies and interventions to food production and security, there is also need to better understand the critical facets of food insecurity which will translate into poverty eradication. It is impossible to redress gender inequalities in the short term, however minimum policy interventions should do no harm, and ideally they should catalyze a change process for ending gender discrimination and securing women's access to key productive resources. Developing gendered policy options and strategies to support food production systems that potentially have the greatest impacts on women is the solution to food insecurity in the region.

5. Implications

Inequality in the distribution of resources between men and women is linked with food production inefficiency, however, interventions meant for promoting food production and security often fail to redress women's lack of access to, and control of, important productive resources. Legislation and policies, decentralized administrative and institutional capacities and public awareness campaigns need to assert, protect and enhance women's rights to productive resources, land and property. Policies should be made to support efforts to strengthen governmental capacities and legal frameworks to guarantee women full legal rights to own property and to inherit as a critical issue for the economic empowerment of women. Women's low participation in national and regional policy-making, their invisibility in national statistics and their low participation in extension services

has meant that those issues of most concern to women have been neglected in the design and implementation of many development policies and programs in Southern Africa. Development of gender sensitive policies have far more reaching implications for addressing the main concerns of women by paying attention to agricultural productive role of women. This can only be achieved involving women in policy making decision or by directly consulting them to articulate their needs. In Southern Africa it is imperative to create women affairs ministries which could be an important step in ensuring that women's needs and concerns are put on the national agenda. The lack of creation of such ministries in most countries has weakened the influence of women on food production and the direct impact of policy on women has been negligible hence resulting in inadequately addressing women's needs for assistance concomitant with their agricultural production responsibilities.

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