

FOOD SECURITY, GENDER AND PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT: PERSPECTIVE OF PAKISTAN

Khizra Ejaz

Director Office, COMSATS Institute of Information Technology

1.5 KM, Defence Road, Off Raiwind Road, Lahore

Punjab 54000 Pakistan

Email: khazraejaz@ciitlahore.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Food security will be a topic of major concern for the next 50 years and beyond (Rosegrant et al, 2003). Today, it is widely accepted that food security is as much a matter of poverty – access to food – as it is a matter of supply – food availability (Derez and Sen, 1989). According to Rosegrant et al, 2003, South Asia and Africa are the regions of special concern. Though the food grain production has more than doubled in South Asia since 1960s yet growing population in this region have brought many countries in the list of net importers of food grain (Gera, 2004). The realization that the root of the problem is attached to gender discrimination in most of the South Asia is now gaining more attention (Ramachandran, 2008). This paper attempts to highlight the food security situation in Pakistan with special reference to rural women and their rights as described by the religion Islam. It also draws attention towards the effectiveness of measures taken up in the rural areas to empower women and build the capacity of these areas.

Key words: Food Security, Rural Women, Gender Discrimination, Participatory Development, Pakistan, Women Rights in Islam.

Introduction

FAO (2000) defines food security as the “physical, social and economic access by all people at all times to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs according to their food preferences for an active and healthy life.” Food security will be a topic of major concern for the next 50 years and beyond (Rosegrant et al, 2003). Today it is widely accepted that food security is as much a matter of poverty – access to food – as it is a matter of supply – food availability (Derez and Sen, 1989). The world at present has enough resources to feed everyone yet a large set of population does not have adequate resources to buy the required amount of food because of inequitable distribution of policies, leading to food insecurity (Gera, 2004). Sen (1989, pp. 278) argues that “the elimination of regular hunger and under nutrition is a much harder task than the eradication of famines.”

Eradication of hunger and poverty has been adopted as one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goal in 2001. Much of the concern therefore is invested in agriculture sector to support the growing concerns of food security in the ever increasing population (Rosegrant et al, 2003). South Asia and Africa are the regions of special concern (Rosegrant et al, 2003). Though the food grain production has more than doubled in South Asia since 1960s yet growing population in this region have brought many countries in the list of net importers of food grain (Gera, 2004). Gera (2004) argues that if the total supply of imported and domestically produced grain is distributed equitably then all the South Asian would receive more than 2,416 calories per day which is the minimum required for a healthy diet. Food security researchers have often commented that though most of the South Asian countries have available food stocks and better health and education facilities as compared to Sub Saharan Africa yet their nutrition level of women and children is much lower (Ramachandran, 2008). The realization that the root of the problem is attached to gender discrimination in most of the South Asia is now gaining more attention (Ramachandran, 2008).

Women graphically represent about 50% of the world’s population and almost one-third of the total labour force. Their working hours are nearly two-third of the total working hours but they receive only one-tenth of the world income and less than one percent as their share in property (Prakash, 2003). The condition of rural women especially in developing world is an area of great concern. Women are much associated with the agricultural practices in the developing countries. Their work is highly labour intensive and they usually do not enjoy the benefits of technology (Parakash, 2003). “South Asia falls into the male farming system category and is part of the belt of classic patriarchy characterized by extreme forms of gender discrimination” (IDRC, 2004 cited in Ramachandran, 2008, pp. 5)

This paper attempts to highlight the food security situation in Pakistan with special reference to rural women and their rights as described by the religion Islam. It also draws attention towards the effectiveness of measures taken up in the rural areas to empower women and build the capacity of these areas.

Research design

Food security, women under development, high dependence of females on males, and potential of community participation in enhancing the position of females in the society are critical issues for women in most of the developing countries. These issues are abundantly researched as an independent research questions. This paper does a qualitative investigation of these questions in

an integrated framework. Large set of international and national literature has been reviewed. Later the compiled literature has been structured on the basis of natural linkages to establish the argument that conducted research on these issues.

Discussion

Pakistan is an agriculture based economy. Agricultural production is dominated by crop production, which accounts for almost 61 percent of agriculture's GDP (at constant prices). Livestock accounts for almost 35 per cent. Fisheries and forestry currently make up about 4 per cent of the GDP (FAO, 2000). However agricultural growth in the country has never been constant. There have been some years of slow and some of moderate growth. The country was almost self sufficient in the production of wheat during early 1980s and was one of the leading exporter of rice. The domestic demand increased over time due to the increase in population and the food grain production fell behind demand because of the consistent decline in the world prices of food grains. Therefore the annual imports in 1990s rose 2.5 million tons. Even with these imports food security is still the major concern in country owing to the inequitable access to food and the declining purchasing power of the poor (Gera, 2004). Pakistan however is not a food insecure country (FAO, 2000). Hunger and malnutrition are mostly the result of limited access of food by poor and vulnerable people (Gera, 2004). Gera (2004) reports that around one-third of population in Pakistan has no access to food in order to maintain adequate nutrition. FAO Report (2000) states that 34% of population in the country live below poverty line and when it comes to rural areas, this proportion becomes one-third to one-half and women disproportionately share the burden of poverty.

Due to high level of illiteracy, social norms and taboos hold a high importance in the rural society. Women in rural societies are not much respected and are equally exploited under the rural social system. According to the statistics given by FAO fact sheet for Pakistan the percentage of rural women attached to agriculture (79.4%) is higher as compared to men (60.8%) yet they do not get the recognition they deserve. Mostly they are working as unpaid labours doing their daily round of domestic chores combined with the work in field. "Women grow about half of the world's food but hardly own any land" (Parakash, 2003, pp. 3). Discriminatory patterns of land ownership run across South Asia and Pakistan is no exception (Ramachandran, 2008). Though the religion (Islam) provides a complete structure of inheritance according to which the wife gets one eighth of the property and the remaining is distributed among the children with the daughters receiving half as much as the sons. The important point here is that the system is not based on the inequality of sexes but on the concept of justice in patrilineal society. As in such societies male members look after the wellbeing of the other dependent members (Rahman, 1987). Unfortunately in spite of these clear religious legal provisions women in rural areas are not given their due share in land holdings (Rahman, 1987). Land entitlement to women is more related to the size of land holdings and economic and educational level of the families than to the religious injunctions (Rahman, 1987). Ramachandran (2008) argues that with growing feminization of agriculture the land ownership issues of women are becoming more prominent. She (2008) points out how women are struggling to ensure the livelihood and food security of their families without 'credit', 'technology' and 'extension services'. A study (Rao, 2005) done in Burkina Faso suggested that agricultural output could be increased 6-20% through equitable distribution of resources between male and female farmers. Chen (1996) in his study found that increased decision making of women in the absence of men in China led to the better farm management. In China where men moved more towards non-farm sector, women's better access to land and greater control over agricultural activities led to better opportunities (Chen, 1996).

High percentages of women are associated with the agriculture and services sector which implies higher and more regular wages hence enhanced food security (Ramachandran, 2008). However the wages of women are one-third the wages of men. Ramachandran (2008) makes a comparison between the wages of men and women in the South Asian region. According to her, the wage rates paid to women workers are 20 to 30% less than what it is paid to male workers for the same activity. Although women are preferred choice of labour for works such as cotton picking yet the disparity among wages exists (Ramachandran, 2008). In addition discrimination also exists in terms of health and education of women. Islam does stresses on the education of both the sexes the first word of Quran "Iqra" means "read" emphasizes the importance of education in Islam. However rural societies are still apprehensive in getting their female child educated. Rural societies believe female child education to be a useless investment on the basis of her getting married to other household (Sarmad et al, 1989). Surveys showed that illiterate mothers are associated with highest incidence of child under nutrition (Ramachandran, 2008). Rosegrant (2003) emphasizes on the women education stating that it affects all the dimensions of development from lowering fertility rates to raising productivity and improving environmental management.

In Pakistan men are generally considered superior than women. Women do not take part in the family decisions and have little say in the family matters (Nazli and Hamid, nd). A male child is more favoured in terms of food as compared to the female. Women are normally treated as residual category eating normally after men and children and a male child has an edge in terms of food as compared to female. (Ramachandran, 2008). Research studies have found that improvement in household food security and nutrition are associated with women empowerment. In rural areas of Pakistan majority of women borrowers (94%) borrowed to fulfill the needs of their households. This led the policy maker to target women for credit and small enterprise programs leading to female empowerment. (Ramachandran, 2008). Ramachandran (2008) argues that educated women farmers with land are a power asset she also believes that malnourished illiterate women perpetuate poverty.

Rural females have limited control over productive resources. The vast gender disparity, illiteracy and lack of awareness among the rural females are contributing factors towards their limited growth. Women all over have been an attention to national and international development programs. Participatory development approaches are a step towards this direction. Participatory research methods have been tested and tried across the world to address the issue. Today it is widely advocated and documented as philosophy and mode of development (Chambers, 1994). Be it the case of seed selection in India and Nepal (studies by Claude et., al cited in Scoones, Thompson, Chambers, 2009) or potato cultivation in Bolivia, Ethiopia, Peru and Uganda (studies by

Ortiz et., al, cited in Scoones, Thompson, Chambers, 2009) participatory approaches have provided farmers opportunities to judge technologies on the basis of cultural considerations, productivity and profitability (Scoones, Thompson, Chambers, 2009).

The concept of community based participation in Pakistan started in early 1980 in the small area of Karachi called Orangi where local and provincial government failed to address the problems of the citizens due to institutional and structural reasons. (Hassan and Salim, 2004). Orangi Pilot Project was a socially innovative initiative taken to improve the sanitation conditions of the inhabitants. This new participatory approach effectively mobilized the local managerial and financial resources and brought the cost to a minimum level (Khan, 1991). The successful implementation of this project encouraged communities to solve their problems on self help basis. Following the success of Orangi Pilot Project Agha Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP) devised the model for participation in the rural areas (Nejima, 2002). AKRSP developed in 1982 was successful in doing programs that involved farmer's involvement like afforestation, cultivation and marketing of cash crops which were suitable for the cold climate etc. The model adopted by AKRSP was more devised on the basis of trial and error and 100,000 mountain farmers were involved in it. Today around sixteen community organizations are working for rural development following the model of AKRSP. They have formed a network of Rural Support Program (RSP) in order to promote exchange of information and knowledge (Nejima, 2002).

The RSPs recognized the inevitable role female farmers in the food security. Many initiatives have been taken by these community organizations to help and educate female farmers with their land and agricultural practices. Farmer field schools are a step in this regard. Farmer field school "is a well tested approach based upon 'learning by doing' to empower the communities to build their capacity for informed decision making" (WWF-P). It provides a platform to the farmers where they can share their experience and knowledge to improve their existing practices (WWF-P). Under this program Women Open Schools (WOS) have been formed which provide assistance to the female farmers and work in collaboration with RSPs. One case study on these schools is discussed under:

In Sind 37 Women Open Schools have been established with the objective of 'capacity building', 'empowerment' and 'improved decision making' among women. Women farmers keenly participate in these programs to learn about better agricultural practices. These sessions educate women about techniques such as sowing dates of crops and vegetables, sowing methods, seed rate and other management practices. Many women have taken benefit from such centers and have now have improved their daily earning from US\$ 2.34 to US\$ 2.93 (FAO, 2011). This has not only increased their income but has also contributed in assuring food security. SOFA (2010/11) stated that, "If women had the same access to productive resources on their farms as men, they could increase yields by 20-30% and lift up to 150 million out of hunger."

Conclusion

Participatory development seems a better approach in attaining a better future. In countries like Pakistan where the performance of public institutions has never been satisfactory participatory development has provided better opportunities to the poor people. Rural farmers especially women have been able to improve their living standards by improving their income. It has been an instrument of economic growth in the rural areas have made significant contributions in eradicating poverty which is an ultimate source of food insecurity.

References

- Chambers, R., (1994). Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA): Analysis of Experience. *World Development*, Vol. 22, No. 9, pp. 1253-1268
- Chen, H., (1996). The Role of Gender in Farming Household Decision Making in Yaan, South Western China, Wageningen University, Netherlands.
- Dreze, J., and Sen, A., (1989). Hunger and Public Action. Oxford University Press
- FAO, (2011). Pakistan and FAO Achievements and Success Stories [online] Available from: <http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/rap/files/epublications/PakistanedocFINAL.pdf>
- Farmer Field School (WWF-P) [online] Available from: http://www.wfpak.org/bmp/bmp_farmer_field_school.php
- Gera, N., (2004). Food Security Under structural Adjustment in Pakistan. *Asian Survey* Vol. 44, No. 3, pp. 353-368
- Hassan. A and Salim. A (2004) Karachi: Filling a Space in Local Governance with Self-Reliant Development in Wignaraja. P and Sirivardana. S (eds), Pro-poor Growth and Governance in South Asia: Decentralization and Participatory Development, Sage Publications, India
- Khan. A. H, (1991) Work without Contractors and Bondage in Wignaraja. P et., al (eds) Participatory Development Learning from South Asia, United Nations University Press, Tokyo and Oxford University Press, Karachi
- Nazli, H., and Hamid, S., (nd). Concerns of Food Security, Role of Gender and Intra-household Dynamics in Pakistan [online] Available from: <http://www.eldis.org/fulltext/PIDE-householddynamics.pdf>
- Nejima, S., (2002) in Shigetomi. S (ed), The State of NGOs: Perspective from Asia, Institute of South Asian Studies, Singapore
- Parakash, D., (2003). Rural Women, Food Security and Agricultural Cooperatives. Rural development and Management Centre [online] Available from: [http://www.acdivocacoopex.org/acdivoca/CoopLib.nsf/35d0f140112b2c7e8525682a007811b0/A6918DA2DA25D6F885256EFA00653C07/\\$FILE/Rural+Women+coops.pdf](http://www.acdivocacoopex.org/acdivoca/CoopLib.nsf/35d0f140112b2c7e8525682a007811b0/A6918DA2DA25D6F885256EFA00653C07/$FILE/Rural+Women+coops.pdf)
- Ramchandran, N., (2008). Underfed, Underpaid and Overlooked: Women the Key to Food Security in South Asia. International Institute for Environment and Development [online] Available from: <http://dlc.dlib.indiana.edu/dlc/bitstream/handle/10535/5903/14857IIED.pdf?sequence=1>

- Rao, N., (2005). Land Rights, Gender Equality and Household Food Security: Exploring the Conceptual Links in the Case of India. *Food Policy*, pp. 180-193
- Rehman, M., (1987). Women and Rural Development in Pakistan. *Journal of Rural Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 247-253
- Rome Declaration on World Food Security and World Food Summit Plan of Action, (1996) [online] Available from: <http://www.fao.org/ag/againfo/programmes/es/lead/toolbox/Indust/romedec.pdf>
- Rosegrant, M. W., and Sarah, A. C., (2003). Global Food Security: Challenges and Policies. *Science* Vol. 302
- Sarmad, K., F. Hussain, and G. M. Zahid, (1989) Some Issues in the Development of Pakistan's Education Sector: In Hyder, S. N. (ed) (1989) *The Regional Workshop on Development and Utilisation of Human Resources: Issues and Policies*. Pakistan Manpower Institute, Islamabad.
- Scoones, I., Thompson, J., Chambers, R., (ed) (2009). Farmer First Revisited: Innovation for Agri-Research Development SOFA Report (2010/11) [online] Available from: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e.pdf>
- United Nations Statement on Food Security in Pakistan, FAO, 2000, cited at: <http://www.rdfs.net/OLDSite/EN/News/Pakistan1.pdf>
- Women in Agriculture, Environment and Rural Production, Fact Sheet Pakistan, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), cited at: <http://www.fao.org/sd/WPdirect/WPre0111.htm>