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AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION IN WESTERN KENYA
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The Area

Western Kenya, an area with fertile soil and generous rainfall, permits two growing seasons per year. All residents grow maize and beans--important food and cash crops--and a minority of residents grow coffee, tea, "European vegetables," and passion fruit. Western Kenya is also a densely settled area, with farm sizes typically limited to about 2½ acres. The population is disproportionately female, as many working-age men migrate elsewhere in Kenya, in search of wage employment. These migration patterns have resulted in approximately a third of rural households being female headed, according to the 1969 census.

Women have traditionally worked extensively in agriculture. Women plant, weed, harvest, process, and trade in food crops. Grinding mills, located in market centers, have alleviated the laborious task of pounding maize. Men traditionally cleared the land, burned off weeds, and plowed with oxen. Because of dense settlement patterns, there is very little new land now to clear. The male migration patterns mean many men "work with money" in the contemporary period by sending remittances to women. However, low-paying jobs as domestics and night watchmen and irregular employment limit the amounts remitted. The patterns of male migration have added full-time farm management to women's full agricultural participation.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research was to analyze crop and husbandry practices, adoptions of agricultural innovations, and access to agricultural services. Through the Ministry of Agriculture, the Government of Kenya offers a wide

variety of services, most of which are delivered by agricultural extension officers operating at the sublocation level (the lowest-level administrative unit). The officers visit farm households, inform residents of training opportunities (one-to-two week short courses) at the nearby Bukura Farmer Training Center, make verbal presentations at "demonstration plots" (a form of group training), and inform residents about procedures for acquiring agricultural credit.

In 1974-75, research was conducted in two sublocations of Kakamega District. Information was collected from over two-hundred farm households, and the sample of households was divided into female and male managed farms. The latter is perhaps better termed "joint management." Male presence on the farm does not necessarily mean men work on the farm. Indeed, many men disdain work in agriculture, deeming it "women's work."

Research Results

Women farm managers, who constituted two-fifths of the sample, always had less access to agricultural services compared to men managers. For example, one-half of all women managers had never been visited by an extension agent (the most common form of service), versus a quarter of the men. The gaps between the sexes in access to services increased as the value of the service increased. Farms with a man present were four times more likely to have had a household member trained at the Farmer Training Center, and fourteen times more likely to have detailed information about applying for and/or to have received agricultural credit than was the case for female farm managers. Group extension had the fewest disparities between the sexes, but demonstration plots were rarely held.

The sample was categorized in a variety of ways to further examine access to services. The bias against women managers persisted. Even wealthier women farmers on relatively large pieces of land had less access to services compared to men in similar categories. Lower-income women managers were the most disadvantaged category.

Surrogate measures of productivity were also examined. Farm households were categorized in terms of their income-earning orientation, crop diversification, and time of hybrid maize adoption. Again, the bias persisted. Women managers, who were early adopters of hybrid maize, growing a variety of crops promoted by the extension service with an income-earning orientation, had much more limited access to agricultural services than men in similar categories.

Explanation

What accounts for women's limited access to agricultural services, in a society where women are the primary agricultural producers? First, agricultural policy in Kenya, since its colonial inception, has been based on the assumption that farm modernization is associated with more male involvement. Documents from the government archives indicated conscious intentions to eliminate women's field work. These kinds of assumptions became building blocks for the structure of agricultural extension that later developed.

Second, most of the agricultural extension officers are men, operating in a society where men tend to speak with men, and women with women. Furthermore, male officers avoid visiting women household heads, due to suspicions about communication between unrelated men and women. Male agricultural officers make announcements at local community meetings, known as barazas, at which men largely attend. In Kakamega District, 98% of the agricultural field staff were men, and 2% were women. Most of the women were Home Economics Assistants, working with a job definition of wide scope, ranging from prenatal care to sanitation and cooking, and only a part of which dealt with agriculture. Moreover, the home economists, partly due to their limited numbers, were assigned to a larger geographical area, making it difficult to cover all farm households effectively. In the area of this research, male agricultural officers were assigned to sublocations with approximately 1,500-2,000 households, while the home economists were assigned at the location level, with 15,000-20,000 households.

Third, women's limited access to credit is institutionalized in the collateral requirements for loans. Most farmers use land title deeds to obtain credit, and the land reform completed in 1973 placed men's names on virtually all title deeds, despite traditional land management guarantees of access to all users. Women managers who want credit must persuade distant and often uninterested husbands. Widows can obtain credit through a doubly complex procedure by transferring title deeds to their names.

Implications for Productivity

What are the implications of women's limited access to agricultural services? Continuing preference for men will take its toll on women's productivity relative to men and on overall agricultural productivity.

Women producers appear to be as productive as men producers. Peter Mook's research in southern Kakamega found women managers (a third of the sample) to be as productive as men managers, based on measurements of yield per acre. When he controlled for access to education and extension, however, women were more productive than men. This research, utilizing the aforementioned surrogate measures of productivity, also found women to be as productive as men in the sublocation with minimal agricultural services. However, women's productivity relative to men's decreased in the sublocation with extensive, male-oriented services, including three cooperatives (which recruit largely men) and more extension staff. Ironically, the availability of more services--because they were virtually by definition more male-oriented services--appears to have detrimental effects on women's productivity.

Policy Implications

Several policy implications flow from this analysis, as listed below.

- Build on women's existing work, making it more productive and profitable
- Recruit more female staff, particularly in regular agricultural extension
- Build administrative incentives for male staff to reach women farmers
- Promote more group approaches to extension
- Deal with institutionalized credit discrimination (for example, substitute collateral such as crop insurance, valuable possessions, and group liability)

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For more information, see:

Kathleen A. Staudt, "Women Farmers and Inequities in Agricultural Services,"
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AREAS, July, 1978, pp. 398-414.

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