

Session Nine: Gender and Agricultural Value Chains

Case Study - Subsistence Crops

Gender roles vary according to ethnicity, income, and status. Women are largely responsible for nearly all reproductive tasks such as fetching fuel wood and water, cooking, washing, cleaning and child care. In most cases, men are the heads of households and are therefore the principal decision-makers in the household although some consultation with women may take place. Women have longer working hours than men; they carry much of the burden of reproductive work in addition to their productive activities. Women are commonly responsible, along with their children, for taking care of small livestock, production and marketing of butter, cheese, and vegetables. They also engage in non-farm income activities such as petty trading, beer brewing and leather work.

A farm contains mixed agriculture in which livestock are used as a source of draft and transportation. Cereals, pulses, and oil crops are the most important crops of the agricultural system. Cereal crops occupy the largest area, with teff being the most important food crop. However, this crop is highly delicate and fragile and requires a lot of labor. Both males and females participate in farming activities under close supervision of the head of the household. During the agriculture peak seasons, women work more than double the hours done by men. Females play a more significant role than males in manual weeding, threshing and transportation of farm produce. However, both males and females play equal roles in planting, soil conservation and management, application of fertilizers and herbicides, storage and marketing of farm produce.

Teff accounts for about two-third of the daily protein intake in the diet of the population. Its grain is mainly used for making different kinds of bread, porridge, and feed. Teff is also used in making a local alcoholic drink and a native beer. The straw is used mainly for reinforcing mud for plastering wooden walls of buildings and for livestock feed. It is also used as mulch. Teff has a high economic value as its grain can be kept for many years in practically any kind of storage facilities without being seriously damaged by common storage insect pests

In teff production activities, males do most of the field activities from plowing till threshing, storage and transport. Women have important role mostly in weeding; harvesting or collecting of harvested plants, preparation of threshing ground, transportation and selling of the seeds and the straw in the cities and towns. The rest of the activities such as milling of teff and preparation of food in different forms are exclusively left to the women.