



## **A STUDY ON THE CHALLENGES FACED BY SMALL AND MARGINAL WOMEN FARMERS IN RURAL ZAMBIA**

**Dr. T. Marirajan**

Senior Lecturer, Department of Social Work  
DMI-St.Eugene University  
Chibombo, Zambia.

**Mrs. Mulenga Chilese**

Department of Social Work, DMI-St.Eugene University  
Chibombo, Zambia.

### **ABSTRACT**

#### ***BACKGROUND***

*Women farmers play a critical role in the development agriculture sector. The forty three percent of agriculture labourer comprises of women and in some in goes upto 70 per cent. Especially in Africa, 80% of the agricultural produces grown by small and marginal farmers, who are mostly rural women but they produce lower yields than their counter part male farmers. It is happened not because of women are less skilled, but they do not have equitable access to natural resources and adequate opportunity (FAO, 2015) they need to be more productive. This study highlights the major challenges faced by women in agriculture sector in Zambia.*

#### ***METHODS***

*The study was commission in the month December 2015 to March 2016. The primary data collected from 100 selected women farmers and agriculture labourers using both*

---

*quantitative and qualitative methods. The structured questionnaire and semi structured interviews techniques were used for collection of data. The data analysis done with the support of SPSS 17.0.*

## **RESULTS**

*The results of the study reveals that the gender gaps in accessing agricultural resources such as fertile land, irrigation facilities, support to livestock, farm labor, education, extension services, credit facilities, manure and machinery support. It is essential for government to provide agricultural scholarship to women and add a course on the sector to school curriculum. It is important for village chiefs and government to promise land for women farmers to grow their crops on. Apart from this, there is a need for government and private sector to identify and provide market access with affordable merchandized solutions for women farmers.*

## **CONCLUSION**

*In addition to this, closing the gender gap in agriculture chain would generate significant gains for agriculture and for society on the whole.*

**KEY WORDS:** Women, gender, agriculture, labour force, employment, production, market access, Women in agriculture.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Rural Women make essential contributions to the agricultural production and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector. Rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises, collecting fuel and water, engaging in trade and marketing, caring for family members and maintaining their homes. Many of these activities are not defined as “economically active employment” in national accounts but they are essential to the well-being of rural households.

The forty three percent of agriculture laborer comprises of women and in some case it goes upto 70 per cent<sup>1</sup>. Especially in Africa, 80% of the agricultural produces grown by small and marginal farmers, who are mostly rural women but they produce lower yields than their counter part male farmers. It is happened not because of women are less skilled, but they do not have equitable access to natural resources and adequate opportunity (FAO, 2015) they need to be more productive. When it comes to food production in Africa women farmers are solely responsible but continue to suffer from long hours spent in the field limited or no access to land, information, knowledge, skills, education, financing, and technology.

Access to land is extremely important for women trying to provide a living in the agricultural sector especially those in rural area and the creation of access to land facilitate food security within a home, a source of employment and job creation plus the generation income. SIDA (2012) states that “when women have access to land this will help as collateral when accessing credit from financial institutions. It will help them take part in decision making concerning their community and different organizations and also helps in upgrading their status, identity and livelihood in the community”.<sup>2</sup> According to a joint report by the world bank/FAO/IFAD (2009), mentioned that the existing women land rights policies are met with a lot of challenges from customary laws. Due to lack of knowledge, information, confidence and finance it’s been almost difficult for women to advocate for their land right working against customary law”.

According to OECD (2007) “There is not only direct connection between education and food security but there are also simple literacy and numeracy capabilities that help develop and improve farmers living standards”.<sup>3</sup> According to the World bank (2011) “women farmers are even greater disadvantaged due to lack of education and finances to acquire modern technology like laptops and mobile phones to access knowledge and information about new agricultural practices from home as the male folk would”.<sup>4</sup>

According FAO (2011), the number of farm holders who are women continues to remain small and women however, continue to retain plots smaller than men. While there is little

documentation on the challenges encountered by women who varied from region, countries, and continents, there is a possibility of detecting issues.<sup>1</sup>

There have been more studies on farming issues and relatively few studies on the challenges faced by women farmers in Zambia. Keeping the above mentioned facts in view, the current study was undertaken to study the challenges based by women farmers and possible way out in Zambia with reference peri urban area.

The purpose of the study is to find out the importance of women in the agriculture sector and address the challenges they face and how these can be overcome. The basic theory is that having more women producers with the right knowledge, equipment and funding will enable them to produce better crops, spend less time in the field and be able to make sustainable living through agribusiness; an empowered woman is an empowered community or village

#### **THE MAJOR OBJECTIVES OF STUDY ARE:**

This study was guided by the following objectives

1. To understand the importance of women in agriculture and household food security
2. To identify the challenges faced by women in agriculture
3. To identify how these challenges can be addressed
4. What is government doing to help these women in addressing their problems?

#### **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

The present study was carried out during the month of December 2015 to March 2016 in Shimabala area which is south of Lusaka. According to the local records, Shimabala area has a total population of 3000. Out of the total population the area has an estimated total of 800 male farmers and about 300 women farmers. A structured questionnaire was used during the household surveys.

A house to house survey was carried out among selected women farmers using simple random sampling techniques. The selected women farmers were interviewed about their Socioeconomic Status, importance of women in agriculture, necessary skills to be taught, challenges faced by women and how address the challenges of women in agriculture and the role of state in improving the overall situation of women farmers. The total sample size of 150 women interviewed and the data was analyzed finally. Each interviewed women explained about the objectives of the study and an informal verbal consent was taken before interview. Statistical analysis was done with SPSS for Windows (Release Version 17.0) computer software.

## **RESULTS**

Among 150 women farmers under study, 42% of them are belongs to 20 to 30 years age group, 24% of them are 31 to 40 years age group and the remaining 34% belongs to 40 to 50 years age group. The respondent's involvement with farming activity denotes that, 26% of them involved in less than five years while 28% of the women doing farming for more than 6 to 10 years, 20% of the women have been farmers for 11 to 15 years and 26% have been farmers for 16 to 20 years. Among total number of respondents, 32% are completed their education up to primary level, 28% of them gone up to secondary level while 40% of the women have reached their tertiary education.

The marital status of the respondent shows that 52% of women farmers are single while 48% of the women got married. 52% of the respondents having the responsibility of up to five children and remain 48% are having more than five children. From data collected 48% felt that they play the role of developing the nation while 52% percent feel they play the role of feeding the nation. 52% feel they contribute to feeding in the nation as the good they produce is sold mainly to the local while 48% produce is sold both locally and for export.

Among the total number of respondents, 60 % sell their produce to ordinary markets while 40% sell their produce to super markets, 60% of these women sell their produce to ordinary markets because they have no access to super markets. 40% sell the grown produce to super markets as that's the only way they can have more money and some their produce can be

exported. Data collected shows that 90% of the women contribute greatly to their families, while 10% of the respondents say they don't contribute to their families. Data collected shows that 86% of the women contribute to national development while 14% do not contribute to national development.

In terms of skills needed, 88% of the women farmers need skills to contribute to the agriculture sector while 12% do not need skills to contribute to the agriculture sector positively. Data collected shows that 64% need skill training this could be in form of workshops while 36% feel they need technological training to contribute positively to the agriculture sector. 64% of the respondents felt that they ready to acquired skills and knowledge in terms of new technologies and 36% need technology skills as this will make easy to move with the new technology in agriculture. Data collected reviews that 54% say if these skills were taught they would be able to produce more food and some 46% they would contribute to being knowledgeable.

According to data collected from the respondents 72% of the women owned the land that they farm on while 28% rent the land that they farm on. From the respondents owning land, 66% of the women own titled land while in 34% own customary. Among the land owning women, 48% of them are owning between 1-5 acres while 52% own land that is 6-10 acres. Among the land holding women, 68% of the farmer's farms are located near the road side which actually makes it so easy to transport goods while 32% of the women's farms are not allocated near the road side.

More than 88% of the woman has agriculture technology while 12% of them don't have any agriculture technology. Among respondents who are access to agriculture technology, 30% of the women acquire technology through asset fixing, while 54% of these women acquired this technology through hand me down, 8% of these women acquire this technology through the leased process while another 8% actually acquire this technology through borrowing. More than 20% of the women own tractors that they are using for their framing, 40% of them own ploughs and those are the ones they are using ton tilt there land, 16% of the women own combine harvesters and 24% of the total population of the women in Shimabala area own disk hallow.

Among total respondents, 50% of women farmers felt that their challenges can be addressed through the allocation of loans while the other 50% feel their challenges can be overcome through training. 70% of them want to get skills training as they feel that is one of the major things that they can do to overcome these challenges while 30% of them are busy sourcing for funds that can help them overcome the challenges they are facing in the agriculture sector. 54% of the women feel that government should allocate them with small interest loans as this might help them overcome some of the challenges that these women are facing while 46% of them feel the allocation of land to women can help them overcome their challenges. Among the respondents, 40% of them felt that access to finance is the major mitigation strategy while 12% feel their challenges can be mitigated through having access to land, 8% feel their challenges can be mitigated through technology and 40% feel access to knowledge would help in the mitigation of the challenges.

## **DISCUSSION:**

Most of the respondents in the research were in the range of 31 years to 41 years. An age group that has women who tend to be more mature, focused, hardworking, of sound mind, responsible and caregivers. Another outstanding age band was 45 to 60 years this made up age women farmers who are old school, difficult to manipulate and very reluctant to change and new ideas

From the information collected through the use of questionnaires it is very evident to see that women play a very significant role when it comes to agriculture, despite facing a number of challenges such as lack of resources, lack of knowledge, no inadequate technology women still contribute positively to the agriculture section. Women are very important in the agriculture sector as they contribute to the food basket of the nation and that of their own families, Women contribute to national development through the produce that they sale.

It is essential for women to have skills training if these women are to contribute to the agriculture sector in a very positive way. From the data collected it is evident that women need

skills training if they are to contribute positively to the agriculture sector. These skills would be of great relevance because if technological training is offered to these women these women would actually know how best they can use the latest technology in the agriculture sector or agro business.

It is further crucial for the government, donors and private sector to develop training courses and programmes tailor made for women farmers in order to satisfy their needs and fill the knowledge and skills training gap.

There is need for more organizations to offer skills training to women if they are to overcome the challenges that women are facing in the agriculture sector. Skills training can be one of the solutions to some of the challenges that women face in the agriculture sector. More women should be offered scholarships to go and learn skills that are related to agriculture development.

There is need for advocacy campaigns targeting local chiefs, authority, and government to make land available to young women and implement laws and regulations that favour women land ownership. There is need for relevant authorities to provide loans earmarked for women only that are looking to acquire land. From data collected it is evident to see that a lot of women owned their own land while others rented land. There is need for land owners also to come on board to start providing leasing arrangements to enable women farmers to have access to land. Women in Shimabala owned titled land though in past women were not allowed to own land as if they had to purchase land they needed authority from their spouses for those that own customary land there is need for farming intermediary as well as women like a woman farming league group to engage into talks with the elderly people that own massive land to help in the facilitation of land transfer to young women farmers who don't have access to land.

There is need for the private sector to help women farmers have access to mechanization by providing machinery and technology in order for them to stop using traditional methods of farming. Most women have machinery though most of it is actually outdated this is because very few of them can actually afford the latest machinery which can help in the increment of yield.



Women should be taught on how best this latest technology can be used if they have to overcome these challenges.

Government in partnership with the private sector should develop machinery rings that allow communal use of tractors and implements women by farmers in different areas by using booking system that is managed by them. Women should have proper access to technology as this is one of the major challenges that women in agriculture face in Zambia.

Backed by literature review, according to FAO(2007) website,” it is common knowledge and widely recognized that education is fundamental to overcoming developmental challenges encountered in most rural areas, there is only a direct connection between education and food security but there is also simple literacy and numeracy capabilities that help develop and improve farmers living standard”.

Data collected clearly shows that if these challenges are to be addressed there is need for women to invest most of their time trying to acquire knowledge that would help women in not facing the challenges that they are facing. Some women feel if they were given small interest loans by either government or other leading institutions this would certainly help in addressing the challenges that these women are facing. From data collected the majority of the women farmers were well informed on where to get information on loans as well as where they can access training in order to improve on the way they do there agriculture

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The results of the study reveals that the gender gaps in accessing agricultural resources such as fertile land, irrigation facilities, support to livestock, farm labor, education, extension services, credit facilities, manure and machinery support. It is essential for government to provide agricultural scholarship to women and add a course on the sector to school curriculum. It is important for village chiefs and government to promise land for women farmers to grow their crops on. Apart from this, there is a need for government and private sector to identify and provide market access with affordable merchandized solutions for women farmers.

## REFERENCES

1. FAO (2015), Coping with food and agriculture challenges: Smallholders agenda for Rio 20+,
2. SIDA (2012), Quick Guide to What and How: increasing women's access to land, SE-105 25 Stockholm, Sweden.
3. OECD (2010), "Economic Importance of Agriculture for Poverty Reduction", OECD Food, Agriculture and Fisheries Working Papers, No. 23, OECD Publishing.
4. World Bank (2010), The role of Education training and Capacity development in Poverty Reduction and Food Security 2009-David Acker-Iowa State University.