

South African Women's Access to Agricultural Extension Services: An Analysis of Barriers and Constraints

TS Ngomane

University of Limpopo, South Africa

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to analyse barriers and constraints to South African women's access to agricultural extension services. It is argued that women do most of the agricultural activities and are responsible for the provision of food and, thus, contribute to food security worldwide. They, however, face a lot of constraints in accessing agricultural extension services such as socio-cultural constraints, the reproductive burden, lack of access to credit facilities and their low literacy levels. This paper is a theoretical study based on the analysis of literature, to probe the constraints that women face in accessing agricultural extension services. This paper confirms that there are barriers such as socio-cultural, lack of access to credit, the challenge of women balancing paid and unpaid care work with farming and women's low literacy levels.

Keywords: Agriculture, Extension services, Feminism, Productive work, Reproductive work

1. Introduction

Agricultural extension services in South Africa were founded around 1925 (Liebenberg, 2015). They are said to have been mainly advisory in nature. As a result of the Native Land Act 27 of 1913, extension services for black people were provided as a part of meeting community needs focusing on tangible products rather than on developing human capacity. The 1913 Native Land Act allocated more land to whites, plunging black people into poverty as it prohibited any form of farming that could enable black people to be self-sufficient, thus creating a cheap pool of labour for white farmers. Black men had to migrate to farms and mines to find work and thus left their families in the care of women (Thwala, 2006: 58; Sebola & Tsheola, 2014). In order to offer courses in agricultural extension, major universities in South Africa established research facilities offering courses on agricultural extension. The University of Pretoria also established an association for agricultural extension called South African Society for Agricultural Extension (SASAE). Agricultural colleges such as the Tompi Seleka and Fort Fox Agricultural Colleges were also later established. When South Africa became a democratic country in 1994, agricultural extension services were recognized at a larger scale with the establishment of agricultural extension organisations in the private sector thus supporting government departments. This saw the move from being advisory in nature to utilizing different approaches in assisting farmers and thus merging existing agricultural extension services into one (Koch & Terblanche, 2013).

South Africa drafted the National Development Plan (NDP) and its Vision for 2030 where rural communities are to be prioritised in order to access opportunities to participate fully in the economic, social and political sphere of the country. The emphasis of the NDP is on supporting rural economies in agriculture and other commodities such as mining, tourism, agri.-processing and fisheries. It also gives prominence to the need for the training of agricultural extension advisors who will respond effectively to the needs of small-holder farmers by ensuring the appropriateness of the location of agricultural extension services (RSA, 2012). Since women are responsible for food production and are responsible for food security, poverty and malnutrition alleviation (Collett & Gale, 2009:1), they would thus be in the priority of people to be empowered especially in rural communities.

2. Defining Agricultural Extension Services

Agricultural extension services refer to organisations that support people engaged in agricultural production to assist with information, skills and techniques, to improve productivity and their livelihoods. Agricultural extension services, therefore, help to increase knowledge, skills and techniques that enable farmers to generate profit as it contributes to improved farm management (Collett & Gale, 2009:7; Hart & Aliber, 2012; Mbo'o-Tchouawou & Colverson, 2014:2; Umeta, Lemecha & Mume, 2014). Lack of women's exposure to new skills and techniques to

manage their farms better has a bearing on the poor performance of female-owned farms. According to Ragasa, Berhane, Tadesse & Taffesse (2012), agricultural extension services has a role in ensuring food security and reducing poverty. Agricultural extension services are viewed to be more traditionally geared towards assisting men than women because culturally, men are regarded as custodians of land whilst women are regarded as workers of the land (Collett & Gale, 2009:17; Ayoade, 2012; Ragasa *et al.*, 2012; Ogundiran, 2013; Umata *et al.*, 2014). The cultural constraints women face with regard to access to land and agricultural resources will never receive the desired attention, as long as farming is still regarded as men's work. Cultural biases, gender discrimination and lack of access to agricultural resources impede women's food production (World Bank, 1994; Ogato, Boon & Subramani, 2009; Mogues, Cohen, Birner, Lemma, Randriamamonjy, Tadesse & Paulos, 2010:9; Sharaunga, Mudhara & Bogale, 2015). The provision of productive resources such as extension services has the ability to enable women to increase food production and thus ensure food security for their households and communities in general.

3. Problem Statement

According to Mailula (2011:73) "African communities share special, intimate, and intricate relationships with their land. To Africans, land is more than a mere asset of economic value". Agriculture plays an important role in most economies of developing countries because it contributes to their Growth Domestic Product (GDP). Women also play a vital role in food production, either as producers of food or suppliers of farm labour. They are thus responsible for food security and poverty and malnutrition alleviation (Collett & Gale, 2009:17; Ogato *et al.*, 2009; Owolabi, Abubakar & Amodu, 2011; Umata *et al.*, 2011; Ogundiran, 2013; Odoemelam, Osahon & Nwokocha, 2014; Elias, Nohmi, Yasonobu, & Ishida, 2015; Sharaunga *et al.*, 2015).

Women play a role in the harvesting, weeding, transportation and storing of food. In addition to this, they also feed and take care of livestock in rural settings. Despite the vital role they play in the agricultural value chain, women's contributions are, however, not regarded as important but are, instead regarded as part of 'domestic' work (Manyeh, Gill, Matthews & Murray, 1994:1; Mogues *et al.*, 2010:9; Ayoade, 2012; Benson & Jafry, 2013). This in turn has a negative bearing on women accessing services such as

agricultural extension, to improve their production and grow into commercial farming. Interestingly, women are normally given smaller plots, which most of the time, are of poor quality, to the extent that they only produce minimal required food for subsistence (Collett & Gale, 2009:17; Manfre, Rubin, Summerfield, Colverson & Akeredolu, 2013) whilst prime agricultural land is reserved for males, who are traditionally regarded as heads of households and, thus custodians of land; hence women are given non-productive land. This paper presents literature related to constraints women face in accessing agricultural extension services with reference to the South African experience.

4. Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework in research assists in creating an understanding of how society work, how and why people interact in different ways. This allows researchers to generalise about the different facets of phenomena and how these influence a particular phenomenon (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005; de Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 1998). This paper is based on the feminism theory, which delves deeper in trying to understand why there is gender inequality among human society. This is done through understanding the social roles assigned to both women and men, the experiences of women in particular and their interests. Feminism is aimed at assisting in the promotion of women's interests and the protection of their human rights (Offen, 1988; Sarikakis, Rush, Grubb-Swetnam & Lane, 2009:516; Mota, Fominaya, Eschle & Cox, 2011). Feminism is based on an argument that society organises humanity into male and female and thus assign responsibilities based on gender, hence the view that women must be regarded as weaker when compared with men. The weakness of women in this regard has a bearing on how they access services such as agricultural extension because being regarded as the weaker gender may result in the biased provision of services in favour of men, who are regarded as strong.

For the purpose of this study, it suffices to mention the four perspectives of feminism which are liberal, Marxist, radical and socialist. The liberal perspective argues that prejudice of women is based on mere ignorance by men and as such to deal with men's ignorance, awareness on women's issues need to be continuously created as that will assist in changing attitudes and behaviour that discriminate against

women (Pati, 2006:14; Wanner & Wadham, 2015). The plight of women in accessing agricultural extension services and the impact on food security and poverty needs regular attention to foster gender equity in the access of agricultural services by both men and women. The Marxist perspective argues that the relationship between men and women is based on the capitalist class of employer–employee exploitation. Men are regarded as occupying the position of employers because they have decision making powers and women only relegated to positions of being servants to men. Since the perused literature on women and agricultural extension services confirms that women do not access these services on same footing with men (AFAAS, 2011:5; Habtezion, 2012:2), assumptions can then be drawn that such is caused by the fact that male extension officers view women not as custodians of land but as workers. The third perspective, which is the socialist principle, focuses on women's reproductive work which is said to create social marginalisation because reproductive work is regarded as menial and no value attached to it (Lorber, 2010; Holub, n.d:3). The radical perspective on the other hand argue that women can free themselves from patriarchy and oppression by classing themselves together and form female support groups (Pati, 2006:14; Lindsey, 2011:14).

5. Methodological Approach

The paper is qualitative in nature as it is based on the review of literature and documentary review of secondary sources such as scientific journal articles and academic books. Qualitative research methods answer the why's and how's of human behavior, opinion, and experience (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005; de Vos, Strydom, Fouche & Delpont, 1998). The paper will provide information on barriers experienced by women in accessing to agricultural extension services and also make recommendations on strategies to address the constraints.

6. Literature Review

The paper aims at investigating the constraints of access to agricultural extension services by women in South Africa. The function of agricultural extension officers is to provide support to farmers by providing information, skills development and techniques to increase agricultural production. Women however are said to have difficulties in accessing these services as compared to men.

6.1 Socio-Cultural Constraints to Women Accessing Agricultural Extension Services

Patriarchy is a system of male dominance, characterised by dominance where men are the dominating ones and thus viewed as superior and women the dominated ones and hence viewed as inferior to men (Reeves & Baden, 2000:28; Coetzee, 2001; Johnson & Johnson, 2001; Gardiner, 2005:36; Kambarami, 2006; Stopler, 2008:1; Rao, 2011:6; Sultana, 2011:2). This system defines women in relation to their reproductive roles, which only has a direct impact on the allocation of resources, both within the household and outside. Cultural practices dictate that women should not own land but are rather seen as consumers or beneficiaries or, in most instances, regarded as 'helpers' of men. This is because women's role in agriculture is seen as an extension of their domestic work; hence their agricultural inputs are regarded as predominantly 'gardening' and not farming (Manyeh *et al.*, 1994:1; Collett & Gale, 2009; Madvhani, Pehu & Birner, 2010; Moguees *et al.*, 2010:9; Benson & Jafry, 2013; Manfre *et al.*, 2013; Sharaunga *et al.*, 2015). This happens despite the large amount of agricultural inputs made by women such as weeding, hoeing, harvesting, storing, transportation and the feeding and caring of livestock. This explains why women rarely go into commercial farming and why they are being confined to taking care of domestic animals such as goats, chickens and pigs.

The position of women with regard to farming impacts on their access to agricultural extension services. Most extension workers are males and, as such, they tend to be biased against women because farming is regarded as men's responsibility (Collett & Gale, 2009:10; Hart & Aliber, 2012; Benson & Jafry, 2013; Ogundiran, 2013; Habtezion, 2014:5; Elias *et al.*, 2015). In some societies, it not recommendable for men to communicate with women directly and vice versa, as such this creates problems in the provision of services such as training since most extension officers are male (Manyeh *et al.*, 1994:1; Moguees *et al.*, 2010:23; Owolabi, Abubakar & Amodu, 2011; Nuhu, Donye & Bawa, 2014).

6.2 Women's Reproductive Role

The gender division of labour at household level with regard to reproductive roles such as taking care of the family, fetching of firewood and water, taking care of the sick, attending community engagements and funerals are culturally relegated to women.

Although these roles are important for the functioning of families and communities, they do not have any financial value placed upon them as compared to the productive roles performed by men. Men make decisions about what crops to plant, access to the markets, and about what should be done on the profit made from the sale of crops. Women perform double work when they are compared to men because they carry out productive and reproductive work without being properly recognised (Collett & Gale, 2009:11; AFAAS, 2011:5; Ayoade, 2012; Manfre *et al.*, 2013; Ogundiran, 2013). Women's double tasks regarding productive and reproductive work result in time poverty for them, which in turn impact negatively on their participation in agricultural extension services since these do not take into account women's double role in society. Extension services should be tailor-made to take into consideration time allocated for training against time allocated for reproductive work. Women can be trained at intervals that allow them to take care of other responsibilities such as fetching firewood and water. Training should also be designed so as not to take women away from their homes for long periods without the necessary arrangements around their reproductive roles.

6.3 Access to Credit

Women, just like men, also need access to and control over productive assets and services including land, water, tools, inputs and both financial and extension services. The reason for women to be mainly focused on household food security is because they do not have access to bigger plots and exposure to new technology for them to go commercial. Women do not have access to credit because most institutions require collateral in order to access funds, which women seldom have (Manyeh *et al.*, 1994:18; Habtezion, 2012:2; Ayoade, 2012). Access to credit would allow women to buy farm equipment and other needs such as fertilizers and seeds. This will assist them to have better yields and this will positively influence their access to markets (UN, 2005:4; Paradza, 2011:10; Mbo'o-Tchouawou & Colverson, 2014:2). Agricultural extension officers may be biased towards assisting women to access funding because they do not have confidence in women succeeding in agriculture.

6.4 Women's Literacy Levels

The patriarchal system places value on boy children than girl children and thus parents invest more in a

boys' education than a girls', hence women have the lowest literacy levels in the world than men (Coetzee, 2001; Kambarami, 2006:5; Johnson & Johnson, 2011). The low literacy levels of women farmers are hindrances to women in accessing skills and training to increase their yields. With the introduction of new techniques and skills to farmers, women struggle to catch up especially if the pace is fast. Women either do not understand the content of what is being taught or, due to frustration, choose to opt out and not participate in extension services training (AFAAS, 2011:5; Owolabi *et al.*, 2011; Hart & Aliber, 2012; Benson & Jafry, 2013; Manfre *et al.*, 2013; Ogundiran, 2013). Arguably, extension officers will then be compelled to lower their pace or adjust training modules in order to suit women, and thus compromising deadlines to be met by extension officers.

The inability to grasp new techniques to improve production is a barrier since the skills are needed for commercial farming, which involves access to markets. Most women with low literacy levels will struggle to access markets due to the cut-throat nature of markets. One of the requirements for one to survive in commercial farming, for instance, is said to be financial literacy which most rural women do not have and are struggling to grasp. Better educated women are said to have access to resources than women with low literacy levels (Ogato *et al.*, 2009; Mogue *et al.*, 2010:17). As indicated in the perused literature, extension officers are more inclined to work with men than women farmers because it makes their task easier, there is no need to slow down the pace of training or even change modules to suit their literacy levels.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

The patriarchal nature of agriculture has a negative impact on how women access agricultural extension services because their involvement in agriculture is seen as an extension of their domestic work, hence the failure of most extension services to prioritise them as a group. It is also important to have more female extension officers as cultural constraints may impede the ability of extension officers to assist female farmers. Women suffer from time poverty due to reproductive work which impact negatively on their participation in agricultural extension services, hence the need to provide basic services to them such as electricity, water and day-care facilities. The inability of women to access to credit is an impediment for them to move from subsistence to commercial farming. Women's low literacy levels

are said to be a constraint for them to grasp new techniques to improve production and be able to access markets. Based on the opinions gathered from this desk top study, it is recommended that:

- Female extension officers should be employed to specifically target women, in order to deal with cultural constraints that women face such as reproductive roles and cultural barriers that prohibit females from interacting with male extension officers.
- Financial aid should be tailor-made to target women as a group to enable them to buy farm implements to increase production. Access to credit and agricultural extension services will assist women to increase food production and also grow into commercial farming.
- Agricultural training targeting women is important. It is common knowledge that a training that considers men and women on equal basis is likely to set women up for failure because of different historical opportunities for men and women in the society.
- With the advancement of agricultural technology, more research is needed to gauge women's access and participation in agricultural extension services.

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