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**Fostering Gender Balance in Agrifood Chain
Development: A Review of Contract Farming Issues**

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Abstract

The participation of women in agricultural production is essential to food security and rural development. However, female farmers face many constraints when linking to modernizing, closely coordinated agrifood value chains. Indeed, women are often excluded from market access opportunities offered by agribusinesses that contract farmers for the production and delivery of agricultural products, because they lack ownership and control over the necessary resources for production and marketing. In some cases, gender equality is not duly addressed by legal, cultural and social norms, which may further contribute to hinder the participation of female farmers in agricultural production and market access.

This study reviews the socio-economic and cultural factors that lead to gender imbalance in farmers' access to agrifood value chains and calls for policy incentives, responsible corporate practices and legal and regulatory reviews in order to promote gender equality and improve the rights of women farmers in general and of those involved in contract farming in particular.

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1. Introduction

Social dimensions such as gender issues have often been insufficiently considered in policies and programs aimed at development of agrifood value chains. Attention instead has mainly been focused on technical and economic aspects, but experience has shown that inequalities between men and women's roles and responsibilities in agricultural production and marketing may be important barriers to the achievement of agrifood chain development goals.

Addressing gender issues in value chain development is thus important from a social and economic point of view. The literature and the work of food and agriculture development agencies have often pointed out how the valorisation of women roles in agriculture and the improvement of gender relations can contribute to the improvement of efficiencies in agrifood value chains and the enhancement of food security and associated impacts.

Women farmers make essential contributions in agricultural production, which vary from country to country depending on the specific crop and activity. According to the FAO, 43% of the agricultural work in developing countries is performed by women.¹ They are involved in different farming activities ranging from crop to livestock production, from subsistence to commercial level.

Evidence shows that in developing countries, women perform a high number of farming activities, often in collaboration with their children. Gender analysis of the baby leaf value

¹ FAO. The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011

chain in Nepal, for instance, highlights that the contribution of women in many farming activities such as leaves separation from twigs, drying, twigs bungling, transportation and sale of the commodity is greater than men's, accounting for the two-thirds of the work (Bhattarai et al. 2009).

Cultural and social factors may influence the division of labour along the value chain between men and women, the latter being mostly involved in activities requiring lower skills and thus resulting in lower remuneration activities such as production, collection or packaging of farm products while men are usually involved in more lucrative commercial activities and trading of the products.

Case studies emphasize that, even if women perform a high number of activities, their work may not be duly acknowledged and paid. Women sometimes tend to be categorized as simple "helpers" rather than producers themselves. Evidence from Honduras, for instance, shows that production and harvest of cash crops by women are seen merely as "help" to their husbands' activities (Colverson, 1995).

Constraints in farm productivity are not always due to technical and organizational factors but they may also be caused by social conflicts and gender imbalance. Struggles between male and female farmers over land and other natural resources have negative repercussions on yields and income (Dolan, 2001). Unfair or low wages constitute a disincentive for women to engage in agricultural work. Women's exclusion from agricultural activities implies a reduced

labor force necessary to raise productivity. Gender equality and the establishment of good relations between male and female farmers are thus conducive to achieve rural development and economic growth.

In the agricultural world, women face many constraints that limit their participation in the modern supply chains. They are often excluded from contracting with agro-industrial firms for the delivery of high value products because they lack ownership and control over the necessary resources for agricultural production. Cultural and social norms may constitute another impediment to women participation with agro industries limiting their essential role in agriculture. A correct understanding of these factors is necessary to identify political interventions in order to promote gender equality and improve women's rights in agriculture.

The impediments that women face in commercial farming not only jeopardize their rights but also constitute an obstacle to enhancements in productivity and rural development. The production under contract - also known as contract farming - is increasing in importance in the development world, in view of the advantages that it can provide to male and female farmers². In particular, contract farming can facilitate the production of good quality produce, foster access to markets and increase farmers' revenues. Besides, it can improve supply chain efficiency, allowing farmers to access credit, advanced technologies and professional expertise. On the other hand, contract farming can ensure agro-industrial firms a steady

² Da Silva C. A., The growing role of contract farming in agri-food systems development: drivers, theory and practice, 2005, FAO

supply of good quality produce and the reduction of production costs. To fully benefit from contract farming and to achieve rural development it is, thus, crucial that female and male farmers enjoy equal rights and opportunities.

Through a review of contract farming experiences and associated legal and regulatory aspects, this study aims to underscore the importance of gender equality in the use of contracting as a means to promote agrifood value development and associated socio-economic benefits. It highlights how social and economic barriers may prevent stakeholders involved in a commercial relation in agrifood chains to fully and equally gain from the advantages given by contract farming. It discusses socio-economic and cultural factors that lead to gender imbalance in agriculture and reviews national and international legislation that addresses gender equality. It also examines existing discriminatory norms as legal barriers to gender inclusive agrifood chain development. Finally, the study provides recommendations to promote the minimization of gender inequalities and thus generate greater socio-economic benefits from the development of agrifood chains.

2. Constraints faced by women in economic relations with agribusinesses

Land. One of the main constraints to women's participation in contractual arrangements with agribusiness companies is their limited access to land. Less than 2% of available land worldwide is owned by women (IFPRI, 2013)³. In African countries, constraints to land access date back to the pre-colonialism and colonialism eras. In pre-colonial societies, patriarchal structures did not advantaged women in the access to resources. Such patriarchal structures still survive in the societies of some countries where men are normally the owners of land or have larger and better quality parcels and sons are preferred to daughters in the inheritance of land.⁴ During colonialism, the introduction of private land ownership and land registration have led to the transfer of land titles to males, as heads of the household, to the detriment of women, which, in some countries, still face difficulties in establishing a commercial activity with agricultural enterprises due to their lack of land titles. The lack of land ownership has impacts on women decisions of agricultural activities and their income. This prevents women to sign contracts in their name even if they are the effective working force, given that agribusiness firms consider less risky to engage with landowners.

³ See Doss C. et Al. Gender inequalities in ownership and control of land in Africa. IFPRI, 2013

⁴ See Faustin Kalabamu, Patriarchy and women's land rights in Botswana, 2006; Deere, C.D. and Leon, M. The Gender asset gap: Land in Latin America, 2003

Contract farming is a particular production system that allows the realization of high value lucrative produce for a secure buyer and enables farmers to increase their revenues. Firms are especially attracted to this form of production for the possibility to access land and reduce production costs. However, the intensification of commercial agriculture may generate social conflicts and struggles over productive resources, preventing contract farming to provide benefit to both male and female farmers. The box below shows a negative contract farming experience due to gender inequalities and social conflicts.

Box 1. Contract Farming for French beans in Kenya

One of the main means that permitted small farmers to be integrated into Kenyan horticultural production is the institution of contract farming.

The emergence of contract farming for the export of French beans gave rise to a lucrative market for producers of Meru District in Kenya. This induced men to usurp the land traditionally cultivated by women for home consumption and local sale to increase the amount of production set under contract with the export firm.

Land appropriation by men determined an exclusion of women from contract farming arrangements, whose rights over land were based on usufruct rather than statutory rights. 90% of contracts were concluded indeed between horticultural firms and male farmers, who controlled labour and received payments from the firms.

Notwithstanding the fact that the production of French beans was predominantly conducted by women, the latter did not have any power over sales and payment and the disparity on the distribution of income was high and engendered conflicts.

The low remuneration of women performance was a disincentive to work with dedication and professionalism in the application of the right farming inputs and techniques and this led to a production of low quality.

Source: Dolan 2001. The “Good Wife” struggles over resources in the Kenyan horticultural sector

Financial services. Land is not only a precondition to enter into commercial relations with agribusinesses but is often also a necessary means to obtain financing from banking institutions.

Women's limited access to financial services is indeed another factor that constrains their participation in contract farming agreements. Some contracts may require farmers to invest in new facilities or expensive equipment compliant with the organizational needs of the company, in order to ensure a correct execution of contractual duties. The lack of land ownership precludes women to provide collateral for bank loans, thus preventing them to make the required investments and to take part of the contract farming scheme.

Besides, the typical lower level of education of women when compared to men's is another constraint they face in accessing financial services and engaging in contractual relations with buyers. Indeed, in many traditional societies women are denied access to education. The resulting illiteracy not only makes it difficult for a women farmer to understand the content of contracts but it also impedes her to deal with the formalities and official papers required by a financial institution. In the absence of a formal credit concession, women may be led to rely on the informal sources of credit such as savings, moneylenders or relatives, which may not be sufficient to meet their financial needs to participate in contract farming operations.

Technologies and technical skills. Farmers' knowledge of agricultural technologies and their technical ability in the production process encourage companies to enter into business with

them. Ensuring women access to farming tools and training on farming technologies allows the development of their productive and entrepreneurial capacities.

Although in some contract farming operations farmers may benefit from the technical assistance provided by agribusiness firms, the latter may not always have sufficient means to invest in the provision of farm extension services. In order to reduce transaction costs under such circumstances, farmers who lack appropriate technical skills are likely to be excluded from contractual arrangements.

Women farmers tend to face greater constraints in accessing technologies and training opportunities when compared to men. This may be due to their inability to afford the costs of farm equipment but also to cultural factors. In some developing countries for instance, the use of animals is a male privilege, thus the animal traction as well as other farming practices that require the use of animals by women are socially unacceptable. This impedes women to take part of contractual arrangements and to get sources of revenue. In addition, social restrictions may also hinder the strengthening of women capacities in agriculture. The World Bank shows indeed that in northern Nigeria, women face obstacles in meeting with male agricultural extension agents because of religious considerations⁵.

Some farming activities are typically carried out by women. The processing of agricultural produce as well as the responsibility for fuel and water supply are an example. In some cases

⁵ See Saito A. K. Raising the productivity of women farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa. World Bank Discussion Paper 230, 1994

such activities demand several working hours, time and energy. Lack of access to better technologies that can improve efficiency in such activities is a factor that restrains productivity and causes fatigue in women, thus creating comparative disadvantages in farming when comparing to men. In other cases, men are reserved the use of specific technologies that entail a more remunerative farm activity, to the detriment of women.

Agribusiness companies may play an important role in helping women overcoming problems related to access finance and training. The contract farming case below illustrates an example of successful women integration in the flower industry due to the significant contribution of a Fijian company under the establishment of a contract farming scheme.

Box 2 Contract farming for floriculture in Fiji

A relevant case showing women's integration in a value chain is represented by the South Sea Orchids (SSO) Contract Farming Operation. SSO is a company that made significant contribution to empowering women in the floriculture business in Fiji and other Pacific Island countries.

In Fiji, flowers represent a growing market. There is high domestic demand for many floriculture products used for weddings, funerals and for household and business decoration. More than 1000 people were directly involved in the industry, most of them women, particularly semi-commercial cut-flower growers and a few small commercial growers.

SSO started in Fiji in the early 80s, introducing commercial orchid growing into the country. The growth in flower demand led the company to develop a contract farming operation. In this regard, SSO supported 270 women around the Pacific to start their business by providing training to grow flowers and assistance to access finance.

The company targeted village women, who were allowed to work from home, a practice that enable them to continue to take care of the family needs while helping the company to minimize costs. The biggest challenge women faced to start the flower business was accessing finance in order to buy shade houses for the plants and planting materials. A difficult step was to get Certificates of Registration to apply for bank loans. The company helped women to get credit by guaranteeing their business and assuring the banks that their loans would have being repaid after one or two years.

In order to allow women to repay their loans, SSO committed to buy 100% of the flowers produced providing monthly payments. The company, then, sold all flowers received to florists and other businesses across Fiji.

The successful contract farming operation allowed women not only to pay their loans but also to obtain new ones. It also permitted to improve women's skills and to increase flower production in the country.

Source: Economic opportunities for women in the Pacific, IFC, 2010

Cultural factors. Cultural factors may constitute a reason for women exclusion from contract farming schemes. Some agricultural activities are considered as “female” activities as they produce lower wages compared to male workers, such as jatropha seed collection in Tanzania⁶ or weeding and fertigation in Zambia⁷. Different studies conducted in South Saharan Africa have showed that gender inequalities may be due to the specific crop involved. In Zambia, women cannot enter into contract with agro industries for sugar cane production because this crop is culturally considered a male activity⁸. In Ghana, there is a diffidence to let women cultivate perennial crops because their husbands and male relatives do not want to give up control over the land for long periods. According to the traditional tenure practice, indeed, a farmer growing the same land for more than two crops seasons obtain some succession land rights over that land. For this reason, in Ghana, women are normally engaged in annual crops only⁹.

In some societies, wives that do not respect the will of their husbands incur the risk to be publicly classified as witches¹⁰. Witchcraft allegations existing in some developing countries are embedded in social norms and public discourses and may be the cause of women social isolation and financial deprivation. Dolan shows that in some societies, such as in parts of

⁶ See Elizabeth Daley and Clara Mi-young Park. “The Gender and Equity Implications of Land-Related Investments on Land Access and Labour and Income-Generating Opportunities. A Case Study of Selected Agricultural Investments in Northern Tanzania”, FAO, 2012

⁷ See FAO. “The Gender and Equity Implications of Land-Related Investments on Land Access and Labour and Income-Generating Opportunities. A Case Study of Selected Agricultural Investments in Zambia”, 2013

⁸ See supra note.

⁹ See FAO. “The Gender and Equity Implications of Land-Related Investments on Land Access, Labour and Income-Generating Opportunities in Northern Ghana. The Case Study of Integrated Tamale Fruit Company”, 2013

¹⁰ See Dolan C. S. Gender and witchcraft in agrarian transition: the case of Kenyan horticulture, 2002

Kenya, women may be seen as a threat for the development and that witchcraft allegations may consider them responsible of weather disasters and production losses. Moreover, the negative allegations against women are often used to push female traders out from the competition of agricultural market and the gain offered by a lucrative activity, such as contract farming, which threatens male economic power. This may lead husbands to unfairly accuse their wives of threatening to poison or bewitch them.¹¹

Some religious beliefs may also limit the role of women in agriculture, including in contract farming operations, like for instance, the expected role of married women, which emphasizes the importance of obedience and submission to their husbands¹². Religious practices, if too strict and not in line with the times of a new modern economy that needs women contribution to achieve economic growth, may undermine gender equality precluding women participation in economic, remunerative activities.

Some ideologies and behaviors rooted in patriarchal systems may impede fair commercial relations within the family and generate familial struggles with repercussion on agricultural productivity. A contract farming case study conducted in the Dominican Republic for tomatoes¹³ shows how patriarchal tradition grants husbands the right to decide over their wives' labour and farm gain. The study highlights that women do not have control over production and face problems in receiving payment of their agricultural activity despite their

¹¹ Dolan C. S. Gender and witchcraft in agrarian transition: the case of Kenyan horticulture, 2002

¹² See Dolan C. S. The "Good Wife" struggles over resources in the Kenyan horticultural sector, 2001

¹³ Raynolds, L.T. Wages for wives: Renegotiating Gender and production Relations in Contract Farming in the Dominican Republic, 2002

involvement in hard tasks of work such as weeding. Women are considered as farm "helpers" due to the fact that they do not have rights over land use and thus are not part of the contract. Men are the party who sign the agreement with the industry and play the dominant role in the contract farming relationship, even if they heavily rely on their wives' labour in fulfilling the contractual obligations.

Unequal distribution of income between men and women has also been evidenced in Papua New Guinea, where a lack or low remuneration of female farmers are rooted in gender norms and beliefs and the division of work in agriculture depending on gender is culturally and institutionally accepted.¹⁴ Similar evidence exists from Papua New Guinea, where oil palm production reserves to men the task of harvesting fruit bunches while women are relegated to the collection of loose fruit during harvesting. The women's confinement to some limited works may prevent the development of their skills and the participation in more lucrative and rewarding works. The unfair economic treatment may create social conflicts and lead women to withdraw their involvement in agricultural production affecting yields and thus income growth.

As indicated earlier, agribusiness firms may play an important role in promoting opportunities for male and female farmers under contract farming schemes. Box 3 shows a successful contract farming case where a private company of West New Britain Province, Papua New Guinea, resolved intra-household disputes over labour and income between male

¹⁴ Koczberski G. Loose Fruit Mamas: Creating Incentives for Smallholders Women in Oil Palm Production in Papua New Guinea, 2007

farmers and their wives under its contract farming scheme facilitating the production of high yields.

Box 3. Contract Farming for oil palm in Papua New Guinea

In Papua New Guinea, the New Britain Palm Oil Limited (NBPOL), a local milling company, introduced a gender equitable payment scheme - the *Mama Lus Frut Scheme* - that helped to resolve intra-household disputes over labour and unequal distribution of income in oil palm production. Before entering into contract with the company, women received a low and uncertain remuneration by their husbands. This induced female farmers to withdraw all or part of their labour causing a negative impact on the quantity and quality of oil palm production.

Through the implementation of the new smallholder payment system, women had the possibility to be paid directly by the company for collecting loose fruit on behalf of their husbands. The *Mama Lus Frut Scheme* was of great importance because it helped to identify the poor remuneration of women's labour as major disincentive to participate in palm oil production.

The company provided women with individual harvest nets and harvest payment cards - also known as *Mama cards* - to enable them to sell loose fruit to the company separately from their husbands' harvest. Besides, women received their own monthly income based on the weight of loose fruit collected and payment was made into their own bank account. Under this scheme, women passed from an implicit contract with their husbands to a direct contract with the company that guaranteed payment for their labour.

The *Mama Lus Frut Scheme* was an incentive for women to engage in oil palm production and ensured a fair and stable payment for their farming activities. This payment system represents a mechanism to raise smallholders' productivity and women's access to rural income.

Source: Koczberski G. *Loose Fruit Mamas: Creating Incentives for Smallholders Women in Oil Palm Production in Papua New Guinea*, 2007

Another example of good business practices with equity implications in contract farming schemes is represented by the Integrated Tamale Fruit Company (ITFC), a mango production and processing company placed in Diare in Savelegu Nanton District in Ghana's Northern Region. The firm has contributed to involve female farmers in contractual arrangements allowing the registration with the contract farming scheme at individual basis rather than at household level. Under this scheme, there was not any limitation for the conclusion of the agreement to the household head and women could be part of it in their own right¹⁵.

¹⁵ See FAO. "The Gender and Equity Implications of Land-Related Investments on Land Access, Labour and Income-Generating Opportunities in Northern Ghana. The Case Study of Integrated Tamale Fruit Company", 2013

3. Gender equality and legislation

Considering their importance in agriculture, gender issues in this domain begin to be addressed at national and international level by lawmakers. Some countries promote gender equality and have enacted policies and legislation to protect women's rights in agriculture and improve their legal status. Yet, many countries still need to put in place reforms to foster women's empowerment.

At the international level, women's rights in agriculture are protected by several human rights treaties, which declare the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of sex. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. It provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal opportunities in political and public life, education, health and employment. It defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end it. Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They are also committed to submit periodic reports on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations¹⁶.

Relevant principles on gender equality are also found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Art. 2 of UDRH declares that all individuals are entitled to all the rights and

¹⁶ See the text of the CEDAW at UN Women website available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

freedoms without any distinction of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. No distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty. In addition, according to Art. 7, all human beings are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law.

Important norms have also been enacted in regional human rights treaties such as The European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR), an international treaty that aim to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms in Europe and where principles of non- discrimination on the basis of sex are stated in its Art. 14¹⁷; the American Convention on Human rights (ACHR) in Art. 1¹⁸ and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) in Art. 2¹⁹

At the national level, a number of countries forbid gender inequality in their constitutions. India (Constitution of India, arts. 14 and 15 (1)), Brazil, (Constitution of Brazil, art. 5 (I)) and Burkina Faso (Constitution of Burkina Faso art. 1 (3)) are examples. In addition, some national legislation promotes gender equality. This is the case of the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (PEPUDA) of South Africa, the Kenyan

¹⁷ See the text of the ECHR on <http://echr-online.com/>

¹⁸ See the text of ACHR at the Organization of American States website available at http://www.oas.org/dil/treaties_B-32_American_Convention_on_Human_Rights.htm

¹⁹ See the text of the ACHPR at the African Commission on Human and People's Rights available at <http://www.achpr.org/instruments/achpr/>

National Gender and Development Policy and the Indian National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, among others.

However, although gender issues have been addressed at national and international level, in many countries, discrimination between man and women still occur.

In some legal systems there is the coexistence of norms of different nature such as statutory law, i.e. the written law set down by the legislator and customary law i.e. the oral law. Customary law is largely applied in the regions of developing countries populated by indigenous communities. It refers to a traditional common practice that is repeated over time in a rural community, which is considered binding and more accessible to rural people. Customary law varies from country to country and may include rules that do not favour gender equality. Some African countries, for instance, may contain discriminatory rules with regard to the administration and sale of land as well as restrictions on women's inheritance. However, in Africa there are also customary norms that promote gender equalities and are, indeed, invoked by women to claim rights not recognized under statutory law.²⁰

Evidence has shown that, in some cases, cultural practices are so strong that, although statutory law coexists with customary law, the latter is mostly applied.²¹ The coexistence of norms of different nature may entail, in some cases, legal uncertainty and ambiguity over the rights of male and female farmers and this constitutes an impediment for women, which are

²⁰ See Lorenzo Cotula in Gender and Law, women's rights in agriculture. Fao legislative studies 76, rev 1, 2002

²¹ See the example of Zimbabwe in D. Pasura. A gendered analysis of land reforms in Zimbabwe, 2010

mostly excluded from the exercise of a commercial activity in the absence of a certain legal title.²²

In some cases, gender inequality is embedded in national legislation. The family law of some countries, for instance, such as the one of South Africa before the family law reform of 1998, restricted the legal capacity of married women to administer family property, including land, being women considered as minors. In other cases, the civil and commercial legislation may require the authorization of the husband to conclude contracts and assume obligations, such as in the case of the Civil Code of Oaxaca, Mexico, (arts 169 and 170) or the Commercial Code of Chile (art. 349)²³.

Gender inequality may also be found in other branches of law such as the succession legislation, which may contain norms that hinder wives and daughter's rights. Customary and religious law, for instance, may have negative effects on the rights of women to inheritance.

The Indian Succession Act, although it does not contain discriminatory gender norms, leaves the testator the freedom to choose the successor, which may be used to disinherit wives and daughters²⁴.

Moreover, agrarian legislation may contain norms that do not favour gender equality. As showed by Rimban (1999), in the Philippines the land reform program disadvantaged women

²² See the example of Nigeria in Saito A. K. Raising the productivity of women farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa. World Bank Discussion Paper 230, 1994

²³ See Lorenzo Cotula in Gender and Law, women's rights in agriculture. Fao legislative studies 76, rev 1, 2002

²⁴ See Agarwal, B., A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia. Cambridge University Press. 1994

since land was distributed to permanent farm workers, which in practice were mostly men, and women seasonal workers were excluded.²⁵

²⁵ See Rimban, L. No Woman's Land, in C.C.A. Balgos (ed.), *Her Stories – Investigative Reports on Filipino Women in the 1990s*, Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism, Quezon City, pp. 3–8., 1999

4. Summary and recommendations

The participation of women in agricultural production is essential to food security and rural development. However, female farmers face many constraints when linking to modernizing, agrifood value chains. This problem is particularly relevant in the cases of agrifood chains coordinated by contracts between farmers and firms. Such constraints are due to socio-economic and cultural factors as well as to legal obstacles.

Evidence shows gender inequalities in accessing land, which prevent women to engage directly with buyers of agricultural products, even if they perform most of farming activities. This generates conflicts when production is carried out under contract farming schemes, with negative repercussions on socio-economic impacts. Moreover, the lack of land ownership also precludes female farmers to obtain financing from banking institutions for investments in agricultural production, which in some cases are demanded by the agro industrial firm as contractual condition to enter into business. Also, the unfamiliarity of women with financial instruments and institutions and the low level of education are additional obstacles to the empowerment of women with negative repercussions in contracting.

The adoption by Governments, development organizations and/or NGOs of gender focused microcredit programmes could benefit women excluded from formal credit and thus facilitate their integration in commercial activity involving farming under contracts. These programmes can consider, inter alia, the concession of credit for women farmers to invest in productivity

enhancement assets, such as modern agricultural inputs, farming tools and farm traction animals, to name a few. In order to overcome the problem of lack of collateral, women may gather into groups of borrowers, where each group member guarantees the loan repayment undertaken by the others and have a collective responsibility for it.

Women face more difficulties in accessing agricultural technologies, when compared to men.

The knowledge and use of agricultural technologies and productivity enhancement techniques make female farmers more skilled and efficient business partners and this facilitates women participation in the modern market economy through linkages with agro industrial companies.

Women should be guaranteed access to technologies as men and be trained in their correct use in all stages of production process in order to ensure that technologies are adopted in an appropriate manner, are suitable and effective. Accessing to improved technologies makes it easier to correct implement farming activities helping to raise productivity and yields..

Female farmers should also be guaranteed the same access as males in accessing agricultural extension services and training. Women involvement in training increases the efficiency of their agricultural activities and governments should ensure the provision of women advisory services in the frame of public programs to support agriculture.

Agribusiness companies play an important role in rural development being the parties that transfer knowledge, technologies and income to farmers. Thus governments, in order to

achieve socio-economic development, should be prepared to develop policies that encourage private sector to enter into contracts with farmers and invest in production.

Agribusiness firms involved in contracts may be stimulated by policy incentives to improve gender balance in their operations through the provision of women inclusive extension services that consider the local social and cultural context. Such incentives may include tax breaks, preferential access to financing and / or preferential access to government induced purchases of agricultural products, such as school lunch programs.

Agribusiness firms may also contribute to overcome disparities between male and female farmers if they involve all farmers engaged in the production process in the negotiation of contractual terms and conditions, and not only farm leaders, which normally are males. In order to improve working conditions of women, agribusinesses may apply international labour standards and codes of conducts.

Women involvement in contract farming schemes may also be fostered through the adoption of specific contractual clauses. In Zambia, for instance, the participation of female farmers in contract farming schemes is increasing among other reasons because of the inclusion of the succession clause in the agreements, which provide inheritance rights to family members irrespective of gender²⁶.

²⁶ See FAO. “The Gender and Equity Implications of Land-Related Investments on Land Access and Labour and Income-Generating Opportunities. A Case Study of Selected Agricultural Investments in Zambia”, 2013

With regard to contractual clauses regarding payment, these should ideally foresee direct payment to women workers, as a means to overcome unequal distribution of income between wives and husbands and thus prevent intra-household disputes. Moreover, direct payment may help to guarantee women remuneration, especially where they only have usufruct and not ownership rights over land. In this respect it is important that the contract is concluded in the name of individual farmers and not only limited to the male head of the household, so as to ensure transparency as well as a higher degree of women control over production process and income.

Governments may also promote gender balance in contract farming through the review of the legal and regulatory framework that hinders equality. Legislation may indeed in some cases limit the exercise of commercial activities by female farmers. This is particularly the case in the area of family, commercial and succession law in some countries, with regard to the freedom to conclude transactions and inheritance rights related to land. As for agrarian law, land distribution programmes have in some cases mainly benefited men, by including requirements discriminating against women and by issuing land titles in the name of the household head only. In other cases, even if the legislation does not provide any statement on gender equality, possibilities of discrimination may occur in the absence of an explicit legal principle. A review of such discriminatory laws is therefore an important prerequisite for more balanced gender relations in agriculture in general and in contract farming in particular.

Governments should forbid any sort of discrimination and recognize women full legal capacity to conclude contracts as well as to borrow and obtain loans. They should support women participation in rural organizations and put in place regulations to increase their bargaining power through associative rights and advocate their participation in decision making processes, particularly in the case of direct interfaces with agro industrial companies.

Cultural factors constitute, in some countries, an impediment to women participation in agribusiness relations, which hinder their professional growth and limit their opportunities to increase income. Religious beliefs and discriminatory public gender discourses, indeed, have in some cases induced to women social exclusion and financial deprivation. Certain agricultural activities are “reserved” to male farmers in part because they require a particular physical strength but also because they are more remunerative or related to land tenure issues. Some societies guarantee women legal rights in agriculture but often in practice they are not applied because cultural standpoints conflict with formal legislation. In many cases, rural women are not aware about their rights, thus it is essential that they are educated on them. However, to ensure the enforcement of gender balanced rights, it is also necessary that men and community leaders are informed on women’s rights as well.

Empowering women and reducing gender inequalities in farming is not only important to safeguard women rights and ensure equal access to benefits and opportunities, but also to promote social-economic growth, particularly in many developing countries where agriculture is a major contributor to income and employment generation. Especially in these countries,

governments should play an active role to foster gender equality in the agrifood sector by enacting legislation that curbs gender discrimination and by adopting specific measures to facilitate women's access to credit, capacity building and productive assets in order to facilitate the conduction of economic activities. Governments should put in place reforms to entrepreneurship by entrepreneurs, improve their socio-economic advancement and guarantee their access to courts to protect their legal rights.

In sum, the promotion of gender equality in agrifood chain development in general and contract farming in particular will demand a concerted effort by governments, development organizations, the private sector and other concerned actors in order to ensure that the existing barriers reviewed in this study are duly overcome.

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