

Gendered Analysis of Perceptions of Stakeholders in the Agricultural Sector on Gender Notions in Northern Region of Ghana

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Article's History

Submitted: 7th August 2023

Accepted: 16th August 2023

Published: 21st August 2023

Abstract

Aim: The study analyzed stakeholders in the agricultural sector perceptions of gendered notions in Northern Region of Ghana. Three Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) were purposively sampled from the 16 MMDAs in the region.

Methods: The research applied the explanatory sequential mixed methods design. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to elicit responses from 54 policymakers and implementers followed by a FGD and interviews for the 400 farmers in 12 communities. A 5-point Likert scale perception index was used to analyze the perceptions of stakeholders on gender.

Results: The results revealed that cumulatively, the stakeholder's thoughts on gender notions were widespread and culturally grounded and implied to a large extent that ownership and control over productive resources was male-dominated while the distribution of labor portrayed a heavier burden on women making the men more empowered at the community management level.

Conclusion: The study concludes that, the stakeholders in the agricultural sector do not unanimously agree on these notions. Though the women portray some level of readiness to challenge the status quo, access to and control over resources like land and other resources challenge their efforts while the men, for fear of losing their access and control over the resources, protect their territories graciously.

Recommendation: The study therefore recommends policymakers at the national and regional levels and implementers at the MMDAs and community levels to ensure that both women and men have access and control over resources. The study also recommends (policymakers and implementers) in the agricultural sector be more conscious of the different gender roles and its implication for both women and men in society and also conscientize both the female and male farmers on these gender roles.

Keywords: *Perceptions, gender notions, stakeholders, agricultural sector.*

INTRODUCTION

The majority of African nations depend heavily on agriculture for their livelihoods. For example, agriculture generated over 22% of Ghana's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022. Although both men and women contribute significantly to agricultural productivity, their access to resources differs (Deere and Doss 2006 & Food and Agricultural Organization, 2010). Gender inequality, which manifests itself as limited access to and control over financial and agricultural resources, is a major impediment to agricultural progress (United Nations Women, 2018).

Agriculture is Ghana's major production industry, employing 42 percent of the working population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2021). According to the national and population housing census, 49 percent of Ghana's agricultural labor force is female, while 51 percent is male. Females, on the other hand, dominate subsistence production, accounting for 70 percent of the labor force (Ghana Statistical Service 2013). According to Milcah (2018), gender inequity exists in access to valuable agricultural production resources such as land; variable agricultural inputs (including seeds, labor, chemicals, and so on); credit; production technologies; extension services, training, and other production services that would improve production efficiency and productivity levels. For example, when land becomes increasingly commercialized, access to it is severely restricted among women farmers, causing women to lose out totally. Mensah and Fosu-Mensah (2020) investigated agriculture and gender roles in Ghana's semi-arid region. Despite the fact that women are increasingly involved in agricultural production, the study maintains that women still have less control over physical and financial resources, making them more exposed to risks of food security and less able to tackle poverty. Most national agricultural, natural resource, and poverty-reduction policies in Ghana include attention to gender mainstreaming and increasing participation and equal access to resources and benefits for women, youth, and marginalized members of communities. Thus, most Ghanaian national policies incorporate gender considerations in their goals and objectives (Dittoh et al., 2015).

Dale (2022) examined gender differentials in terms of gender roles in agricultural production in Ethiopia. She concluded in her research, that Gender-based roles, which are socially constructed are accepted as the norm, and put women in a disadvantaged position. Citing Belay (2016), Dale noted that the socially constructed norms have created a systemic denial of access to opportunities and resources for women which negatively affects their self-esteem and confidence, in turn restraining women from participation, competition, and engagement in formal paid employment. In the light of the foregoing, this paper investigates the perception of stakeholders in the agricultural sector on the gender notions in the northern region of Ghana

Dittoh et al. (2015) highlighted gender policy and implementation in agriculture, natural resources, and poverty reduction in Ghana's Upper East Region. According to the study, the idea that gender only affects women is widespread among both men and women, from the national to the community level. The reason most people associate gender with activities that only benefit women is linked to the fact that majority of the issues on gender emphasize the status of women. However, the notions on gender differ from national and regional levels to the local level.

In the Northern Region, as in the rest of Ghana, traditional gender disparities prevail in agricultural production and commercial operations. Men overwhelmingly dominate the cash crop and livestock production sectors of agriculture, owing to their status as the primary source of income for houses or families. Subsistence agricultural production, on the other hand, is often dominated by women's sphere.

Problem Statement

In Ghana, most areas are patriarchal societies in which the power structure is male dominated. Therefore, there may be gender differences in how farmers both female and male and other agricultural players perceive crop and livestock farming.

Agriculture is the primary source of income and well-being in Northern Ghana. Farmers grow maize, yam, groundnuts, sorghum, rice and other crops, consuming and selling their harvest to maintain food security and earn an income (Wahabu, 2022). Women farmers in rural areas, on the other hand, confront unique problems that are worsened by gender norms. Traditionally, the man is deemed the farmer and the woman as the farmer's wife. Most people in the region associate gender with activities that only benefit women (Dittoh et al., 2015). Peralta et al., (2022) in examining the perceptions of women's participation and the roles of social norms in agricultural decision-making found out that, men and women have different perceptions about women's role and suggest that rigorous consideration of social norms is required to understand intra household decision-making.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

The case study area is the Northern Region of Ghana. The economy of the Northern Region of Ghana is fuelled by agriculture and as such, the population is highly dependent on natural resources. According to the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA), (2007), rain fed agriculture accounts for the majority of agricultural production, with lower output during the dry season. Over the last 30 years, the average annual rainfall has fluctuated from 700 mm to 1200 mm. Cereals (maize, rice, millet, and sorghum), root and tuber crops (cassava, yam, and sweet potatoes), vegetables (pepper, tomato, onions, okra, and garden eggs), pulses and nuts (sheanut, cashew nut, dawadawa, and tamarine), fruits (mango), are the most important food crops grown in the region, and livestock (cattle, sheep, goats, pigs), poultry, and fish (Bawa, 2019) dominates the agricultural sector in the region.

Study Design

The study employed the explanatory sequential mixed methods design where the quantitative study was followed by qualitative study to explain the results of the quantitative data. The study was conducted in the Northern region of Ghana. Three Metropolitan, Municipal and District Assemblies (MMDAs) namely Tamale Metropolitan, Savelugu Municipal, and Zabzugu District were purposively sampled from the 16 MMDAs in the region. The selection of the three MMDAs was to appreciate the gender dynamics within the metropolitan, municipal, and district perspectives to ensure appropriate generalization of the results. Slovin's (1960) formula was employed to calculate an appropriate sample size from the Northern Region Population and Housing Census (2021) figure. The total sample was 454 made up of 54 policymakers and implementers and 400 farmers.

A semi-structured questionnaire was used to elicit responses from the 54 officers and 130 farmers, followed by a Focus Group Discussion and interviews for the 270 farmers. The semi-structured questionnaires and the FGD contained similar items. The items were based on the Harvard Analytical Framework (1985) cited by March (1999), often referred to as the Gender Roles Framework and Moser analytical tools. Under these frameworks the Stakeholders' perceptions were sought in three key areas; productive roles, reproductive roles, and community roles.

Perception index was used as an indicator of the farmers' perceptions on the gender notions. Frequencies, percentages, and means were computed using SPSS before being interpreted. Data was evaluated using a five-point Likert scale with 1 denoting strongly agree; 2= Agree 3= Undecided; 4= Disagree 5= Strongly Disagree

RESULTS

Quantitative Findings

Table 1: Perceptions of male and female farmers on gender notions in the Northern Region

Perception statement	Male mean	Female mean
Productive Roles		
The man is the primary farmer in a farming household	1.6	1.7
Women produce for household consumption but not for sale	1.7	1.6
Women produce legumes and vegetables and men produce cash crop	2.7	1.8
Women are responsible for planting, weeding and fertilizer applications	2.7	3.3
Women are responsible for milking and selling livestock products	4.2	4.3
Women often harvest and market farm produce	1.9	2.6
Women are usually in charge of crop processing compared to men	2.4	1.5
Women do not own livestock	1.6	1.6
Women are responsible for producing and selling seedlings	4.0	3.9
Overall perception index of the productive roles	2.5	2.4
Reproductive Roles		
Women are responsible for cooking, childcare, washing and cleaning the home	3.4	3.4
Rural women's occupations are limited to unpaid on-farm labour and household work	3.7	1.6
Women are more responsible for household budgeting than men.	1.2	3.3
Women are responsible for children's expenses	3.8	2.4
Overall perception index of the reproductive roles	3.1	2.2
Community Management Role		
Women are less engaged in community management activities than men.	4.2	2.6
Women are more likely to belong to farmer associations and groups than men	1.9	2.2
Women are more likely to attend weddings and funerals than men in the communities	1.4	1.5
Overall perception index community management roles	2.5	2.1

Source: Field data (2022)

The results in table 1 show the overall perception index of the male and female farmers' productive roles, reproductive roles and community management roles. The results show that the overall perception index on the productive role was 2.5 for the male and 2.4 for the female which implies that on average there was a consensus on these notions as both the male and female agreed with the productive notions. The results also show an overall perception index of 3.1 for the male and 2.2 for the female on the reproductive notions which implies that while the male farmers were undecided on these reproductive roles the females agreed with the reproductive notions. Table 4 also shows an overall perception of 2.5 for the male and 2.0 for the female on the community management notions implying that on average both the male and female farmers agreed with the community management notions.

Table 2: Perceptions of policy implementers and policy makers' perception on the gender notions in the Northern Region

Perception statement	Policy implementers Mean	Policymakers Mean
Productive Roles		
The man is the primary farmer in a farming household	1.6	2.0
Women produce for household consumption but not for sale	1.8	2.0
Women produce legumes and vegetables and men produce cash crop	1.9	2.2
Women are responsible for planting, weeding and fertilizer applications	3.3	5.0
Women are responsible for milking and selling livestock products	4.4	4.0
Women often harvest and market farm produce	2.2	4.0
Women are usually in charge of crop processing compared to men	2.0	2.0
Women do not own Livestock	1.8	2.8
Women are responsible for producing and selling seedlings	4.2	5.0
Overall perception index of the productive roles	2.5	3.0
Reproductive Roles		
Women are responsible for cooking, childcare, washing and cleaning the home	2.7	4.7
Rural women's occupations are limited to unpaid on-farm labour and household work	4.2	2.0
Women are more responsible for household budgeting than men.	1.8	4.6
Women are responsible for children's expenses	4.2	4.0
Overall perception index of the reproductive role	2.3	3.8

Community Management Role		
Women are less engaged in community management activities than men.	4.3	4.0
Women are more likely to belong to farmer associations and groups than men	2.6	3.7
Women are more likely to attend weddings and funerals than men in the communities	1.4	2.0
Overall perception index of the community management role	2.3	3.9

Source: Field data (2022)

Table 2 shows the perception of policymakers and policy implementers on gender notions in the Northern region. The overall perception index of the productive role for the policy implementers was 2.5 and 3.0 for policymakers implying that on average majority of the policy implementers agreed that these notions were widespread whiles on average the policymakers were undecided on these notions. On the reproductive notions the overall perception index was 3.8 for the policymakers and 2.3 for the policy implementers implying that whiles the majority of the policy implementers agreed with these notions, the policymakers disagreed with these reproductive notions. Also, the overall perception index of the policy implementers on the community management role was 2.3 and 3.9 for the policymakers. This implies that on the average majority of the policy, implementers agreed to these notions whiles the policymakers disagreed with the community management roles.

FINDINGS

Qualitative Findings

Figure 1 depicts the thematic map of the thoughts of the various stakeholders thus policymakers and implementers at the national, regional, MMD and community levels as well as the farmers both female and male on the gender notions within the northern region of Ghana. These notions have been clustered into three phases with three different shades of colors which have been explained below.

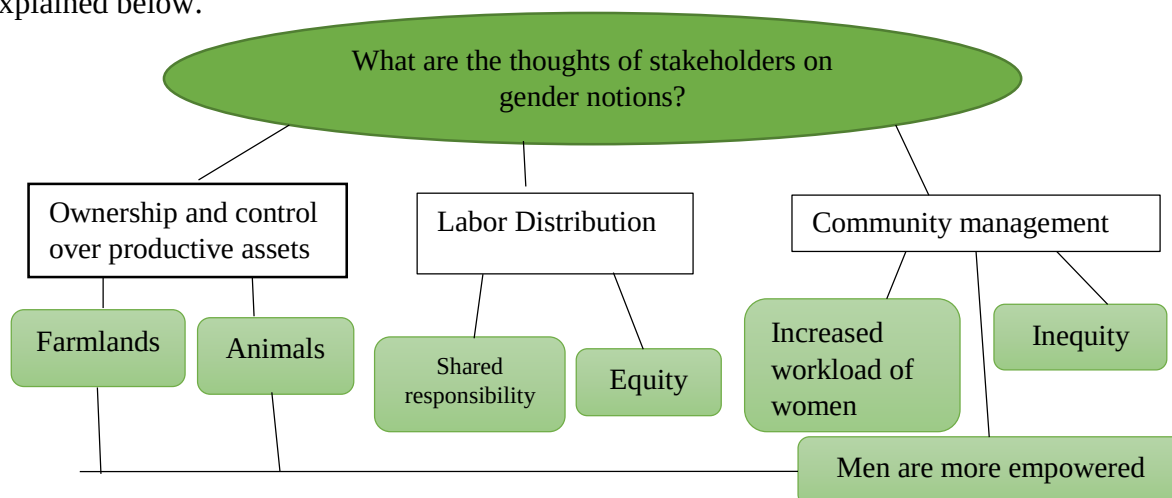


Figure 1: Thematic map of stakeholder perceptions on the gender notions

Source: Field data (2022)

Figure 1 shows that the various officers at the national, regional and MMD are clear and consistent about the gender roles and made concrete suggestions about how current practices could be improved. The farmers and some implementers at the community level were however inconsistent about the notions.

Cumulatively, the stakeholder's thoughts on gender notions were rooted in ownership and control over productive assets, labor distribution and the community management as a whole. The stakeholders perceived farmlands and livestock as the main productive resources within the community. They conceptualized shared responsibilities as the guiding principle in the distribution of labor for both women and men. To ensure fair labor distribution and to close the parity gap, particularly concerning the duties and responsibilities carried out by women and men in the communities in Ghana's Northern area, the fundamental motivation for responsibility sharing was the need to ensure fairness in the distribution of work. This was inextricably linked as they felt that sharing gender roles especially the rearing of children at home had the potential of ensuring gender equity in the distribution of labor which had the potential of affecting positively the productive roles as well as community management activities. This was explained by a WIAD officer in the Savelugu Municipality in the following narration that:

"We make sure that interventions that are provided take into consideration the triple roles of women, especially with regards to time. We also encourage the male counterparts to switch roles with their wives like stirring TZ during the value addition processing training for them to have a feel of what the women go through and also take away the it is a women's responsibility tag" [WIAD Officer, Savelugu].

Officers felt that if farmers especially men get the opportunity to experience each other's roles, it could make them more accommodative and also promote empathy which invariably encourages them to share their responsibility not just at home but on their farmlands and even the community level where issues of community management become a shared responsibility for both the women and the men.

Significantly, stakeholders identified that women are not visibly in the management of community activities which they attributed to women's increased workloads or extended responsibilities transferred from their households to the social arena like weddings and funerals within the communities. This, therefore, presented both negative and positive effects on how women take part in community management activities. For instance, the increase in the workloads of women meant that they could not get time to be part of community management activities thereby instead of bringing about equity rather results in widening the gender equality gaps and making women more vulnerable.

Mixed Methods Findings

The responses on the notions gathered from the officers at the regional and MMD levels on the reproductive roles were varied in context and perspective. The overall perception index for the male productive role was 2.5 implying that on average the male agrees with the notions of the productive roles. On the other hand, the results also show an overall perception index of 3.1 for the reproductive notions implying that on average the male farmers were undecided on these reproductive roles. In addition, the results also shows an overall perception of 2.5 on the notions of the community management role implying that on average the male farmers agreed to the notions. This is consistent with a study by Peralta et al., (2022) who examined the social norms and perceptions that influence women's participation in agricultural decisions in West Java, Indonesia. It was found that men and women have different perceptions about how

women make decisions in agricultural activities. Additionally, Peralta et al., (2022) contends that societal norms have an impact on how spouses perceive their involvement in decision-making, which accounts for the majority of the difference in the results. Therefore, the study advised that before implementing any type of intervention, it is necessary to carefully evaluate social norms to comprehend intra-household decision-making.

Confirming these assertions, Mudege et al. (2015), revealed that women's access to training and information is hindered by stereotypical views of women held by their husbands and extension workers. This leads to institutional biases within extension systems that perpetuate gender inequality by reinforcing stereotypical gender norms. Specifically, the notion of the reproductive role of some of the respondents indicated that there has been an enormous improvement concerning child rearing and caring in most of the communities. Interestingly, this was very prominent within the Zabzugu enclave (rural area) where the implementers hinted that most of the “rural women's occupations are not limited to unpaid on-farm labor and household work” but rather they cultivate and earn income too to take care of themselves and their families. They expressed optimism that women now more than ever are in charge of the budgeting at home and also have their husbands supporting the family system. For those in the urban and peri-urban areas, the officers indicated that though the burden was heavy on the women most of them are defying the odds to earn some living outside their homes. In contrast to these results, Peralta et al., (2022) conducted a study on the roles of men and women in agriculture and agricultural decisions in Vanuatu where it was discovered that women participate in many aspects of the production and post-harvest activities of food and cash crops, even though women lack the power to participate in, influence, and have autonomy over decisions about agricultural activities and income from crop sales.

Meanwhile, the responses from the farmers in the rural, peri-urban, and urban areas were also varied just like what the policymakers and implementers said. Whiles some of the men proudly talked about how they were taking care of their children when their wives go to the market to sell, some of the women had contrary views. The women described the burden on them as unbearable. They explained that taking care of the entire household rested on the shoulders of the women with the men providing just maize and expecting their food on the table, clothing for the children and even when the kids were to attend school was the responsibility of the woman. Some of the women accepted that the reproductive role generally was a natural responsibility bestowed on them from generation to generation which implies there is a deficit that needs to be addressed. This deficit based on the theory of change within which this study is situated, indicates that there is a need for more awareness creation, sensitization, and stakeholder engagement to address these negative perceptions that ultimately most likely impede the realization of the gender mainstreaming agenda.

The overall perception index of the policy implementers and policy makers were 2.3 and 3.9 respectively. This implies that on the average majority of the policy makers agreed to these notions whiles the policymakers disagreed with the community management roles. Meanwhile a further probe from both the policymakers and implementers revealed that in the community management roles by both women and men, ‘engagement with the FBOs’ and ‘attending weddings and funerals’ had more women participating than men. The reasons for women's engagement with FBOs were that their needs were adequately catered for and most of the interventions target women more than men making gender mainstreaming more of women's affairs than for men. This though a way of closing the gender gap tended to threaten the accomplishment of gender mainstreaming. According to the women farmers, because their needs were addressed promptly by WIAD, they had this sense of belonging when it came to

their relationship with WIAD. This was implied in all three MMDs. For the men it was revealed that it was just of late they realized there were some benefits associated with associating oneself with FBOs that have made some of them very active in recent times.

However, in terms of building schools and other community activities, the officers at the various levels intimated that it is mainly the men who are engaged in the actual community activities while the women contribute and also cook for them. This they described as very valuable in the accomplishment of community goals. The farmers however perceived it differently. The mere fact that the women might not necessarily be the ones to be at the forefront of a community activity like building a school means they are not involved but rather the men. On weddings and funerals, women were said to be engaged more because in the view of the men, the women will get the opportunity to show off their new clothes and also gossip about their husbands while the women said they participate more in such gatherings because they are very passionate when it comes to taking care of the families during such occasions because they care about their families and by extension the community people and their needs.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the perceptions of stakeholders (policymakers, policy implementers, and farmers) in the agriculture on gender notions. In terms of the productive roles, the results show unclear pathway on these notions. Though the women seem ready to challenge the status quo, access to and control over resources like land and other resources challenge their efforts. The men on the other side, for fear of losing their access and control over the resources, protect their territory graciously. Though policy implementers are aware of these notions, there is very little they can do as policies developed in line with these notions touch on the periphery and are not deeply addressed.

Most of the reproductive roles commonly referred to as “natural role” like childbearing which is linked to child care tend to exert more burden on the women who have accepted their roles with pride but invariably widens the gender gap and place women in very vulnerable circumstances. Therefore, this creates a major crux in the gender mainstreaming agenda as the natural/biological role is associated with an additional burden. It is very clear from the study that there is some calculated agenda not to temper the status quo of male chauvinism in the region. Though some of the farmers both men and women are in support of changing these backward notions to bring a balance, majority of the them seem to be holding on firmly to what has been handed over to them by their ancestral heritage.

On the community role, the notions which were more community-focused also seem to be disproportionate as critical decisions within the community were taken at the community management level where women were idolized as a symbol of beauty which is good but should that be the case? Ultimately, the results show that anytime women are mentioned their roles seem to be downplayed while men's roles are hyped to connote masculinity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. There is need for policymakers at the national and regional levels and implementers at the MMDAs and community levels to ensure that both women and men have access to and control over resources (land, extension services, credit and inputs) to ensure gender equity.
- ii. Officers (policymakers and implementers) in the agricultural sector should be more conscious of the different gender roles and its implication for both women and men so that trainings, inputs and credit can target both women and men in the region.

- iii. Officers at the MMDA level need to ensure that female and male farmers are conscientized on the gender roles so that they can support each other to promote gender equity.
- iv. There should be continuous role change for women and men to appreciate the need for families to work as a team and bring about balance in the distribution of labour, access and control over productive resources within the region.

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