

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Rural women's access to productive resources: Implications for poverty reduction- the case of Gamo Gofa Zone, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region (SNNPR)

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Received 10 July, 2015; Accepted 25 September, 2015

Rural areas of Ethiopia strikingly vary in terms of social and economic structure, geography and culture. The same is true for rural women's participation in productive activities. Likewise rural women of Gamo Gofa Zone are experiencing inadequate right to access different productive resources like land and other resources they require. This study therefore, intends to identify the existing rural women's access to productive resources and its effect on the stated poverty reduction strategy in the study area. The study explicitly reflect as the rural agriculture sector, where gender inequalities in access to productive resources are persistent, undermining a sustainable and inclusive development of the sector and their contribution for poverty reduction.

**Key words:** Rural women, access to, domestic chores, division of labor, poverty reduction.

## INTRODUCTION

### Back ground of the study

Rural areas of Ethiopia strikingly vary in terms of social and economic structure, geography and culture. Likewise rural women are not homogeneous groups. They have different roles and occupations, on farms and in family businesses, in employment and in community activities. Their needs and interests differ too, particularly from one age group to another, and depending on the size and composition of their family and age of their children. The economic and social changes that rural areas are undergoing do not affect all women in the same way.

Offering opportunities to some, to others they bring difficult challenges (Akuna, 2004). Despite of these differences almost all Ethiopian women perform multiple roles for the survival of their homes and the nation. In addition to this there are inequalities in the distribution of food, health care, employment opportunities (World Bank, 2001, 2007). Overall evidence suggests that the scale of poverty in the developing countries continue to worsen despite investments in poverty reduction (Jazairy et al., 1992). The tasks which the rural women are expected to perform and the skills needed to carry them out vary. Men hold superior position in households and

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**Table 1.** Gender and division of labor.

S/N		Mothers		Fathers		Both		Neither	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
1	Girls have to help	142	78.9	1	0.6	37	20.6	0	0
2	Boys have to help	21	11.7	114	63.3	31	17.2	14	7.8
3	Who sleeps more	2	1.1	175	97.2	0	0	3	1.7
4	Who works more in house	177	97.3	0	0	0	0	3	1.7

Source: Field survey.

communities and women are put to inferior position (NAP-GE, 2006). In women's access to productive resource issues power in gender relation implies men's higher access to productive resource and women's less access productive resource. Rural women's access to productive resources has become more critical in developing countries like in Ethiopia as productive resources are the means to alleviate poverty and bring sustainable rural development (Tesfaye, 2003). These conditions necessitate the assessment of rural women's access to productive resources and its implication in Gamo Gofa Zone.

### **Access to productive resources**

Resources are means and goods including those that are economic like household income, productive like land, equipments, agricultural inputs (including labor) and opportunity to leadership and decision-making, information, organization and time. Access to resource implies to the ability to use resources and/or benefits and to make short-term decisions on these resources (Sida, 2003). This study therefore, intends to identify the labor division in the area: Find out the existing rural women's access to productive resources and its effect on the stated poverty reduction strategy in Gamo Gofa Zone of SNNP Region.

### **METHODOLOGY**

There are 15 woredas (Districts) in the Gamo Gofa Zone with different agro-ecologies. This study carried out in two woredas from different agro-ecology that have been selected by simple random sampling technique. Three kebeles was selected from each two woredas by using lottery method of random sampling and then totally six kebeles (the lowest government administration structure) were selected to represent the zone. Finally, for survey questionnaire 30 respondents per kebele was selected using simple random sampling technique. Totally, 180 rural women were participated to respond the interview questionnaire of the study. Whereas 5 women and 5 men were selected for group discussion at each woreda based on their nature to act as the opinion leader. Both quantitative and qualitative data are used for this study. Structured interview questionnaire used for quantitative data and Semi-structured interview questionnaire are used for qualitative

data. The interview was conducted at appropriate time they want to be interview.

The study mainly focuses on gender and division of labor and the access of rural women's to productive resources. Gender and division of labor contain the variables like who work more, whom boys and girls help more and who sleeps more. Gender based distribution of household activities includes the variables: Cooking, fetching water, collect fire wood, cleaning work, washing clothe, cares the children, take care of patient, grinding grains and purchasing salt and others. Land, labor, water, livestock, inputs, and finance are the variables included for assessing the rural women's access to productive resources.

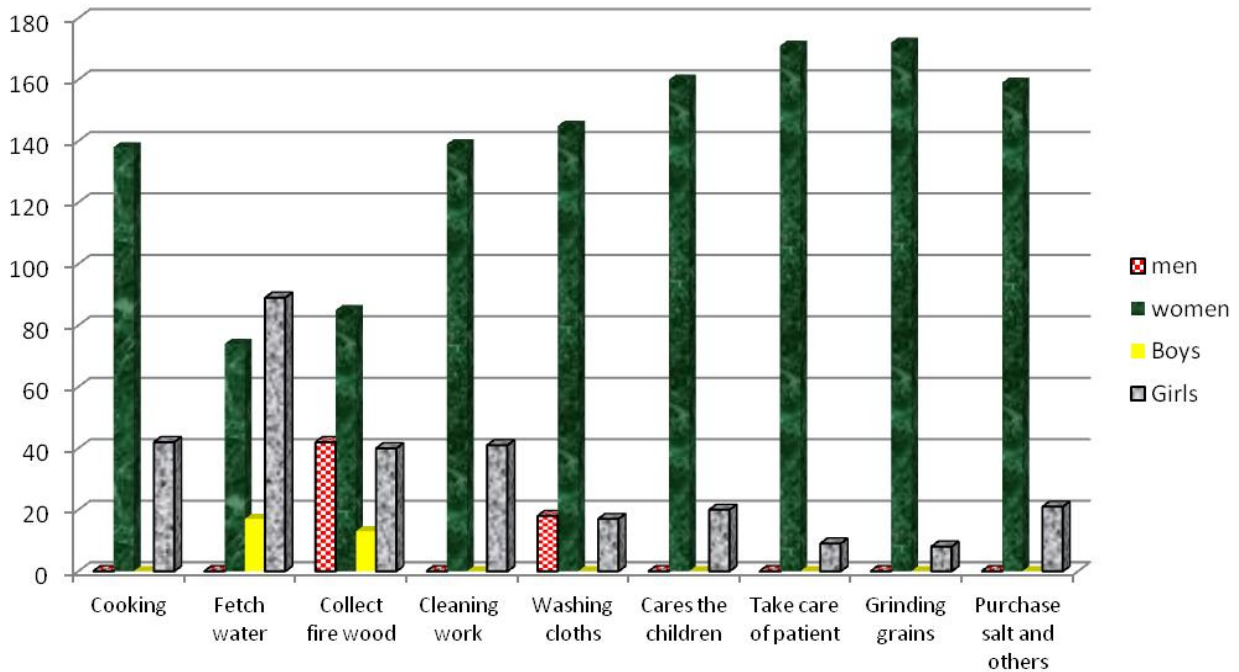
To get background information and the number of the study area, secondary sources were reviewed. The primary data were obtained from the rural women and men by using appropriate data collection instruments like questionnaire, focus group discussion, and interview and field observation. Data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) and some descriptive statistics, such as percentage and mean.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Gender based division of labor**

Gender division of labor in households is the main economic strategy used to meet family basic needs for shelter, food, health, procreation and education. And yet, the nature of this division of labor is one that constrains development. A number of factors are responsible for the gender division of labor today: Some are gender-neutral and others are gender-biased. The facts are shown in the following Table 1. As indicated in Table 1, girls help (about 78.9%) her mothers. Girls help their mother than boys in working domestic chores and boys have to help their father. In another way mothers discharge about 97.3% of domestic chores. Hence, if girls are expected to help their mother, both of them are expected to play reproductive role which is categorized under unpaid work. This elucidated as almost all domestic chores are on the shoulder of rural women. The respondents assured as fathers sleep more (97.2%) than mothers.

Discussants come in to consensus as rural women do all of the domestic chores, working on average up to 16 h a day in most of rural houses while conducting group discussion. This data is in line with the most literature report as rural women works on average 16 h in developing countries (Braunstein, 2008; Elson, 2009;



**Figure 1.** Gender based distribution of household activities.

FAO, 2011; NAP-GE, 2006).

The domestic chores described further and main activities are identified in group discussion to interview as whose responsibility are they. According to this survey result the number of hours men commit to housework has remained roughly none in the study area. While women spent her working hours almost in home work and related role. Figure 1 shows that rural women's are an implementer of these main unpaid domestic activities'. Figure 1 explicit as women dominate or almost sole contributor on activities like cares the children (88.9%), takes care of patient (95%), grinding grains (95.6%), purchase salt and other (88.3%) and shares the activities like fetching water, food preparation and cleanup with her daughters. The share of men is restricted only on activities like collecting fire wood (23%) and washing clothes (10%). Mainly these activities are carried out when the woman are pregnant and gives birth. The above facts give more sense when it presented in the form of histogram. It helps to compare the contribution of household members in main domestic activities.

As it is displayed on the above graph except fetching water where girls take the great share other domestic chores are done by women. Girls are participating in each and every domestic role even though their role is less than women. Whereas men has a role in two domestic activities and boys share water fetching duty with girls and women.

The above pie chart displays the fact of labor division related to domestic chores on an average, 77% of women, 18% of girls, 3% of men and 2% of boys. Women

in rural areas generally bear primary responsibility for the nutrition of their children, from gestation through weaning and throughout the critical period of growth. In addition, they are the principal food producers and preparers for the rest of the family. Women play their domestic role while they are participating at significant level in different crop production activities or farm works. Despite their contributions to food security, women tend to be invisible actors in development. All too often, their work is not recorded in statistics or recognized by society or mentioned in reports. As a result, their contribution is poorly understood and often underestimated. The data found in Figure 2 reveals this fact. There are many reasons for this. Work in the household is often considered to be part of a woman's duties as wife and mother, rather than an occupation to be accounted for both men and women.

A great deal of rural women labor - whether regular or seasonal - goes unpaid and is, therefore, rarely taken into account in official statistics (UN ECA, 2004). If women were more likely to be breadwinners, they had have less to do around the house or domestic chores should be equal responsibility for both partners (World Bank, 2001).

### **Rural women's access to productive resources**

Improved access to productive resources like land and credit and other will facilitate the opening up of new opportunities for rural women, which in turn will provide

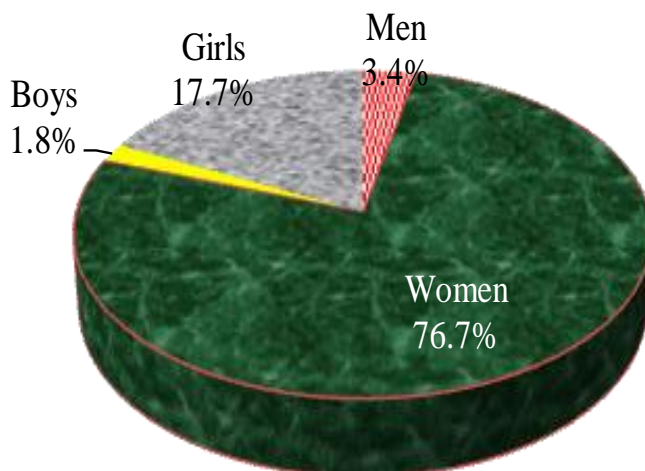


Figure 2. Average shares of domestic activities.

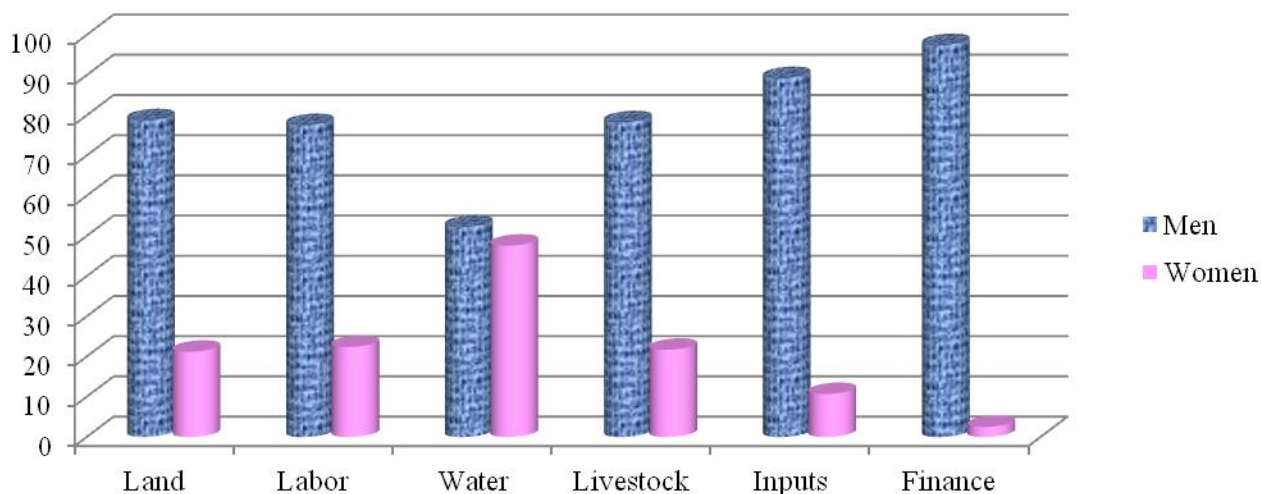


Figure 3. Access to productive resources.

even further stimulus to rural economic growth and well-being. As illustrated in Figure 3 the results of the data analysis show limited access by female farmers to key productive resources and agricultural services. Females in both male headed households and female-headed households tend to have poor access to productive resources because of gender division of labor and cultural barriers. The male farmers enjoy better access to productive resources mainly because of the culture, family headship and gender division of labor.

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#### **Access to land**

As to data above, men have 78.81% of access to land where women have only 21.19% of access land. This is an indicator how much they are neglected from crucial resource in rural agrarian community's productive resource. The access to land is decisive position in rural community.

Land lessens is a global phenomenon that disproportionately affects women. The rights of women to own, use, access, transfer, inherit and otherwise take decisions about land are recognized throughout the research area.

Not only do women have less access to land than men, but they are also often restricted to so-called secondary land rights, meaning that they hold these rights through male family members, and thus she is under the risk of losing these entitlements in case of divorce, widowhood or the migration of the male relative. Frequently, women have only user rights, mediated by men, and those rights remain highly precarious. Rural women have much less or insufficient access to land, membership in rural organizations, credit, agricultural inputs and technology, training and extension services, and marketing services.

### **Labor**

Table 1 reveals that men have 77.58% of access to productive resources and women have 22.43% of access to productive resources. Women dominantly have a full access (98.9%) to girls' labor. Other type of labor is hardly accessed by rural women.

### **Water**

Rural women tend to have high access to water than their counter part. But the reality is very different. Women have 47.54% of access to water and men have 52.34% of access to water resources. When the access to different sources of water is compared women have better access; 84.4 and 97.8% of access consecutively in potable water and sanitation water. Whereas, their access to livestock water and spring water is very less than men's access to it.

### **Livestock**

According to the data from Table 1, 78.35% access to livestock is for men and only 21.66% of access is for women. When one looks separately the access of rural women for cow is about 84.4% and for poultry is about 84.5%. Their counterpart have less access for these both type of livestock. In opposition to this the access of men to another type of livestock is almost 100% and women have no access to these types of livestock.

### **Inputs**

The access of rural women for different type of inputs is 10.7 and 89.3% for men. When we look separately they have only access to poultry related inputs. The access of women farmers to agricultural inputs and technologies is constrained by their lack of access to credit and membership in rural organizations, but also by gender blind development programs and lack of attention to the needs of women farmers in research and technology

development programs.

Because women farmers everywhere are engaged in a wide range of laborious tasks related to food security, there is a need for the development and introduction of appropriate laborsaving technology in food processing and storage as well in food production, and in related areas such water, sanitation, fuel and food preparation.

### **Finance**

Surprisingly rural women have only 2.5% of access for different type of financial resources and men have 97.5% of access to men. This is a sign as rural women have no access to different financial resources, if they fail to have enough access to financial resources their ability to participate in any income generating activities will be almost null. This is a serious obstacle to improving women's agricultural productivity, as without credit rural women are unable to buy inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and improved technologies, or to hire labor. Paradoxically, numerous studies have shown that women are more likely than men to repay loans.

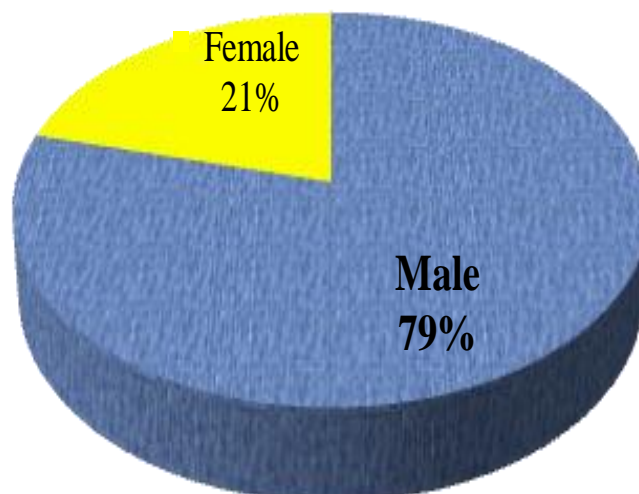
Because rural man and rural women often have different responsibilities in agricultural production and food security, both need credit according to their needs. It is thus important for rural women to have not only access to credit but also control over the use of the credit so that it is not diverted to male-dominated production systems, at the expense of women's productive activities. The respondents informed as all amount of finance including the safety net money given for fulfill their food gap is less accessed by rural women.

If all access to productive resources is summed up men have 79% of access to total productive resource where as women have only 21% of access (Figure 4). This indicates as rural women have weak or less access to different productive resources. Unless different concerned bodies' reverses this access the chance of rural women to break the poverty vicious circle is less.

### **Implication of the result to poverty reduction**

Having less access to productive resources rural women's effort towards poverty reduction is very less. All development efforts still on-going are just like clamping with one hand. The gender based division of labor leaves aside the half of societies (women's) labor. They are still playing reproductive role. The productive role and almost all of the means of production are controlled by men.

Poverty can be thought of as an "inadequate" livelihood outcome. It may be the result of the household having inadequate access to assets, like land, water, credit or social support. It can be also caused by policies, institutions and processes that are not supportive of achieving an equal access of productive resources of



**Figure 4.** General access to productive resources.

both men and women. Therefore poverty can be defined simply as the combination of uncertain or non-existent income and a lack of access to productive resources needed to ensure sustainable living conditions.

In rural areas, where services and job opportunities are even fewer than in urban areas and where rural women's have very less access to productive resources, poverty is also more acute. The situation is worse for women, who are less likely to have access to production factors, services and resources such as credit, land, water for irrigation, inheritance, education, information, extension services, technology and farm inputs, as well as a say in decision-making.

Another reason for the persistence of female poverty is gender vulnerability within the home. When poor families cannot afford to send all of their children to school, they favor investing in the boy-children, keeping the girls at home to help with domestic work. In this research area as well as in many societies, inequalities of women and men were part and parcel of an accepted male-dominated culture.

Improving gender division of labor, ensuring women's access to productive resources requires an integrated approach to growth and development, focused on gender bases. Economic growth and poverty reduction strategies should give attention to the real economy and focus on creating a gender-sensitive macroeconomic environment, access to land, property and other productive resources as well as financial services, and full coverage of social protection measures.

Throughout the research area, gender inequality in access to productive resources, such as land, water, credit, technology and other means of production, is closely related to women's poverty and economic and social exclusion. While challenges to the effective enjoyment of rural women's economic rights are complex

and often context-specific, there are also many shared obstacles, including their ineffective implementation of legal rights at all levels, as well as discriminatory attitudes and practices. In order to ensure that women enjoy their rights in practice, a broad conceptualization of rights and access to productive resources is needed that is sustainable, gender-responsive and inclusive of both urban and rural areas. This approach should be consistent with national human rights standards and the human rights-based approach to development.

### Conclusion

Rural women are key agents for development. They play a catalytic role towards achievement of transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development and poverty reduction. But man biased division of labor, less access to different productive resources are among the many challenges they face. Gender differences, arising from the socially constructed relationship between men and women, affect the division of labor the role they play in the community the distribution of resources between them and the benefits from different development outcomes. This is explicitly found in the agriculture sector, where gender inequalities in access to resources are persistent, undermining a sustainable and inclusive development of the sector and their contribution for poverty reduction.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

An effective implementation of Ethiopia's gender empowerment policy will significantly help to improve the conditions of rural female farmers.

Without the participation of the rural poor female farmers in rural development implementation and the establishment of efficient rural organizations to act as countervailing forces to vested interests, it is unlikely that significant progress will be made in increasing access by rural women farmers to productive resources. Economic growth strategies should give attention to the real economy and focus on creating a gender sensitive microeconomic environment, full employment and decent work, access to land, property and other productive resources as well as financial services, and full coverage of social protection measures. Extension services are pivotal to increased productivity, agricultural development and poverty reduction. Therefore by any means rural women should have get chance to contact with DAs. Continuous contact with DA's can help rural farmers to get new idea and practice about the agricultural work.

### Conflict of Interests

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors acknowledge the financial support of Arba Minch University as well as College of Agricultural Sciences to undertake this research study at field level. Their special acknowledgement also goes to the sample rural women's and district administrators who provided the necessary information.

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