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PANEL REPORT: GENDER PERSPECTIVES ON LAND RIGHTS,
INTRA-HOUSEHOLD ALLOCATIONS AND PRODUCTIVITY

ORGANIZER, CHAIRPERSON AND RAPPORTEUR

Bina Agarwal (Institute of Economic Growth, University of Delhi, India)

PANEL DISCUSSANTS

Exploring the Relationships between Gendered Land Rights, Intra-household Allocations and Productivity in Africa *Cheryl Doss (Yale University, New Haven, USA)*

Gender Inequality in the Land Tenure System of Rural China *Zhu Ling (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, China) and Jiang Zhongyi (Ministry of Agriculture, Beijing, China)*

Who Owns the Land? Gender and Land Titling Programmes in Latin America
Carmen Diana Deere and Magdalena Leon (National University, Bogota, Colombia)

Economists have long emphasized the importance of secure land rights for promoting incentives and efficiency in agriculture. It is also well recognized that for millions of rural households in developing countries the ownership and control of agricultural land is crucially linked to viable livelihoods, a lower risk of poverty, a greater ability to bargain for higher wages, and better access to credit and improved agricultural technology. In other words, command over land is found to add both to welfare and to efficiency within agriculture (for references, see Agarwal, 1994).

However, although these linkages are well recognized at the household level, they have been relatively little examined at the intra-household level from a gender perspective. For instance, what is women's access to land within farming households? How does a gender gap in land ownership and control affect family welfare and farm productivity? What are the gender biases in the three main sources for land acquisition: inheritance, land markets and government schemes for land titling and distribution? Much of mainstream agricultural economics has failed even to raise these questions, much less answer them. Moreover, few agricultural censuses or other large surveys gather gender-disaggregated data on the ownership and use of land that would help us

monitor the implications of various land-related laws and land distribution programmes. This panel sought to address some of these questions on the basis of recent work on Africa, China and Latin America, while also building on earlier work on South Asia (for example, Agarwal, 1994).

The panellists focused on the gender gap in command over arable land and its implications for intra-household resource allocation, gender relations and agricultural productivity. Implicitly or explicitly, this and related work (for example, Udry *et al.*, 1995; Quisumbing, 1996; Agarwal, 1994) also call into question the assumptions underlying a unitary concept of the household, and show how gender differences in incentives, preferences and interests within households could have notable effects on household expenditures and on agricultural production decisions and outcomes.

Three papers were presented in this panel, focusing respectively on Africa, Asia and Latin America. The first paper, by Cheryl Doss, outlined several reasons why it is important to examine the issue of land rights in Africa from a gender perspective. One, it argued that such analysis is essential for understanding the gendered effects of prevailing and newly formulated land rights. Formal law, customary law and social norms all affect access to land. In many places there is also a continuing trend towards titling and registration of land. Definitions of ownership, and the rights that ownership confers, may themselves vary, in some cases giving the owner only rights of use and not of sale and so on. Rights may also be allocated among several people, and through different channels such as the village head or kinship networks. Gender can impinge on all these issues. For instance, men and women may be granted different land rights by law, or their access may be differently affected by laws and norms.

Two, women's land rights can affect agricultural productivity. It is often noted that productivity gains in African agriculture will depend, at least in part, on increasing the productivity of women farmers; and productivity-enhancing investments are in turn affected by security of land rights. Doss's research in Ghana, for instance, showed that gender differences in constraints, especially differential access to land, rather than different preferences, explained the gendered pattern of technology adoption among Ghanaian maize farmers. Gender was significant in explaining both land ownership and cultivation patterns. Women owned and cultivated smaller plots than men and were also much less likely than male farmers to use improved maize varieties or fertilizers. However, after controlling for land ownership, extension, education and household size, gender was not a significant determinant of improved technology adoption. Rather, headship mattered: women farmers in female-headed households were less likely to adopt improved technologies, while women in male-headed households made adoption decisions similar to men's in such households. Headship affected access to both land and other inputs.

Three, gender inequality in farmland distribution within households can affect household expenditure patterns. In Ghana, for instance, Doss found that budget shares for food increased, while those for alcohol, tobacco and recreation decreased, when women owned greater shares of the household's farmland. This suggests that land ownership enhances women's voice in household decisions.

Basically, Doss emphasized that gender differences in land ownership can affect both agricultural technology adoption decisions and household economic decisions. There is also notable evidence (reviewed in Doss, 1999) that many development projects have failed owing to lack of attention to gender issues. At the same time, Doss cautioned that Africa is a heterogeneous continent within which the relationships between land rights, intra-household allocation and productivity can vary widely. Also the relationships are complex and their effects on women are not always easy to predict. For example, land value rises through productivity-enhancing measures, such as improvements in irrigation and soil fertility, in production technology (through the use of modern seed varieties and fertilizers) and in marketing channels with infrastructural development or urbanization. At the same time, these changes may also reduce women's access to land, since existing literature on women farmers and technology adoption suggests that women are more likely to own land when it is less valuable, and may lose access to land as its value rises. Similarly, giving women land titles may reduce the investments that others are willing to make in their particular plots. Also intra-household economic relationships are dynamic and households may renegotiate many decisions (including decisions about labour allocations and expenditures) when circumstances change. These hypotheses need to be tested explicitly, but there is some supportive evidence from Africa suggesting that they are important.

The paper thus concluded that, while it is clear that land rights are important for women, more analysis is needed to identify the best ways of guaranteeing women's ownership and control of land so as to ensure that women actually realize the intended gains.

The paper by Zhu Ling and Jiang Zhongyi focused on the factors underlying gender inequalities in access to agricultural land and the welfare implications of this unequal access. The paper examined the nature of Chinese women's land rights in terms of both the current legal framework and the institutional arrangements that mediate such rights in practice. On the basis of a sample survey of 947 households undertaken in Shanxi Province in 1996, the authors outlined the current state of land distribution, identified the causes of insecurity in land rights that women face and the impact of this insecurity on their socioeconomic status, and spelled out policy implications.

In the absence of private land ownership in rural China, access to land is through state land distribution practices, rather than via inheritance. Each member of the village community is entitled to a share of village land, eligibility being based on permanent resident records. The study defines land rights as rights of use and management in which the farmers can take all decisions regarding input use, output disposal and so on. It finds that, while the existing institutions are meant to be gender-neutral, in practice loopholes in arrangements and women's social position undermine land access in significant ways, leading to substantial insecurities. For a start, women are seriously disadvantaged in their land claims owing to marriage relocation from their parental to their marital villages. While communities are expected to redistribute land every few years to take account of relocations, in practice many do so only at long intervals: between 1980 and 1990, one-third of China's villages did not

redistribute land. Hence a newcomer to the village joins a 'waiting list' and gets a share only when someone dies or migrates out. A woman entering a village on marriage may thus have a long wait before she gets a plot, rendering her landless in the interim. Meanwhile, her marital family accommodates her and her children on the pre-distributed plot, rendering the whole family vulnerable to poverty.

Divorce introduces an even greater source of vulnerability which affects even the women who have a share of village land. More than 45 per cent of the women interviewed in the study reported that they would be unable to retain their land in the event of divorce. A divorced woman is socially pressured to move out of her ex-husband's village (and so forfeit her land claim). At the same time, she can seldom live for long periods with her parents or brothers if she returns to her natal village. Quick remarriage is often her only option, and again one which provides no guarantee of a land share in the new husband's village. Both marriage relocation and marital break-up thus make for insecure and unequal land rights for Chinese women, and render them much more vulnerable to poverty than men.

The study also finds that 60 per cent of women farmers did not participate in farm decisions on land use, agricultural credit and investment and product disposal. And the majority received no technical support from extension services. In agricultural wage employment, again, women were able to find work for fewer days and received lower daily wages than men; and men again were the ones better able to migrate to non-farm urban jobs, leaving women behind in agriculture, without the same security of land rights or the same livelihood options.

On the basis of their analysis, the authors emphasize the need to revise China's land laws in order to define more clearly women's land rights, and to reformulate government regulations on farmland tenure, land distribution and agricultural extension, so as to make them gender equal and women inclusive.

In contrast to the African and Chinese context, however, Latin America presents a somewhat more positive picture in relation to women's land claims. Carmen Diana Deere and Magdalena Leon's paper is on the gender impact of the state's land titling interventions in the 1990s, designed to promote security of tenure and enliven land markets. They review the titling programmes of seven Latin American countries. On the negative side, the authors find that the schemes were often designed without sufficient attention to civil codes and marital regimes which protect women's property rights. By assuming that the family farm is owned by the male household head, these interventions undermined women's ownership rights. They ignored the possibility that a household's total land endowment may belong partly to the wife, partly to the husband, and partly to both jointly. Nonetheless, on the positive side, the share of female beneficiaries in land titling in the 1990s has been much higher than the land share that women adjudicated under the agrarian reforms of previous decades. This is partly because the primary way that women acquire land is through inheritance, and inheritance in Latin American countries is more gender-equitable than other methods of acquiring land. Moreover, the implementation of the 1990s agrarian legislation was more gender-equal, especially where rural

women's organizations were strong. Colombia and Nicaragua, for instance, which mandated joint titling to couples irrespective of marital status, and gave priority to female household heads, had strong rural women's organizations which both lobbied for and ensured the implementation of gender-progressive legislation. Here women constituted 44 per cent and 33.5 per cent, respectively, of the beneficiaries. Honduras and Mexico, by contrast, lacked a strong national rural women's movement: here only 25 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively, of the beneficiaries were women. The authors stress the need to strengthen rural women's organizations and for them to give priority to women's property rights issues to ensure more gender equality in the land titling programmes which are continuing.

In conclusion, the evidence presented by the panel demonstrated that the issue of women's land rights, long neglected, is a critical one for analysis and policy. Existing research on it (including that presented by the panellists) is both illuminating and a pointer to notable gaps in our knowledge and data availability, both of which warrant urgent attention.

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