

Gender Issues in Agriculture-Sri Lanka.

(A review of women's involvement/empowerment in agriculture)

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Context;

Sri Lankan women though relatively enjoying a better status than women in many other developing countries, have yet to achieve gender equality and empowerment in relation to expectations of the Beijing Platform for Action, provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and some Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Sri Lanka ranks 99th out of 177 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI) with a score of 0.743 and on appearance women have had equal rights long before many developed countries, enjoying universal franchise from 1931. While women exercise the right to vote and many educated women have reached the pinnacle of success in non gender biased professions such as medicine, law, engineering, accountancy, public administration and politics the percentage of women in political and decision making bodies remain low and dismally so in the agricultural sector. While HDI focuses on the building of human capacity the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) which tracks utilization of the skills acquired with respect to political and decision making benchmarks under which Sri Lanka ranks 100th out of 108 countries in the GEM index with a value of 0.371 (0.274 in 2000) - *source UNDP HDI 2008.*

A complex amalgam of factors has contributed to the present situation *vis a vis* women, a forward looking social policy, package of free education and health services and subsidized food, relatively slow economic growth, substantial incidence of poverty, unevenly developed infrastructure and ad hoc regional development. Supervening factors have been the contradictions between the liberal traditional laws and inequalities reflected in the current legal system and in traditional and patriarchal values. The armed conflict that engulfed the country for nearly three decades and periodic knee jerk inappropriate macro economic policies have exacerbated constraints and resulted in the deterioration in the status and quality of life of women. In the agriculture sector technology adaptation has rather than improving the status and importance of women further eroded their contribution relegating them to mostly household related activities and agricultural labour support activities distancing them further from tasks that involve decision making.

1) Population and Gender;

Sri Lanka's population is currently estimated at around 19.7million with a sex ratio of 98 in favour of women. A population growth rate nearing the replacement rate is expected to reach a threshold level of around 23million in 2025 with an urban/rural mix of 50% from the current 75% in rural areas. The labour force participation rate for women has fluctuated between 33% and 37% since the early nineties, almost half the rate of 65% for men. An increase of around 1% annually of women in the female labour force in regular or casual employment from 51.7% in 1999 and decline in the same ratio of unpaid family workers from 30.3% is a positive trend. On the other hand structural changes to the economy have seen a decline of the percentage of women employed in agriculture by over 1% annually from 48.6% in 1999. Women representation among unpaid family workers is mostly in agriculture with rate rising from 58% to 73% during the decade. They account for 22% of the total female work force. The strength of the women workforce has been highest in the plantation districts (Nuwara Eliya 51.7%, Badulla 50.3%).

Women account for one third of the employed population and during the last decade rate of growth of women in gainful employment has been higher than that of men.

Distribution of Population

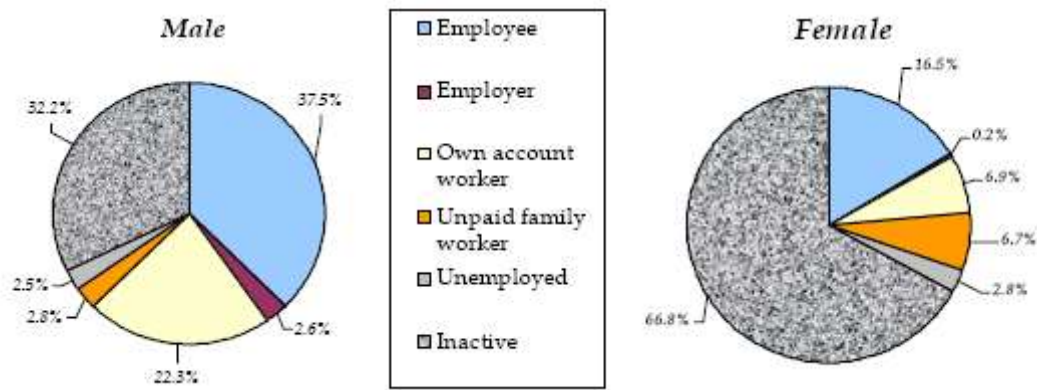


Fig 1-A- Distribution of Population by Economic position – 2008 (DCS)

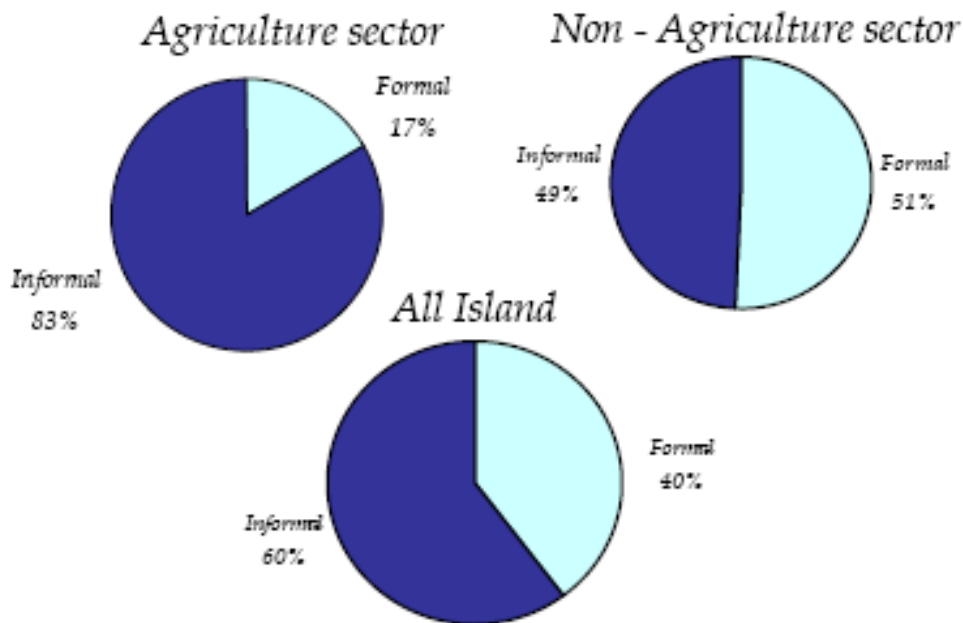


Fig 1-B- Employment in agriculture – 2008 (DCS)

A high literacy rate (90%) and life expectancy of over 70 years with probability of women reaching 65 years at 82% against men at 71% compounded by an overall aging population has implications for labour force growth which has declined from an annual 1% from the 1990's to around a projected 0.3% over the next decade (source ILO).

2) Role of Agriculture* in the Economy;

Of a land area of 6.55 million hectares 35% constitutes agricultural land. Total cultivated area is estimated at 1.86 million. ha(*DCS2003*), with irrigated land at 632,000ha (*Meegastenne 2005*). The non plantation sector is characterized by small farms with paddy cultivation dominating. Average farm size is 0.6 ha with over 70% of households operating on less than 1ha of land and 90% on less than 2ha. 17% of agricultural households are classified as being landless with marginal farmers who cultivate around 0.2ha of land constitutes 22% of the households. Paddy accounts for 30% of the area with other cereals accounting for another 35% (*World Bank Sector Report 2003*) Agriculture contributes around 18% to GDP (27% in 1990) and employs around 1/3rd of the country's labour force. 41.5% of employed women and 35.5% of employed men are engaged in agriculture and allied sectors (*FAO 2007*).

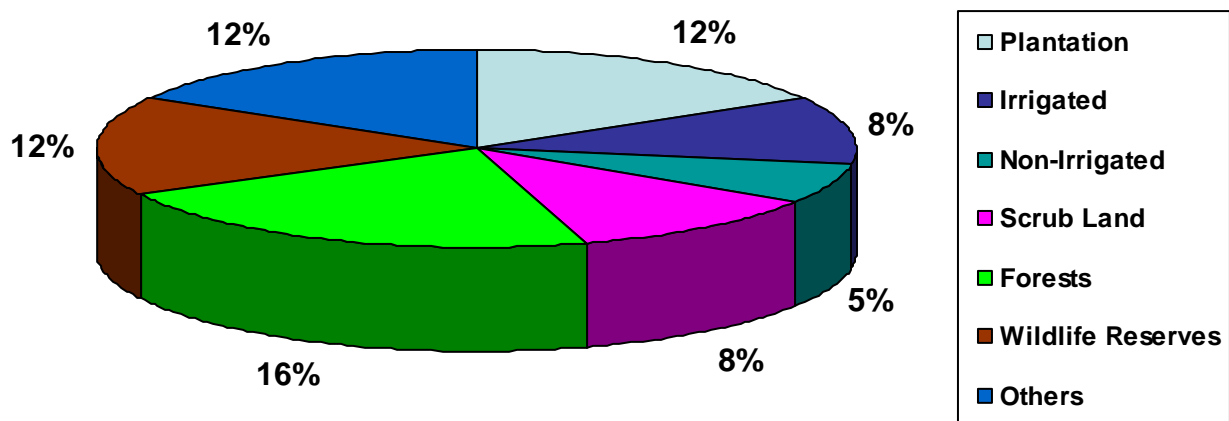


Fig 2. Sri Lanka Land Use

Agricultural commodities, primarily plantation or estate crops contribute about 20% of export earnings and the non plantation agriculture including irrigated agriculture contributes around 5.6 % of GDP with livestock contributing 1.2% .The estate sector contains the largest share of households living in poverty: estate (30%) national(23%),rural (25%) and urban (8%). Agriculture has the highest rate of incidence of poverty at 40% with a poverty depth index of 9.3 and severity index of 3.0 almost double of those employed in other sectors (*ADB 2007*). However, overall unemployment has declined over the last decade from 14% to 8% with rural unemployment still slightly higher. Underemployment is also highest in agriculture with higher rates for women in all categories. Sri Lanka labour Force Survey in 2006 reveals that underemployment is mostly prevalent in agriculture (men 43%, women 50%).

*Includes fisheries, forestry and livestock

With labour force participation at 74% for men and 42% for women with overall labour force participation declining from 36% in 2000 to 32.6% in 2008 (*Dept of Census and Statistics*) and youth unemployment in Sri Lanka high at 14% (*ILO 2008*) compared to the South Asian average of 10.1%, sees opportunity for more young people and women to move to the labour market including in agriculture though trends show an aversion of youth to take to agriculture. Low labour productivity compared to other sectors (half that of industry) is another issue to be resolved with respect to agriculture and a matter of concern has been the slight further decline in productivity rather than improvement over the last few years.

Low productivity and inadequate incomes have compelled women in small farm families to move from unpaid family labour to other occupations, particularly in the garment industry and as overseas domestic labour. Plantations are undergoing a process of privatization of management and sequentially ownership. Concomitantly casualization of labour and labour shortages is increasing in plantations. Youth in plantation families with better access to education and opportunities now look for employment outside plantation enclaves with women chiefly seeking domestic labour in urban areas and overseas (*SAMT*). As much as technology has impacted on reducing the role of women in the non plantation sector, men have been the affected party in the plantation sector with adoption of technology for weeding, pruning, land consolidation etc.

3) Status and Role of Women in Agriculture;

Notwithstanding the important role of women in agriculture, customary laws and traditional social norms have been biased in favour of men, which constitute a barrier to women's equitable access to resources. Though contributing a major part of their lives to providing services and support the opportunity to be placed in decision making roles or have control over assets is limited. Despite their routine and expected domestic work, women are very actively involved in agriculture production.

Gender role stereo types imbedded in the perceptions of a patriarchal society, its policymakers, administrators and employers and internalized stereotyping by both men and women are reflected in the social and economic policies and political participation.

Women have been disadvantaged by perceptions of men as breadwinners, producers and community leaders and the normative relegation of women to their reproductive role to dependency and subordination have affected their visibility and actual contribution and inhibited their decision making power especially in agriculture. Technology and mechanization have not only usurped women's traditional roles in agricultural production but also impacted on post harvest activities such as crop drying milling etc that were traditional important activities handled by women.

a) Plantation/non plantation agriculture;

Women's contribution to subsistence production (farm/income generating activities) is counted as unpaid family work. It is estimated that over 56% of the women work as unpaid family workers (*UNDP*) with women's participation in planting, weeding and post harvest work high. However, improvement in farm practices and technology adoption/mechanization has somewhat reduced this contribution. Gender division of labour in paddy/chena cultivation is given in the **Table 1**, (*van der Molan 2001*).

Table 1. Involvement in farm-level activities by men and women.

Activities (p = paddy, c = chena)	Paddy cultivation		Chena cultivation		Day labor (p, c)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Slash-and-burn (c)			v		v	
Land preparation (p, c)	v	v	v	v	v	
Ploughing by tractor (p)	v				v	
Cleaning, constructing field bunds (p)	v	v			v	
Cleaning canals (p)	v	v			v	
Leveling (manually) (p, c)	v	v	v	v	v	
Leveling (tractor) (p)	v				v	
Sowing (p, c)	v	v	v	v	v	Chena
Diverting water to fields (p)	v	v			By owner	
Applying fertilizer or spraying pesticides/weedicides (p, c)	v		v	v	By owner	
Weeding (p, c)	v		v	v	Chena	Chena
Planting or transplanting (p, c)		v		v		v
Fencing (p, c)	v		v		Rarely	
Building watching huts (p, c)	v		v		Rarely	
Watching fields at night (p, c)	v		v		Rarely	
Harvesting or plucking (p, c)		v		v	Rarely	v
Threshing (p)	v				v	
Transporting (p, c)	v		v		By owner	
Selling products in town (p, c)	v		v	v	By owner	
Selling products at home (c)		v		v	By owner	

Women constitute the major labour force in plantation agriculture at 56% and at 42% of the total female labour force, form the largest labour group in Sri Lanka. Women's work is intensive and time consuming. It has been observed that when men collect the family's estate income and as it grows larger, they feel less need to work, so labour less on the estate, requiring women to labour more to generate family income. Nearly 68% women in agriculture work in plantations and more than 70% of rural women in subsistence production (*Wickremasinghe1994*).

Also noted has been the fact that women's workload has increased with expansion of plantations, changes to chena and dry land farming with men concentrating on cash crop production and opting for wage labour where possible, thus increasing women's responsibilities for home maintenance and household/home garden crop production. Women play a major role in both vegetable cultivation and floriculture in the Western and upland Central and Uva provinces being actively involved in land preparation, seeding, planting, weeding harvesting and preparation for market. In the dry zone areas they do contribute to seeding, weeding, harvesting and irrigation under agro wells and pump irrigation. In both cases transport to market and marketing is handled by males with women restricted mainly to stall sales of produce.

b) Forestry and Environment;

Rural women are heavily dependent on forests for subsistence, consumption and maintenance of their family. Data reveals that for women, of 10 categories of products gathered from forests, food, fuel wood and fodder predominate while men focus on timber, construction materials etc. Of a total of 23 types of forest produce gathered by peripheral dwellers in the Adams Peak wilderness women are gatherers of 21 products (*Wickremasinghe 1994*). Women also gather non food products such as medicinal plants, plants for dyes, grasses for thatching/weaving etc and also sell them to earn cash income (*Kumar 1998*).

A study in the intermediate zone of the Central highlands has shown that in 68% of households surveyed food from forests and household production are major contributors to the food basket (*Wickremasinghe 1994*).

Women in Sri Lanka have an intrinsic relationship with the environment. Women are attributed to giving most local names to different plants for day to day use and they are attributed to not only have discovered Gotukola (*Centella asiatica*) as a vegetable but for propagating it in home gardens (*Kumar1998*). Deforestation and environmental degradation has had a severe impact on rural livelihoods and limited non wood forest produce on incomes. Fuel wood scarcity has resulted in many abandoning traditional time and energy consuming diets and production of treacle from kitul. Also the scarcity of such forest produce has affected the incomes generated by especially rural women in selling produce in roadside stalls to supplement family income. With one of the highest deforestation rates in Asia the rapid loss of soil cover and erosion cause disasters and create hardships for women

c) Fisheries;

Marine fisheries are carried out all around the island and more than one-third of the populations that dwell in these areas are dependent on it either as producers or consumers.

Women actively participate in the small scale fishery industry and on the Southern coast are the main managers of income. In migrant fishing communities women play a crucial role in fish sorting, processing, drying and even dragging boats ashore. About 75% of women in Mannar (North-West), Trincomalee and Batticaloa (East) and about 25% of Women the west coast areas of Negombo, Chilaw and Kalpitiya are estimated to be engaged in fishing related activity.

In some areas of the west coast women take part in fishing with beach seines and in marketing both retail and wholesale with women in some areas of the west and north west coast also own beach seines and boats and also involved with post harvest activities of small pelagic fisheries undertaking sorting, drying and marketing (*FAO-RAPA*). Unlike in other parts of Sri Lanka women in the East are less involved in marine fishery support activities participating more in lagoon fishing and activities such as mending of nets. Since men in these areas migrate seasonally and leave women behind, women have desperate need for activities to improve their livelihoods. (*ADB- NECCDP 2003*)

d) Livestock;

Livestock is an integral component of farming systems in Sri Lanka and women play a major role in raising livestock and poultry.

The reduction of grazing livestock and moving to stall feeding due to pressure on land has resulted in women driven livestock programmes with improved stock that add to non family income.

This compensates for their reduced participation in crop production. Cattle and goat raising projects have proved to be successful income generating activities for poor rural women. While women attend to the actual rearing and milking of animals, data shows that it is mainly the men who register for and handle supplies to milk collection centers (*NLDB 2008*). With regard to milk production there are several female headed family groups actively pursuing this for livelihood. This also provides improved nutrition for the family (*Pillai 1995*).

4) Women and the Irrigation sub Sector;

Women's involvement in irrigated agriculture has been an integral part of the agricultural scene for over two millennia. Clear and defined roles based on local social and cultural norms and practices have determined what traditional supportive role women play in irrigated farming both with respect to society and their family.

However, gender roles and relations have not been static with pace and uneven social development and women not being a homogeneous group with the added dimension of the conflict of the last three decades having impacted on the socio cultural constraints and presented a scenario of both positive and negative influences.

In relation to irrigation gender is often translated by focusing on division of labour, property/water rights and representation in local water institutions. Women's access to resources and decision making affect not only themselves but is also interwoven with the choices and actions of their families (*van der Molan 2001*). Irrigated farming and attendant roles are determined by the various farmer categories involved viz; farmers (livelihood), cultivators, landowners, shareholders *dejure and defacto* female heads of households and tenants.

Much information exists of the practice of irrigated agriculture and official gender policies and strategies, but less so on actual desegregated information by gender, more so in the recent conflict areas where actual data and reliable information is lacking.

However several studies including by IWMI and HARTI have generated useful information. In the North Central Province as a rule 75%-80% are involved in irrigated farming and chena cultivation. The rest not involved due other employment old age or due to physical condition or maternity needs. 5% -10% who are otherwise employed serve in the garment industry and domestic services locally and abroad. Youth, both male and female now seem less likely to move to agriculture as a livelihood. Women in a group of 4%-8% are responsible for most of the cultivation themselves as their spouses are otherwise employed, joined the armed forces or gone abroad for employment.

Ownership of land has significant impact on the status and security levels enjoyed by women. In most village systems between 7%-35% are noted as being owned by women with higher rate related to number of widows or where couples have settled in the brides village (*binna* marriage) due to proximity, rather than in the husbands village (*diga* marriage) where the influence even on self owned land is lesser and devolving on other family members for operations due to moving away.

In most cases of village land the location of settlement of the couple determines one's rights and claims to the land (*Von Brenda- Beckmann et al.1977*).

In major irrigation settlements on the other hand due to historical reasons and conditions encountered during initial settlement where land clearing and development was involved in locations far from original villages almost 99% land was alienated to males.

Land alienation and settlement under the Land Development Ordinance both under Village Expansion and Major Irrigation Settlements favoured males, though administratively up to 10% of allotments were set aside for women headed households. The development environment especially under Major Irrigation Settlements which included advanced alienation of undeveloped land and initial living in camps etc predisposed and weighted selection in favour of males. Anti fragmentation rules under the Land Development Ordinance under which most such land was alienated also worked in favour of males in nominated lines of succession. Under Mahaveli System Resettlement a conscious attempt was made to settle women led households and up to 10% was set aside though due to other criteria involved not more than 2%-3% was actually accommodated.

While the *defacto* ownership is still likely to keep women to around 2%-3% with respect to ownership, *dejure* custody levels are much higher and estimated at around 5% -10% due to widowhood and spouse/successor employed or living elsewhere with women heading the family. It is noted that in schemes that have been in existence for over 50 years notwithstanding the nominated successor line of inheritance women children of the next generation continue to live and farm parts of the original settlement. With most having non farming spouses the women manage the agricultural activities in these lots.

There have been attempts to set up specific agricultural settlements for women. The Mirusivil Girl's Scheme for subsidiary crops was one attempt which may be considered successful. This was in the mid 1960's when Youth Settlement Schemes were being set essentially for male youths to take to a livelihood in agriculture.

a) Farmer Institution Membership;

An indicator of involvement of women in decision making in irrigated agriculture could be evaluated considering their role in the local farmer organization (FO). While ownership and being a shareholder confers some legitimate influence, a practical demonstration is seen where women are active in local FO whether in matters of irrigation (O&M and rehabilitation), credit and input supply or marketing.

A study by IWMI in 8 sites of the NCP involving Village or Minor Irrigation Systems (>80ha) showed participation (inc; as representatives) levels from 30% to one system of 98%.

Also noted that in some systems the number of members were more than the actual number of shareholders (parents land being sub divided) and women had more representatives as male members other wise involved or working out of the village. Women in FO were highest in villages with high rate of widows and *binna* marriages averaging 12%-25% to a peak of 35%. The lowest recorded was 6% in a low caste village, with low levels of education and low productivity (*van der Molan 2001*).

A survey of 3 Agricultural Service Centres in the Districts of Puttlam, Moneragala and Ratnapura recently (*2009-Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Services*) indicated that in 141 FO with 9570 members 22% were women which included 4 office bearers at level of President (2.8%), 19 Secretaries (13.5%), 19 Treasurers (13.5%) and 35 Committee Members (9.3%) indicating a fair representation of women in FO of minor systems mostly private land.

In Major Irrigation Systems (>200ha-mostly state alienated land)) on the other hand levels of representation and membership is noted to be low (2%-5%) though women represent their spouses as proxies at meetings etc due to other commitments by the male members. Nevertheless most input/extension, market related activities and economic transactions are the domain of men. (*Walpola 1998*).

Also even when they do participate they go mostly to listen rather than take up issues directly, while some do not wish to attend such meetings even though they are the registered legal entity as they are satisfied with the men handling the issues or wish to avoid arguments or confront /avoid drunken behaviour and also where their perception is that of a malfunctioning or corrupt organization.

So also with most contacts with government organizations especially when links outside the village are involved unless they relate to matters of intra family conflict where women heads of households have no option but deal directly with officials.

Even where the heads of households are women who earn their living by farming there is great dependency on relatives and neighbours on issues related to external transactions including where transport/other locations such as banks are involved. There are also some tasks such as watching fields at night, handling water rotations in the night, canal cleaning and fencing and working on the threshing floor (taboo) that are outsourced to relatives or hired labour as appropriate (*van der Molan 2001*).

Actual female heads of households may not hold membership in the FO and when they do, are seldom in decision making positions. In Ridi Bendi Ela Major Scheme (2000ha-1000lots) the number of female headed households were 31% in 1997(ARTI6-1997) and 44% in 2009 (*Namika Rabi-2009*). Irrigation Management Division (IMD) which is in charge of the scheme reports that 456 female members are enrolled in the 14 FO but none are Executive/Committee members. In 41 schemes reported on by IMD many systems had a fair percentage of female members but few were in positions of power. The highest was in Tabbowa scheme (North Western Province) where with 58 members in the 8 FO, 8 were Committee Members. In the large Minipe scheme (Central Province) with 1480 women members in the 60 FO only 5 were in the Committee. The highest concentration of women in positions of decision making were strangely in Trincomalee District (Eastern Province) where in the Alllai Scheme with 35 FO has 15 Committee members and relatively new Morawewa where with 250 women members, 15 were in the Committee of 4 FO of a total of 544 members (46%) and in Weli Oya which had 20 committee members with a representative strength of 210 in the 30 FO.

Information on schemes of the Northern Province was not available. In all, IMD reports that in the 41 Major schemes under its INMAS (Integrated Management of Major Agricultural Settlements) programme in 819 FO with a total membership of 141,049 there are 20589 female members with 152 holding Executive Committee positions. In all there were 10 positions of President, 3 of Vice President, 29 of Secretary and 28 posts of Treasurer held by women in these FO indicating an increasing role of women in FO decision making. Female membership constitutes 14.6% of the total membership of the FO.

In the Mahaveli Authority (MASL) Systems (post 1975) the position of women was better, as there was a conscious attempt to encourage women settlers and administratively about 10% of allotments where suitable were set aside for women. In case of resettlement this was higher as all eligible females were considered notwithstanding size of original land holding. Of a survey of 933 FO in MASL systems (*IDD-MASL-2009*) including the older Uda Walawe it was seen that nearly 18% of the 97,786 members were women. System B had the lowest percentage at 5.31% and System L the highest at 24.7% in their respective FO. Uda Walawe had 17.6% membership by women but also had 2 female Chairpersons, 10 Treasurers and 14 at level of Secretary the highest in the MASL systems.

Overall there were 4 Chairpersons, 36 Treasurers and 26 positions of Secretary held by women and it is estimated that nearly 15% of Committee positions were held by women, indicating a fair level of women in decision making.

b) Activities Undertaken by Women;

As indicated in Table 1, other than in routine domestic chores, traditional activities undertaken by women farmers have mostly been confined to those related to some aspects of land preparation such as cleaning and construction of field bunds, cleaning canals, manual levelling, sowing diverting water, weeding transplanting and harvesting. In transplanting and harvesting women play a major role but conditioned by local traditions (men predominantly harvest in the Southern region). Traditional activities such as transplanting, weeding and harvesting handled by women have been impacted negatively as technology, weedicides and mechanization has taken over and cultural practices have changed with the times. Women are involved in cultivation and sale of produce of other field crops (OFC) but less in the marketing of paddy. As day labour, women confine themselves more to activities such as transplanting, weeding and harvesting.

5) Women's role and status in the conflict zone.

The role of women changed drastically with the advent of conflict in the North and East (N&E). The North and East produced over one third the rice crop and over half the nations requirement of OFC's including pulses, onions and chillies. Also a major part of the requirement of fresh and dry sea fish came from the North and East. It is estimated that rice production fell to a low 5% of output and market for OFC declined tremendously. Irrigation infrastructure was damaged and extensive land mines prevented cultivation of large extents. Youth were conscripted by the LTTE and many left the area for safer locations or abroad to avoid conscription.

It has been observed that many girls have been given in marriage at young age and have borne children to avoid conscription by the LTTE. Many deaths in combat and collateral damage left women in large numbers as the heads of households but with little access to resources to maintain livelihoods. Women's labour force participation in the N&E was low by national standards in the pre conflict period, cultural norms restricting tamil and muslim women to household chores and some agricultural support activities.

Although the women in the North constitute 64% of the working age population labour force participation is at 16% compared to the male rate of 55%. Rate in the East was 18% compared to the male 64%. Lowest female participation was in Mannar (13%) Trincomallee (13%) and Vauniya (14%). Women in the conflict areas had to be engaged in agricultural pursuits providing cheap labour not covered by labour legislation. Conflict related poverty brought increased labour force participation for women mainly in the rural informal sector. However women's economic participation rate is lower compared to other parts of the country.

11% of women employed in the North were unpaid family labour compared to 31% in the East (FAO RAPA). Most female employment was in the agricultural sector where in N&E women were engaged in forestry and fisheries (*Dept of Census & Statistics 2004*).

The role of women in agriculture was also affected by the conflict. Their traditional role of supporting cultivation activities expanded to cover marketing of produce and transportation which was essentially a male activity as it was easier for women to pass security check points.

Both local and foreign NGO provided women, especially widows and families who lost income earners with income generation through micro and small scale projects during the conflict period. Women were trained in both traditional and non traditional vocations. However lack of inputs and access to markets hampered women IDP returnees to recommence farming.

6) Women's access to resources and assets in the agriculture sector;

One of the key aspects impeding empowerment of women has been the limited access to resources which provide opportunities for participation but inhibit furtherance of their contribution as decision makers including in agriculture. Established social and cultural norms of a patriarchal society together with certain legal impediments compounded by administrative interpretation has precluded women from enjoying equal rights with respect to access to resources and or ownership of assets.

Different land ownership laws (Tesawalami, Muslim Law, Roman Dutch Law) and lack of a common civil code make land use assessment difficult. The Tesawalami, governs the inheritance of property and matrimonial rights of Tamil women in Jaffna. While it allows owning of property and entitlement to patrimonial and non patrimonial inheritance provides for acquisition of property and to keep any dowry received, control is in the hands of a guardian which passes from the father to the husband. Any disposition and contractual arrangements are only entered through the guardian and legally women are treated as minors in the Courts of Law. Muslim law regulates Muslim women's land rights.

While apparently women are dealt equitably in terms of inheritance and property in actual fact widower and son get more and female children receive less than male children. However recent research studies show that increasingly families in the non conflict areas treat both sons and daughters equally in matters relating to immovable property.

The Roman Dutch Law governs land rights not covered by the above are not gender biased and women are assured equality of ownership. As mentioned earlier the Land Development Ordinance of 1935 regulates state agricultural land and though gender neutral, administrative interpretation and alienation practices often favour the male. A succession policy with respect to nominated successors has preference for male heirs. (Wanasundara, FAO RAPA- 2006)

Any use, appropriation and decision making rights with respect to water are integral with land rights and status of women with respect to water rights are conditioned by the above.

With respect to wages women's wages are much lower than of males as in other sectors and without improvement of the rural economy continue to stagnate due to imbalance of supply over demand.

Regards credit under the Comprehensive Scheme of Rural Credit the government is gradually withdrawing subsidized credit and banks have stringent credit disbursement laws for farmers, fisher folk and traders. Women traditionally disadvantaged in obtaining institutional credit are more so affected. Nevertheless there are some credit institutions and banks, aid agency, NGO and project based credit initiatives aimed at women based programmes and community actions that are underway. There is acceptance that women repay credit regularly and are less likely to default in both individual and group credit schemes.

There are special credit schemes for rural women and even the conflict areas Madar Sangams as these CBO are known are a conduit for credit and aid and increasingly recognized by projects and NGO for channelling resources.

Financial institutions such as banks, micro finance institutions, cooperative rural banks, SANASA Thrift and Credit Cooperative Movement, SEEDS and many NGO are now directly involved in rural women based credit support.

Table 2 - Women's participation in the Credit Programmes as at December 2007

	Institution	No. of Loans			Value Rs. mn	% Received by Women
		Male	Female	Total		
1.	Regional Development Banks (RDBs)	50,804	43,277	94,081	1,614	46.00
2.	Licensed Commercial Banks (LCBs)	N.A.*	N.A.*	N.A.*	N.A.*	
3.	Sanasa Development Bank Thrift & Credit Societies	321,687 36,726	246,896 85,696	568,583 122,422	13,000 2,816	43.42 70.00
4.	Cooperative Rural Banks (CRBs)	316,142	135,490	451,632	8,999.0	30.00
5.	Poverty Alleviation Microfinance Project (PAMP)	12,604	39,388	51,992	1,058.4	75.76
6.	Small Farmers & Landless Credit Project (SFLCP)	669	8,681	9,350	244.5	92.84
7.	MFI's - SEEDS (SKS)	11,540	23,081	34,621	1,986	66.67

* NA - refers to the non-availability of
disaggregated data

Source: Regional Development Dept
Central Bank of Sri Lanka

SFLCP, PAMP and SANASA have been successful in providing loans at 93%, 76% and 70% for women respectively. Sarvodaya (SEEDS) has also been in the forefront reporting a total loan value of Rs 1.9 billion in 2007 of which 67% was for women borrowers (*Jayamaha, Central Bank 2008*).

Regards common property resources rural women seem to be adversely affected with reduced access to forest resources. As primary users of fuel wood special recognition of landless women's rights to forest resources need special recognition.

7) Capacity Building;

The need to mainstream women as a human resource is central to national development and though the agricultural sector is declining relative to national output its continued importance in providing employment and opportunity for women remains. Women entrepreneurs in rural industry and agro production have throughout comprised an important proportion of domestic producers. High education levels and with few social barriers much potential exists for women to move from the status of unpaid family labour and coupled with concomitant changes to legal impediments and socio cultural hang ups the time is right for women to be not only participants in agriculture but also managers and decision makers within and outside the family. Certain initiatives in capacity building such as undertaken by the Women's Chamber of Industry and Commerce, formation of Agromart Outreach Foundation and special components in development projects that provide training free of gender bias, specially target capacity building and livelihood improvement projects with emphasis on female headed households with intent to further women friendly community and social infrastructure with gender inclusive design and to ensure mandatory levels of participation and involvement can reduce the current imbalance that exists with respect to access to resources and decision making currently facing women especially in agriculture. Policies of agricultural sub sectors are usually gender neutral but gender sensitive policies are required to increase women's participation in decision making and accessing resources in the agriculture sector.

8) Impact of externalities

Drastic changes to climate with increased incidence of floods and drought is likely to affect rural agricultural activities and women adversely with respect to not only routine household chores and looking after the health sanitation issues of the family, but also impact on their livelihoods by affecting the productivity of land, destruction of crops and livestock and increasing the drudgery of aspects such as of securing potable water for domestic needs which is a prime responsibility of rural women. This will impact more on female headed households. Study projections and scenarios indicate that the agriculture sector will be negatively impacted by climate change causing pressure on water availability with some coastal areas identified as very vulnerable. Surprisingly some basins such as Walawe are expected to benefit to a degree. Mitigation measures being contemplated has to take into consideration this aspect and to ensure gender inclusive design in preparation of designs and plans.

The N&E were the traditional suppliers of OFC and pulses to the rest of the country. Large extents of land in other areas came under such crops with the onset of the conflict and a large number of small farmers depend on the available market for their livelihood.

With peace returning to the North and East, reestablishment of the agricultural base and considering the more conducive factors including higher labour productivity aiding production, incomes of farmers in the other areas with respect to these crops are likely to be affected. With Sri Lanka not enjoying any advantage with respect to productivity of these crops *vis a vis* the region and regional trade agreements allowing freer unrestricted trade, life for such farmers are likely to be difficult. There is need therefore for policy and support initiatives to be set in place through clear strategic and institutional planning to ensure that the agriculture sector is not unduly affected.

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