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The agrarian transition and the 'feminization' of agriculture

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Abstract¹

This article discusses the significance of the so-called "feminization of agriculture" both to policymakers and to feminist theory. It first highlights the various meanings that, depending on the context, such "feminization" refers to. It then examines the situation of women as independent food producers. Though women play a greater role than ever as food producers, they face obstacles such that they are often relegated to a form of agricultural production that is characterized by its low productivity and that is geared towards own consumption. Such homestead-based production can represent an important contribution to food security and deserves support. But it also presents the risk of confirming existing gender roles and it does not favor the economic independence of women ; nor does it truly expand women's choices. The article also reviews the situation of women as farmworkers, which represents another manifestation of this "feminization of agriculture".

Feminist theory has always been divided between the recognition of the specific position of women and their assimilation into existing institutional structures. We confront a similar dilemma in the agrarian transition. The position of this article is that we should not have choose between supporting women's roles as food producers by taking into account the existing gender roles and the time and mobility constraints that women are imposed, or instead challenging those roles and ignoring those constraints, to make women more like men and ensure that they have the same opportunities as their male counterparts. The constraints are real, and they will take time to be removed. As long as they subsist, we must ensure at least that the choices of women within the food systems can expand. Whether they decide to act within the existing gender roles or whether they seek to escape the constraints these roles currently impose on them, the choices they make in the various contexts in which they operate should not be choices by default: only by removing the constraints they face, and by shaping pathways towards alternatives to the current situation in which they face multiple barriers, can this be ensured.

1. What is the "feminization" of agriculture ?

It has been a general pattern in the past that, as countries climb up the development ladder, the relative weight of the agricultural sector is reduced, whether it is measured as its contribution to the total GDP or as the proportion of the workforce that it employs (Lobao and Meyer 2001). In developing countries in particular, this agrarian transition is deeply gendered. The rapid rise in industry and services and urbanization, involving both a change in migratory

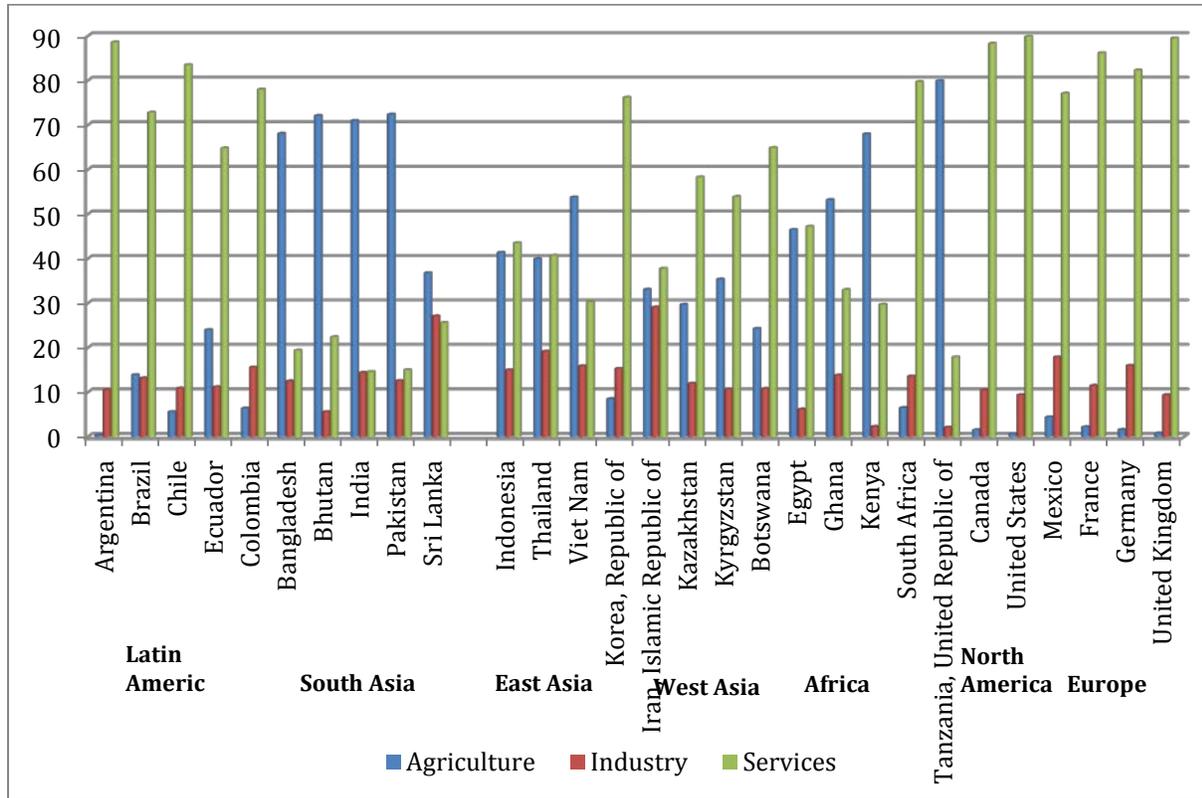
¹ This draft conference paper is under review at the *Journal of Peasant Studies*.

patterns and agrarian transitions, the two often combined, follows gender lines. Men migrate first, for longer periods and to further destinations, in part because of social norms concerning gender roles, and in part because of their higher levels of education, on average, that allow them to seek off-farm employment. Because they they face fewer mobility and time constraints than women, men are more likely to abandon agricultural work at home and seek waged employment on large farms, or income-generating activities in other sectors.

This results in what has been referred to in recent years as the "feminization" of agriculture. Broadly understood, we mean by this the increased importance of women's role in agriculture, whether as measured by the ratio between women and men in this sector or whether it is reflected in the high proportion of women whose main employment is in agriculture. Though a global phenomenon, the feminization of agriculture shows important regional variations. Women comprise 43 percent of the agricultural workforce in developing countries in general (FAO 2010: 9). But they still represent only about 20 percent of the total agricultural workforce in agriculture in Latin America, although the presence of women in the waged agricultural workforce in the region's agro-export sector has increased over the years (Deere 2005). In comparison, the feminization of agriculture has been more pronounced in Asia and in Africa. Though the share of women in agriculture has remained stable in recent years in some Asian countries, at between 40 and 50 per cent of the total agricultural workforce (and at 30 per cent in India), even declining in Malaysia and the Philippines, it has increased in China (where it is now at about 48 per cent), and especially in Pakistan (now at 30 percent, triple the percentage of 30 years ago) and Bangladesh (where it is above 50 per cent) (FAO 2010: 9). In Africa, the share of women in agriculture has also increased, in part as a result of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, of conflict and migration (FAO 2010:9).

As measured by the proportion of women whose main employment is in agriculture, the gendered nature of agrarian transition is especially significant in South Asia. This is illustrated by the following graph :

Fig 1. Women in various sectors of the economy (percentage of economically active women, by sector, in selected countries)



Source: International Labour Organization, *Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM), Sixth Edition* (available from www.ilo.org/empelm/pubs/WCMS_114060/lang--en/index.htm). The ILO Employment Trends unit has designed and maintains three econometric models that are used in estimating labour market indicators of the countries and years for which no real data exist, disaggregated by sex and age. Information was derived from a variety of sources, including household or labour force surveys, official estimates and censuses provided by countries to the ILO. In a very few cases, information was derived from insurance records and establishment surveys.

Note. The graph represents the ratio of employed females to employed males. Overall ratio includes all employment sectors. Indicator calculations: Employed females divided by employed males.

ILO data thus reveal the extent of the feminization of agriculture in Asia, especially in South Asia: in East Asia, it was estimated that 32.2 per cent of men were employed in agriculture in

2011 (down from 41 per cent in 2000), in comparison to 39.3 per cent of women (55.8 in 2000); in South-East Asia and the Pacific, 42.5 per cent of men were employed in agriculture in 2011 (48.6 in 2000), compared to 43.9 per cent of women (51.2 in 2000); in South Asia, 44.4 per cent of men were employed in agriculture in 2011 (down from 53.4 in 2000), compared to 68.8 per cent of women (down from 74.9 per cent in 2000), and in this region, the percentage of men employed in the services sector is double that of women (32.5 against 15.9 per cent) (ILO 2012: Appendix, table A10). But even such regional comparisons are of limited utility, given the strong differences from country to country: for instance, while the agricultural sector is an important source of employment for women in many South Asian countries, agricultural employment represented 46 per cent of total female employment in India for 2003-2005; this figure was 60 per cent for Bangladesh, and about 40 per cent in Sri Lanka (FAO-IFAD-ILO 2010: 8).

Such data concerning the gendered nature of the agrarian transition have to be treated with caution, however, even beyond the limited utility of global or regional figures. There are three reasons for this. First, there is no harmonized methodology for identifying the numbers, and this sheds doubts on the validity of any cross-country comparisons. Indeed, it is likely that in many countries, the family members (whether men or women) working on the family farm to produce for their own consumption rather than for the markets would not even enter official statistics: such statistics measure the contribution to the country's GDP, and only take into account that part of the economic activity that enters into the cash economy. This under-reporting of women's activity in agriculture due to the fact that women's work in subsistence agriculture forms part of the non-cash "household" economy (and thus is not considered as productive activity) may explain, for instance, that scholars have sometimes disagreed as to the extent of the feminization of agriculture in China (see de Brauw et al. 2008 (expressing doubts about the reality of the feminization of agriculture in China); and compare with Chang et al. 2011, and Mu and van de Walle 2011; but see now de Brauw et al. 2012 (recognizing that such feminization has been developing since 1997)).

Second, the share of women's employment in agriculture varies from crop to crop, from activity to activity (planting, for instance, is more frequently practiced by women, whereas ploughing is an activity generally performed by men), and from age group to age group: the younger female age cohorts, for example, join off-farm employment in greater numbers, whereas relatively older women (beyond the age of 35) tend to remain in the rural communities even as rural-to-urban migratory patterns develop (Pang et al. 2004; Zhang et al. 2004). Indeed, in countries such as Malaysia and Sri Lanka, young women tend to out-migrate to urban centers to work in transnational production sites or free trade zones, in a shift that creates well-documented tensions between the traditional values of the peasant society from which they originate and

the values of the industrial sites where they work (Ong 1987). Young women from Cambodia, China, Sri Lanka and in the Philippines, as well as other Asia-Pacific nations, increasingly migrate to other countries to serve as domestic workers (particularly in the Middle East), or sometimes as sex workers (especially in Thailand and Malaysia) (Adams and Dickey 2000; Brochmann 1993; Henshall Momsen 1999; Mason 1999): female migrants formed respectively three quarters of those migrating from Sri Lanka, and over half of those migrating from the Philippines in recent years (UNRISD 2005) -- often to become part of a heavily segmented employment market (Salazar Parrenas 2001). Though precise figures are missing, due to the often clandestine nature of prostitution and the associated trafficking and exploitation, it is estimated that "by 2002 there were at least 1.3 million foreign women working in the seven major labour-importing countries: Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Taiwan Province of China, Hong Kong (SAR China), Republic of Korea and Japan", constituting a high proportion of the total immigrant labour force in some of these countries (UNRISD 2005: 115). These women make a generally undervalued contribution to meeting household/family needs through remittances (Gunewardena and Kingsolver 2007), which often expands in times of economic crisis (Lean Lim 1998). The increased references in recent years to the "feminization of agriculture" should not mask these important exceptions to the general pattern.

But the third and perhaps most striking limitation of these data stems from the fact that they conflate three very different modalities through which agriculture is "feminized". This can occur by the male adult members of the family finding employment outside the family farm, which often implies migrating to cities. Women who are left behind shoulder the burden of production work on the family plot of land. They thus meet the bulk of household food security needs, in addition to their work in reproductive and care work, as the children and the elderly remain with them. This corresponds to the scenario in which so-called "subsistence" agriculture increasingly is in the hands of women, despite the significant constraints they face. The women in this situation may be supported by the receipt of remittances, which can serve to buy inputs or to hire labour for the performance of the more heavy tasks, such as land preparation, that are not generally seen as suitable for women : this appears to be quite common in South East Asia, where the productivity of land could be maintained in part thanks to such remittances (Paris et al. 2009). However, as discussed below, women often have little legal protection or rights to property ownership, and they face cultural and social norms that are obstacles to their ability to improve productivity as much as they could in the absence of such barriers.

A variation on this first pathway towards the feminization of agriculture is when women take over agricultural production from men on the family plot of land, not with a view to providing for the consumption of the family, but in order to produce for the market. The constraints here are especially significant: production for the market generally requires larger volumes of output,

requiring the use of external inputs (whereas more diversified forms of farming, if well practiced, may require less of such inputs); and it requires interactions with buyers, who are generally men, or that the women-farmer travels the distance that separates her from the market. But both the acquisition of inputs (which generally means access to credit) and entry into supply chains (especially when it takes the form of contract farming) require that the woman be recognized as the legitimate owner of the land, whereas in most cases the land will have been registered in the name of the man. And the various travels that commercial farming implies, whether to fetch the inputs and carry them to the field or to market the agricultural produce, may conflict with the mobility constraints women face, which range from the extreme case of imposed seclusiveness as under the customary *purdah* still common in some South Asian societies, to the more common situation where they find that they cannot be absent from the home except, at best, between the morning and the preparation of evening meals. The more women seek to practice types of commercial farming that require moving outside from the home, the more they may find it difficult to reconcile their role of small-scale food producers with their responsibilities in the household, an obstacle male agricultural producers do not face. Indeed, the constraints are such that, a decade ago, concerns were expressed about the impact the feminization of agriculture may have on local food security if, due to the obstacles they face, women are less productive than men (UNDP 2003).

Finally, the feminization of agriculture also occurs by women taking up waged employment on large plantations, sometimes located at some distance from the home or even requiring her to migrate for long periods: it is then linked, not to the small-scale family farm sector, but to the shift to more capitalized forms of agriculture, and often to an increase in land concentration. Though both forms of "feminization of agriculture" will show up in statistics as increases in the female agricultural workforce (in proportion to the employment of men or even, though less frequently, in comparison to the female employment in other sectors), each in fact will result in a very different set of gender relationships, and each will correspond to a very different type of agrarian transition.

These different forms of "feminization of agriculture" call for separate questions, that this article seeks to address. The following section examines the nature of the discrimination that women face as small-scale, independent food producers. But, though these various forms of discrimination can and should urgently be addressed, not all the constraints women face can be removed at once, particularly when those constraints relate to existing gender roles: the various types of support given to farmers, therefore, may have to be made "gender-sensitive", taking into account the specific constraints women face. But here emerges a dilemma: recognizing such constraints, and organizing the support given to women farmers to take such constraints into account by relieving them from some of the burdens that they shoulder, may

lead at the same time to confirm existing gender roles, making them even more difficult to challenge. Recognition and relief should therefore be combined with the redistribution of gender roles. Section 2 offers some ways to draw the triangle between recognition, relief, and redistribution.

Section 3 turns to the situation of women as waged farmworkers. Access to waged agricultural employment can bring about important benefits to women, who often have a considerable say in how their wages are spent. But a number of problems remain. Women are over-represented among the "peripheral" segment of the agricultural workforce, made of unskilled workers, often recruited at certain points of the year only, and often without a formal contract of employment. There is also ample evidence of discrimination and violence against women in the waged agricultural sector. Where the remuneration is calculated on a piece-rate basis, based on how much of the task has been accomplished, it tends to disfavour women, since the pay is calculated on the basis of male productivity standards. And women may face specific difficulties in reconciling their responsibilities in the care economy, particularly as regards the minding and educating of children of pre-school age, and their work on farms. These various disadvantages that women farmworkers face raise the question whether the cooptation of women in the agricultural workforce to replace the men that have migrated to other sectors, although it does contribute to the economic independence of women, is not also perpetuating the pattern of exploitation and domination on which the low-cost food economy is based.

The situation of women as food producers provides therefore a useful vantage point from which to assess the general direction of agricultural development in low-income countries. The agrifood systems today hardly allow female independent producers to thrive, instead relegating them to a form of agricultural production that is often characterized by its low productivity and that is geared towards own consumption or meeting the needs of the family. Though such homestead-based production can represent an important contribution to food security and deserves support, it also presents the risk of confirming existing gender roles and it does not favor the economic independence of women ; nor does it truly expand the choices for women, who should be allowed to decide whether to produce for local markets or to remain confined to subsistence agriculture. Instead, the approach proposed here would reshape the markets at the same time as it would support women as small-scale independent food producers seeking to produce to satisfy the needs of their families and communities : both approaches should be pursued at the same time, in order to allow women to make real choices. The adoption of measures to improve the situation of women farmworkers is an integral component of this strategy, given the links between these two worlds of farming: the current exploitation of women on plantations is a form of unfair competition that undermines the ability for small-scale food producers, among which women are increasingly represented, to make a decent

living from farming.

2. Women as independent food producers

Women face a range of obstacles as independent food producers. These obstacles relate to access to land, to extension services and financial services, to their ability to benefit from agricultural research and development efforts, and finally, in access to markets. But what would it mean to adopt a gender-aware approach in these various areas? Does it require reshaping the existing modalities of support going to farmers in order to ensure that women, as well as men, can improve their productivity and maximize the income-generating potential of farming? Or should we recognize that farming, practiced as a home-based activity and primarily geared towards the satisfaction of the food needs of the family and the local community, may call for other forms of support -- forms of support that aim not to increase market competitiveness, but that serve the values of resilience, autonomy, and stability? That this choice exists often remains implicit in policy discussions. Yet it does matter. Only by ensuring that both options are open to women farmers can we ensure that the choices they make, whether to turn into entrepreneurs by producing what the market demands and increase their incomes from farming, or to produce for the "non-cash" economy of the household or the local community, will not be simply adapting to the narrow range of possibilities open to them.

a) Access to land

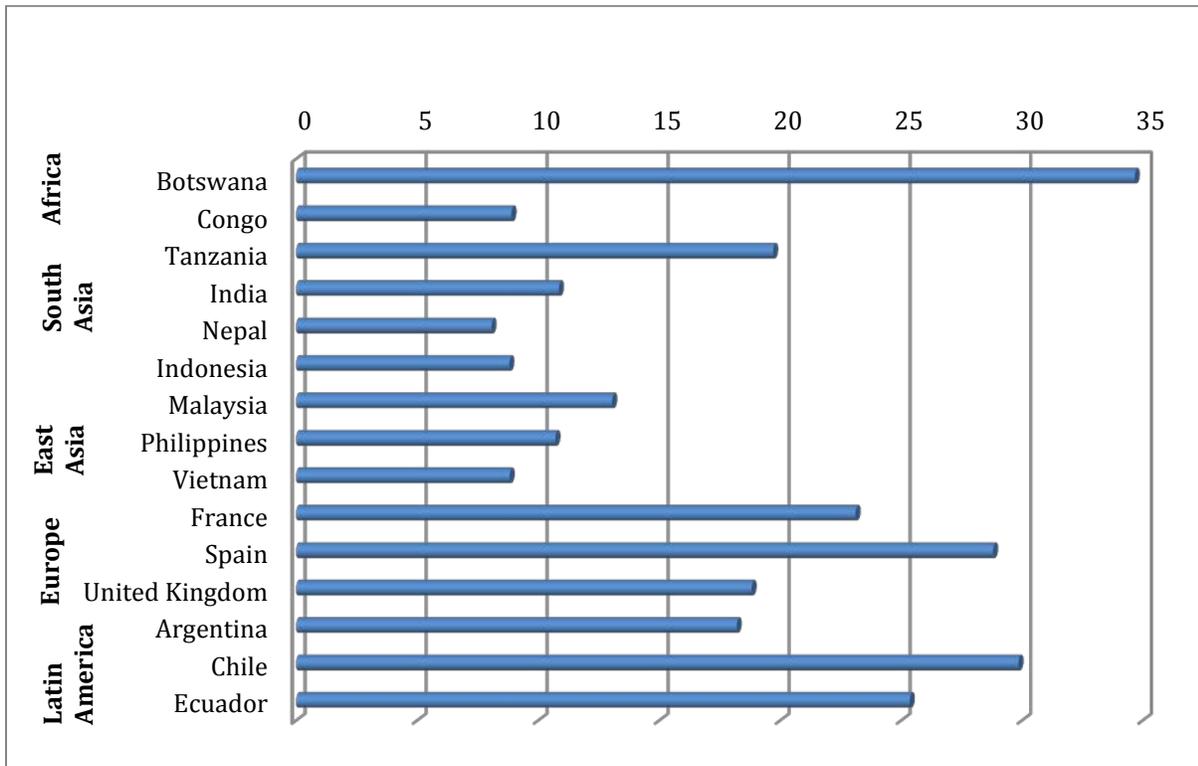
Land is the most valued form of property and a source of livelihood security in rural areas. Because it reduces the dependency of the household on market prices for food commodities, it acts as a buffer against economic shocks (Carter 2003), providing "almost complete insurance against malnutrition" (Deininger and Binswanger 1999: 256). For women, land is a pivotal resource for meeting subsistence needs, and for accessing other goods and services, such as credit, since access to credit often depends on the ability to use land as a collateral. But the value of land is not reducible to its value as an economic asset, to be sold or mortgaged as a means to invest into the market economy : land rights for women, it has been written, "are not primarily marketable assets but rather a secure foundation for sheltering and nurturing their families and making a living. In addition to tenure security for women, ... property ownership increases a woman's bargaining power within the household and her status as a citizen in the community" (Lastarria-Cornhiel 2007, referring to Meizen-Dick et al. 1997). For instance, a study of Indonesian women's power relative to that of their husbands found that the use of prenatal and delivery care was significantly higher in households in which women have some share of the household's assets : at least up to the point when the woman owns 25 per cent of the household pie (beyond which point additional assets shall not provide more benefits in

terms of decision-making power within the household), owning assets was found to be a significant factor to allow women to make reproductive health decisions (Beegle et al. 2001). The study shows that addressing power relationships within households -- that can be influenced most easily by strengthening the ability of women to own assets -- can have effects that go beyond the purely economic sphere: it can favor of greater use of services that will allow women to be in better control of their own lives, and in particular, to limit the number of children.

The improved bargaining position of women within the family leads to improved welfare for children (Doss 2005). In 2010, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Development Centre noted that countries where women lack any right to own land have, on average, 60 percent more malnourished children compared with countries where women do have some or equal access to credit and land: there is a relationship between women's control of assets, their share in decision-making power within the household, and nutritional outcomes (OECD 2010). One recent study on the Indian state of Karnataka highlighted the central role that land ownership plays in facilitating the mobility of women -- their capacity to travel alone --, and their capacity to make autonomous choices, as a result of the improved bargaining power within the household that results from owning land (Swaminathan et al. 2012). Land ownership is also important to enhancing women's participation in rural institutions that could enhance their decision-making power and leverage more collective rights and resources: ownership of land makes women more economically secure, enhancing their self-confidence and self-esteem and their role in decision-making, and allowing them to garner more social, familial and community support (ICRW 2006: 100). Women who own property are also less exposed to violence, since they can flee marital violence (Agarwal and Panda 2007; Friedemann-Sánchez 2006; ICRW 2006: 12).

Despite the importance of access to landed property, discrimination against women in access to land remains pervasive. Though this occurs in all regions, such discrimination is particularly important in South Asia (see also Agarwal 1994), as illustrated in the following graph:

Fig. 2. Ownership of land among women (percentage of women land holders among all landholders, selected countries)



Source: author, based on data from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Gender and Land Rights Database, <http://www.fao.org/gender/landrights/topic-selection/en/> (the figures indicate the percentage of the deeds that mention the name of the woman)

A first major source of discrimination against women in access to land is the denial of equal inheritance rights to property women face in several countries. Even if formal laws are gender neutral, traditional norms and status of women in the society restrict women from inheriting land or other assets. China provides a good illustration. In large part due to migratory patterns in which men, more frequently than women, seek employment outside agriculture, women account for between 60 and 70 per cent of all farm labour (de Brauw et al. 2012). Though the Marriage Law gave women the right to land within the household unit and the Agrarian Reform Law granted men and women equal rights to land in general, in much of rural China, customary practices still prevail, and sons rather than widows or daughters, continue to be considered the natural heirs of land (OECD 2010: 25). Furthermore, women's land rights are seldom reflected in the land certificates issued to households: according to one study, only 7 per cent of certificates were in the name of the woman, while 5 per cent of the certificates were issued to

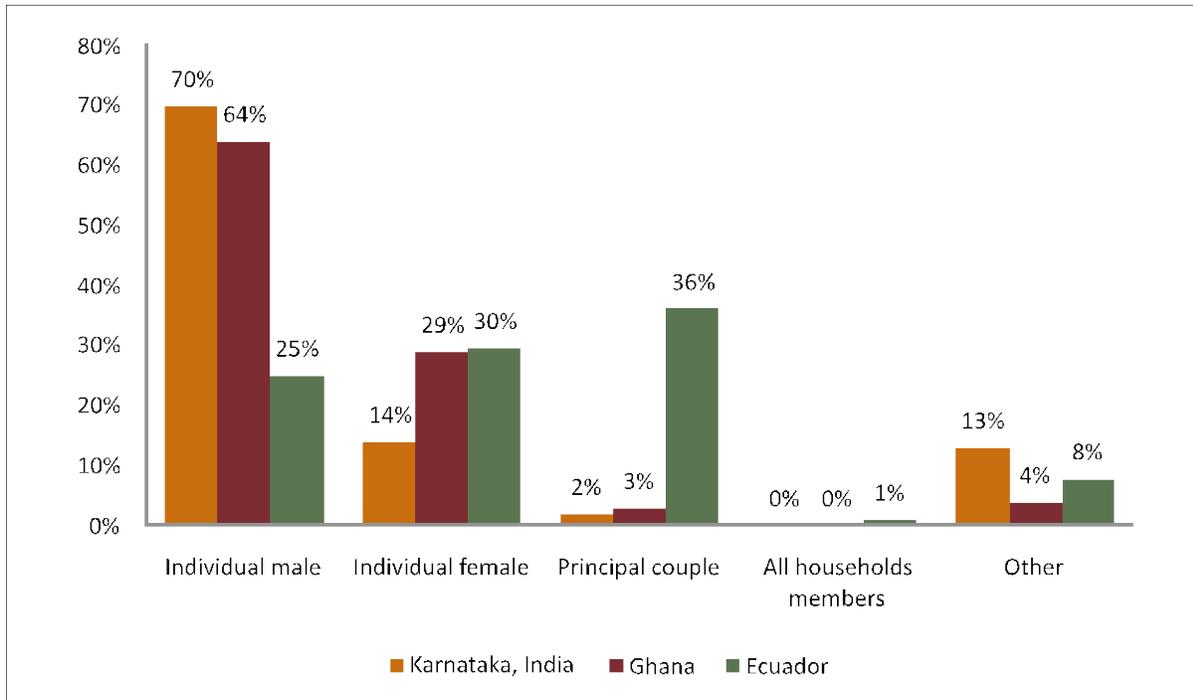
a man and a woman jointly; the remaining land-use certificates were in the name of the husband, father or father-in-law (Zongmin Li and Bruce 2005: 276). In India, even after the amendments introduced in 2005 to the Hindu Succession Act giving women equal rights in their natal family assets, women inheriting property is rare. Women also often tend to renounce their claim to natal property which they are entitled to, in order to maintain good social relations with their brothers: in particular, women may accept a lumpsum payment in lieu of their property rights, in order to preserve visitation rights to the parental home.

A second source of discrimination, which plays a particularly important role in South Asia, is the adoption of a separation of property regime in marriage. This means that any property bought after marriage is owned not jointly by the couple but by the person whose name is mentioned in the registration records : under such a regime, marriage does not automatically confer any legal rights over the property acquired by one's spouse ; instead, assets brought into the marriage or acquired during marriage remain individual property. While couples may choose to own assets jointly and open joint savings accounts or put both names on a title deed, this is not a legal requirement. However, the significant non-monetary contributions of women in marriage, which they make by looking after the house, child-rearing, caring for the elderly, or various other household chores, are not recognized in a regime based on the separation of property.

This contrasts with the situation in most developed countries and in Latin America, where community of property (joint ownership) is the norm. Under this regime any property which is acquired after marriage is the joint property of the married couple. A recent study in Ecuador found that due to community of property regime and equal inheritance practices the gender gap in asset ownership is almost absent (Deere and Diaz 2011). Indeed, a comparison between Ecuador on the one hand, where the common property regime within the couple is the rule, and India and Ghana on the other hand, where the rule is the separation of property, shows the considerable impacts this had on the ownership of agricultural land. As the researchers involved in this comparison explain:

[While] in Ecuador, the most common form of ownership is by the principal couple, [in contrast], only 2% of land parcels in [the Indian state of] Karnataka and 3% in Ghana are reported as being owned by the principal couple. In Karnataka, 13% of the plots are reported as owned jointly by people other than the principal couple. These plots are often owned jointly by a parent and an adult child; this category also includes joint ownership with a non-household member. In Ecuador, more parcels are owned by individual females than by individual males. This is in stark contrast to Karnataka and Ghana where 70% and 64% of the parcels are owned by individual males respectively (IIM 2011: 3).

Fig. 3. Distribution according to the form of ownership of parcels of agricultural land: a comparison between Ecuador, Ghana, and Karnataka (India)



Source: IIM (Indian Institute of Management - Bangalore). (2011). The Gender Asset and Wealth Gaps : Evidence from Ecuador, Ghana and Karnataka, India.

The fact that women have limited earnings and little collateral, as they are unremunerated for the work they do in the household and face both discrimination in access to the labor market and in wage determination, also implies that their earnings are typically insufficient to buy land even when they do have some source of income. In addition, because their levels of education are generally lower than those of men, women have less knowledge about land markets and legal registration requirements. The combination of these factors may explain that in the Indian state of Karnataka for instance, only 16 per cent of women land owners have acquired land through purchase (Swaminathan et al. 2011: 39).

Though they are widely discussed, the obstacles women face in having access to land are still underestimated in their impacts. This is both because of the non-economic consequences of such exclusion -- land as a source of social citizenship and empowerment --, which are often ignored or minimized, and because of the links between land and other productive resources that women depend on as small-scale food producers. Where women do not have a secure title

to land, they lack the collateral required for credit. Land rights serve as an anchor for greater economic and social bargaining power and affects women's access to other key inputs and services, including extension, since their ability to interact with extension workers depends also on their social status within the community.

b) Access to inputs, technology and services

The mutually reinforcing nature of the different forms of discrimination women face as well as the complementarities between different agricultural inputs make it difficult to disaggregate the various obstacles women encounter in seeking to improve their productivity as farmers. This is confirmed both by a recent comprehensive literature review on that topic comparing the results of the empirical studies published between 1999 and 2009 on gender differences in access to non-land agricultural inputs (Peterman et al. 2010), and by the synthesis provided by the FAO in its 2010 *State of Food and Agriculture Report* (FAO 2010). Though the data still remain fragmentary, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn. Women, on average, own less land than men, for the reasons already described above; the plots managed by women are generally smaller than those managed by men; women are generally less well educated than men, and although the educational gap between girls and boys is narrowing in many regions, it is being bridged more slowly in rural areas than within urban populations; and women experience specific difficulties in bringing their produce to the markets, both because of restrictions to their mobility that result from social norms and the responsibilities they shoulder in the household, and because buyers generally tend to treat with men, as they act on the presumption that the men own and manage the land. All these obstacles matter.

Gender-responsive extension services

Various studies have highlighted why extension services should be reformed in order to better serve women. In 1988-89 already, a survey covering 97 countries found that worldwide, only 5 per cent of extension services were addressed to rural women, and only 15 per cent of the advisors were female (FAO 1993; and FAO 1996). More recently, 16 researchers from the World Bank and IFPRI identified large gender inequalities in access to extension services, in the surveys they made in Ghana, Ethiopia, and the Indian state of Karnataka (World Bank and IFPRI 2010). In Karnataka, 27 per cent of male-headed rural households reported having received the visit of an agricultural advisor during the past year: that was the case for only 20 per cent of female-headed households. The gap was less important, however, for livestock-related extension services (78 per cent of male-headed households were provided advice, compared to 71 per cent of female-headed households), a difference which the researchers attributed to the importance of dairy cooperatives in the Indian context, as cooperatives tend to be more gender neutral.

The failure of extension services to benefit women farmers as much as they benefit farmers who are men, seems to be attributable to four factors. First, there is a striking underrepresentation of women among extension services agents (De Schutter 2010b: para. 41). In the 2010 study mentioned above, the World Bank and IFPRI researchers noted that in Karnataka, none of the 41 agricultural extension workers were female, only 1 of 41 junior engineers was female, and only 4 of 40 veterinary assistants were female. This matters because, in some contexts, religious, social or cultural rules may prohibit contacts between a woman farmer and a male agricultural agent, especially when the woman is single, widowed or abandoned. Female extension agents may also often find such norms and rules a deterrent in their ability to work in the field, given the moral repercussions they are likely to face. In addition, male agents may have less understanding for the specific constraints faced by women, such as the demands on their time, their more limited mobility, or the gendered division of tasks in agricultural work.

Second, extension services generally tend to presume that any knowledge transmitted to the men shall automatically trickle down to women and benefit them equally: the men to whom they speak are assumed to be the only producers in the household and the sole decision-makers regarding household farming activities, and women in any case may not be able to attend meetings at which information is provided given the many conflicting demands on their time (as when, in Papua New Guinea, USAID organized a training that could not be attended by most women because it required traveling and remaining three days away from their family responsibilities: see Cahn 2008). This almost by design ensures that women will not be transmitted all the knowledge required to enhance their agricultural productivity, and to take part in key production decisions -- what to plant, whether to sell, to whom and at what price, and whether to invest. It also reinforces pre-existing imbalances in decision-making within the household. And finally, it neglects the fact that the needs and priorities of women may be different than those of men: the type of knowledge they demand may correspond to specific constraints they face, for instance because they have less command over labour, fewer possibilities to buy and transport external inputs, or because of social or cultural norms that discourage the use of certain types of machinery.

Third, women have a social life within the community that is different from that of men: as illustrated both by the World Bank and IFPRI survey of 2010 and by an earlier study of 304 rural households in the Philippines (Godquin and Quisumbing 2008), women generally join women self-help groups or women's groups, whereas the men tend to socialize more in cooperatives or other producers' organisations. As Marie Godquin and Agnes Quisumbing summarize the main conclusion of their research (2008: 23):

Males are more likely to be members of production groups, while females are more likely to participate in civic groups. This may indicate a division of labour within the household or separate spheres of decision-making. Men, who are more heavily involved in agricultural production, are indeed more involved in groups related to income generation whereas women, who tend to be engaged in non-agriculture and are largely responsible for maintaining social networks, are more involved in civic and religious groups.

Therefore, if extension workers provide information through group sessions with the local group of agricultural producers, there is a risk that women will be under-represented among the beneficiaries.

Of course, extension service workers are not the only means through which information can be provided about how to improve productivity on farms. For instance, such information could be provided through brochures, or it could be transmitted through new information and communication technologies, including the internet. However, those means hardly constitute realistic alternatives for poor rural women. Those who are most in need of support are often the least well educated, and they include a significant proportion of illiterate or quasi-illiterate women: if brochures are distributed explaining farming techniques, they would have to be composed of drawings in order to be effective. As to communication technologies, few women would have access to them -- a 2010 study found that in South Asia, 37 percent less women than men owned a mobile phone (GSMA Development Fund 2010) ; and both the incentive to turn to such information and the ability to absorb it would require the support and guidance of an extension worker. Moreover, the information related to farming is highly context-specific: for instance, the use of fertilizer or the choice of seeds, but also of irrigation techniques, depend on the particular ecosystem in which the farm operates -- the quality of the soils, the sufficiency of biomass for the production of organic fertilizers, rainfall or the proximity of water sources, or the risks of erosion associated with the landscape. This reduces the possibilities of substituting distance learning for direct exchanges.

Gender-responsive financial services

In the developing world, the obstacles to poor farming households having access to credit are manifold. The infrastructure for financial services in rural areas is often weak or non-existent: the major formal financial institutions have no network of branches in rural areas because the population is spread too thin and poor, and the investment thus not considered worthwhile. In addition, institutional investors are reluctant to provide credit because of the information asymmetries they face and resulting screening, monitoring, and enforcement problems, where they are asked to insure or to finance what is a highly risky activity -- agricultural production in

a context of high price volatility and a changing climate (Binswanger and Rosenzweig 1986; Hoff and Stiglitz 1993; Ghosh et al. 2001). Poor rural households may also encounter difficulties in providing the required collateral to obtain loans: this is the case particularly where they have no legally recognized title or deed on the land that they use, where the markets for land rights are insufficiently liquid, or where the land that could be mortgaged is too small and thus could not be easily sold in case of default to allow the lender to obtain reimbursement of the loan. This specific obstacle may be overcome by encouraging borrowers to form groups which guarantee one another's loans. Group lending not only reassures the lending institution that it will be reimbursed (as none of the borrowers of the group will have access to a second loan unless all have reimbursed their first loan); it also may reduce transaction costs by allowing the loan to be negotiated between one representative of the group and one bank representative (Panjaitan-Drioadisuryo and Cloud 1999; Pitt and Khandker 1998). But, where alternatives such as social collateral do not exist, poor small-scale farmers wanting to invest on their land often have no other choice than to turn to local money-lenders, who charge very high interest rates, creating the risk of unsustainable cycle of debts (see, for a comparison of informal finance in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Philippines, and Thailand, Ghatge 1992; see also Holt and Ribe 1991).

These difficulties are further magnified for women, both because women face specific obstacles in having their rights to the land recognized, and because of cultural norms that make it more difficult for them to have access to credit (FAO 2010: 33-34). Although some countries, such as India, now mandate that a third of all loans by the state development banks go to women (Elavia 1994), most commercial institutions lend to women in much smaller proportions than to men.

Microfinance is often cited as the key to overcoming these obstacles, particularly for women. It has been favored particularly since the 1980s as a preferred substitute to top-down poverty-reduction plans by governments, in part because it is more cost-effective (as it takes the form of loans rather than grants), and in part because it is more bottom-up (meeting the demand for access to credit for investment in individual projects), and may thus be more effective in the long-term alleviation of rural poverty (Sharma 2003; Bali Swain 2007).

Microfinance programmes also can target women specifically, which other tools for poverty alleviation may not do in the same way. This is a significant advantage, because women may be excluded in fact from access to credit even when the household has access: a survey of 210 households in rural Paraguay found that, while 23 per cent of the women surveyed declared they were credit constrained, in two thirds of these cases, their husbands asserted they had adequate access to credit (Fletschner 2009). In contrast, microfinance programmes specifically

directed at women may increase the participation of women in decision making within the household, particularly as regards family planning and education of children. Other members of the household (especially girls and the elderly) may even be recruited to undertake a greater part of the housework, as women benefiting from a microcredit programme spent more time on their businesses. Thus, a survey of 121 women benefiting from the Small Farmers Development Program (SFDP) launched by the Indonesian government in the early 1990s, whose answers were compared to those of a control group of 94 women, showed that the programme (targeting not only women in poor agricultural families but also those who do fishing, home industry, and trading) allowed women beneficiaries to command more contributions from other members of the household (Panjaitan-Drioadisuryo and Cloud 1999).

Yet, microfinance presents its own problems. First, it is important not to confuse improved access to loans for rural women with control over the use of the loans, or with the empowerment of women and their ability to improve their productivity as independent producers. Where women are not adequately supported in using the loans they are granted for micro-enterprise development or are not trained in management, the loans are of limited effect in the long term. This was one of the lessons drawn from the Sri Lanka Poverty Alleviation Project supported by the World Bank in 1991-1998, that included a microcredit component (Credit & Micro-Enterprise Development, CMED) : though a higher percentage of females (57 per cent) than males benefited from the CMED, allowing the beneficiaries to bypass money-lender charging exorbitant rates, it appeared that only about one third of the beneficiaries could establish and operate successful micro-enterprises over a period of three years, a low performance that the World Bank evaluation report attributes to insufficient preparation of the beneficiaries (World Bank 1998: 88). In another instance, after access to microfinance was increased for the benefit of rural women in Bangladesh in the 1980s, it appeared that in many cases the loans were in fact used by their male relatives, even while the female borrowers were liable for repayment: in the early 1990s, ten years after the existing microfinance programmes had shifted their focus to benefit women, a qualitative study was conducted on 275 loans (22 of these to men) across four organizations: BRAC's Rural Development programme (106 loans to women; 22 to men), Grameen Bank (53), a programme managed by a women's NGO (Thangemaru M&b *Sebuj Sengstha* - TMSS) (39), and the government's Rural Poor Programme RD-12 (55). The study showed that while women retained full or significant control of loan use in 37 per cent of the cases, in 43 per cent of the cases, they had no control on the use of the loan, or only limited or partial control; and in 22 per cent of the cases, the women surveyed were either unable to give details of loan use, or were unaware of how their husbands or other male household members had used loans (Goetz et al. 1996).

Indeed, the study by Goetz and others (1996) offers some evidence that because the

creditworthiness of women (as measured by the repayment rates of loans) is higher than that of men, women in practice may be used as convenient "middlemen" by fieldworkers of lending institutions and by the male members of households alike, with the risk of increased tensions within the household when the woman does not obtain from the husband or other male relative that he provides cash to allow her to repay the loan, or when the woman does not manage to have access to loans that the male relative seeks to obtain (see also Rahman 1999). For the husband or the male relative, it is perfectly rational to use the woman in order to obtain credit through a microfinance program that is targeting women, when the alternative would be to turn to a local moneylender charging very high interest rates. And the attitude of the woman is entirely understandable even where she is uncertain whether the male relative shall repay his debt, and where there is a risk that she shall have to pay the loan back with her own resources : the alternative may be conflict or divorce (Balasubramanian 2012: 8). In a context such as rural Bangladesh where men still control the assets within the household under strong sociocultural norms, the likelihood of men controlling the use of loans obtained by women will remain high, with the resulting conflicts, until the men are led to understand they have nothing to lose, and instead might gain, from a more equitable sharing of the power over resources. The authors of the study note that this may be achieved through "intensive qualitative investments in changing men's perceptions of women's worth", or through "ensuring that men's access to resources is not constrained in proportion to women's increasing access, in an apparently zero-sum manner" (Goetz et al. 1996: 56). But they also acknowledge that this is often outside the remit of development programmes to achieve.

The same socio-cultural obstacles explain why women benefiting from microcredit in rural Bangladesh, for instance through the Grameen Bank, seldom use loans to run their own businesses: instead of becoming entrepreneurs themselves, women often use the loans to support the capital of existing businesses that are usually managed by male members in the household (Chowdhury 2008), or to support their husbands in launching micro-enterprises (Chowdhury 2009). In Andhra Pradesh, it was found that 67 per cent of women's loans were invested in assets or businesses controlled by their husbands, and in 82 to 88 per cent of these cases, women ended up having to engage in wage labour to make repayments, being unable to get the money from their husbands (Garikipati 2008). A study in Faridpur, Bangladesh finds that only 31-32 per cent of women having obtained loans have primary decision-making power over the use of the profit generated than to the loans, compared to 79-83 per cent of male beneficiaries (Kabeer 2001b). Research on India shows that women may end up being less empowered through microcredit, even as the household's situation improves through a diversification of livelihoods, a result Garikipati refers to as "impact paradox" (Garikipati 2008 and 2010).

Second, as microfinance programmes increasingly target rural women, and as there is a pressure on fieldworkers providing credit to disburse larger loans to more women, there is a risk that women who have most assets already, or who have male relatives to work with them, will benefit most. Indeed, microfinance programmes often do not reach the poorest, who operate in a "mini-economy" of very small transactions, so small in fact that the transaction costs of dealing with them are too high even for microcredit institutions (Hulme and Mosley 1996; Sabates-Wheeler and Kabeer 2003: 40). Loans may be more easily obtained by these women rather than, for instance, by female-headed households with no adult male in the household, or by landless or landpoor women, who are considered less creditworthy (Goetz et al. 1996: 56-57).

Nor should this come as a surprise. The spread of microfinance schemes is based on the hope that they can function as a financially self-sustaining means of addressing rural poverty. But there is an inherent tension between this objective and supporting the poorest or single women whose ability to improve their productivity levels is perhaps most questionable -- because they may be poorly qualified or illiterate, or because they cannot move beyond home-based activities in particular to market their produce as travelling would be incompatible with their household responsibilities. Sabates-Wheeler and Kabeer acknowledge the reality of this tension:

The constraints posed by the high transaction costs of dealing with the extreme poor have been exacerbated by the increasing emphasis within the donor community on the "sustainable" as opposed to the "subsidized" transfer of resources to the poor. This has led to an increasing stress on loan repayment by various micro-finance organizations affecting their ability to be responsive to the fluctuating income flows of the very poor. The stress on weekly repayments generates additional pressures at group level to exclude the very poor who are likely to have difficulties in meeting their repayment obligations and could hence jeopardize the group's future access to loans (Sabates-Wheeler and Kabeer 2003: 40).

The loans that women take out may still be controlled by their male relatives, and the poorest women may still face difficulties in rebuilding their asset base. Both of these constraints point to the fact that, unless women are actively supported in improving their productivity, and in particular in having a better access to markets, the gender relations and the perception of the value of their work may not change simply through an improved access to credit. Important though as it is, therefore, access to credit is not a substitute for rural development policies and investment in women smallholders that can improve their ability to climb out of poverty. Credit without real opportunities to use it effectively can only have limited impacts.

Microcredit also raises another, more fundamental question. It represents a powerful incentive to move towards production for the market, rather than for self-consumption: investments that are made possible through borrowing, can only be reimbursed by selling against cash on the market. Some have therefore denounced the dangers of an approach that would result in coercing women into entering more capitalized forms of agricultural production, by providing them with credit at sustainable (or even attractive) conditions, thus guiding them towards certain forms of agricultural production that may not, in fact, be in the best interest of local food security and improved nutritional outcomes for the family (Kabeer 2001a). The obvious answer may be that women are not forced to take a loan : if they prefer to remain in subsistence agriculture, and do not wish to increase the productivity of their land to produce surplus that they may sell on the market, that option remains open to them. However, that is true only to the extent that microcredit schemes do not crowd out other forms of support provided to small-scale food producers, that would ensure that the choice left to them -- as to which type of agricultural production to practice -- is indeed real. This dilemma presents itself in even starker form in the area of agricultural research and development.

Gender-responsive agricultural research

Given the existence of gendered roles in agriculture (although how such roles are defined varies from region to region), the choice as to which new varieties of plants to develop or which technologies to introduce cannot be considered to be gender-neutral by definition. For instance, women may have a preference for growing crops that they may prepare easily for home consumption, and that require little or no processing, or for varieties that taste good, and that can be easily preserved. Because they face time constraints, they may prefer varieties that can be more easily cultivated, for instance because they are less threatened by weeds or because they can be easily husked. Since it is more difficult for them than for men to have access to credit, they may prefer to grow crops following agroecological, low-external input techniques, which also presents for them the specific advantage that they shall not have to transport bags of fertilizers, which could present a difficulty in the absence of adequate means of transportation (for a series of illustrations, see Meinzen-Dick et al., 2010 and 2011; see also FAO-IFAD-ILO 2010: 13).

The reorientation of agricultural research and development in order to better integrate the perspective of women and in order to ensure that they co-design the solutions that suit them best, can also have impacts that go beyond the field: it can be transformative of social norms and of social relations. Gender-sensitive participatory plant breeding (PPB) provides an example. PPB is generally considered to achieve better results than conventional breeding, because the involvement of the end users in the process ensures that the results will take into account their

needs, and increases the final rate of uptake (Ashby and Lilja 2004). However, not all participatory plant breeding has sought in the past to explicitly involve women. This may be an important missed opportunity: "Failure to include gender-differentiated production and consumption traits and focusing on the wrong attributes leads to biased and inappropriate varietal promotions. Evaluating new varieties only on yield-related characteristics (often gender-neutral) has led to 19 per cent of all varieties being miscategorized as superior, whereas incorporating gender-differentiated traits (labour-related, consumption, post-harvest) has reduced miscategorization and increases adoption potential" (Paris et al. 2008: 98). Paris and collaborators (2008) worked on submergence-prone and drought-prone villages in Uttar Pradesh, to identify the impacts on women's empowerment of participatory plant breeding (PPB). Using a measure of women's empowerment (the Women's Empowerment Index (WEI)) that is determined by who is the decision-maker within the household (husband or wife) and for which activities decisions are made by women (for instance, which rice to grow, whether to sell or the exchange seeds with neighbours, etc.), they found that PPB had strong empowering impacts. It also raised the productivity of the whole household by ensuring that the varieties selected are the best for the fragile environments which they depend on, and freed women for additional jobs to gain income.

Meinzen-Dick et al. (2010: 50) provide this summary of what is at stake in this transformation :

Reorienting the agricultural research system to be more gender responsive requires being more aware of the different needs and preferences of male and female farmers; the different roles that men and women play in the production and marketing process; differential access to and control of productive resources; differential constraints that female farmers may face in adopting new technologies, including time constraints owing to domestic responsibilities and nonmarket production; the representation of male and female scientists and extension agents in the agricultural research and extension systems, among others.

A greater representation of women among agricultural scientists involved in research and development, as well as a greater participation of women farmers and consumers in the design of research, its implementation and its evaluation, are the means through which this can be achieved -- although the list of indicators that would allow to measure the 'gender-responsiveness' of agricultural research is much longer (see Meinzen-Dick et al. 2011: 100-2).

Adopting such a gender-sensitive approach, in turn, can significantly enrich our understanding of what ends research should serve, and to recognize the many functions crop, livestock and fish improvement and the introduction of new technologies must fulfil. It can also oblige us to

replace agricultural research and development into the broader web of social relations in which it shall have to succeed -- or in which it will fail. More precisely, by developing agricultural research in ways that are more responsive to women's needs and by involving them, as is done in PPB, we may expect that greater attention shall be paid to the preservation of the resource base, or the ecosystems, on which the beneficiaries depend: beneficiaries care more than the scientists about their continued ability, in the long term, to be able to be supported by the resource base (trees, soil, water, local agrobiodiversity including wild plants), on which they rely not only for agricultural production but also for domestic needs; and the local community is better placed to enforce social norms that penalize the depletion of such resources, or their use where it goes beyond the carrying capacity (Ostrom 1990). We may also expect that the attention of the scientists will be directed towards fruits and vegetables, and the most nutritious food crops in general, while they are usually primarily concerned with staple crops, particularly cereals. We may expect that, in assessing the respective merits of different plant varieties, greater attention will be paid to the post-harvesting phase -- not simply to the prospects of selling the produce on high-value markets, but also to the possibility of preserving the food from losses, to the nutritional value of the food that is produced for consumption within the household, or to the impact cultivating a particular variety may have on the time constraints of women. Even where cash crops are developed, we may expect women's participation to question the impacts on the allocation of incomes between women and men, and the use of such incomes as they may be increased by the planned improvements (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2010: 51-52).

c) Access to markets

In part because of their reduced mobility, and in part because of social and cultural norms, women may face specific difficulties in moving from subsistence agriculture, aimed at own consumption, to the marketing of their surplus, even when productivity gains are achieved that could allow this. Two institutions in particular deserve comment in this regard. They may be used in combination.

Contract farming

One means through which small-scale farmers can move from subsistence agriculture for self-consumption to food production for markets, is by contract farming, implying a long-term relationship with a buyer, who typically provides technical advice, access to credit and inputs, in exchange for having a stable and reliable source of supply (Singh 2000). The shift to contract farming often has been found to have gendered effects. Women, less than men, have access to contract farming : a study found that in the Kenyan horticulture export industry, women comprised fewer than 10 percent of contracted farmers, and in a sample of 59 contract farmers

for French beans exported from Senegal, only one was a woman (FAO-IFAD-WFP 2011: 13, based on Maertens and Swinnen 2009). The ability for women to benefit from contract farming is mediated by their rights over land, and by the power relationships both within households or, when the contract is negotiated through representatives of the community or the farmers' organisation, within these groups. Indeed, even where most of the work is in fact performed by the wife and other family members, it is not unusual for the contract to be signed by the husband, as head of the household, as seen in sugar contract farming in South Africa or in vegetable contract farming in the Indian Punjab (FAO-IFAD-WFP 2011: 13; Behrman et al. 2011: 11; Kumar 2006), or in some cases in China (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2011b). While women often decide within the household how the food that is grown is going to be used, men decide how the cash is spent. Therefore, unless the framework for contract farming is gender sensitive, it may weaken the situation of women vis-à-vis men (Man-Kwun Chan 2010 ; Schneider and Gugerty 2010).

For all these reasons, it has been recommended that contracts be put in the woman's name, where she does most or all of the work on the land, or in the name of both the woman and the man ; it should not be only in the name of the man, even when he is considered head of the household or when the title to the land is in his name only (De Schutter 2011: 13). Ideally, the payments should go directly to the woman, both to enhance her bargaining position within the household and to ensure that the improved incomes from the contract shall lead to better nutritional and health outcomes. While the limited mobility of women in the past often has been an obstacle to the woman receiving such payments -- as she was unable to spend time away from household chores to fetch the money or as she was restricted in her movements by social norms --, this has now become easier thanks to new methods of payment, such as through mobile phones, and because more women are now members of microfinance groups or producer groups, and therefore have accounts in their own name. It has been noted, however, that direct payment on the woman's account may not be sufficient to ensure that women maintain control of production, especially if men feel threatened by the improvement of their position : working with men, in order to allow them to feel that they are part of this transition and to explore possibilities for them to also improve their incomes, must therefore be integrated in such a strategy (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2011b).

Group farming

Another means through which the switch to higher-value crops, that can be sold at remunerative prices on markets, may be facilitated, is by organizing individual farmers into collectives. This presents a number of advantages (Braverman et al. 1991; World Bank 2007a: 88; Markelova and Meinzen-Dick 2009; World Food Programme 2009: 133). It can allow for economies of scale for the storing of crops and for the acquisition of some tools, including for

the mechanization on the farm, which may lead to improved productivity : research across 17 Indian states over a period of ten years (1999-2008) showed that the consolidation of very small productive units into slightly larger units could significantly improve the profits per surface, thanks to the cost savings allowed by consolidation (Foster and Rosenzweig 2010).

Economies of scale can also be important for the packaging, the transport and the marketing of food. By joining efforts, individual farmers may also climb up the value chain into processing and marketing, rather than having to remain confined to the production of raw commodities. They may also spread the risks across a number of individuals, thus favoring experimentation with new technologies and potentially higher-value crops, and improving access to credit and insurance, as micro-lenders and micro-insurers may find it desirable to contract with the collective rather than with one individual farmer alone, as the risk of default or loss is significantly smaller. By working through collectives, farmers can pool resources and improve their ability to have access to land, by purchasing or leasing land. Furthermore, the organisation of farmers improves their bargaining position, both vis-à-vis input providers and vis-à-vis buyers, leading to reduced costs of production and higher revenues. It can also accelerate the exchange of knowledge across farmers. This is particularly important for low external-input agriculture relying on the principles of agroecology, which is highly knowledge-intensive and context-sensitive, and therefore requires the establishment of adequate institutions for the sharing of good practices, as is done through farmer-field schools (Van Den Berg and Jiggins 2007; Warner and Kirschenmann 2007). Collectives also are better positioned to preserve certain collective goods, such as water, forests, or the quality of soils, because they can impose on all members of the collective certain measures to limit negative externalities and to manage the common resources in ways that take into account long-term considerations, avoiding what has been referred to as the "tragedy of the commons" (Hardin 1968). Finally, the organisation of farmers into cooperatives or unions, or in other forms, allows them to have a voice in decision-making processes, and thus to participate in the design and evaluation of policies that affect them.

Many of these advantages generally associated with the forming of cooperatives or other forms of collectives are particularly important for women farmers, because as a result of discrimination, they are particularly disadvantaged in all these areas. Indeed, because of their responsibilities within the household, women benefit in particular from forms of organisation that allow to share labour across a certain number of individuals, or to economize on the most labor-intensive duties by such economies of scale as these collective forms of organisation should allow. However, unless the gender dimension is taken into account, many of these potential benefits will be lost for women. All too often, cooperatives or other farmers' organisations are dominated by men, and do not allow effective participation of women into

decision-making ; they therefore hardly contribute, if at all, to improving the ability of women to move and to interact within the community ; they are not empowering women.

This is why all-women cooperatives or, if that were too difficult to achieve, the imposition of strong rules on decision-making within cooperatives in order to ensure that women are effectively represented and take part in decisions, may be encouraged. Group farming, which is one variant of collective organization in which land that is owned individually is pooled or in which land is leased jointly by a number of individuals, also could bring about important benefits (Agarwal, 2010 and 2011). Agarwal highlights the work done in drought-prone regions of Andhra Pradesh in south India by the NGO Deccan Development Society in support of poor, low-caste women (Agarwal 2003). The women involved typically would not have been able to buy or cultivate land on an individual basis. Group farming allowed them not only to lease or purchase land in groups of 5 to 15, with the support of government schemes, but also to plant a wide range of diverse crops, thus mitigating the risks of crop failure by the portfolio effect it allows and providing for a balanced subsistence diet. In addition,

working together has enhanced women's ability to survey land, hire tractors, share labour, meet government officials, buy inputs and market the produce. Collective cultivation allows them flexibility in labour time, cost sharing, and the pooling of their differential skills in farming, accounting, and public dealing. The groups are voluntary in nature, socio-economically homogenous, constituted of women who know each other, small sized in both membership and production units, participatory in decision-making, and equitable in the distribution of the produce. Group members report improvement in family diets, healthcare and children's education; a reduction in spousal desertion and violence; and enhanced social status in the community (Agarwal 2011: 19-20).

In contrast to the organisation of farmers into collectives that are male-dominated, women's collectives such as these therefore have a potential to challenge prevailing social norms, in ways that matter for the empowerment of women.

d) Conclusion: two models of "supporting women farmers"

Women disproportionately shoulder the burden of household responsibilities, including not only the care of children and of the elderly but also the purchase of food and the preparation of meals, and fetching water and fuelwood. However, this does not necessarily imply that, even if given equal access to land and to other productive inputs, they will perform less well as agricultural producers than men. Institutions are not fixed. The support given to farmers and the organisation of markets can be made more responsive to the needs of women. In China, a recent study found that women could seize the opportunities the markets offered as well as

men thanks to important investments having been made into the infrastructure that markets need to operate well, such as, in particular, "roads, communications, and accessible wholesale marketing facilities, open to all and lightly taxed. In this environment, literally thousands of traders seek out agricultural producers who are willing to sell their goods—no matter if they are rich or poor, no matter if they are young or old, and no matter if they are male or female. Too many traders exist for any one trader to have enough market power to discriminate" (de Brauw et al. 2012: 19). Public policies may thus aim at the *reduction* of the difficulties women face due to the existing gendered division of roles: although women have a more limited mobility than men because of the household responsibilities they assume to a far greater extent, markets can be made more hospitable to women, by facilitating access of producers to traders and reducing the time required for the former to bring their produce to the markets, or the distances to be covered.

Such benevolent effects of markets expansion are not automatic, however. Where food systems develop so as to reward mostly middle-size and large-size production units, who can be more competitive because of the economies of scale they can achieve, because of their superior ability to replace labour by machinery, and because of the lower transaction costs that buyers must incur in dealing with such units, small farms may lose out. Not only are small farms less well positioned to reap the benefits from expanded opportunities to trade, but in addition, they may be losing out against larger farms in the competition for resources -- particularly land and water, but also capital --, for infrastructure -- such as storage facilities and roads --, and for other forms of public support such as extension services. This may be the result, in particular, of the expansion of export-led agriculture, itself the result of trade liberalization and of the lowering of the costs of transportation and logistical improvements. The impacts of the growth of export-led agriculture, in particular the marginalization of small farms, are gendered : women are disproportionately represented amongst smallholders, and the larger the production unit, the better men are represented (FAO-IFAD-ILO 2010: 22-23). These negative gender impacts are not inevitable. Efforts could be made to develop local markets in addition to the expansion of global value chains and export opportunities; and some have argued that the negative impacts on smaller production units of the expansion of more capitalized forms of agriculture can be compensated by the increased employment opportunities that arise on large farms, particularly for women (Maertens and Swinnen 2009). But it is nevertheless vital that governments are aware of the gender impacts of the modernization of supply chains, and that they take all necessary measures to ensure that the situation of women does not worsen as a result of this transformation.

In moving towards this end however, governments shall encounter a dilemma that is both of great importance yet usually help implicit. On the one hand, governments are expected to

reshape how support services are provided to producers, and indeed to reshape the markets themselves, in order to allow women farmers to succeed as entrepreneurs: as seen above, a range of remedial measures that could be adopted in this regard, that aim to remove the obstacles women as potential (but often, frustrated) market participants. On the other hand however, an alternative model of family farming presents itself, that sets other priorities and is based on other values. It seeks to feed the family and to protect it from price volatility by producing its own food. Rather than on profit maximization, it is based on the values of resilience, autonomy, and stability. This dilemma is not ideological: it is practical. How the dilemma is addressed may have a deep influence on public action, for instance on which investments are made or how services are delivered.

Which of these two approaches should be prioritized in an issue that can only be decided in a highly contextualized manner. There is no reason to presume that women farmers will necessarily have profit maximization as their main objective, if that implies the switch to high-value cash crops (and thus producing less food that can be consumed within the family), or if that requires dedicating more time to market the produce (potentially worsening the time poverty of women). Indeed, women may have reasons to prefer a type of farming that protects the family from shocks, and that consists in a primarily home-based activity and is therefore easiest to reconcile with household responsibilities. For women, that may also be a means of preserving power. As we have seen, studies suggest that women lose control over decision-making when crops are produced for cash rather than for feeding the local community : while women decide about the use of food produced for self-consumption, they do not decide how the monetary income of the household is spent (Man-Kwun Chan 2010 ; Schneider and Gugerty 2010). It may therefore be perfectly rational, from the woman's point of view, to prioritize a low-cash farming system, in which production is primarily for food to be consumed within the family or the community rather than for monetary reward, and in which few if any inputs are bought: in such a system, seeds are obtained from the previous year's harvest or from exchange with other farmers, inputs are produced locally by the recycling of agricultural waste, manure or compost, and pests are kept away by intercropping techniques or other modes of biological control. This type of farming is knowledge-intensive, and it requires that women be trained or that they share knowledge about farming techniques (Jewitt 2000; Warner and Kirschenmann 2007) ; but it does not depend on external inputs, and it is a less costly way to farm (Altieri 1995; Gliessman 2007; De Schutter 2010). It relies on agro-ecological techniques that better sustain the ecosystems, which women in particular may see as an advantage because of their dependence on the neighbouring environment for the various uses discussed above.

This, then, is the dilemma: Should priority be given to allow women farmers to succeed as

entrepreneurs, producing high-value crops for the market and selling them through channels that allow them to capture a remunerative price ? Or should the focus be instead on supporting the alternative model of family farming, in which food crops (rather than cash crops) are prioritized, to ensure the family's or the community's needs are satisfied, and in which a low-external input model of farming, requiring less investment from the farmer, is encouraged ?

The answer shall depend of course, on the local conditions present, on which of these models is most likely to contribute to food security, and on the preferences expressed by women in the specific contexts in which they operate. Participation of women is therefore indispensable for food security strategies to adequately take into account the specific needs of women. However, for women to be able to make a real choice as to the type of support that they should receive, both options should be truly open. It would not be acceptable for women farmers to be relegated to subsistence farming, or to practice low-external input farming, because of a lack of access to markets or to inputs. By the same token however, it would not be acceptable for women farmers to be denied support because they prefer to cultivate crops that feed their families and are primarily destined for own consumption, if it is their considered choice that this is the type of farming that best suits their needs -- for instance, because it reduces the dependency of the household on the increasingly volatile prices of the market.

In sum, in the context of an increased feminization of small-scale agriculture, there is only one way to support women farmers: it is to do so by broadening the range of options they may choose from. This means reshaping the institutional environment and the markets in order to allow them to enter into the high-value supply chains, while at the same time supporting family farming that may best allow them to reconcile their role as food producers with their household responsibilities and the specific constraints that they face. Both sets of measures typically will combine a dosis of *relief* with a dosis of *recognition*: whilst women shall be relieved from the burdens they shoulder by improved connectivity to markets and by public services such as better childcare, piped water and clean electricity in rural areas -- thus reducing the amount of time women spend minding children, fetching fuelwood or water --, at the same time, it would be naive not to recognize the reality of the imbalance between women and men in the current division of gender roles and the need, accordingly, to take into account the specific time and mobility constraints women face in the reshaping of markets and institutional support to farmers. Relief and recognition, however, should go hand in hand with transformative strategies that encourage the *redistribution* of such roles, encouraging men to accept a greater share in household responsibilities and strengthening the bargaining position of women within households (Elson 2010; Eyben and Fontana 2011; Fälth and Blackden 2009). Indeed, it may be argued that until the responsibilities in the household are more fairly shared between women and men, such responsibilities will continue to be undervalued and neglected

-- and those who perform them, will not be supported as they should. "Redistribution initiatives are about supporting men's and women's own efforts to change gender norms that prevent men assuming equal roles in care responsibilities, making it easier for men to become more involved in and respected for sharing the family's caring responsibilities as well as for doing paid care work" (Eyben and Fontana 2011: 10).

3. Women as farmworkers

The increased representation of women among farmworkers represents the other face of the "feminization of agriculture". Worldwide, it is estimated that 450 million people are employed as farmworkers. Of these, at least 20 to 30 per cent are women, although the proportion is higher, at around 40 per cent, in Latin America and the Caribbean (ILO-FAO-IUF 2007: 32). These figures should be treated with caution, however, since much of the employment in this sector is informal and undeclared, and official statistics are therefore often unreliable ; in addition, International Labour Organization statistics on waged employment either do not distinguish between rural and urban areas, or do not disaggregate data by gender.

The rights of agricultural workers are routinely violated in many developing countries. The violations range from the failure to pay even the minimum wage applicable (let alone the living wage that would be required for the employment to provide "decent" work (De Schutter 2009: paras. 14-17; FAO-IFAD-ILO 2010: 20)), to bonded labour practices in which the workers are under the total dependence of the employer, and which are perpetuated from one generation to the next. Since much of waged employment is in the informal sector, national labour legislation is unable to ensure the right to a minimum wage or to protect women from discrimination. In addition, labour legislation frequently treats the agricultural sector differently from other sectors with regard to issues such as working time, overtime pay, of leave (ILO 2008: para. 295), a problem the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations has repeatedly denounced (FAO-IFAD-ILO 2010: 14). And the labour inspectorates are often grossly understaffed and do not have the capacity to monitor the agricultural sector due, in part, to the costs of dealing with a large number of farms dispersed over large areas, when the means of transportation are insufficient or even non-existent.

In principle, a greater recognition of collective bargaining should provide solutions to these difficulties. But unionization on farms is discouraged, sometimes actively repressed, by the employer. And it is in any case made difficult by the fact that a proportion of the workers, often significant, are migrant and temporary workers, who have little incentives to organize and whose situation is too fragile to dare protest: "When workers know that their positions are temporary, they are much more likely to tolerate exploitative conditions, either because they

view their situation as short-term or fear that they will lose the little work they have if they complain. This arrangement also militates against worker organization and collective bargaining. Furthermore, casual workers are more prone to dismissal, because employers are not legally required to award compensation when terminating temporary employees" (Dolan and Sorby 2003: 32). In addition, employers rely in some cases on sub-contractors, who recruit workers for them: where this is the case, the workers formally are not employed by the actual owner of the production unit, which can make it impossible for the workers to rely on any collective agreement that may have been concluded, as only the workers directly employed by the plantation owner would be covered. In addition, again due to the migrant and temporary nature of much of the workforce, as well as to the low level of literacy (including legal literacy) of the farmworkers, they are generally very poorly informed about their rights or about the means to claim them (De Schutter 2009).

For many women who become agricultural workers, working on farms represents a first opportunity to have access to income. But the benefits are not unmitigated. First, although most studies available seem to indicate that women have a considerable say in how their wages are spent (Kabeer 2005), this is not necessarily the case. On tea plantations in Sri Lanka, for example, females who are the majority of tea pickers evidence high rates of illiteracy and lack of numeracy skills ; customarily it is their husband or male kin who collects the daily payment at weighing time, with little of it accessed by the woman worker (Nandini Gunewardena, personal communication).

The situation of women farmworkers must also be related to the general organization of labor forms in the agricultural sector. The growth in the proportion of women employed as agricultural workers occurs at a time when non-traditional agricultural exports are rising, especially for horticultural products. New jobs are created in cut flowers, and in vegetable growing and packing: these are "high-value" products, because they require special handling or some processing, which adds substantive value beyond the farm (Regmi and Gehlar 2001). For employers, recruiting women in these relatively labor-intensive types of production presents a number of advantages. Women are considered more docile than men, and more reliable. The nature of the tasks in the emerging export sectors -- fruits and vegetables in particular -- are generally physically less demanding and do not require the use of heavy machinery, and are therefore considered suitable for women. But in most high-value agriculture, one relatively stable and qualified segment of the workforce coexists with another segment, made of unskilled workers, often recruited at certain points of the year only, and often as casual workers, without a formal contract of employment (Dolan and Sorby 2003: 29). The pressure to maintain such a dualized system even as technological advances have made production less dependent on seasonality, can be explained as the result of globalization and the need to "rationalize" (i.e.,

make more profitable) the management of workforce (Standing 1999). That also explains why the jobs in the "periphery" part of the workforce are classified as seasonal or temporary, even in cases where they may be in fact continuous (ILO-FAO-IUF 2007: 24).

Typically, women are disproportionately over-represented in this "periphery" segment, rather than in the "core" segment of permanently employed workers (Human Rights Watch 2011: 26; du Toit and Ally 2003). Contrary to what has sometimes been asserted (Hakim 1996), this is not because they prefer such "flexibility" in order to reconcile their "reproductive" work in the "care" economy with their "productive" work on the farm: it is because they are easier to exploit, as they have fewer options than men. The overwhelming majority of women employed as farmworkers have only a very low level of education, and they often have moved to this occupation because of a lack of economic opportunities: they are typically land-poor or landless, and have fallen short of options (Dolan and Sorby 2003: 28).

Moreover, wages may be determined in ways that result in a *de facto* discrimination against women. In the "periphery" segment of the workforce, it is not unusual for the remuneration to be calculated on a piece-rate basis, based on how much of the task has been accomplished. This mode of calculation of the wage is advantageous to the employer, because it generally means that the employer shall not provide benefits additional to the wage earned, or social security. It also requires much less supervision: those who work less, or less efficiently, shall simply be paid less. Sometimes the payment is made to a group of workers for a task, in which case the workers themselves, as a collective, monitor the performance. Research in four villages in a the semi-arid Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh conducted during 1984-1997 described this shift from daily wages to piece-rate wages in cotton picking or weeding. At the same time that this change occurred, women more frequently worked in groups (*gumpu*). The combination of these changes resulted in a transformation of relationships between employers and laborers:

Both piece work and *gumpu* work require little or no supervision because unlike daily wage work, output and labor intensity are readily measurable. Thus, these labor arrangements also change the relationship between workers and work as discipline is internalized: workers themselves lengthen the workday, magnify the pace and intensity of work, and monitor each other's performance. As a result, the relationship between "efficient" workers (those who can do a lot of piece work or *gumpu* work) and those who cannot, is also changing by creating a hierarchy of workers. Even as individual wage earnings become more unequal, these labor relationships decrease average wage costs for producers (Ramamurthy 2000: 566).

Though it does result in a form of hierarchization of workers, this mode of calculation of wages

may benefit the most highly performing workers. Indeed, women sometimes benefit, when they can work harder or when they are particularly well suited to the tasks to be performed (du Toit and Ally 2003). However, this mode of calculation of wages generally disfavours women, since the pay is calculated on the basis of male productivity standards. And one consequence of this system is that it encourages workers, especially women, to have their children work with them, in order to perform the task faster: this is one of the reasons why so many children are employed in agriculture. "In order to make a living wage, it is common for the family of a migrant worker - including the children - to work on the farm or plantation. These "helpers" [...] do not figure on the payroll and their existence is not officially recognized by government agencies. Child labour remains a blight on the industry." (ILO-FAO-IUF 2007: 89). About 70 per cent of child labour in the world is in agriculture, representing approximately 132 million girls and boys aged 5–14.

Women also may face specific difficulties in reconciling their responsibilities in the care economy, particularly as regards the minding and educating of children of pre-school age, and their work on farms. The lack of access to child care services in rural areas, combined with poor transportation services, sometimes leads women to bring the children with them on the plantation, as has been documented in the past in the horticultural sector in Punjab (Gill 2001), or in the informal settlements established nearby the plantation during the working season, as in South Africa (Barrientos and Kritzing 2002). Other forms of abuse against women farmworkers include exposure to harmful agricultural chemicals (fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides) and a failure to provide women with protective gear or information on the need for such safeguards; a refusal by employers to hire women who are pregnant, leading seasonal pregnant workers to sometimes hide their pregnancy in order to maintain their access to incomes; and an exposure of women to domestic violence because of their impossibility to move away from the plantation (Human Rights Watch 2011: 29).

A number of the issues that in practice are of particular concern to women, could be addressed in principle through collective bargaining. However, apart from the general problems related to unionization on farms, it is unclear whether unions always pay sufficient attention to these issues that matter especially to women, as they are still predominantly male-dominated.² It may be difficult for male union representatives to fully grasp the gender implications of apparently neutral issues for collective bargaining, including how wages are determined, leave, overtime, or bonus systems since these often in reality impact on women and men differently (ILO-FAO-IUF 2007: 46 ; Olney et al. 2002). Moreover, there is a general under-representation

² Unions are now trying to address this gap: the International Union of Food and Agricultural Workers (IUF), for example, has produced a gender-equality guide and aims at a 40 per cent representation of women on all its committees (FAO-IFAD-ILO 2010: 15).

of women in social dialogue institutions: in South Asia, only 11 per cent of the participants in such institutions were women (Breneman-Pennas and Rueda Catry, 2008).

4. The feminization of agriculture as a challenge to feminism

The obstacles faced by women as independent small-scale food producers are distinct, of course, from the obstacles women face as farmworkers in having access to decent employment. Despite these differences however, both channels through which agriculture is "feminized" present the feminist agenda with similar dilemmas. On the one hand, it is tempting to see the existing obstacles as having to be removed. Removing these obstacles means to ensure access to land to women farmers through titling schemes that identify them as the owners; to improve their ability to have access to credit; to take gender into account in the design of agricultural research and development; and to remove the various forms of discrimination that women face as members of the waged agricultural workforce. It means, in other terms : allowing women to succeed, or fail, just like men may succeed or fail.

This is the favorite strategy of reformist policymakers. But it faces two objections. First, most obviously, it is incomplete. It questions neither the lack of political empowerment of women, nor the existing division of gender roles within households and communities. Economic inclusion appears, *de facto*, as a substitute for both. This is why feminists such as Diane Elson, Rosalind Eyben or Marzia Fontana (Elson 2010; Eyben and Fontana 2011) insist on *redistribution* as having to complement the provision of services that can relieve women from the burden of their household responsibilities and the adoption of measures that recognize the reality of their unremunerated contribution to production and reproduction within the household. In legal terms, this translates into the requirement to challenge stereotypes, i.e. the dominant understanding of gender roles within society, that operates essentially by locating women within the sphere of reproduction and non remunerated "care", whilst the sphere of production and income-generating activities remains dominated by men (Cook and Cusack 2010).

Second, this strategy leads to co-opt women into the project of capitalist accumulation -- "using the bodies of women to produce more", as Raj Patel once stated (personal communication). One branch of feminism, now most clearly associated with Nancy Fraser, denounces the "subterranean elective affinity between feminism and neoliberalism" (Fraser 2009: 114), or what might be called (again paraphrasing Fraser) the "cunning of neoliberal reason", in which the vindication of women's identity rights leads to obliterate the need to challenge class divisions, not just for the benefit of women, but for all those who suffer under capitalist exploitation. Fraser questions the quest for recognition and the accompanying shift to the predominance of cultural issues in "second-wave" feminism -- a shift, she asserts, that is

oblivious of the task of moving towards social justice with which feminism initially was tied. This comes from an unmistakably Western perspective, and Fraser's characterization of feminism certainly cannot be treated as valid through all regions (see Aslan and Gambetti 2011). Yet, she does raise the disturbing question whether an objective alliance is not being formed between many contemporary feminist claims and neoliberalism: both, after all, challenge the weight of traditional authorities, seeking to 'emancipate women from personalized subjection to men, be they fathers, brothers, priests, elders, or husbands', and to replace such subjection by the 'freely chosen' relationships of a market society (Fraser 2009: 114); and there is a way in which the quest of women for economic independence, whether by access to entrepreneurship or access to wages, serves to reinforce the capitalist process of wealth accumulation -- microfinance for women farmers, for instance, bringing them into more capitalized forms of agriculture, and the arrival of women as waged workers on farms exercising a pressure downwards on wages of all farmworkers. We may also express this in the terminology introduced by Douwe van der Ploeg: the dominant strategy, in a way, seeks to "rescue" women from peasantization (assimilated to marginalization), and to allow them to become entrepreneurs or to seek waged employment in the "Empire" of corporate-led, industrialized agriculture (Douwe van der Ploeg 2008: 1-10).

These risks should not be underestimated. However, nor is the present situation tenable. At least equally important are the risks of perpetuating the domination of men over women by relegating women to the household sphere, thus denying women both the possibility to have access to revenues allowing them to resist their husband's demands without having to fear separation, and the opportunity to expand their social relations and the possibilities for emancipation. For all the dangers of dependence resulting from the reliance on markets, and for all the abuse they may face as farmworkers, to many women of the global South, improved access to markets as independent food producers and access to waged employment are still often more desirable than their current relegation to subsistence agriculture and their confinement to household "duties".

With great lucidity, Drucilla Barker notes that feminist studies faces two major contradictions in the current juncture: 'First, there is a contradiction between valorizing work typically associated with women such as caring for children and other sorts of domestic labor, on the one hand, and changing the role that domestic labor plays in creating and maintaining women's subordinate status, on the other. Second, there is a contradiction between the emancipatory potential of gender equality in the workforce and the exploitation and inequality associated with the global feminization of labor' (Barker 2005). In order to overcome these contradictions, the centrality of *choice* should be reaffirmed. Unless we content ourselves with a purely formal conception of choice, however, this requires that various options are open, that are all equally realistic and

that all represent an improvement in comparison to the existing *status quo*. We must both ensure that family farming focused on satisfying the needs of the household and the local community is possible and adequately supported, and that those seeking to switch to producing for the markets have the possibility to do so -- and whomever is the producer, woman or or man, should be able to make that choice. Nor should women be denied the possibility to be employed as waged workers on larger production units, in conditions that provide decent work -- free from discrimination and abuse, and with the guarantee of living wages equal to those of men. The struggle of many collectives of women to be allowed to practice a form of farming that is agroecological, based on a limited use of external inputs, and that primarily aims at feeding their families and communities, is entirely respectable, and indeed it deserves far more support than it has received hitherto from governments and international agencies. But that choice should not be made by default. It should not be the result of the lack of any viable alternative: it should be free and voluntary, rather than a flight away from markets that are shaped by men and for men, and away from a world of farm labour that has built its recent "successes" on the subordination and exploitation of women.

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FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: A CRITICAL DIALOGUE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE PAPER SERIES

Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue

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A fundamentally contested concept, food sovereignty has — as a political project and campaign, an alternative, a social movement, and an analytical framework — barged into global agrarian discourse over the last two decades. Since then, it has inspired and mobilized diverse publics: workers, scholars and public intellectuals, farmers and peasant movements, NGOs and human rights activists in the North and global South. The term has become a challenging subject for social science research, and has been interpreted and reinterpreted in a variety of ways by various groups and individuals. Indeed, it is a concept that is broadly defined as the right of peoples to democratically control or determine the shape of their food system, and to produce sufficient and healthy food in culturally appropriate and ecologically sustainable ways in and near their territory. As such it spans issues such as food politics, agroecology, land reform, biofuels, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), urban gardening, the patenting of life forms, labor migration, the feeding of volatile cities, ecological sustainability, and subsistence rights.

Sponsored by the [Program in Agrarian Studies at Yale University](#) and the [Journal of Peasant Studies](#), and co-organized by [Food First](#), [Initiatives in Critical Agrarian Studies \(ICAS\)](#) and the [International Institute of Social Studies \(ISS\)](#) in The Hague, as well as the Amsterdam-based [Transnational Institute \(TNI\)](#), the conference “Food Sovereignty: A Critical Dialogue” will be held at Yale University on September 14–15, 2013. The event will bring together leading scholars and political activists who are advocates of and sympathetic to the idea of food sovereignty, as well as those who are skeptical to the concept of food sovereignty to foster a critical and productive dialogue on the issue. The purpose of the meeting is to examine what food sovereignty might mean, how it might be variously construed, and what policies (e.g. of land use, commodity policy, and food subsidies) it implies. Moreover, such a dialogue aims at exploring whether the subject of food sovereignty has an “intellectual future” in critical agrarian studies and, if so, on what terms.

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