



GENDER AND SOCIAL EQUITY OF POST-HARVEST MANAGEMENT OF CEREALS IN BENIN

Introduction

Gender inequalities persist despite the increased recognition of women's rights. The improvement of the economic and social well-being of African women can have positive outcomes that may benefit society as a whole (UNDP, 2016).

In sub-Saharan Africa, women constitute the majority of the agricultural labour force and the division of agricultural work varies considerably depending on gender. According to Fourn (2011), in the informal sector, one in three women work in agriculture. It is essentially women who are dealing with post-harvest management aspects in rural areas. However, recognition of this position contrasts with the lack of consideration of gender roles and relations and social equity in the innovation process in agriculture on the one hand, and with practical measures for improving livelihoods and reducing poverty of women, on the other hand.

Achieving sustainable and equitable human development is subject to the consolidation of the economic, social, and environmental resilience of women and men, to improve their productivity (UNDP, 2016). Therefore, this note emphasizes the need for post-harvest management policies best suited to the gender realities and which promote social equity through accountability of all stakeholders. Furthermore, these policies need to fulfil commitments in terms of planning, budgeting, and gender-sensitive implementation.



Key Messages

- Post-harvest activities (processing, marketing) in the cereals value chains are normally done by women, with some differentiation in their levels of involvement depending on cultural background and age.
- In the agricultural sector two major instruments govern the reduction of disparities in gender and social equity, namely the Gender Action Plan of the Agricultural Sector (PAGSA) and the Strategic Plan for the Revival of the Agricultural Sector (PSRSA).
- There are action plans for gender promotion in the agricultural sector, but due to a lack of adequate funding, these are not translated into practical, goal-orientated measures. Thus, inequalities of gender and social equity issues persist in Benin and the disparities are growing in the post-harvest management sub-sector.
- Gender characteristics are not taken into account when developing post-harvest technologies, resulting in “blind-type” innovations. This is a disadvantage for women who are mostly involved in post-harvest management.
- There is little specialized advice on post-harvest management. In addition, women have limited access to the Agricultural Council, specifically regarding post-harvest management.
- A reduction in gender differentiation and the promotion of social equity in post-harvest management activities will probably improve the conditions of vulnerable groups and women in particular.

Gender and Social Equity in Post-Harvest Management in Benin

What do we know?

In Benin, the notion of gender in policies and programs has evolved especially since the advent of the democratic period. Since the Basic Law of the People's Republic of Benin and the Constitution of Benin in 1990, all of the strategic directions of development in the country include the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women. Apart from the Basic Law, this development is reflected in three national frameworks that define gender and equity orientations in all sectors in Benin, namely:

The **National Policy for the Promotion of Women (PNFP)** of 2001 (Houinsa & Amadou, 2008) aims to improve the living conditions of rural people by giving women and men equal opportunities to participate in the development process of Benin. The National Policy for Promotion of Gender (PNPG) of 2009 is multi-sectoral action plan that has its overall goal as the achievement of equality and equity between men and women by 2025.

The agricultural sector has two major instruments that govern the reduction of disparities in gender and social equity and these are the Gender Action Plan of the Agricultural Sector (PAGSA) and The **Strategic Plan for the Revival of the Agricultural Sector (PSRSA)** of 2011 (MAEP, 2011). The PSRSA is the current national plan which aims to improve the performance of agricultural production systems to ensure food sovereignty. Cereal value chains considered in this plan are corn and rice, which are the most consumed by the population.

The goal of improving the processing and storage of cereals in the PSRSA will not be achieved if gender issues are not considered, especially since women constitute a significant capital that dominates the marketing and processing of food products. Better still, the female-to-male ratio is 0.88, reflecting a significant economic participation of women.

Women are mainly employed in the agricultural sector, with only 27% of women employed in non-agricultural sectors. However, the estimated income of women compared to men is 0.68 and only 16% of the area sown for cereals are owned by women (Djinadou, 2016).

There is a clear division of labour between men and women in post-harvest management activities in Benin. Generally, post-harvest activities are mainly reserved for women, with some differentiation in participation based on ethnicity and age.

In the cereal value chains, very few activities require the participation of men. The main post-harvest operations (shelling, storage, conservation, ginning, winnowing, etc.) are mostly carried out by women. In some instances, men working in these value chains are paid by women, thus increasing the cost price of products processed by women. The activities that men engage in and receive compensation for by the women mainly entail service activities like the transportation of cereals from the field to the home and from the home to the market or the place of processing. Water and wood are also transported to their processing locations. In addition, the grinding of the cereals at the mill is an activity only performed by men.

Existing Policy Frameworks on Post-Harvest Management

Despite many documents highlighting the importance of gender equality and the existence of favourable national and international laws, social equity and inequalities persist in Benin and the disparities are increasing in the post-harvest management sub-sector. Several deficiencies limiting the effective integration of gender in the agricultural sector have been identified.

Policy documents

There is no policy document or strategy specific to post-harvest management. In addition, there are no specific chapters on post-harvest management in existing policy documents or strategies in the agricultural sector. Despite government efforts to institutionalize gender decentralized structures in the agricultural sector, no direct or visible

effects on reducing gender inequalities and inequities in post-harvest management are observed.

The institutions created for the promotion of women, for example the National Institute for the Promotion of Women, do not coordinate their efforts with sectoral ministries. In the PSRSA, the diagnosis of the agricultural sector did not highlight the inequalities in the systems of social differentiation due to the lack of data disaggregated by gender. Thus, apart from the declarations of intent and the announcement effects, the PSRSA did not carry out a thorough analysis of gender or planned a proper strategy to take into account the gender dimension in the post-harvest management sub-sector.

Technical and financial partners

In order to ensure the institutionalization of gender in the agricultural sector, technical and financial partners (TFP) supported the development of several policies and national strategies of gender, followed by gender action plans. However, implementation of these action plans is not translated into real actions in order to achieve the goal, due to lack of funding, which makes the intervention of the TFP ineffective.

By way of example, the Danish cooperation has supported the Ministry of Agriculture to develop the policy document on women in the rural sector, the PNPG, and the gender action plan in the agricultural sector. Similarly, the Belgian cooperation has supported the same Ministry for updating the gender action plan by anchoring it to the PSRSA. Unfortunately, a limited number of activities listed in these action plans is being considered by the TFP as an action of sovereignty of the country. Non-funding of such activities would be perceived as a disavowal of sovereignty over gender issues, especially in post-harvest management.

The practical measures for the mobilization of resources needed for the implementation of the policies should have been taken into account during the planning stages when responsibilities were being allocated to different stakeholders.

Research and extension methods

Failure to account for gender specificities does not allow for the accurate identification of priorities and relevant resources that women and other social groups need. This leads to researchers developing “blind-type” technologies. Women are disadvantaged by these “blind-type” technologies as some equipment developed by the researchers do not take into account some important feminine features they want. As a result, the introduction of these types of equipment developed by research aggravates gender inequalities.

The prices of equipment likely to alleviate the arduousness of post-harvest activities are often too high for women, which limits their access to these technologies, thus reducing the opportunity to increase their income. Dissemination approaches of technologies used by extension services, both public and private, are also directed towards the heads of households as primary beneficiaries. As a result, they do not benefit directly from the assistance and advice provided by research and extension services, because of various socio-cultural barriers.

The introduction of innovations and technologies for post-harvest management, which is a privileged area of women, should pay special attention to the practical and strategic needs of women in this field; for example, the reduction of the workload in operations carried out mainly by women on the basis of the capacity assessment, net-working time, and opportunities for increasing their income. But the reality is that, on the contrary, gender imbalances are increasing because of insufficient operationalization of gender.

Proposals and Recommendations

Proposals for state actors

- Include post-harvest management as a chapter in the new development plan of the agricultural sector (PDSA 2016-2021).
- Perform a gender diagnosis of the agricultural sector for more equitable policies and strategies.
- Consistently fund the gender action plans developed.
- Facilitate women’s access to adequate cost effective post-harvest technologies.
- Enhance the gender sensitive programming capacities in the decentralized structures of the State.
- Develop and implement a post-harvest management programme sensitive to gender and social equity.
- Develop gender-sensitive equipment that effectively reduces the arduousness of purely feminine activities.

Proposals for technical and financial partners

- Observe the commitments of the Busan partnership by strengthening the implementation of the principles of development effectiveness (national ownership, alignment, multi-actor approach, accountability, etc.).

- Provide technical and financial support to the gender-sensitive planning and budgeting process, giving special consideration to disaggregated agricultural statistics (support for the implementation of gender action plans).
- Support training and awareness activities on gender and the integration of social equity in post-harvest management.
- Support the dissemination of post-harvest technologies that are gender-sensitive and cost-effective.

Proposals for non-state actors

- Play a supportive monitoring role in post-harvest management, as to ensure the development and distribution of gender sensitive post-harvest equipment and technologies that rely on mechanisms that facilitate access for women.
- Advocate for gender and social equity, both in national and local policies and in post-harvest activities at all level.

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The Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN) is an autonomous regional stakeholder driven policy research, analysis and implementation network that was formally established by Ministers of Agriculture from Eastern and Southern Africa in 1997. FANRPAN was borne out of the need for comprehensive policies and strategies required to resuscitate agriculture. FANRPAN is mandated to work in all African countries and currently has activities in 17 countries namely Angola, Benin, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

FANRPAN Regional Secretariat

141 Cresswell Road, Weavind Park 0184, Private Bag X2087, Silverton 014, Pretoria, South Africa
Telephone: +27 12 804 2966. Facsimile: +27 12 804 0600. Email: policy@fanrpan.org. Website: www.fanrpan.org

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