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Gender Impact on Living Standard — A Case Study of Druze Farming Systems in Lebanon

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Abstract

In Lebanon, most investments are channelled into the sectors of trade and financial services, while agriculture and industry are largely neglected. As a consequence the agricultural sector suffers from persistent structural problems, the gap between rural and urban areas is continuously widening and especially young people are migrating to the cities in search for employment. Women play a crucial role as producers of food, managers of natural resources and executors of household food security. Nevertheless, they face numerous cultural and religious constraints and their role as a human resource is largely undervalued due to the lack of gender desegregated data.

A comparative analysis of 30 small-scale farms with male and female household heads in 5 Druze villages in the Chouf mountains, allowed for the specification of the problems of local farming systems and their general causes, the contribution of women to income generating activities and their constraints. It also yielded information on differences in living standard, linkages within the rural community, strategies of successful and less successful farmers, interactions between different activities and their effects on the families socio-economic situation under special consideration of gender aspects.

The results indicate that major constraints for both men and women are limited access to resources, specifically high costs of inputs, low prices of outputs and lack of access to credit and marketing facilities. Nevertheless, female-headed households are significantly more affected by poverty since women face numerous additional constraints, like lack of land title, use of very low levels of technology and restricted mobility due to prevailing socio-cultural norms. Farms with higher economic success have better access to assets, specifically cash (pensions, liquid assets like livestock), and human capital (education, involvement and recognition of women). They have more choice and flexibility in the use of their resources, (alternative sources of income, diversified farming systems), and possess a greater ability to cope with structural problems and seasonal fluctuations.

Keywords: Farming systems, gender, Lebanon, living standard