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Agricultural Intensification, Labour Allocation and Social Change in Syria

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Abstract

Syrian agriculture is a main pillar in the economy of the country, and population growth is among the highest in the region. Thus agricultural development during the last few decades was directed towards intensification of production using improved varieties, greater use of fertiliser and other inputs, introducing irrigation, diversifying production, reducing fallow area, and using mechanisation. As concomitants to intensification, were greatly affected the labour use and allocation in Northwest Syria. New land use patterns have emerged, increasing the volume of “traditional labour jobs” and developing new demands for “un-traditional labour jobs” impacting the gender balance of agricultural labour. A descriptive model of agriculture and the gendered aspects of agricultural labour and the influencing factors together with the labour management and organisation are discussed in the paper. The methodology used is a combination of secondary data, informal and formal surveys. The results illustrate how the household related activities have been greatly modified. The social system has been modified based on economic needs in societies where perceptions about working outside the household boundaries are rapidly changing. Empirical observations provide contributions to the scientific debate on social transformation based on economic changes, impacting household economies. Improvements in productivity and yields are also the result of mechanisation that has contributed to the migration of rural population mainly male from rural to urban areas seeking better work opportunities, leaving women and children in villages to work in agriculture as family or hired labour. The increase in labour demand in agriculture concerns mainly a feminized labour force performing manual operations. The picture emerging from the discussion of this paper in relation to poverty, particularly that of rural women is complex. It is considered even alarming when we look at the workload left to them after the migration of men. But a gleam of hope appears from the local women’s networks for labour organisation and management, which constitute a niche for women’s concerns. Policy and other improvements of the conditions of women could be conveyed through these channels where important social capital is embedded, given that rural development specialists establish the link between these networks and decision-makers.

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