



Tropentag, September 17-19, 2018, Ghent

“Global food security and food safety:
The role of universities”

Translation of Gender Awareness into Practice: Experiences from a Nutrition-Sensitive Agriculture Project in Yayu, Southwestern Ethiopia

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Abstract

Women in sub-Saharan Africa play a key role for agricultural production and are usually overburdened with work. While issues of gender equality in agriculture have caught increasing attention, the adoption and implementation of gender policies and project agendas at local level remain a key challenge. This research aims to investigate gendered workload and labour division in Ethiopia and to identify possible pathways to improve the status quo. In addition to gender-disaggregated household survey data (n=334), this research uses a qualitative approach, including 30 role-playing-games, 45 semi-structured interviews and four focus group discussions with farmers and officials in four villages in southwestern Ethiopia.

Research results indicate that gender awareness, gained through trainings and media, is not yet translated into daily practices. Despite a high awareness of women's workload among both, men and women, the division of labour tasks is highly gendered and remains unfair. Women work up to five hours per day more than their husbands. While female participation in male-dominated tasks are the norm, male participation in reproductive labour is a cultural taboo. Although all women expressed the desire to be more supported by men, they hardly had any own vision of what could alleviate their workload. However, both male and female participants identified increased male participation in vegetable production as a possible pathway to achieve a fairer distribution of labour. While Ethiopian policies and project interventions address gender inequality at household level, severe problems with the implementation process were identified. Apart from a general lack of staff, the gender knowledge and sensitivity of extension staff is low. While officials indicated that more gender trainings are needed, female farmers perceived trainings as additional workload while not bringing any benefits to them. More research is needed on how gender policies can be translated more effectively at local level in order to induce lasting change of habits.

Keywords: Ethiopia, female workload, gender, policy implementation, social change