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The Impact of Household Head’s Gender on Food Security in Syria

KINDAH IBRAHIM, TEREZA PILAROVA, MIROSLAVA BAVOROVA

Czech Univeristy of Life Sciences Prague, Faculty of Tropical AgriSciences, Department of Economics and Development, Czech Republic

Abstract

Food security and eradicating hunger are gaining more attention from the global community. Together with gender equity, they form a priority on the development agendas of many countries including Syria. Entering its eighth year, Syrian crisis has severely affected agricultural sector and food production, leaving what was once a “self-sufficient” food-producing nation under the threat of food insecurity. UN reports indicate a significant disproportion of females over males in active population resulting from the conflict. With little evidence on the role of household-head’s gender in achieving food security, the question that arises is if female headship can successfully replace that of males? To close this gap, our main objective is to examine the effect of household-head’s gender on food security.

Primary data were obtained from a 2017 survey conducted by the Syrian National Agricultural Policy Centre. Some total of 1381 households were interviewed in 12 governorates. Food security is estimated based on the World Food Programme’s Food Consumption Score (FCS). To estimate gender, we used the household-head’s gender to reflect the decision-making process for agricultural production and food expenditure. In our sample, 72 households were female-headed, and in 40 of them, women were the “bread-winners”. Taking the FCS threshold, only 0.6 % of households were “food-insecure”, 6.6 % were on “borderline” and 92.8 % had “acceptable” food security level. We used the OLS regression to depict the effect of headship’s gender on food security status, other variables such as land size and family size were included in the model. Findings suggest that being a female-headed household will decrease the FCS ($p < 0.05$), other factors showed no or little significant effect.

The analysis provides interesting results regarding the effect of gender on food security. They show, that only limited number of households are female-headed. Furthermore, they reveal that female-headed households are more food secure. The results provide first evidence, that there is a potential, not yet fully used, of female as farms-heads for increasing food security in Syria. In future research, reasons for low share of women as households’ head should be further investigated to understand the problem more in-depth.

Keywords: Agriculture, food security, gender, household head, Syria