

A note on women and animal traction technology in Ethiopia

by

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Abstract

Women must be integrated in the development process of any country if economic and social growth are to be achieved. Development requires the use of material and human resources. As the productive use of male and female human resources is a key factor in development, more attention should be given to the role women play, and could be playing in Ethiopia. Use of animal-drawn implements such as plows, harrows and carts, could enable women to be more productive, but shortages of implements, poor extension services, and lack of purchasing power limit their adoption. Development agencies should work towards solving these problems.

Introduction

Women comprise about 50% of the rural work force in Ethiopia. They work much longer each day than men because they are involved in both agricultural and household tasks. Women's agricultural tasks include clearing fields, weeding, harvesting, threshing and transport of crops from the fields to the homestead and markets. Household activities include transporting water and firewood, preparing food and looking after children. Yet these activities tend to be undervalued, and women's economic contributions to the household are not appreciated.

One way to raise the status of women, and to enable them to play a role in the development of the country, would be to provide them with labour-saving animal-drawn implements.

Animal traction implements

Several private and governmental organisations in Ethiopia are involved in the development, import and manufacture of animal-drawn implements. Among these the Arsi Rural Development Unit (ARDU), the Institute of Agricultural Research (IAR) and the Rural Technology Promotion Department (RTPD) have undertaken extensive programmes to develop and test different types of mouldboard plows, harrows and animal-drawn carts. The plows were produced by metal-working factories; the harrows and carts by local workshops.

Promotion of these implements mainly involves giving demonstrations and training to farmers and

extension agents. Uptake has been low, with farmer interest in the new seedbed preparation implements only being significant in areas with light soils.

In addition to reducing the time needed to plow and prepare a seedbed, the mouldboard plow buries weeds and the spike tooth harrow drags weeds to the edges of the field. Both implements reduce the women's tasks of land clearing and weeding.

Animal-drawn carts

Women traditionally transport seed, fertiliser, farm tools, agricultural produce, water, firewood, etc, on their heads, backs or shoulders. Animal-drawn carts not only reduce the effort of transport, but also enable larger quantities to be transported in a given time. Use of a donkey and cart can increase a woman's transport efficiency more than 20-fold.

Factors limiting adoption

The main technical and socioeconomic factors that limit the development, manufacture and wide adoption of improved animal-drawn implements are:

- shortage of implements due to underproduction
- lack of coordination between ministries and other organisations engaged in development, manufacture, marketing and promotion
- limited purchasing power of smallholders
- lack of technical skilled manpower
- shortage of transport, and hence limited opportunities to visit farmers' fields to demonstrate or give training on implement use.

Conclusion

The full integration of women in development will take place only when the human resources that women represent are no longer wasted. In developing countries such as Ethiopia, most women work from dawn to midnight. Introduction of improved animal-drawn implements can dramatically increase women's productivity in agricultural and transport tasks. This should be considered in government and NGO policies.