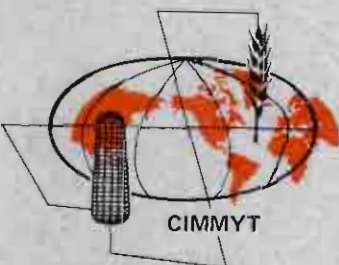


NOTES ON THE ROLE OF RURAL PAKISTANI  
WOMEN IN FARMING IN THE NORTHWEST  
FRONTIER PROVINCE

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It is gradually being accepted that women in Pakistan make a direct contribution in the farming sector. The extent and nature of their contribution, however, is not fully known to development planners. In the past, very little socio-economic research has been directed toward the role of rural Pakistani women: as a consequence, their participation in agricultural development has been ignored.

This short article is an attempt to enhance understanding of the general role that women in the NWFP play in farming. The data used are taken from the maize economic survey study undertaken in selected parts of NWFP in 1975-76. This study was organized by CIMMYT in collaboration with the NWFP Department of Agriculture. Data were gathered from 240 farmers.

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This short note is an elaboration of a small piece from the overall research manuscript by Dr. M. Ashraf, titled "Maize in the Small Farming Production Systems of the North-West Frontier Province of Pakistan". Support for this research study was received from CIMMYT, Ford Foundation, NWFP Department of Agriculture and Maize and Millets Research Institute, Pirsabak. The author is particularly indebted to Donald Winkelmann and Richard Perrin for their continued support during all phases of research work.

Dr. Ashraf received his Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics at the University of Massachusetts in 1974. He was employed by CIMMYT during the period when the study was undertaken and report was written. He is now with the USAID in Pakistan. Views reflected here are not necessarily those of CIMMYT or USAID.

Several questions were included which permit inferences about women's contribution to production, especially as it relates to the production of maize. Readers may be cautioned that the data were gathered by male agricultural extension workers through interviews with male farmers. It is, therefore, likely that the women's contribution is underestimated, as farmers do not readily volunteer information about women of their families.

Farming activities examined for the role of rural women are a combination of activities performed in the house plus those performed in the fields. Because of traditional Islamic values the location of a farm job is an important variable influencing participation of women. According to these customs, women are not expected to be seen barefaced outside their homes. Some ethnic groups such as Syeds, Rajputs and Pakhtuns observe these norms very strictly while other ethnic groups like Jats and Arians observe such taboos less restrictively and let their women come out of "Purdah" to assist in field chores. The parts of NWFP where this study was undertaken include the districts of Mardan and Peshawar and the division of Hazara. The inhabitants of Peshawar and Mardan are mostly Pakhtun but those in Hazara are ethnically mixed and more liberal in their behavior.

Table 1 includes eight typical farm activities pertaining to crop and livestock enterprises. The first three activities are related to the handling of grains after they are transported from the fields. A typical farmer in NWFP grows about 4 grain crops including wheat, maize, beans and pulses. He then stores the produce in sufficient quantities to meet the year round needs of the family. Food and seed grains are usually stored together in ordinary clay or wooden bins. The clay bins of 100 to 600 kilos capacity, are constructed by women.

The activities concerned with livestock include feeding and milking dairy animals. Feeding activities usually include: pasturing, harvesting green forage from the fields, chaffing, processing feed concentrates and manger feeding. For purposes of this paper the first three items are not included since they are usually handled by men. The remaining items are usually done inside the family compound. Similarly, milking dairy animals is done inside the compound. Some other daily milk handling activities, which are not included here, but which are always done by women, are pasteurization, fermenting milk for Dehi (yogurt) and processing butter.

The remaining three production activities refer to harvesting, shelling and crop cultural practices. Harvesting of maize includes removal of ears and husking, which are done in the field; and shelling which is performed both in the fields and inside the home. Larger harvests are usually shelled in the fields through cooperative effort by the neighboring farmers. Crop cultural practices like thinning and hoeing are obviously performed in the fields.

Having discussed the nature and location of various farm work activities, the data given in Table 1 may now be examined. Rural women are actively involved in all farm-related activities handled inside their homes.

Table 1. Participation of Women in Various Farm Work Activities in Selected Tehsils of N.W.F.P., Pakistan (Percentage of Families)

Farm Work Activity	Hazara Division			Mardan Dist.		Peshawar District		Average
	Hari-pur	Abbot-tabad	Mansehra/Batagram	Swabi	Mardan	Char-sadda	Newshe- ra/Pesh- awar	
No. of Sample Farms	32	44	44	26	34	26	34	240
1. Cleaning Seed	81	59	70	62	62	58	71	66
2. Drying Grains	47	73	80	46	79	69	71	68
3. Selling Grains	9	0	5	0	0	0	0	2
4. Feeding Livestock	28	52	39	46	76	58	56	50
5. Milking Dairy Animals	34	52	32	62	91	92	100	64
6. Harvesting and Husking Crop	28	55	39	0	0	0	15	23
7. Shelling Cobs	22	25	32	65	38	38	59	38
8. Thinning/Weeding	16	27	41	0	0	0	0	15

This is true for all ethnic groups, as represented by regions, irrespective of differences in tenure, farm size and family size. One exception to this rule is observed for the marketing or disposal of surplus grains. Farmers alone make all decisions pertaining to period of disposal, place of disposal, person to whom farm produce is sold and prices obtained. The marginal contribution of women for marketing grains is in determining the surplus quantity available for sale, taking grain out of the containers, and helping to put grain in gunny sacks if marketing is done in the town market. These aspects were, however, not investigated formally. While 18 percent of the sample farmers in Hazara, 37 percent in Mardan district, and 20 percent in Peshawar district reported selling grain, no women in Mardan or Peshawar district were involved as selling parties. In Hazara Division a few families (4 percent) did report that women do the marketing job.

In contrast, about two thirds of the farmers reported that women dry and clean grain. Drying grain is a particularly tedious job. Once or twice a year grain is sundried by manually transporting it to the houseyard or roof top and back to the storage containers. Women usually do this job. Families in Hazara usually dry their grain on the roof top, while in Mardan and Peshawar the job is done in houseyard to avoid exposing women to outsiders.

Differences in the contribution of women are not evident from district to district in those activities which are undertaken within the family compound. Women seem to contribute less to livestock activities and to shelling grain in Hazara than in Mardan and Peshawar districts. Perhaps this difference arises because the more labor intensive agriculture of these two districts, where virtually all maize land is irrigated, absorbs virtually all

of the labor of the men, requiring that the women contribute more to the livestock activities. This is in contrast with Hazara, where the degree of irrigation is far lower.

Differences in the contribution of women are most notable in harvesting and husking maize and in thinning and weeding activities. These activities are carried out in the field, outside of the family compound. Here, the more conservative behavior of the ethnic groups of Mardan and Peshawar districts is quite evident and virtually no women are reported to engage in this field work. This is in marked contrast to Hazara Division, where the ethnic mixture makes for less conservative behavior and where roughly one third of the farmers interviewed reported that women are involved in field work.

In conclusion, it can be said that rural women in NWFP play a selective role in farming. There is a division of labor among men and women; men doing the field jobs and women contributing to farm jobs which can be done inside the family compound or which relate to care of livestock and, in some areas only, on jobs involving field work.

