



Rwanda's gendered agricultural transformation: A mixed-method study on the rural labour market, wage gap and care penalty



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ABSTRACT

Rwanda's development policy focuses on socio-economic transformation with a specific focus on the agriculture sector and gender equality. Through the commercialization of agriculture, employment opportunities inside and outside the sector are expected to be created. Both women and men are integrated into this new agriculture production system. Based on a mixed-method approach, this paper provides insights into current transformations of the rural labour market. The feminization debates build the theoretical background. The empirical results show that wage employment is created almost exclusively in the informal sector, typically for casual on-field agriculture workers. It is apparent that for the same work, women earn approximately 20% less than men. Women play an important role in the rural labour market while carrying the main bulk of reproductive work. The agricultural transformation is gendered, and due to reproductive work, women do not have the same opportunities in the paid labour market.

1. Introduction

The rural labour market, especially with regard to rural wage employment, has recently garnered worldwide interest. Through continuous commercialization of agriculture, as well as ongoing population growth and an increase in land scarcity, rural wage employment is becoming increasingly more important (Headey & Jayne, 2014; Holden & Otsuka, 2014; Pritchard, 2013). Globally, almost half of the population lives in rural areas. In sub-Saharan Africa, the rural population accounts for over 60% of the total, and in Rwanda, the number is over 70% (World Bank, 2016a). As globalization has grown, more women have been integrated into the paid labour market in sub-Saharan Africa (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2016). However, they still perform the bulk of unpaid and reproductive labour. This leads to a gender segmentation of the labour market (Razavi, Arza, Braunstein, Cook, & Goulding, 2012).

Internationally, due to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, unpaid care work and decent work for women and men have moved closer to the focal point of the international aid and research agenda (United Nations, 2015). However, the African rural labour market is fragmented, and few studies have been carried out (Oya & Pontara, 2015). So far, investigations have confirmed that women are overrepresented in low income and informal work arrangements in East Africa's non-traditional export industries (Barrientos, Dolan, & Tallontire, 2003; Food and

Agricultural Organization (FAO) and International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2010; ILO, 2010). Similarly, women are employed as casual on-field agricultural workers by wealthier households or more commercialized farmers in Rwanda (Ansoms, 2010; Petit & Rizzo, 2015). The rural livelihood is complex; most small-scale farmers still pursue multi-strategy livelihoods, which means they do self-employed farm work as well as pursue wage employment, mostly on a daily or seasonal basis (Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2010; Oya & Pontara, 2015). Official statistics typically use simple tools that are not able to capture the complexity of rural livelihoods. Because official statistics on rural employment are often incomplete and the participation of women is often underestimated, additional research is required (Doss, 2011; Oya, 2013).

Previous research on rural wage employment has focused exclusively on income-generating activities and has not included reproductive work, which is essential for a gender-sensitive analysis of the labour market (Hirway and Jayne, 2014). Moreover, social and economic transformations are taking place simultaneously and therefore must be addressed together (Perrons, 2015). In response to the research gap, this paper follows up on previous related discussions but goes further. The purpose is to map the rural labour market of the Northern Province of Rwanda from a more holistic perspective with a mixed-method approach, where self-employed farming, wage employment, and reproductive work are taken into account. This is a unique

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strategy for Rwanda, since such detailed data have not been available for this context.

To understand the complexity of the socio-economic transformation and the rural labour market from a gender perspective, it is necessary to begin with a discussion of the ongoing and controversial feminization of poverty.¹ Especially in the scientific field of development studies, this discussion has stimulated further feminist debates — among others, the feminization of the labour market, the feminization of agriculture, and the feminization of responsibilities and obligations. This discussion has stimulated further feminization debates, especially in the scientific field of development studies (Chant, 2006; Chant, 2010; McLanahan & Kelly, 2006; Momsen, 2008; Pearce, 1978). Three debates are at the focus of the analysis: the feminization of the labour market, the feminization of agriculture, and the feminization of responsibilities and obligations. Based on empirical data from the Northern Province of Rwanda, these three debates are critical as we examine the rural labour market in this region in depth.

1.1. State-driven agriculture transformation and the rural labour market

A small, mountainous, landlocked country (Antonites & Haguma, 2011), Rwanda has an equatorial climate and the highest population density in Africa (Huggins, 2014a). Approximately 72% of the inhabitants are employed in the agricultural sector, contributing 33% of the GDP and making this sector the backbone of the economy (World Bank, 2016b). Good climate and topographical conditions make Rwanda's agricultural sector a major player in economic expansion and a key to sustainable development and the improvement of livelihoods (Booth & Golooba-Mutebi, 2014). The World Bank (2013) describes increasing agricultural productivity as the main driving force for the Rwandan economic growth that has taken place during the last decade. Rwanda's economy grew at a rate of 7.1% on average from 2011 to 2014 (World Bank, 2016c). With this growth, it is not surprising that the Government of Rwanda (GoR) focuses on agriculture policies.

In 2000, the “Rwanda Vision 2020” programme was launched. One of the pillars of this vision is to lead subsistence-oriented agriculture into a productive, high value, market-oriented agriculture (Republic of Rwanda, 2000). To reach this goal, the government of Rwanda formulated the “Strategic Plan for the Transformation of Agriculture” and the “Crop Intensification Program (CIP).” Rapid growth of the agriculture sector through commercialization is the main intention of CIP. The policy focuses on the selection of crops, the shift from inter-cropping to mono-cropping, and the use of quality inputs and land consolidation (Clay, 2017; Huggins, 2014a). The government works through agriculture cooperatives to reach small-scale farmers, and cooperative members benefit from subsidized inputs and training (Ansoms, Marijnen, Cioffo, & Murison, 2017; Republic of Rwanda, 2012b; Republic of Rwanda, 2013a; Verhofstadt & Maertens, 2014). Cooperative membership has a positive impact on a farm household's income level, but poor farmers with limited access to land and finances are excluded and do not have the opportunity to profit from government subsidies (Verhofstadt & Maertens, 2015). According to Huggins (2014a), cooperatives are also seen as the government's long arm, and only farmers who adhere to the given programme benefit fully. Rwanda follows a neoliberal approach, where subsistence-oriented agriculture production is seen as underdeveloped and economy of scale and export-oriented agriculture production are the goals for prosperity and poverty reduction (Ansoms & Claessens, 2011; Huggins, 2014a; Tobias, Mair, & Barbosa-Leiker, 2013). The government of Rwanda argues that this process should go hand in hand with employment creation inside and outside the agriculture sector (Republic of Rwanda, 2013b).

¹ The term feminization of poverty focuses on gender differences in poverty rates. Feminization describes both the unequal state of men's and women's poverty rates and the processes by which women's risk of poverty has increasingly exceeded that of men's (McLanahan & Kelly, 2006).

The present agriculture policies, especially the CIP, are criticized by different researchers. Some note that only a small part of the population is profiting from this transformation because the expected employment creation is limited, especially outside the primary sector (Ansoms et al., 2017; Cioffo, Ansoms, & Murison, 2016). Huggins (2014a) and Lund (2016) argue that Rwanda's agricultural policies are effective for some crops because the yield has tripled, but at the same time, small-scale farmers are depending more on food purchases and market forces, which leads to greater vulnerability. Cioffo et al. (2016) go a step further and indicate that the CIP has a negative effect on small-scale farmers in other ways: First, poorer farmers with less access to quality inputs do not profit in the same way as medium- and higher-income farmers. Second, the mainly top down implementation of the programme faces some bureaucratic obstacles, and this has a negative impact on ecological and social sustainability. According to Dawson, Martin, and Sikor (2016), only a small and wealthy group profits from the current agricultural policies; landless and poorer households do not benefit from this green revolution. Therefore, Cioffo et al. (2016) conclude that CIP generates disparities. Furthermore, Ansoms et al. (2017) show that there is a mismatch between the government's expectations in terms of the effectiveness of the agricultural production, the related pressure on the small-scale farmers and the realities at the local level. Lund (2016) notes that when small-scale farmers are told how and what to cultivate, various forms of resistance may occur in the transformation process. Diao, Hazell, and Thurlow (2010) promote alternative growth strategies rather than the commercialization of a small-scale farmer's household in Africa, especially because agricultural-led growth has failed in many African countries. Huggins (2014a) notes that the Rwandan agricultural policy was not tested extensively in the field and that the priority crop programme was implemented after only a short testing phase. Connected with the fact that women are mainly in charge of household food security and stable food production, the transformation to priority crops, which are mostly cash crops, has had a direct impact on women's lives (Doss, 2002). However, the political effort of the Rwandan government aims not only to intensify agricultural production but also to integrate into the export market, especially with the new export crops. However, this appears to be difficult. While the Rwandan government gives significant attention to international and regional investors in commercial agricultural businesses by establishing entrepreneur-friendly conditions, such as infrastructure and appropriate legislations (Booth & Golooba-Mutebi, 2014), the export of horticultural crops declined in 2015 (National Agricultural Export Development Board, 2015).

Furthermore, the Rwandan population is still growing (World Bank, 2016b), and there is a higher demand for non-agricultural employment. In fact, every year, 200,000 jobs should be created to integrate the youth into the labour market (Republic of Rwanda, 2013b). According to the newest “Poverty Profile Report 2013/2014,” only 90,000 jobs were created between 2011 and 2014 (Republic of Rwanda, 2015b). Twice as many jobs are created in rural areas compared to those created in urban areas. These figures reflect only formal employment; no reliable figures are available for the informal sector. Employment creation in rural areas is crucial for sustainable development, especially with the focus on access to land and the distribution of land. In Rwanda, the availability of employment is restricted as well as access to land. Land is a limited resource in Rwanda, and the average landholding per household decreased from 1.2 ha in 1980 (Jayne, Chamberlin, & Headey, 2014) to 0.7 ha in 2006 (Ansoms & Rostagno, 2012; United Nation Conference on Trade and Development, 2014) and then to 0.59 ha per household in 2013 (Republic of Rwanda, 2013b). According to Ansoms (2007), Holden and Otsuka (2014) and Pritchard (2013), the inequality in the distribution of land has also grown. Holden and Otsuka (2014) also specified that it is difficult to secure a livelihood if the landholding is smaller than 0.25 to 0.5 ha. Therefore, intercropping is a way to minimize the risk of rain-fed agriculture-based livelihoods, but this production system runs counter to the current agricultural policies (Ansoms & Claessens, 2011; Holden & Otsuka, 2014; van Damme,

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