

# The Dimensions Of Women's Contribution To The Workforce In Agriculture: The Turkey Case

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## ABSTRACT

*In less developed and developing countries, women make less use of the benefits resulting from development. Women take part in every stage of production and also shoulder the difficulties of life loaded onto them by their roles within and outside the family. However, the use, distribution, and management of the income created in the family is unjust, and women do not have access to sources such as loans. Women are negatively affected by both the traditional social class structure and the inequality between the socially defined gender roles and statuses. This situation becomes more apparent for especially women who work in agriculture in rural areas. Although women's contribution to the workforce is high due to the fact that they work as unpaid agricultural workers in rural areas, the employment of women in agriculture decreases due to the general decrease of employment in this sector. Women working in agriculture cannot continue taking part in the workforce when they leave the sector or when they move to another region. Women who do take part in the workforce, do low status work requiring no qualifications and without any job security. This may result in women being isolated from work life as well as social life. In Turkey, where social gender roles are shaped by social factors, that is, social gender based distribution of responsibilities, women are usually considered to be responsible for housework and raising children. To a large extent, the domestic responsibilities of women prevent them from searching for a job and joining the work force. Women are expected to first be a housewife and mother. In rural areas, women are unpaid family workers who do agricultural work as an extension of their domestic work. These features of women's life in rural areas make it necessary to study, discuss and find solutions to the problems of women in rural areas, and to develop relevant strategies.*

**Keywords:** Turkey, Women's Employment, Agriculture

## INTRODUCTION

Women who actively contribute to every stage in production cannot benefit from the opportunities brought by development, and are among those who are most affected by the disadvantages caused by poverty and underdevelopment. In countries, such as Turkey, where unemployment is widespread and where education and health services are limited and unevenly distributed, rural women's situation, status, problems, and participation in work life draw considerable attention. For women in rural areas issues such as the combination of housework and production, the low level of education and social status, the inability to form organizations, and inadequacies, and gaps in labor laws and regulations pose the most important problems.

According to the 2007 census, the population of Turkey is 70,6 million, 30% of which lives in rural areas and 70% of which live in urban areas. The overall workforce participation in Turkey is 46,8%, 26,2% of which are women and 73,8% of which are men. Of the working women, 45,5% are in agriculture, 40,6% in the service sector, and 13,9% in industry, that is one of two women works in agriculture. The majority of women working as unpaid family worker in agriculture without social security lost their job due to recent agricultural policies and some moved to cities to find a job. A small number of women who were able to find a job work in unrecorded working fields without job safety and social security.

The economic, social, and political development of Turkey depends on women's reaching the status they deserve in the society, social value system, industry and services. Solving the problems of women, who constitute half of the population and especially of those working under hard conditions in agriculture, is of great importance. In addition, the fact that the percentage of women working in agriculture is very high also needs to be considered as an important issue because the majority of this population works without social security in unrecorded jobs in rural areas under the hardest conditions.

In Turkey agriculture is transforming considerably and positive-negative development is observed. On the one hand, a decrease in agricultural land and businesses, changes in agricultural trade, migration, and abandonment of rural areas are observed; on the other hand, apparently more positive developments such as organic farming, increasing mechanization, and businesses that become increasingly more capitalist are observed. These changes need to be analyzed to determine its advantages and disadvantages for women in rural areas, and accordingly to develop strategies.

## **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

In this research, studies carried out by relevant public and private institutions on issues such as women in agriculture in rural areas in Turkey, their participation in the workforce, women's problems, unemployment, poverty, and migration were reviewed, relevant theses were examined, and books, articles and internet databases were used as a source. By examining and gathering the sources and data, topics were classified and different interpretations and evaluations were made.

## **WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE AND IN RURAL AREAS**

In the development literature, women and children are considered to be the most disadvantaged groups in the society. Due to the negative discrimination that manifests itself in the fact that women's work is less valuable and respected compared to that of men, that women's work is considered less "noteworthy" in nationwide records and evaluations, that women have less access to sources than men in production, that women have little say in the management of the family income, and that the proportion of women with a managerial and supervision roles in public life is far lower than that of men, women, irrespective of their status, are put in a disadvantaged position. The contribution of women in agricultural production in Turkey, which, despite the change, still carries the features of an agricultural society, is considerably high.

The decrease in agricultural income has resulted in men's leaving the sector and an increase of women in agriculture. In addition to the care services they provide in the house, women continue production within the house as well as outside the house in agricultural production. The labor intensive jobs in small and medium size businesses are usually done by women and the work load of women is generally heavier than that of men. However, the work done by men is socially more prestigious and brings more income than that of women. The employment of women involves more domestic labor in the form of seasonal, part-time, and unpaid work. Therefore, the economic value of the products obtained from women's work—food, clothes—is not recognized as these are usually consumed immediately (Gulcubuk and Yasan, 2009).

Despite the rapid decrease in agricultural employment, the agricultural sector is still the sector with the highest ratio of women in employment. The participation of women in the workforce is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. According to the results of the Turkish Statistics Institute (TSI) 2009-Household Labor Survey, 26,5% of the total employment is in agriculture, the employment ratio of women in agriculture is 46,1%, whereas for men the ratio is 18,9%. Thus, the employment ratio of women in agriculture is 2,5 times higher than that of men, which means that the non agricultural work areas created in rural regions has been aimed at men's employment and agriculture has remained to be the fate of rural women.

While in rural women related statistics, women mostly do "not exist", their work and their production may also be considered "non-existent" or may be ignored. To illustrate, women's unpaid agricultural work, their food production for their own family or their temporary work may be ignored. In rural areas it is the rural women who directly contribute the most to production and the national economy. These same women to a large extent work as

unpaid workers in their own houses and business or in that of their relatives (Arıkan, 1988: 3). That is, women do not have a say or decision making power on their own work.

There are several reasons for women to take on work outside the home in addition to their domestic workload. The most important of the is that the income obtained from growing crops and raising livestock only is far from sufficient to sustain the family. In that case, the breadwinner of the family, the man, is forced to find an occupation outside crop and livestock production. The breadwinner, who cannot sustain his family through only crop and livestock production, is not considered a “farmer” and does not see farming as a professional occupation. In general, livestock and crop production activities that can sustain the family and contribute to the family budget are to a large extent added to women’s responsibilities, and men only help women when they have time left over from their actual work (Alkan and Toksoy, 2009: 104). Women, who are given a very sharply defined social role in economic life, are pushed to the background in terms of social relationships as well. That is, the extent to which a woman is considered to “exist” in economic life, determines the extent of her “existence” in terms of social relationships.

**WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN THE WORKFORCE AND THEIR WORKING CONDITIONS**

While women’s employment and participation in the workforce increases throughout the world, this is not the case in Turkey. When Turkey as a candidate for EU membership is compared with other EU countries, its women employment rates are found to be very low. While in 2006 the global rate of women’s employment was 52,4%, this rate was 29,5% for the Middle East and North African regions. The employment rate for women in the EU (25 members) is 62,2%.

**Table 1: Work Types of Employed Women in Turkey by Income by Percentage**

Sector	Number of workers	Salaried and waged	Employer	Self employed/Business owner	Unpaid Family Worker	Total
<b>Agriculture</b>	2.854.000	7,7	0,3	15,0	77,0	100,0
<b>Non-agriculture</b>	3.340.000	83,3	2,0	9,2	5,5	100,0

Source: TSI, 2009-Household Labor Survey Results

The majority of women working in rural areas are at the status of unpaid family worker. The increase of women’s employment is highly dependent on economic development and requires new investments and creation of new areas of work. The distribution of women in the workforce by income (Table.1) reveals that 77% of women working in agriculture are unpaid family workers. However, in the non- agricultural workforce this ratio is only 5,5%. One out of 2 employed women works in agriculture. The low ratio of women who work as “employer” in both the agricultural and non-agricultural sector is noteworthy. It provides evidence to the fact that women almost never are entrepreneurs in society. Another phenomenon to note here is that in both work life and socio-cultural life rural women, who intensively participate in the (agricultural) workforce, are largely forgotten. In socio-political and economic measures and policymaking usually urban women are considered, and the views related to rural women, mainly concentrate around the “deprivation” perspective.

The majority of the population consists of women who do unrecorded work without social security, and the ones who work under the hardest conditions in rural areas are again women. Women who are deprived of education and especially those who do temporary agricultural work without social security are at the highest risk of poverty and, thus, social isolation. Women, who constitute half of the population, face several barriers in education, economy, trade, and social life in general, and this leads to poverty as a women’s issue. (Gulcubuk and Yasan, 2009)

**Table.2: The Amount of Employed Workforce and Workforce Participation Ratios by Percentage**

	Amount of Rural Workforce		Amount of Urban Workforce		Total	
	Number	Workforce Participation Ratio	Number	Workforce Participation Ratio	Number	Workforce Participation Ratio
<b>Turkey</b>	8.013.000	51,7	14.095.000	38,8	22.108.000	42,7
<b>Women</b>	2.940.000	36,7	3.254.000	23,3	6.194.000	23,5
<b>Men</b>	5.073.000	67,7	10.840.000	60,5	15.914.000	62,6

Source: TSI, 2009-Household Labor Survey Results

According to the TSI, 2009-Household Labor Survey Results, the urban employment and workforce participation ratio in Turkey is 38,8%, 60,5% of whom are men and 23,3% of whom are women. The workforce participation of women in rural areas is higher than the total participation rate of women in Turkey.

Another problem for women working in agriculture is the fact that they are deprived from social security as their work is unrecorded. The 2006 registration record of social security institutions reveals that 11.503.000 workers are registered (51,5%) and 10.827.000 people are non-registered workers (48,5%). Among employed women 66% work without social security, while this ratio is 42,3% among employed men. The high ratio of women who work without social security is due to the fact that half of the employed women work in agriculture.

In agriculture, working conditions are arranged not on an hourly but daily basis. As the work is physically demanding in nature and requires strength and power, it is exhausting and wearisome. Yet, the pay is very low as unpaid family work is the case. According to 2005 data, 767.000 (11,8%) agricultural workers are recorded, but 5.726.000 (88,2%) are unrecorded. Of women working in agriculture, 1,5% are recorded, 98,5% are unrecorded, while the corresponding figures for men working in agriculture are 20,4% and 76,6%, respectively (<http://www.sgk.gov.tr>).

The rapid decrease in employment in agriculture in Turkey has resulted in a decrease in employed women as well. When women in agriculture leave the sector or move to another region, they drop out of the workforce, and those that do participate in the workforce work in low status jobs and do unqualified work without social security.

### **THE USE OF LABOR IN AGRICULTURE BY GENDER AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN**

In rural areas the roles adopted by men and women are different from each other. The differentiation of roles of men and women is closely related to the household's basic means of subsistence, product pattern, place of settlement, and their connection with the city. In addition, the potential and expectations of women in villages close to each other are similar. Again, production (food, winter stock preparation, dishes, laundry, cleaning, and childcare) is done by women. The main means of subsistence in rural areas is crop and livestock production, and seasonal migration for work. In villages where agricultural production is limited, men work in the production of vegetables and fruit for household consumption; they prepare the field, pick, water and hoe the products. In households where the main means of subsistence is crop production, the workload of women involves all stages of production, except for the sales. In livestock production, men are responsible for the grazing, feeding, and shearing the animals, whereas women do the milking, process milk products, clean the stables, and gather hay. In addition, women produce fat from meat, yoghurt, and cheese for the daily consumption of the household.

The workload of women largely depends on their role in agricultural activity and the availability of white goods in their daily life. The facilitating effect of white goods and the development of consumption economy reduce the workload of women.

#### **The position of women in agriculture is classified into 4 categories**

- In large businesses women do not work in the fields. Except for direct involvement in production, men are responsible for decision making in production, management, supervision and marketing. In cases where the man cannot cope with the load, women are given management and supervision responsibility, though limited.

- In medium size businesses, men involve in mechanic work and market relationships, whereas women do labor intensive work.
- In small businesses, men search for non agricultural sources of income, whereas women engage in labor intensive production. Both women in households that own small size businesses and those that own medium size land have a higher workload than men when these families engage in the production of diverse crops or industrial production because then women have to do manual work such as hoeing and harvesting.
- In households that own little or no land, both men and women need to work for others to earn their living. Therefore, both men and women do seasonal or mobile work in the village they live or in other regions. In these households, women have to do the labor-intensive jobs in the limited production, such as field work and livestock work.

Irrespective of the type of labor, the fact that rural women do unqualified work that does not require any knowledge or technology also plays a role. Although being unqualified is a feature that is common to all people in rural areas (farmers), the fact that men are recognized as “farmers” results in their being directly or indirectly informed about all developments in agricultural production in its traditional form, their receiving education, even if limited, all of which result in their appearing to be “qualified”. Despite the fact that women experience the same process, they are not recognized as “qualified” and “official” in the agricultural process.

The ratio of women in agriculture who turn their labor into cash is very low. For those women who do turn labor into cash, the most common way is to market and sell the fruits and vegetables they have grown in the fields. Due to traditional mentality, which manifests itself in male and societal pressure, the incidence of women and girls hiring out their labor in a workplace is extremely rare. The rural women who hire out their labor include women who move to seasonal work regions with their family, widows or divorced women who have to maintain the family, and girls of households that migrated to the city. However, this ratio is also not high. In rural areas, the work generally performed by men is of higher status and/or better paid than the labor of women. Women mainly engage in domestic work, and participate in production/work life through seasonal, temporary, and unpaid work. Therefore, the end products of women’s work --food, clothes—mostly are not considered to be of economic value.

In Turkey’s agricultural production, which forms the basic work area in rural regions, women supply almost 50% of the labor involved. However, in terms of marketing and entrepreneurship, they are weak and lag behind. Women cannot realize entrepreneurship potential in rural areas. The ratio of women who can obtain a loan is lower than 1%. Thus, in order for rural women to take on a more active role in economic and social life, they need to be actively involved in entrepreneurship and marketing. Women can become business owners and increase their social status (Anonymous, 2008).

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

To support economic development and to increase the status of women, it is essential that women, who already have responsibility in issues of production, education, health, family relationships, and nutrition among others, participate in development. The basic requirement for economic empowerment is ensuring that women participate in the (recorded?) workforce. However, although women are actively involved in almost all types of work, they generally work without pay, especially in rural areas. Women are in the position of free labor that can be used in the house, in the stables, in the fields and in virtually all types of work, and their work is viewed as part of their normal responsibilities. This illustrates the submission/acceptance and despair of women in rural areas (Gulcubuk and Yasan, 2009).

**The basic problems that women working in agriculture face in Turkey can be summarized as follows:**

- No access to qualified and secure work
- Doing low status work
- Flexible/Unpredictable working conditions
- Exclusion from social security

- Doing unrecorded work
- Difficulty in making use of formal and mass educational opportunities, access problems
- No access to vocational/professional education
- Hard working conditions-heavy workload
- Traditional role definitions
- Acceptance of the inevitable, submission
- Inadequate health service
- No entrepreneurship
- No access to loans/sources of income
- Insufficient non-agricultural employment opportunities
- Disadvantages of small size businesses
- Hard conditions of mobile and temporary work

**Suggestions for improvement of women working in agriculture in Turkey:**

- Organization of women's entrepreneurship
- Encouragement of women's entrepreneurship
- Spread of cooperative trading systems
- Reduction of discrimination in employment
- Reduction of unrecorded labor
- Increase of non agricultural employment opportunities
- Spread of vocational/professional education opportunities
- Revival of local economy
- Positive discrimination toward women in social security practices
- Increased coordination among women's institutions and organizations
- Holistic approach to the Europe Employment Strategy
- Increased emphasis on the quality and quantity of education provided to girls
- Determination of strategies related to women's employment in agriculture

Participation in the workforce, which is most important condition for economic empowerment of women, can be achieved by raising the awareness of both rural and urban women and by equipping them with the same skills and qualifications as men. In order to encourage women's entrepreneurship, the invisibility of women should be ended by spreading micro credit systems, professional education and consultancy networks. To achieve this, firstly women should be given access to sources and credit without bias.

Although in Turkey gender equality is ensured with laws and regulations, a clear public policy on the employment of women and a search for solutions of women's problems do not appear on the agenda. Approaching women's employment solely from a job finding perspective and treating women in agriculture only within the framework of their particular conditions is not effective in solving women's problems. The basic problem is that high status employment for women that includes them in the social security system and that allows them to produce and become self-sufficient is not created. This problem can be solved by creating a work environment in which women have access to basic services and sources and can lead a happy family and work life.

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