

RURAL WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE IN THE LATIN AMERICAN AGRARIAN REFORMS

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Agrarian reform has constituted the major state initiative in Latin America with respect to agricultural development and rural income redistribution over the last several decades. Whatever the form or scale, agrarian reform has involved state intervention in the redistribution of land to formerly landless or land poor households.

In the first instance, the impact of an agrarian reform upon rural women depends upon the class position of each woman's household, and whether that class, or segment of class, is a beneficiary of the reform. The broader the reform's redistributory thrust, the more women it should potentially benefit. However, it cannot be assumed that the impact of an agrarian reform upon rural households is gender neutral. An increase in the household's access to land or employment, or in its level of income, is not necessarily equivalent to a positive change in women's socio-economic position. Processes of social change have complex economic, political and ideological effects which may alter the social status of rural women as well as their position relative to men.

The central thesis of this paper is that most Latin American agrarian reforms have directly benefited only men. It is argued that this is largely due to the common designation of "households" as the beneficiaries of an agrarian reform, but also the subsequent incorporation of only male household heads to the new agrarian reform structures. It is shown

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that a necessary, but not sufficient condition, for rural women to be benefited on par with men is that they too be designated as beneficiaries. Women as well as men must be given access to land or the opportunity to participate within the agrarian cooperatives or state farms promoted by an agrarian reform. This comparative analysis of thirteen Latin American agrarian reforms demonstrates that this has happened only in countries where the incorporation of rural women to the reform is an explicit objective of state policy.

1. AGRARIAN REFORM BENEFICIARIES ACCORDING TO GENDER

The majority of Latin American agrarian reforms have failed to produce either a significant number of female beneficiaries, or even given attention to gender as a beneficiary category. Few Latin American countries report beneficiary data by sex. Even after a decade of "women in development" efforts, the majority of countries still find it sufficient to publish beneficiary data according to the number of households or families benefited. For example, in the recent Salvadoran agrarian reform, potential beneficiaries applying for land under the Land to the Tiller program are not asked their sex (see SIMON, et al, - 1982 : appendix 3). The only country for which complete gender-disaggregated data on agrarian reform beneficiaries is available is Honduras. Data for Cuba and Nicaragua are available only for agrarian reform cooperative membership.

The available national-level data suggest that only in Cuba do women represent a significant number of current agrarian reform beneficiaries. Women constitute 26 % of the 78,000 members of the country's 1,400 production cooperatives (COLLINS et al. - 1984 : chpt. XIII). The available data on employment on the Cuban state farms also show that women have been incorporated as permanent wage workers in significant numbers in these. In the mid-1970s women represented 53 % of the permanent workers in the state tobacco industry, 41 % in the dairy industry, 19 % in food processing, and 7 % in the sugar industry (FMC - 1975 : 19).

The 1982 Nicaraguan Cooperative Census revealed that 20 % of the production cooperatives and 60 % of the credit and service cooperatives (based on individual private holdings), have at least one woman member. However, in 1982 women represented only 6 % of the total cooperative membership of 64,891 (CIERA - 1984). Rural women in Nicaragua fared

somewhat better than their Honduran counterparts where women represent 3.8 % of the agrarian reform beneficiaries (CALLEJAS - 1983).

In the Peruvian case, a 1971 survey of 83 Peruvian agrarian reform cooperatives found that of 724 members interviewed, approximately 5 % were women (BUCHLER - 1975). But as a national estimate, even this figure may be high, for the survey excluded the important coastal agro-industrial sugar cooperatives where membership was almost exclusively male. Moreover, regional studies in northern Peru, of the cotton-producing zone of Piura (FERNANDEZ - 1982) and of the highland area of Cajamarca (DEERE - 1982), found that women comprised only 2 % of cooperative membership.

The available studies of the agrarian reform processes of other Latin American countries also suggest that the overwhelming majority of the agrarian reform beneficiaries have been men. In the Chilean case, Garrett (1982a, b) reports that, as in Peru, few women were beneficiaries of the agrarian reform. Similarly, in the Dominican Republic, the vast majority of beneficiaries have been men (CASTRO, GRULLON & LEON - 1983 ; CEDEE - 1983). In Colombia, of 1,283 collective enterprises organized between 1973 and 1982 women members have been reported to exist on only two of them (CARO - 1982 : 196). No mention of women's participation could be found in the literature on the remaining agrarian reforms surveyed.

2. MECHANISMS OF EXCLUSION

The participation of rural women within the agricultural labor force in Latin America - both within peasant units of production and as seasonal wage workers - has now been well documented (see LEON - 1982). Yet, as the above data demonstrate, women have largely been excluded as agrarian reform beneficiaries. This section considers how and why women have been excluded from this major state initiative in rural areas.

It is argued that the mechanisms of exclusion are legal, structural and ideological. In most of the Latin American agrarian reforms the legal criteria defining beneficiary status have served to exclude the majority of rural women. This is often compounded by the structural characteristics of women's labor force participation. Moreover, ideological norms regarding the "proper" sexual division of labour often impede women from joining cooperatives even when such is legally possible.

Underlying almost all of the Latin American agrarian reforms has been the assumption that the rural household is the primary social unit to be benefited from the reform. But for purpose of implementation, in all except Cuba and Nicaragua, only one member of the household, the household head, has been officially designated the beneficiary. Hence, only the head of household has received land in his/her name or the right of membership in production cooperatives or credit and service cooperatives within the reformed sector.

Restricting beneficiaries to only household heads discriminates against women since throughout Latin American social custom dictates that if both an adult man and woman reside in a household, the man is automatically considered its head. Yet, in the majority of agrarian reforms examined, the beneficiary criteria either required or gave strong preference to heads of households. Even in those cases where beneficiaries were defined as individuals it was usually assumed, if not explicit, that only one individual per household could be designated a beneficiary, and that was to be the household head. As a result, the only women who could potentially be reform beneficiaries were either widows or single mothers with no adult male living in the household.

A related, structural problem, is that many agrarian reforms have benefited only the permanent agricultural wage workers employed on estates at the moment of expropriation, excluding the often large seasonal labor force from cooperative membership. In both Peru and Chile, for example, the permanent agricultural wage workers on the expropriated estates were generally men, although women were often an important component of the seasonal labor force. Fernandez (1982) shows how on the northern Peruvian cotton plantations, although women represented up to 40 % of the temporary labor force, few women held permanent jobs on the plantations, and as a result, women constituted only 2 % of the cooperative membership.

The inability of these agrarian reforms to benefit the vast majority of seasonal agricultural workers certainly was prejudicial to both men and women. But whereas men were found in both categories of workers, permanent and seasonal, the structural characteristics of women's labor force participation resulted in women being excluded as a social group. The few women who were permanent workers on the estates, and thus potential beneficiaries of the reform, were then subject to an additional

criteria to become cooperative members, that they be household heads. This, of course, reduced their participation still further.

Ideological norms governing the proper sexual division of labor - that a woman's place is in the home while a man's is in the fields - appear not only in the content of agrarian reform legislation, but also constitute a significant barrier to the incorporation of women as beneficiaries in reforms that explicitly provide for the inclusion of female headed households.

Only three agrarian reforms, those of Mexico, Bolivia and Honduras, made explicit provisions to include female household heads as potential beneficiaries. For example, the 1962 Honduran agrarian reform law guaranteed the rights of both widows and single women household heads, but discriminated against single women without dependents as compared to single men. In order to qualify as a beneficiary it was required to : "Be Honduran by birth, male, over 16 years of age if single of any age if married, or a single woman or widow if in charge of a family" (Article 68 in ESCOTO - 1965 : 46).

In terms of preference ordering, the Honduran law gave female household heads priority over male heads and single men, unless the men exploited land under indirect forms of tenancy, had been previously dispossessed of their land, or had access to insufficient land as established by the zone (*Ibid.* : 47). Apparently, the overwhelming number of rural men fell into one of these categories for Youssef and Le Bel (1981 : 57) report that "in existing *asentamientos* women have last priority in being allocated land ; they follow male-headed households, and single males". Yet, in 1974, 18.7 % of Honduran rural households were headed by women (CALLEJAS - 1983).

An in-depth study of four Honduran *asentamientos* illustrated how the implementation of the law had resulted in the virtual exclusion of female household heads (SAFILIOS-ROTHSCHILD - 1983 : 19). Women were simply not considered to be agriculturalists. While women's participation in certain agricultural tasks was recognized, women were not considered capable of carrying out the "heavier" agricultural tasks which required greater physical strength. Male cooperative members felt that women could join the cooperatives only if they had sons, and preferably adult sons to replace them in agricultural field work. Thus, predominant norms of the proper sexual division of labor served as a barrier to women's incorporation within the agrarian reform, although the law

explicitly provided for at least female heads of household to be potential beneficiaries of the reform.

3. THE PRECONDITIONS FOR FEMALE PARTICIPATION

In only two countries, Cuba and Nicaragua, has neither sex nor kinship position been a legal barrier to the inclusion of women in the agrarian reform process. In both countries, not only female heads of household, but also wives and daughters, can qualify as agrarian reform cooperative members. Moreover, in both countries, the incorporation of rural women is an explicit state policy goal.

In the Cuban case, women's incorporation into the agrarian reform evolved over the course of the revolution, as a response to both economic (the need to incorporate women into the agricultural labor force due to labor shortages) and ideological factors (the recognition that women's incorporation into social production was a precondition for male-female equality). Women's integration as members of the production cooperatives organized in the late 1970s is largely explained by the active role of the women's organization (the FMC) in making sure that women's interests both in production (equal pay for equal work) and reproduction (child care, the Family Code) were addressed (DEERE - 1982).

The Nicaraguan agrarian reform is the first in Latin America to include, right from the beginning, the incorporation of women among its objectives. In the 1981 agrarian reform law, neither sex nor kinship position is a limitation on being an agrarian reform beneficiary. And the incorporation of women into the agricultural cooperatives is an explicit objective detailed in the 1981 Agricultural Cooperative Law (Chpt. II, Article 2). Moreover, the legislation requires that women be integrated into the cooperatives under the same conditions as men, with the same rights and duties (DEERE - 1983).

In a recent study of women's participation in the Nicaraguan agrarian reform cooperatives it was found that many women did not await the passage of the agrarian reform legislation to begin joining the agricultural cooperatives (CIERA - 1984 : chpt. 3). In the majority of cases studied, women joined the cooperatives as they were being constituted in the 1979-1981 period. This reflects the important participation of women in Nicaragua in the struggle that defeated the Somoza dictatorship : women felt that they "had won their right" to participate

in the cooperative movement. Nonetheless, the study also showed that the law has been an important armament in breaking down traditional views of the proper sexual division of labor and male resistance to female participation in the cooperatives.

Even in a revolutionary setting, cooperatives still are organized without taking the possible participation of women into account. Interviews on all-male cooperatives revealed that members often asserted that women were not interested in cooperatives for they did not perform agricultural work. In fact, in several cases women had demonstrated their interest in joining these cooperatives but the male members had ignored them (DEERE - 1983 ; CIERA - 1984). It was also found, as in Honduras (SAFILIOS-ROTHSCHILD - 1983), that male members were often reluctant to admit women as members since they did not believe that women could carry out a sufficient number of agricultural tasks. Nonetheless, case studies of ten Nicaraguan cooperatives with women members revealed that women participated in productive activities on par with the men. Moreover, men in cooperatives with women members were much more positive about women's participation and contribution than men in cooperatives without women members. This has also been reported in the Honduras case (SAFILIOS-ROTHSCHILD - 1983). It suggests that a positive state policy with regard to women not only creates the necessary preconditions for women's participation, but that giving women a chance to participate also has important effects on ideological norms regarding the gender division of labor.

4. THE IMPORTANCE OF INCORPORATING WOMEN

It is important that women as well as men be included among the direct beneficiaries of an agrarian reform both on social equity grounds and to ensure the success of cooperative development. The exclusion of women not only has high costs for women, in that their position can be harmed both relative to men's and absolutely, but it also has costs for cooperative and rural development programs. And if the goal of an agrarian reform is to foster a process of social transformation, as was considered the case in various of these reforms, then the exclusion of one social group on the basis of gender or family position certainly limits the breadth and depth of such a reform process.

Social equity criteria require, that at the very least, if both men and women are permanent agricultural workers, both be entitled to become beneficiaries of an agrarian reform. If a goal of state policy in creating production cooperatives is to allow the participation of workers in the decisions concerning their labor process and in the allocation of the surplus which they produce, the exclusion of one group from membership on the basis of sex and kinship, is, at best, discriminatory. At worst, it creates the conditions internal to the cooperative for the exploitation of one social group by another.

This is also the case in terms of the relationship between permanent workers (the cooperative members) and temporary workers. In the Peruvian reform process, few temporary workers were incorporated into the cooperatives : they also were not covered by social benefits, and their wages were usually lower than those of the cooperative members. Fernandez (1982) and Chambeu (1981) report that in the cases of the cooperatives in Piura and Cuzco which they studied, not only were the majority of women working on the cooperatives temporary workers, but the women earned wages lower than those of the male temporary workers. Moreover, women's wages relative to both male temporary workers and the cooperative members declined over the reform period. In the case of the Piura cotton cooperatives, work opportunities for women also declined over the reform period (FERNANDEZ - 1982). Since the women had been excluded from cooperative membership, they had no recourse to this deterioration in their economic position.

Another way in which processes of agrarian reform may result harmful to women is in terms of the changes introduced in traditional patterns of land rights. In most Andean highland areas land inheritance has been bilateral. Women's ownership of land has assured them both of participation in agricultural decision-making and in the allocation of household income. Land ownership has also given women a modicum of material security for they have not been totally dependent upon their spouse. If abandoned or separated, their inheritance assures them of a means to be able to maintain their family as single women. Not surprisingly, a woman's status within the household and community is closely related to their ownership of land.

The Peruvian agrarian reform process represented a real setback for rural women. Since only male household heads were designated the

potential beneficiaries, the land titles issued by the reform agency generally have been given only to men.

It also cannot be assumed that indirect participation in a reform process (through the head of household) is the equivalent of direct participation. The organization of credit and service cooperatives among independent producers on the basis of only male household heads may have important consequences for women's agricultural productivity. Providing technical assistance only to men will not necessarily result in women gaining access to the information, or guarantee that they will take it into account, putting it into practice. In the Nicaragua cooperative study an impressive degree of disparity was found in the level of technological knowledge of women members and women non-members (CIERA - 1984 : chpt. 5). Male cooperative members rarely shared with their non-member wives what they were learning.

To the extent that an agrarian reform directs state efforts and resources to benefit one group of the population, through access to land, credit, technical assistance, marketing channels, etc., it is concentrating resources on only one specific group, with socio-economic consequences for those who are excluded. It cannot be assumed that by benefiting the male head of household, all household members will be benefited as well.

Both the Nicaraguan and Cuban experiences show that the incorporation of women within the agrarian cooperatives has been beneficial for cooperatives development. In the cooperatives with women members, women are considered to be excellent agricultural workers and they are a force of cohesion and stability within the cooperatives. For example, in Nicaragua it was found that proportionately more men than women had left the production cooperatives for reasons of personal feuds with other cooperative members or as a result of their not liking collective work. The relatively few women who had abandoned the cooperatives were more likely to have left due to family problems, such as jealous husbands (DEERE - 1983). In the few cooperative enterprises with women members in Colombia, they have also been noted to be a force of stability and cohesion (LODONO - 1975 : 144).

In Nicaragua, as in Cuba, women appear to be a favorable force behind collectivization. In Nicaragua, the strong commitment of the women members of the production cooperatives to collective work is in many ways explained by the history of discrimination against women in

rural Nicaragua. The majority of women members were previously landless wage workers and as women, they had fewer agricultural employment opportunities open to them than did the men. Moreover, in the past, women were always paid less than men, even for the same task. Today they earn the same as men irrespective of the task performed, and the cooperatives offer them security of employment for the first time (*Ibid.*). The discrimination women have faced traditionally also explains why women seem less prone than men to dream of their own private plot, and why in some cases, women have voluntarily pooled their private land parcel to form a production cooperative.

Both the Nicaraguan and Cuban experiences demonstrate that social equity and successful cooperative development are not a trade-off. Moreover, these positive experiences suggest the costs of excluding women in the other Latin American agrarian reforms.

CONCLUSIONS

This comparative analysis of the Latin American agrarian reform experiences has demonstrated that processes of socio-economic change are not gender neutral. It cannot be assumed that state policies designed to benefit rural household will necessarily benefit the women within them.

Rural women in Latin America have not benefited from agrarian reform on par with men. Lack of attention to the incorporation of women as direct beneficiaries has resulted in women losing access to resources and/or being displaced from productive activities. The consequences are both economic - leading to lower female productivity or lower incomes - and social - contributing to a decline in female status and well being. The lack of inclusion of women within new agrarian reform structures has also created new barriers to achieving male-female equality, barriers which serve to reproduce women's subordination. Moreover, the lack of female participation has also lead to less successful processes of cooperative development, agrarian reform, and certainly of social transformation.

This comparative analysis of agrarian reform processes suggests that how rural women fare in an agrarian reform is closely tied to state policy. The inclusion of women in a process of social-economic change does not happen automatically. At a minimum, it requires state

attention to the legal and structural barriers which preclude female participation. It has been demonstrated how the criteria for selection of agrarian reform beneficiaries is most important in this regard. A crucial pre-condition for an egalitarian agrarian reform is that all adults within the targeted group be legally entitled to be beneficiaries.

The right to acquire land in one's own name or the right of cooperative membership is a necessary but not sufficient condition for women to participate on par with men in an agrarian reform. State policy must also be directed towards creating the incentive and support structure for women to want to participate, to be able to overcome the possible resistance of men, and to be able to participate effectively.

Attention to women's domestic responsibilities within the household, and making these compatible with productive work, are important components of both the incentive and support structure. Other policies which enable women to participate more effectively within the new agrarian structures include adult literacy programs and agricultural and leadership training courses specifically for women. Also important is the organization of rural women into organizations which can promote their gender-based interests as women. For women to achieve full equality with men within new agrarian structures, state attention must be given to the material and ideological aspects of women's subordination.

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ABSTRACT

Based on a comparative analysis of 13 Latin American agrarian reforms, this paper shows that a necessary, but not sufficient condition, for rural women to derive benefits on a par with men, is that they too be designated as beneficiaries. Women, as well as men, must be given access to land or the opportunity to participate in the agrarian cooperatives or state farms. But this has happened only in countries where the inclusion of rural women in the reform is an explicit objective in state policy.

RÉSUMÉ

A partir d'une analyse comparative de 13 réformes agraires latino-américaines, cette communication indique qu'une condition nécessaire mais non suffisante pour que les femmes rurales ne soient pas lésées par rapport aux hommes consiste à les désigner, à égalité avec les hommes, comme les bénéficiaires de ces politiques. Il convient de donner aux femmes autant qu'aux hommes l'accès à la terre, ou la possibilité de participer aux coopératives agricoles ou aux fermes d'Etat. Mais tel n'a pas été le cas sauf dans les pays où les Etats ont affiché expressément, comme but de leur politique, la participation des femmes rurales aux réformes entreprises.