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Introduction

Women in rural areas have always played a central role in decision making. More than urban areas in rural areas one was able to talk about equality as a result of cooperation between men and women in the field. Women in rural areas worked in the house and cared about the animals and their increased role in the field started in the 1970s, when males travelled abroad (Amin 1985).

However, based on experience and more recent studies it is in most cases expressed by men and women that women do not play a role in agriculture and irrigation. Nevertheless, reality has shown the opposite as women play a direct and indirect role and this is also the case in the pilot area that is addressed in the next section.

Women's Landownership

Women's agricultural landownership ranges between 10-15% of the total ownership in the pilot area (Agricultural Cooperatives Records). Their ownership falls mainly between the less than one *feddan* and 1-3 *feddan* categories. According to respondents in the pilot area most landownerships of women are a result of the death of the

husband's that transferred the ownership to her name – but only temporarily until her children grow up - as it was expressed that women here do not inherit. Women are given their share (inheritance) in monetary form in order not to divide the land and also not to allow it to go outside the family.

Women's Role in Agriculture and Irrigation

The situation of women in the pilot area could be described as follows. There are families who permit their women to work in the field and others who do not. The non-working of women in the field is according to farmers due to two reasons. First they want to comfort their women i.e. that they only work at home and care about the animals. This also derives from the level of female education and the prosperity of the family. Furthermore, in general the pilot area is composed of a mixture of population of Egyptian farmers and farmers who consider themselves to be

originally from Arab descendants i.e. have nomadic origins that have more conservative norms concerning women's work in the field. Hag El-Shamy from Mehanna hamlet said: *Women do not have a role in agriculture and irrigation, because it's a male's job and we want women to stay comfortable at home. We are taking care of the land and if we require help we just hire laborers.*

Saeeda from Muftah hamlet:

Irrigation is mostly done at dawn or in the late evening; therefore it is a men's job and women cannot play a role in irrigation.

Hag Mohamed from Badr hamlet:

Women here do not go to the field, they only care about the house and the children and in rare cases they could bring us the food in the field.

However, some women denied having any role to play in agriculture and irrigation when asked about the type of crop they prefer for rice and wheat they immediately explained that they tell their men about their preferences. These preferences are taken into consideration by men as women are the ones in charge of caring about the family and feeding its members. Thus women are in most cases the ones indirectly deciding on the cultivated wheat and rice varieties.

Neema Abdel Aziz from Mehanna hamlet said:

We do not prefer the rice variety no. 5102, because it breaks as for the wheat variety we prefer nos. 61, 69, 93 and 68 because they make white dough and are easy to use to bake our bread.

Nevertheless, the majority of women met in the pilot area have explained that they help their husbands in the field.

Women from Mehanna hamlet were met while working in the field. Om Azouz from Mehanna hamlet

I do everything to help my husband in all agricultural activities to reduce the cost of laborers. When he goes to work as a laborer to get some extra income he operates the pump for me and I open the mud field ditches to allow water to flow in our land

(half a feddan). We have cultivated turnip and after that we will cultivate rice.



Tahany from Badr hamlet a small holder:

Women here do everything, they work as men in the field and they also irrigate. I go to the field and ask a passerby to help me with turning on the pump and then I can open the mud field ditches to allow water to flow in the field.

Ayda El-Reweiny from Sultan hamlet:

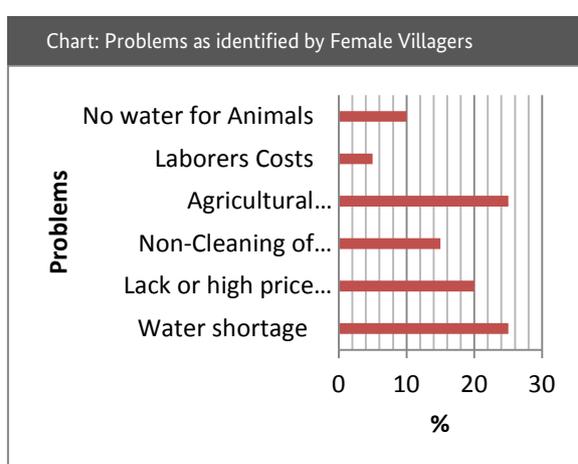
Women are with men in the field to help them control the water in the fields as we here operate more than one pump at the same time. We have to make sure that there is water coming out of the different pumps or they will be damaged.

Hag Mohamed El-Gazzaz from Sultan hamlet:

In our area women help us in everything, they prepare food for the laborers in the field, they supervise the pumps during their operation and also they undertake some agricultural activities such as cleaning the crops from the weeds and participating in harvesting processes.

Women's Knowledge about Irrigation and Agriculture Problems

Interviewed women knew about the main problems countered in agriculture and irrigation, especially those related to water shortage and to agricultural cooperatives. Accordingly, they identified the following problems that do not differ much from those identified and prioritized by men (see Chart).



The difference in women's identification of problems lies in giving more importance of the lack of water and its impact on animals as they are responsible for the house animals (cows, Nile buffalos, etc.). Additionally, the impact of lack of diesel and its high price was highlighted by women due to its twofold impact. First its lack requires male family members (husband and/or sons) to look for it in different patrol stations that often leads to fights between the men which make females worry. The other aspect is the increased price of diesel in the black market which affects the household budget.

Women from Badr hamlet mainly small holders and tenants:

The problem with diesel is that men have to go to many patrol stations to get one gallon, which could take more than one day.

Women of small hold farmers from Sultan hamlet:
Men go to the patrol stations and fight to buy diesel, or we have to buy it from the black market for LE50 per gallon.

Aziza from Massanah hamlet:

The lack of diesel and its high price form the black market is a big problem. In case of water shortage and the need to operate more than one pump a gallon of diesel is used to irrigate one feddan; however if water was available only ½ of a gallon would have been enough.

Safaa from Muftah hamlet:

About 90% of the area here cultivated with rice, therefore when the rice nurseries are prepared the water shortage problem starts. This leads in many cases to disputes between farmers about who is to irrigate first.

Mariam from Massanah hamlet:

The non-cleaning of canals is severe because there is a pipe that conveys the water to our canal that is always blocked with big rocks. To allow water to flow we usually hire someone to clean the canal on our expense.

To overcome the water shortage problem Saida and Rasmeya from Muftah hamlet:

After the cultivation of cantaloupe, sweet potatoes, melon seeds or turnip the land is cultivated with rice in July after the passing of the period (May-June).

Om Maged from Badr hamlet:

Last year water was not available when we wanted to transplant our rice seedlings. This necessitated that we irrigate at night using more than one pump to be able to reach water of the drain and transfer it to our field.

Wafaa El-Gazzaz from Sultan hamlet:

We here depend 100% on agriculture for our income, because even though we have family members who have been to university, but they find not jobs and thus they work in the field.



Tahany from Badr hamlet:

Pesticides especially for cotton that the cooperative is providing at subsidized price are not enough and we have to buy what we need from the market.

Bahga from Massanah hamlet:

We buy a lot of the agricultural input from the market, because we have only one feddan and we do not have connections at the cooperative therefore we do not get the inputs we need at a subsidized price. Thus we buy from the market and pay later which makes our men prone to be imprisoned if the yield is not enough and we are unable to pay back our debts.

Saida from Muftah hamlet:

If there is water we cultivate rice and if there is a good price for cotton set by the government we will cultivate cotton. Farmers are afraid of cotton because of the high cultivation costs and its low prices.

Women's Perception of the Impact of Water Shortage

In this part the perception of women or the impact of water shortage on women is addressed. Female villagers are concerned with the impact of water shortage on the household budget, family food as well as the presence of their husbands. According to women in the pilot area wheat and rice are two important pillars of the household. In case of their lack as a result of low yields they face problems as

we they have to buy it from the market, which is an additional cost to their household budget.

A group of women from Badr hamlet mainly small holders and tenants:

The productivity of the land affects the whole household e.g. to have enough money for arranging

the marriages of our daughters as well as pay our debts resulting from buying agricultural inputs.

A group of women from Muftah hamlet:

Water shortage forces use to irrigate using drain water - though we know about its bad impact on agricultural land due to its salinity - affects the land produce.

A group of women from Massanah hamlet:

This year we cultivated cucumber, but because of the salinity of the soil and the lack of the water it did not work though we spent LE2000 on it. We removed it and cultivated cotton instead. If water was available we would have cultivated rice. If the cultivated cotton works we will have to use part of the return to buy the amount of rice we need from the market.

A group of women from Badr hamlet mainly small holders and tenants:

Farmers prefer to cultivate rice because they need for their household and it is easier to sell compared to cotton because of the latter's cultivation cost. In addition if not sold it is like a dead body in the house.

Seedaa Mohamed from Badr hamlet (1.3 landownership):

When my husband arrives at night - he works as a driver- he goes to the field and stays until very late. Sometimes he goes to the field and finds that someone else has operated his pump and took all the water and in such cases disputes erupts.



Women from Muftah hamlet:

Last year men used to spend long time in the field at night to irrigate the rice fields.

A group of female farmers from Sultan hamlet:

The high cost of laborers is a real problem that farmers face. As the former work only for three hours a day and want to get LE40. This has increased the role of women in the field.

Safaa from Muftah hamlet:

Last year there were a lot of problems and disputes between farmers over water (about 70%) for irrigating the rice nurseries as a result of cultivating about 90% of the area with rice.

Rasmeya from Muftah hamlet:

If water is available for the cultivation of rice the yield will be high, which would allow us to take what we need for the household and sell the rest that

would ensure a good income. Additionally, the availability of water would also lead to less diesel consumption as there will be no need for the operation of more than one pump to be able to irrigate from the drain. Finally, the availability of water will allow men to rest and spend more time at home instead of spending nights in the field.

Om Khattab from Badr hamlet (small holder):
I go to the field and do all agricultural activities as well as irrigate in order to help my husband. When my husband is not present – as he works on car – I go with my elder daughter to the field and we do everything. In case of water shortage I have to go to the field for three consecutive days in order to be able to irrigate the land and

The impact of water shortage on women is because they are responsible for the house

animals, when there is no water in canals, the animals have to drink from the house water (tap water). Additionally they are in charge of food preparation for the family. Accordingly the harvested wheat has to be washed before sending it to be grinded.

Women from Badr hamlet mainly small holders and tenants:

We do not find enough water in the canal for the animals to drink or even for washing the wheat before grinding it.

As a result of the different felt impacts of water shortage on women, they were all in favor of the installation of a new pump to allow the mixing of El-Inshaa drain water – which they consider as clean – with El-Menshaweya canal water in increase water availability.

Women and WUAs in the Pilot Area

In Lyon 2 & 3 the Representative Committee is 39, of which 31 are men and 8 women. The BCWUA board is composed of 11 members, of which 2 are women.

The role of women is in the residential area to talk to women and convince them not to throw waste in the canals.

However, the majority of women do not know anything about the existence of WUAs and their role. Only the wives or family members of the members of WUAs are aware that such an organization called WUAs exists. When they were asked about their functions their said they meet to

solve problems related to water. Only Se'eda the wife of Hag Zakaria from Muftah hamlet (member of the Lyon 2 & 3 WUA) knows that the WUA has also a role cleaning canals by supervising the work of the excavator.