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Supporting Women in Rural Areas within the Framework of Policies and Programs in Turkey

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ABSTRACT

In rural areas, the most of women are employed in agriculture sector, therefore women's labour intensity is also high in agricultural production as in the households. But, the proportion of women in agriculture sector accepted low wages is extremely high and frequently this group gained their income by means of marketing agricultural products obtained by working in the vineyards and orchards or fields. In this sense, to generate and diversify income-generating activities are major importance for women engaged in agricultural activities.

Considering the Turkey's conditions, the employment of women in the rural areas would reduce depending on a decrease trend in agricultural employment. Constraints for empowering women in the rural area are mainly lack of social security for women, traditional thinking of men and the community pressure, perception of family workers. Despite several projects and programs are implemented, it is still essential to make further studies for the women working in the rural areas. In this perspective, the contribution of this article is to assess and make policy proposals about the promotion of women in the rural areas particularly in the framework of policies and programs implemented in Turkey.

INTRODUCTION

When the development literature is examined, women in the rural area are considered to be "disadvantaged group", since the labour of women in the rural area is mainly used in agricultural and forestry activities. They might be observed in soil conservation, erosion control, arboriculture, afforestation, firewood collection and water supply.

Women in the rural area are also to be accepted as a target group in many development programs and projects. Several international level institutions and research organisations (e.g. World Bank, FAO, IFAD) that undertake women empowerment projects. The primary objective of these projects is to strengthen processes that promote economic development of them and generate or enhance an environment for social change.

As announced by Food and Agriculture Organization ^[1], agriculture and forestry possess important development potential in many countries. In this context, providing human oriented approach for sustainable development in the agriculture and forestry sectors, to develop policies for women remains significant. Because, facilitating and incentivizing women participation in these sectors would not only provide much needed employment opportunities, but may also help drive the innovation and growth needed to reduce rural poverty.

While this situation is evaluated in the light of European Statistics ^[2] data in **Figure 1.**, the employment rate of women in the EU-28 in 2011, 2012 and 2013 remains as a constant level (45.6 %).

In Turkey, the employment rate of women has a lower level compared to the EU-28 average and the labour force participation rate of women in rural areas is high due to the work as family workers in the agriculture and forestry sectors; this group is employed in low-paid and non-compliance with the qualifications jobs.



Figure 1. Employment Rate by Gender.

The overall employment for the rural women in 2009 was 2.619 thousand person in **Table 1**. It also illustrates that agriculture is, relative to industry, construction and services, the most important sector of employment for women in the rural area in Turkey^[3]. Another critical observation is that the number of rural women employment in services sector is increased year after year and it would be expected to stay at high levels in the forthcoming years.

Table 1. Women Employment in Rural Area in Turkey (By Economic Activity, NACE Rev.1).

	Agriculture	Industry	Construction	Services	Total
2004	2.270	113	2	167	2.552
2005	2.077	126	3	218	2.424
2006	2.034	125	3	245	2.407
2007	2.044	108	3	254	2.409
2008	2.084	117	3	274	2.478
2009	2.201	124	3	291	2.619

SAMPLES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION (EU) AND THE UNITED STATES (US) PRACTICES

Due to the importance of this issue, the European Commission is called for all European Union (EU) member countries to systematically take care of the equal opportunities in rural development programs. In this context, individual policies and projects are created for women in the rural areas at the EU level.

With this approach, "The European Agriculture Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)" is considered as an important financial tool that consists of four axes: "competitiveness", "land management", "broad rural development" and "rural development initiative (liaison entre action direct pour environment rural-LEADER)". Referring to the woman population in rural areas and assessments are more located under the "LEADER" axis.

Besides the direct financial support programs, there is an internet-based support service for women entrepreneurs named as "The Women's Agricultural Network ^[4]" and carried out partnership of USDA and the University of Vermont. By this joint work, training and technical support services have been offered to women in rural areas since 1995.

POLICIES, PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS IN TURKEY

Policies and Programs

Similar to rural areas in the EU and the United States, the women in Turkey are unable to actively participate in the labour force and develop their skills. At the same time, socio-economic, regional, poverty and gender inequalities are still risk factors for this population. Based on Turkey's employment policies, increasing formal employment by reducing unemployment and the removal of barriers to the employment of women, and the disabled have been identified as priority targets. The importance of women employment is also emphasized in national development plans and annual programs^[5-7]. The details of priorities are shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2. Development Plans and Annual Programs.

Development Plans	
Ninth Development Plan (2007-2013)	
➤	Within the scope of the legal and institutional regulations carried out to increase the effectiveness of the rural development policies, efforts to establish a rural development institution, the decision making processes of which is stipulated to involve the relevant organizations and to establish an implementation and payment unit are continuing.
➤	Emphasis will be placed on carrying out these services in a way to include young and women farmers by producer organizations with strengthened structures.
➤	Income-generating projects will be supported in a way to diversify the economic activities targeting the poor. In particular, entrepreneurship in rural areas and underdeveloped regions will be encouraged.

Tenth Development Plan (2014-2018)

- Actualizing human oriented development approach for humanity and distributing welfare to all segments of society are the basic priorities.
- Rural development supports will be provided in a way that would improve competitiveness in agriculture. The commonality of objectives between the EU funds and national funds will be strengthened; the compliance and complementarity will be improved in terms of potential beneficiaries and geographical coverage.
- Support instruments based on production and income will be developed for villages located in and around forests in particular, for those located in or around preservation areas such as national parks and for those in mountainous areas, aiming at reducing development problems resulting from their disadvantageous locations.

2015 Annual Program

- Women's participation of labour force and employment will be increased.
- Training of project development and implementation for potential beneficiaries in the provinces where the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPARD) Programme implementation will be increased.

The monitoring and evaluation of the progress of the development plans in Turkey are performed by "Development Plan Monitoring and Direction Committee" that is directed by the Undersecretary of the Ministry of Development and comprised of high level administrators from related ministries. Each priority transformation of the plan is put into practice within the framework of action plans, programs and projects.

The most significant progress in supporting women in rural areas which prepared by coordination of Ministry of Labour and Social Security is "National Employment Strategy and Action Plan-NES (2014-2016)". This document also focus on improving the employment conditions for the women in agricultural sector although includes several objectives related other sectors. NES^[8] mentioned that:

- As for the agricultural sector workers, entrepreneurship, and in particular women's entrepreneurship will be supported,
- Employed in agriculture, especially women, will facilitate to entry into the social security coverage,
- The quality of the workforce in the sector will be increased through the establishment of professional standards and made job descriptions of employees in the agricultural sector.

In addition to NES, "Women's Empowerment in Rural Areas Action Plan (2012-2016)^[9]" is another important policy document. This plan has been prepared by Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock and has close connection with rural women. The main strategic areas and development axis of this document are;

- Rural areas and women (Poverty, Education, Health),
- The role of women in rural areas in agricultural production and marketing (Agricultural Production, Entrepreneurship and Marketing),
- Women and natural resources (Use and Management of Natural Resources, Conservation of Natural Resources),
- Women employment in rural areas and organization (Agricultural Employment and Organization, Social Security).

There are also joint works between Turkey and the EU by means of implementation projects. To participate the agricultural production in a more efficient and better conditions, the joint activities between Turkey and the EU are conducted for women. In particular, at the level of policy development, Joint Assessment Paper on Employment Priority Policies (JAP), aimed at our country's accession to the European Employment Strategy, is located in an important position.

On one hand, EU has given financial and technical support the activities that are under "Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) Regional Development Program" of the rural development component. Furthermore, "Women's Empowerment Innovation in the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) Region" project, aimed to strengthen the social and economic aspects of women and supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) was implemented. The main components of the project are establishment of production workshops for producing high value-added and long-term products and strengthening of existing ones, the establishment of market linkages and brand creation, identification of alternative markets and sales channels, organization, exhibiting the manufactured products in major cities and trainings.

Projects

Besides policies and programs, there are various projects and studies carried out by different institutions and organizations for rural women in Turkey. These projects create new opportunities for the women as well as increase agricultural production and improve the standard of living in the rural.

Most notably, Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock implements some key projects in order to support women in the rural areas. Each priority of these projects are conducting research on the present situation and problems of rural women, preparing annual training programs and ensuring the transfer of technological information to women farmers. Listed below are some example projects for rural women^[8,9].

Rural Women Projects of Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock

a) Home Economics Education Extension Studies: In 81 provinces in Turkey, trainings are given on the subject of management of family resources, child development and education, nutrition and hand arts for women and young girls.

b) Women Farmers Agricultural Extension Project: Agricultural input supply is given and training is provided according to the project subject (fruit, vegetables, milk, cattle, livestock, greenhouse vegetable growing and greenhouse floriculture etc.).

c) Dere Tepe Education Women's Support Program: In Niğde, Tokat, Samsun, Ordu and Erzurum provinces, trainings are given on the subject of healthy lifestyle, healthy pregnancy, child care, health, nutrition, child growth and development, communication techniques with children.

d) Women empowerment through enhancing agricultural extension services in Turkey and Azerbaijan: The main objective is applying gender-sensitive approaches in agricultural extension and rural advisory services in Turkey and Azerbaijan.

Apart from these projects, Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock is organized annually a workshop on "Women Farmers Compete Information and Project Competition"^[10] for the female population in the rural. The targets of this organization also cause the rise of agricultural production capacity development and socio-economic empowerment through increasing the knowledge, skills and self-confidence of rural women.

On the spending side, towards achieving a sustainable living standards in the forest villages, Ministry of Forestry and Water Affairs^[11] is responsible for helping the socio-economic development of forest villagers and leading all kinds of loans and grants to direct them. General Directorate of Forestry and Rural Affairs (ORKOY)^[10] conducted some projects for forest villagers, especially women;

- Eastern Anatolia Watershed Rehabilitation Project,
- Ordu-Giresun Rural Development Project,
- Muş-Bingöl Rural Development Project,
- Yozgat Rural Development Project.

By virtue of these projects experience, it might be considered that forest villagers should be a key actor for consideration with national attention on employment and poverty reduction. The State Forestry Service in Turkey has created some supporting measures for the development of forest villages. These mainly provide employment to forest villagers through forestry activities in their regions, both direct and indirect resource allocation. State programs aim to minimize the pressures on forests and direct forest villagers to alternative income sources by making contributions to the social and economic development of villagers.

Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP)^[12] Regional Development Administration is responsible for working on the basis of strategies that ensure the effectiveness and fairness to reduce inter-regional differences and promote the competitiveness. In this respect, GAP Social Action Plan was prepared based on the five key research findings between 1992 and 1994 by GAP Regional Development Administration.

In this regard, Multi-Purpose Community Centres (MPCC/ÇATOMs) are created not only this plan but also in the line with the findings of "Women's Status in the GAP Region and Integration Research of the Development Process". The primary objective of ÇATOMs is to eliminate the gender-related inequalities in the GAP Region by enabling women and to improve their individual, economic and social skills.

Not surprisingly, a study on social impact assessment of ÇATOMs demonstrates the real success of this program. As the holistic evaluation in this study, the effectiveness level of ÇATOMs is examined within the context of "Empowerment of Women" and the research data is gathered from face-to-face interviews with 2.187 women in total, consisting of 1.058 women from 24 ÇATOMs of seven different provinces in the GAP Region and 1129 women from the neighbourhoods in which those 1.058 women live. The study has produced the following three important outputs. Firstly, the single and young women in rural are prioritised for participation into the ÇATOMs. Secondly, even though the effectiveness level of ÇATOMs is low inside the model of indicating factors in the process of cumulatively becoming stronger women, ÇATOMs have a significant role and impact in terms of the participatory women. Lastly, although the ÇATOMs encounter with the problems in different areas, they effort to deal with basically the similar problems^[13].

CONCLUSION

The women's empowerment might be used as an effective tool in order to ensure a sustainable and developed rural area. Since, the most practices in agriculture sector such as plant and animal productions and afforestation done by the women. Therefore, it is essential to strengthen the rural women's knowledge and skills by the side of their living conditions via various training programs.

Independent and diverse studies on the rural women are performed by different institutions and organizations but accessing sufficient capital, lack of social security and public pressure are still on-going problems of rural women in Turkey. Considering the continued need for supporting this target group, a model should be established to maximize benefits from the capabilities of

them. Providing an effective coordination and collaboration mechanism among the related public institutions, there is a need to prepare a unique and national level “program” that specifically focuses on promoting employment opportunities for rural female population and makes it more visible role in their places.

In this framework, to carry out a “support program” like SODES (social support program) would be a good and applicable example. Parallel to SODES, this support program should cover large number of rural women that maintain their life and directly deal with agriculture. Furthermore, comparing with other socio-economic content implementations in Turkey, this program should adopt project-based and micro-credit applications approach as well as provide demonstration and training activities in the rural areas.

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