GENDER ISSUES IN AGRICULTURE IN AZERBAIJAN

The Republic of Azerbaijan is an independent secular state in the South Caucasus. It is located on the border of Europe and Asia, at the crossroads of trade routes connecting the West and the East. The territory of Azerbaijan is 86,600 km². In 2015, the population of Azerbaijan was 9,593,000 people, and women represented 50.2 percent of the total population. The rural population accounts for 46.8 percent of the total population (which has decreased by 30 percent over the last 100 years). Women represent 50.9 percent of the total rural population. There are 1,007 women per 1,000 men in rural areas. There are 1.8 times fewer men of retirement age (above 63 years) than women of the same age. The fertility rate in rural areas is higher than in urban areas (2.4 and 2.0 respectively). Maternal mortality is also higher in rural areas (15.8 and 13.4).

The average salary of employees in agriculture is one of the lowest in the country, and amounts to 153.4 AZN in state institutions and 319.5 AZN in the private sector (the average wage in the whole economy is 649.7 AZN and 2,337.9 AZN in the oil industry).

Agricultural statistics are included in some aggregated statistical data, and are supplemented with data obtained in specific surveys. In official statistics, the section entitled “Agriculture, forestry and fisheries” contains four gender-specific indicators, and the section entitled “Welfare and social security” contains 12 gender-specific indicators. A proportion of the sex-disaggregated data is made available by the State Statistical Committee, in a shared database in the section on “Gender.”

The last decade of the twentieth century has been crucial for Azerbaijan. It was marked by the achievement of independence and radical transformations in political, economic and social life. Since the early 1990s, the country has been engaged in a military conflict, has suffered material damage worth billions of dollars, and has lost 20 percent of its territory (mainly agricultural). The inhabitants of the occupied territories, who have become internally displaced, in addition to ethnic refugees from a neighbouring country (about 1 million people), rushed to different regions of the country, creating and encountering serious problems, primarily associated with access to food.

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2 State Statistical Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan & UNFPA, 2015, Tables: 1,2, 1,4, 1,10 and 1,14.
3 Ibid. Table: 4,7.
4 Ibid. Tables: 6,1, 6,2, 6,3 and 6,4.
5 Ibid. Tables: 6,1, 6,2, 6,3 and 6,4.
Nevertheless, in recent years, Azerbaijan has made a significant breakthrough in terms of its economic development, by increasing production capacity, mainly in the oil sector, and by formulating investment policies and activities to support the harmonization of its social structure. The global economic crisis, caused by falling oil prices, has intensified the country’s search for ways of developing the non-oil sector. Government policy has been based on an understanding that the progress of the economy (in all areas which are not associated with the extraction and processing of oil and gas) is a tool for human development. First of all, it concerns agriculture, where the development of human potential is impossible without a thorough understanding of the gender composition of the society and the social status of women and men.

What is the situation in relation to a gender approach in agriculture in Azerbaijan today?

The government strategy is identified in the State programme on reliable food supply for the population in the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2008-2015, with a main focus on food security through self-sufficiency. However, the saturation of the market with food products does not guarantee food security for the most vulnerable groups, including women. Significant growth in the economy in the period 2006 to 2010 stimulated the creation of more than 100,000 new jobs (equivalent to an employment growth rate of two percent), however, the overall employment rate in agriculture has not increased by much. Although the share of this sector in the economy fell, it continues to be high, and the number of working women and men within the sector amounts to approximately two-fifths of the total number of employed people in the country. More than 83 percent of those employed in agriculture are self-employed. Sex-disaggregated data for this indicator are not available.

Currently, official statistics disaggregate the data of economic activity of the population by place of primary employment and private entrepreneurship in various sectors, and also take into account indicators in relation to the economically inactive population. This enables the creation of a picture of the gender situation in various fields. While there is gender asymmetry in some sectors of the economy, for example, a large majority of men in construction and energy, and a large majority of women in education and health care, there is a relative gender balance within agriculture. There is also a relatively equal ratio of men and women engaged in private enterprise in agriculture (with a slight majority of men). However, it is interesting to note that while there is a minor gender difference in private entrepreneurship, there is a larger gender difference in relation to the main place of work. This is demonstrated in Chart 1.

Chart 1: The distribution of men and women entrepreneurs in various sectors of the economy (%)

A special rural households survey conducted in 2012 by the State Statistical Committee, shows the following gender distribution in production, harvesting and product sales.
Table 2: Gender issues revealed by the rural household survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey participants</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>52.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in production</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>48.0</td>
<td>52.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in harvesting</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>50.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaged in sales</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>69.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved from outside</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>36.7</td>
<td>63.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of the data in Table 2 shows that although there is a relatively equal distribution of men and women involved in the production and harvesting of products, there are almost twice as many men engaged in the sale of agricultural products. This can be explained by the existence of gender stereotypes, where men are associated with the process of making money. This is also demonstrated in indicators related to obtaining credit (see Table 3). The data on the use of agricultural machinery and fertilizers in the same table indirectly point to the predominance of men in the group of people who use more machinery and fertilizers, which results in increased productivity and, of course, in higher revenues.

Table 3: Special survey of rural households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of households</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Received credits</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>74.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used agricultural machinery</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>78.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Used fertilizers</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>75.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The same rural household survey revealed that the sector with the most gender asymmetry was fisheries. In this sector, only two indicators were considered: Lake and Pond fishery and the Fishing quota. In relation to the first indicator, the number of men within the sector is 8.3 times greater than the number of women (175 men versus 21 women), and in relation to the second indicator, the number of men is 240 times greater than the number of women. According to the available information, worldwide fisheries and aquaculture are traditionally male sectors, even though women are involved in some of the processes within these sectors. Unfortunately, there are insufficiently detailed data on this issue. However, the predominance of men in this sector cannot solely be explained by the fact that fishing (this relates to marine fisheries in Azerbaijan) is heavy and dangerous work: it also explained by the high levels of income, in particular from the sale of valuable products such as sturgeon and caviar.

The current social protection system in Azerbaijan involves social insurance and social assistance. Social insurance benefits (for example, old-age, unemployment and illness) are financed by social insurance contributions made by members of the employed population. Monthly social transfers such as children’s allowance, benefits of targeted social assistance and disability benefits are financed from the state budget. The main aim of the social assistance programmes is to support a minimum level of consumption in low-income groups. With reforms underway, there has been progress in the registration and implementation of social insurance payments.

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However, there are no disaggregated data in relation to expenditure on social protection in urban/rural areas as a proportion of the total state budget (central, local) and its dynamics. There is no difference between the rural and urban populations in relation to the old-age pension. According to the 2009 law on pensions, women with five or more children retire earlier, and each subsequent child reduces the age of retirement by one year. The law is also applicable in cases where a father raises children in the event of the death of a mother. However, there are no gender statistics on these indicators.

Table 4: Gender distribution in the economically inactive population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Gender ratio (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High school full-time students</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old-age pensioners</td>
<td>32.6</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>51.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability pensioners</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rentiers deriving income from property</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housewives, childcare</td>
<td>30.8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>96.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (%)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>52.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The main gender issue in Azerbaijan is the limited access of women living in rural areas to productive and technical resources, and to the markets for sale of their agricultural products. This ultimately limits their incomes and creates economic dependence. Gender stereotypes form the basis of these problems. Gender issues in agriculture in Azerbaijan also include the poor gender responsiveness of legislation in various spheres of agriculture and the fragmentation of statistical databases.

Specific measures to improve the situation may include:

- Conducting a large-scale, comprehensive study of the gender situation in rural areas, including gender analyses of national legislation in all fields of agriculture and in-depth interviews with rural women and men;
- Ensuring the further improvement of gender statistics in agriculture;
- Developing principles of cooperation and improving interaction between NGOs and state structures in relation to the assistance of rural women;
- Undertaking media campaigns to overcome gender stereotypes;
- Developing training programmes on private entrepreneurship and advanced training programmes for female small farmers.

Since women of retirement age, who have at least secondary or incomplete secondary education, predominate in the structure of the economically inactive population, it is advised that targeted programmes are developed on how they can harness their professional and life potential.

An example of best practice for the engagement of rural women is the project on reviving old silk scarves. Following the collapse of the system of command economy in Azerbaijan, one of the most developed fields of sericulture declined. The research centre “Inkishaf” restored the technique of silk production using a very popular silk product, the women’s traditional headscarf or “kelagayi”. The project has ensured employment and increased income for more than 100 rural households, including all household members (both women and men). In the space of one year, this folk craft was restored using artisanal production techniques, ensuring the preservation of all technological requirements, and in compliance with the structural and aesthetic features of the product. On 26 November 2014, kelagayi was included in the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, which affirmed the appropriateness of the project and created jobs for rural women in Ismayilli, Sheki, Gabala, Guba, Shamakhi and other regions of Azerbaijan.

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11 Data on budgeting in the municipalities is missing.
12 State Statistical Committee of Azerbaijan Republic.
13 The traditional Azerbaijani art of making and wearing the women’s silk headscarf “kelagayi” and its symbolism was included in the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2014. Information is available at www.unesco.org.
References

