



POLICY BRIEF

Photo: Hisham Al Alaoui, Research Assistant, ICARDA, Rabat, Morocco



Gendered Inequity in Wages and Working Conditions for Landless Agricultural Labourers in Morocco.

Women increasingly perform the majority of agricultural work in the Global South, including the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, yet research on the gendered dynamics of agricultural wage labour in MENA areas is limited. New research from Saiss in Morocco, an area where fruit production is practiced on a large-scale and is highly dependent on wage work, finds that gender norms, working conditions and wages interact to shape the experiences of landless female and male agricultural labourers.

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Agriculture plays an important role in the Moroccan economy. National employment in agriculture has grown dramatically in recent decades and so has the contribution made to the sector by female agricultural labour. According to FAO (2011), Morocco witnessed a sharp increase in female employment in agriculture from 38.9% in 1995 to 47.7% in 2010, while

KEY RESULTS

- Higher-paid, equipment-intensive tasks are predominantly assigned to men, whereas women often perform lower-paid, time-intensive tasks.
- Women are systematically paid less than men even when they perform the same tasks.
- Women are more likely to experience a severe lean period in the winter.
- Women agricultural workers are subject to gender specific forms of exploitation.
- Male and female labourers use different strategies to cope with financial hardship.
- Wages and working conditions for agricultural labourers are locally specific.

men's contribution to agriculture decreased considerably from 66% to 55% during the same period (Abdelali-Martini 2011). Similar trends in the "feminisation of agriculture" have also been reported in Algeria, Jordan, Syria, Libya, Palestine and Egypt (ibid.). Meanwhile, land privatisation, combined with the loss of common pasture land and drought in neighboring areas, has fueled landlessness and migration in some areas of Morocco and created a surge in agricultural labour in more productive areas.

Most of the existing literature on gender and agricultural wage work focuses on sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America (Deere 2005; Tallontire et al. 2005; Razavi 2009; Dey de Pryck and Termine 2014), with relatively few studies conducted in the MENA region, including in Morocco. While the majority of studies focus on working conditions (e.g. pay, social security, safety, childcare services, unionisation), a few also focus on the social, economic and political empowerment dimensions for women involved in wage work (e.g. Friedemann-Sánchez 2006; Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2014; Abdelali-Martini and Dey de Pryck 2015). To date, a lack of sex-disaggregated data on the agricultural sector and inadequate monitoring mechanisms make it difficult to detect the specific problems faced by female and male agricultural wage labourers.

To better understand the experiences of landless agricultural labourers in Morocco, primary research was conducted with female and male labourers and labour supervisors in the Saiss region of the country. Study findings highlight gendered inequities in opportunities for work, remuneration and problems experienced by workers, as well as deficits in achieving decent work.

RESEARCH APPROACH

Researchers used a mixed methods approach to study the experiences of landless agricultural labourers in three areas of Saiss: Ain Jemaa, Betit and Sidi Slimane. A household survey was administered to 415 labourers (187 women and 228 men) to elicit information about the types of agricultural tasks assigned to men and women and the underlying rationale; wage differences based on gender, age and communities; problems faced by men and women agricultural workers; and reasons for working in agriculture. The survey data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistical tools.

The survey data were complemented with semi-structured interviews and gender-segregated focus groups with labourers and labour supervisors in each of the three study areas. The interviews and focus groups were aimed at acquiring in depth understanding of wages and working conditions in paid agricultural labour, underlying reasons, and gender norms, which can be difficult to learn about

using quantitative surveys. Qualitative data were analysed manually through theme identification and explanation building.

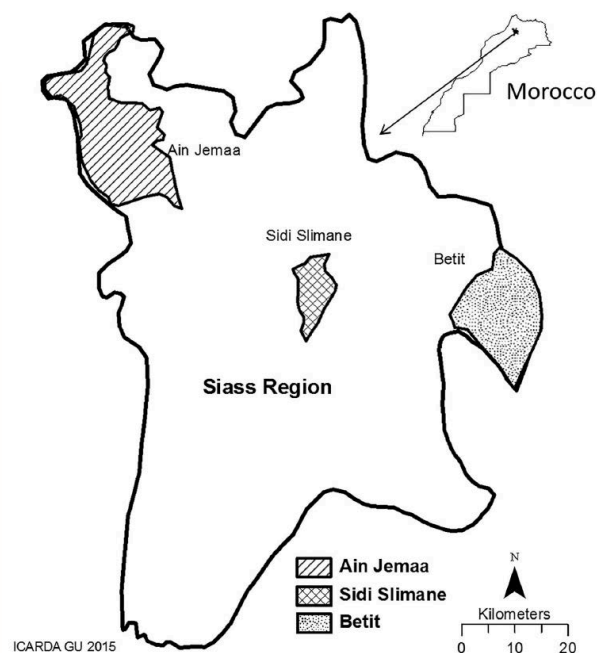


FIGURE 1. CASE STUDY AREAS AIN JEMAA, BETIT, AND SIDI SLIMANE

KEY FINDINGS

Higher-paid, equipment-intensive tasks are predominantly assigned to men, whereas women often perform lower-paid, time-intensive tasks.

Study findings reveal that higher paid tasks like supervision of labour, and tasks involving the use of mechanised equipment like irrigation, fertiliser and pesticide application, are predominantly performed by men. Tasks predominately performed by women – weeding, thinning, packing, grafting and sorting – take longer to complete and tend to be paid a daily average of 20 dirham less than tasks performed by men (during time of fieldwork US\$1 ≈ 10 dirham). Interviews with labourers and supervisors reveal that assumptions about women's inability to operate equipment and their greater willingness (borne at least partially by a lack of options) to work for lower wages, motivates employers to hire women more often for these lower-paid, time-intensive tasks. The total gender wage gap between tasks dominated by women and tasks dominated by men is on average about 25%.

Women are systematically paid less than men even when they perform the same tasks.

Both men and women workers identify low wages as a problem, however men are paid on average 16% more for tasks including packing, planting and related activities. On bigger farms, researchers found that women are often paid less than men for the same tasks (by 10 dirham per day on average). Employers reportedly pay women less than men for equal work because they assume that men are more efficient and faster workers than women. This point is a unique contribution of the study as such findings of a wage gap for the same task are rarely noted in the existing literature on agricultural wage labour.

Women are more likely to experience a severe lean period in the winter.

The tasks most commonly performed by women tend to be carried out during the peak season. During the low labour-demand season, from December to February, most of the agricultural jobs available involve ploughing, pruning, irrigating, and fertilising the land, which, as mentioned, are performed predominantly by men. Harvesting olives is one of the few tasks available to women in the winter, however the daily pay is 10–15 dirham lower than other harvesting tasks. Even if women can find work during the low season, they are more likely to experience late and reduced payments from employers because they are perceived (sometimes falsely) to be secondary breadwinners and because they have less bargaining power than men. All of this means that women are more likely to experience a severe lean period in the winter, which is characterized by financial hardship, reduced spending and increased necessity to accumulate loans and debt.

Women agricultural workers are subject to gender specific forms of exploitation.

Male agricultural labourers included in the study identify low wages, lack of work and poor working conditions as major problems faced at work. Women also identify these as major problems but they further experience gender specific forms of sexual harassment and exploitation. Female agricultural workers report that supervisors overseeing the work were especially disrespectful to women. They also report being subjected to sexual harassment by labour lords and fellow male labourers and asked for sexual favours. Because women's access to work often depends on their tolerance of sexual harassment, they are rarely able to resist unwanted advances or to demand respect at work. Yet gender norms dictate that women are expected to refuse men's sexual advances and accused of initiating them if they complain.

Male and female labourers use different strategies to cope with financial hardship.

Both men and women identify reducing spending, moving in with family and taking loans as strategies used to deal with financial hardships. Credit from local grocery stores also enables many labourers to purchase household goods during lean times. Men report a wider range of coping mechanisms, including selling livestock, asking for advances from employers, and migration. Men also report having better access to other non-agricultural work, like construction jobs, and more savings. Women report activities such as selling snails and working as maids in middle-class homes as strategies for surviving lean periods.

Wages and working conditions for agricultural labourers are locally specific.

The three areas of the Saiss region included in the study differ in terms of natural resource endowments, labour markets and gender norm dynamics, and this impacts local wages and working conditions. For example, there are striking differences in the three communities in responses about the social acceptability of women's paid work in agriculture. In Ain Jemaa, focus groups identify permission from husbands, working in sex-segregated groups, and proximity to home as important criteria for socially acceptable agricultural work for women. In Betit and Sidi Slimane, on the other hand, focus group respondents do not seem to share these concerns. Wages also differed with regards to type of crops, with wheat crop, which is mainly grown in Ain Jemaa, having the most pronounced gender wage gap. Additionally, concerns about the mechanisation of agricultural work replacing manual labour, particularly by men, are more pronounced in Ain Jemaa, which is the least mechanised area of the three study areas but is – perhaps consequently – experiencing mechanisation faster than Betit and Sidi Slimane. These findings suggest that it is important to identify local conditions to develop context appropriate policy responses for the agricultural sector.

POLICY INSIGHTS

Since their labour is the most important asset the landless poor in general, and women in particular, have to offer, it is critical that due emphasis is given to improving wages and working conditions (Razavi 2009; Dey de Pryck and Termine 2014). Study findings point to several recommendations for governments and policy-makers to achieve decent wages and working conditions for female and male agricultural labourers.

Follow decent work guidelines to protect the rights and wellbeing of agricultural labourers.

ILO guidelines around decent work, to which Morocco is a signatory, stipulate fair pay, equal opportunities and treatment, security, social protection, social dialogue, as well as rights at work, and offer a valuable opportunity to improve the working conditions of wage workers. The creation of associations to lobby for better wages and working conditions, expanded social protections, and formalisation of work – meaning access to a stable income as well as social benefits and medical insurance – should each be a priority for Morocco. These considerations are especially important for women whose bargaining power and networks are limited compared to men. Public policy should also anticipate mechanisation displacing wage work and train those affected in other skills.

Advocacy and enforcement of existing legislation in Morocco can promote gender equity.

Sexist stereotypes and societal prejudice against women combine to shape their experience as agricultural wage workers. Awareness building for employers along with the enforcement of existing legislation in Morocco to ensure equal pay, zero tolerance for sexual harassment, and better working conditions for women is an essential first step towards gender equity. Training women for higher paying jobs (such as pruning and pesticide application), more public education about women's rights and gender equality are also key to combating gender stereotypes.

A revalorisation of the importance of agriculture is necessary so that agricultural labour is not perceived as an occupation of last resort.

The health of the agricultural sector is important and necessary to the economy of Morocco, the Arab States, and the world at large. Yet findings reveal that for 38% of women and 22% of men respondents their employment in the agricultural wage sector is an option of last resort. Stronger social recognition and the revalorisation of the value and importance of agricultural labour is crucial to ensure food security of future generations in the context of youth exiting agriculture and to achieve decent work conditions for all.

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This brief was authored by Najjar, D., Baruah, B., Aw-Hassan, A., Bentaibi, A. and G.T. Kassie and designed by K. Grantham. It draws on key findings of the paper, "[*Women, work, and wage equity in agricultural labour in Saiss, Morocco.*](#)"

Suggested Citation:

Najjar, D., Baruah, B., Aw-Hassan, A., Bentaibi, A. and G.T. Kassie. 2018. "Gendered Inequity in Wages and Working Conditions for Landless Agricultural Labourers in Morocco." *GrOW Research Series Policy Brief*. Montreal, Canada: Institute for the Study of International Development, McGill University.

Produced with support from McGill University and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC). The observations and views expressed in this work are the sole responsibility of the author(s).

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