

INFLUENCE OF GENDER EQUALITY ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF VILLAGES IN THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

Marija GJOSHEVA KOVACHEVIKJ^{1*}, Blagoj GORGIEVSKI²

¹Institute of Sociological, Political and Juridical Research, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia,

²University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Bitola, Faculty of Law, Republic of Macedonia

*Corresponding author: marija9272@yahoo.com

Abstract

Sustainable rural development is important for the society, posing a challenge for rural households, in terms of ensuring continuous improvement of the quality of life and wellbeing for present and future generations. The equal participation of rural women and men is crucial for sustainable development but still remains a complex goal. The aim of this paper was to review the status of women in rural areas from the perspective of gender balance and to highlight the role of the equality in the activities related to sustainable rural development. The methods of descriptive statistics of data were used to process the official data for gender balance in the labour market. Additionally, a field interview for gender equality in decision-making and management was conducted on 140 rural households in Macedonia. The findings demonstrate that the employment rate of rural women amounted to 34%, what is lower than the employment rate of men in rural areas (66%). According to the structure of the status of employees in rural areas, women in the "unpaid family workers" category amounted to 8%, compared to women in urban areas amounting to only 1%. Additionally, the data from the field research show that rural women have very low levels of decision-making in the family and leadership of family businesses, especially in the rural areas with predominantly Muslim population. By identifying gender-differentiated opportunities and constraints, policy makers in Macedonia can develop gender-responsive actions that can lead to more effective measures for the overall improvement in natural resources management.

Key words: *Gender, Rural women, Sustainable rural development, Macedonia.*

Introduction

Sustainable development is a multidimensional principle which calls for integrating social, ecological and economic objectives at various geographical scales, and ensuring compliance with general system requirements, such as ecological and cultural integrity, economic stability, social equity, and economic efficiency (Hediger *et al.*, 1998). Sustainable rural development, as a crucial component for many societies, especially for the countries with predominant rural areas as it is Macedonia, poses a big challenge to ensure mitigation of the unsustainable trends regarding climate changes, energy usage, poverty and social exclusion, demographic pressure and aging, threats to public health, use of natural resources and loss of biodiversity.

Inspired by the common agricultural policy of the EU, the Republic of Macedonia reaffirmed its rural development policy in order to increase the competitiveness of family businesses and to improve the living conditions in rural areas. This is in particular important as rural areas cover 80% of the total territory of the country and 59% of the total population lives in predominantly rural regions (compared to 22,5% in the EU 27, according to the Eurostat). However, the indicators show that the country has modest improvements or even negative trends in some areas consider as significant for rural sustainable development. For those who live in rural areas, the problem of access to banking services face 36%, access to postal services 24% and access to cultural facilities 20%. Basic transportation services are not

available or are difficult to access for 22% of the populations in rural areas. The need to improve the road network in rural areas is highlighted as a high priority, both in lowland villages (51%) and in the mountain villages (54%) (MAFWE, 2015). Furthermore, internal migration data show an increase from rural to urban migration. In 2015, the total number of migrants from rural to urban areas increased by 2.7% in comparison with the previous year. The number of migrants aged 15-29 decreased by 2.0%, while the number of working-age migrants (30-64) grew by 9.0%. Considerable share (13,4%) of rural population above age of 15 has insufficient or total lack of education, 2,6% are illiterate and 10,9% have not completed primary education. Illiteracy is higher among women (4,5%) than among men (1,3%) and it is particularly worrisome among the female adult population as there are more than three times as many adult illiterate women as there are illiterate men. The educational problem is obvious among the unemployed, since only 16% of them have higher or university education, the majority (55%) has secondary education, and the remaining 29% are unqualified (MAFWE, 2015). These facts designate that the development of the socio-economic situation in the rural areas should be high priority for the country at all levels. Studies from FAO (2015) and World Bank group (2010) indicate that the women's empowerment is a pre-condition for achieving of the sustainable rural development goals, such as poverty, responsible consumption and production, migration, affordable and clean energy, clean water and sanitation and others. Consequently the rural women and men have different needs, priorities, and knowledge about diverse crops, plants, and animals what play important roles in resource management and genetic diversity. Women, therefore, play an important role in maintaining biodiversity, working against the decrease in biodiversity caused in part by men favouring cash-oriented monocultures (Lope-Alzina, 2007). Gender inequality in the rural society cause increased vulnerability of women with the inappropriate management of the natural resources, what are the main sources for living of the rural population. The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the current situation of the rural women in Macedonia, and highlights the importance of the gender dimensions in the planning and implementation of the strategies for rural sustainability.

Material and Methods

The research is based on primary and secondary source of data. The target group are the rural households in Macedonia, which according to the Statistical data cover 59% of the total population. The survey refers to the 2015, encompassing data from 140 rural households from two different regions in Macedonia, Polog and Pelagonia. The questionnaires are composed of three sections. One section contained questions about households' characteristics (location, nationalities, gender structure of the families and family holders), the second focus on the source of incomes in the family and involvement of the rural woman in the family rural businesses, and the third asked about role of women in decision-making in the family in terms of children nutrition and task assignments, family businesses, spending of the family budget and selling of the family produced products and services.

Apart from field survey, the research use secondary source of data, mainly from official statistics. The methods of descriptive statistics of data were used to process the official data for sustainable indicators in the Republic of Macedonia, in order to get the general picture of the current situation, as well data for the gender balance in the labor market were provided by Labor force survey in 2016 and from the publication for women and men in Macedonia for 2016. In addition, research data for gender equity in education, land ownership, migration agricultural production in Macedonia, conducted by concerned institution on this issue, such as FAO, World Bank group, Ministry of agriculture, forestry and water economy, UN women, CRPM (Centre for research and policy making in Macedonia), have been used.

Results and Discussion

According to the field survey, for most of the interviewed rural households (75% or 105 rural households) agriculture is the primary activity and the main source of income, followed by households with main incomes from own small businesses (crafts, rural tourism, processing of agricultural products) representing around 10% (14 households), 13% (18 households) live from salaries from employments at others and about 2 % from pensions.

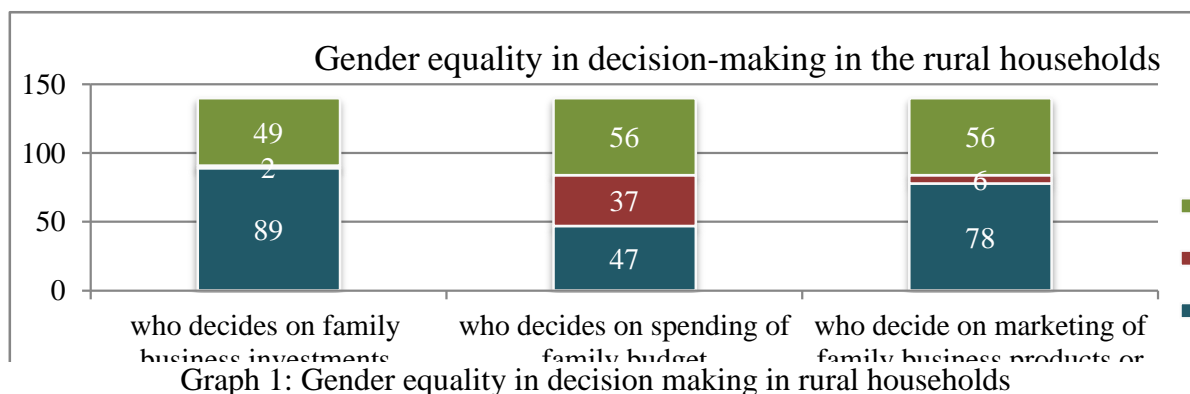
The research revealed that out of the total surveyed rural households; there are only 9 women family holders (7%). The situation is worse in the Polog region with predominantly Muslim population (Albanians and Turks are around 65% of total interviewed households) with share of only 3% of women family holders compared to the Pelagonia region with share of 10% (Table 1). This indicates a low level of gender equality in terms of ownership, i.e. the holder of the rural economy, but the involvement of women in production, especially labor in harvesting as a family, is a highly prevalent and an average of 33% of the total family labor. In most cases, the woman is the owner of the rural family business as formality due to higher state support for rural women.

Table 1. Structure of family holder according to the gender and nationality

Nationalities/Regions	Macedon.	Albanian.	Turks	Vlachs	Others	Total	Share
Pelagonia	54	10	2	3	1	70	100%
women	4	0	0	3	0	7	10%
men	50	10	2	0	1	63	90%
Polog	24	40	6	0	0	70	100%
women	2	0	0	0	0	2	3%
men	22	40	6	0	0	68	97%
Grand Total	78	50	8	3	1	140	100%

Sources: Own field survey, 2015

The most of the interviewed family members (72%) consider that the role of rural women have decision making power in assigning working tasks to the children and nutrition. In addition, the field research indicates that the main decision making power in Macedonian rural families lies with males who make almost all decisions concerning family business investments (less than 1% of the rural women population has role in taking decision for family business occupation). About 26% (37 women) of the rural women take decisions on spending of the family budget and only 4% (6 women) on marketing of the family business products or services. However, the rural women are involved in the groups where the decisions are taken by all family members, with a share of approximately 40% or 56 responds to this group.



Sources: Own field survey, 2015

The labour market in Macedonia is characterized by a gender imbalance in favour of males in both, rural and urban areas. In 2016, the employment rate for women in urban areas (43%) is lower than the employment rate for men (57%), but this ratio is much higher in rural areas, where employment rate for women is 34% compared to 66% of employment rate for men (Table 2). In addition, the gender gap between unpaid rural male workforce and unpaid rural female workforce sees disparity in favour of women, accounting 5% and 8% respectively, while the share of unpaid women labor in urban areas is even less than 1%. Only 4% of rural women are registered as self-employed mainly because in less than 6% of rural households, women own farmland or a house (CRPM, 2012). On contrary, 16% of the total male labour force in rural areas is self-employed, what are the mostly agricultural workers. The share of businesses run by women is very low in rural (1%) and in urban (2%) areas as well, with little advantage in urban areas.

Table 2. Employed by economic status and gender in urban and rural areas, 2016.

Employed by economic status and gender in urban areas, 2016										
Gender	Total		Employee		Employer		Self-employed		Unpaid family worker	
Total	413,383	100%	350,609	85%	22,097	5%	33,107	8%	7,570	2%
Men	234,951	57%	190,331	46%	15,812	4%	25,680	6%	3,129	1%
Women	178,432	43%	160,278	39%	6,286	2%	7,427	2%	4,441	1%
Employed by economic status and gender in rural areas, 2016										
Gender	Total		Employee		Employer		Self-employed		Unpaid family worker	
Total	310,167	100%	198,364	64%	9,905	3%	62,258	20%	39,641	13%
Men	204,765	66%	131,096	42%	8,234	3%	49,980	16%	15,455	5%
Women	105,402	34%	67,268	22%	1,671	1%	12,278	4%	24,186	8%

*Source: State Statistical Office, 2016.

Women's participation in agriculture in the country is also characterized by lack of land ownership, little input into agricultural decision making, and lack of control over their time and labour (FAO, 2015). Women in rural areas tend to have primary education only, while in the urban areas, they tend to complete secondary levels at least.

According to the survey of rural women by UN Women, in the majority of households women and men together make the important decisions concerning children (CRPM, 2012).

Access to new technology, information, and training related to natural resource management remains highly gendered, with most of the related initiatives targeted to men (World Bank group, 2010). It is known that communities are better off during natural disasters when women play a leadership role in early warning systems and reconstruction. Other studies have found that women tend to share information related to community well-being, choose less polluting energy sources and adapt more easily to environmental changes when their family's survival is at stake (International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources, 2007; Women's Environment and Development Organization, 2007).

Despite numerous efforts to mainstream gender, many governments, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and development agencies find these efforts particularly difficult in the agriculture and natural resource arenas. For example, extension personnel in agriculture and natural resources frequently speak only to men, often erroneously expecting that the men will convey information to their wives. Until gender is successfully mainstreamed, women's groups, organizations, and networks can increase women's access to knowledge, information, and technologies (Enarson and Meyreles 2004). Women are still absent from the climate

change and natural resource-related decision-making processes at all levels (World Bank group, 2010). Equal participation in community-based decision making remains a complex and difficult goal to achieve, especially in the contexts of highly unequal gender and class relations. At the local level, more natural resource projects and interventions emphasize community-level participation (World Bank group, 2010).

Conclusions

The sustainable rural development is a crucial for growing of the Macedonian economy take into consideration that rural area cover 80% of the total territory of the country and 59% of the total population. Data from the field research and official sources demonstrate that the population in rural areas in the country is significantly deprived in terms of population in urban areas in many respects. For example, the rural areas in Macedonia outside urban municipalities experience higher population decline; less access to public services; have less-educated labour force; experienced much higher unemployment rates and have lower incomes. Furthermore, the figures show that the Macedonian rural woman faces various challenges in terms of gender equality in many areas such as: daily activities and households, receiving of incomes (in most cases the rural women occurs as unpaid workers), access to education, participation in decision making at the households level and employment representation in the decision making at local and national levels. Women and men of varying ethnic groupings have varying levels of socio-economic status, political participation, and access to resources, all of which affect their ability to cope with and respond to sustainable development challenges. Various studies determine that women's role in families and communities, as well as their local knowledge in rural areas of environment, soils, water and production, are valuable resources for reduction and adaptation sustainable strategies—making them effective actors and agents of change.

According to these finding, the gender equality is a prerequisite for sustainable rural development of the Republic of Macedonia, contributing to reducing of migration, unemployment and poverty. Sustainable development as a key principle for rural policy is a big challenge for all involved and concerned actors in the country.

If women are more involved in decision-making, and if they had the required and needed access as men to productive and financial resources, income, education and services, agricultural yields would increase and the number of poor and hungry people would fall (FAO, 2015).

Traditional agricultural support policies are increasingly ineffective in accomplishing rural sustainable development objectives. For this purpose, a comprehensive analysis is required to deal with the inter-linkages between the agro-food sector and the economic, societal and environmental systems of rural areas, and the national and international political and economic context with accent on gender sensitive procedures and mechanisms:

- Equal opportunities in employment and equal wages for rural men and women commensurate with the nature of work must be ensured.
- Community and institutional system for increasing of knowledge for natural resource management, climate changes, biodiversity and energy efficiency by ensuring of women participation should be set up.
- Women should be given rights over village common property land to access the resources for their livelihood, and benefit-sharing mechanisms should be developed for wider participation.
- Common property resources must meet daily household needs for fuel and fodder and provide livelihood options for women. Social fencing creates hardships for vulnerable

groups. To circumvent the long gestation period for realizing the benefits, a buffer zone approach should be used to develop common property land. In general, greater female participation in economic development poses an asset to a community's and country's ability to recover and sustain growth in times of change and stress. (Aguirre et al, 2012).

References

- Aguirre D., Dustin J.M. (2012). Genetic diversity increases population productivity in a sessile marine invertebrate. *Ecological society of America*, Vol. 93, Issue 5; pp. 1134-1142.
- Enarson, E. and L. Meyreles (2004) 'International Perspectives on Gender and Disaster: Differences and Possibilities', *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 24(10):49–93.
- Eurostat (2017) http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Rural_development_statistics_by_urban-rural_typology (accessed on 10/06/2017)
- FAO (Food and agriculture organisation of the United Nations) (2015). FAO and the 17 sustainable development goals. FAO, Rome, Italy.
- Hediger W., Theler A., Lehmann B. (1998). Congress of the European Regional Science Association: Sustainable development of rural areas – methodological issues. 28 August – 1 September 1998, Vienna.
- Lope-Alzina D. G. (2007). Gendered production spaces and crop varietal selection: Case study in Yucatán, Mexico. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, Vol. 28, Issue 1; pp. 21-38.
- Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water economy (MAFWE) (2015). IPARD (Instrument for Pre-Accession for Rural development programme), 2014-2020. MAFWE, Skopje, Macedonia;
- Risteska M., Lazarevski G., Raleva A. (2012). Perspectives of women in rural areas. CRPM (Center for research and policy making), Skopje.
- SSO (State Statistical Office) (2016). Sustainable development, 2016. SSO of Republic of Macedonia, Skopje.
- SSO (State Statistical Office) (2017). Labour force survey, 2016. SSO of Republic of Macedonia, Skopje.
- SSO (State Statistical Office) (2016). Women and men in Macedonia, 2016. SSO of Republic of Macedonia, Skopje.
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) (2013) Ensuring gender equity in climate change financing. New York.
- World Bank Group (2010). Gender and natural resources management. World Bank group, Washington DC.