Gendered livelihoods and conservation agriculture: Space, decision-making, and access

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Abstract

This paper investigates gender-based constraints and opportunities to the dissemination of conservation agriculture based on a case study with smallholder farmers in the village of Pichangva, Ratanakiri District, Battambang Province, Cambodia. A mixed-methods approach was used, including focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, household surveys, and participatory mapping to explore the effect of conservation agriculture on men’s and women’s allocation of labor, gendered power relations in intra-household negotiations, and access to resources and information. We found that conservation agriculture has the potential to decrease men’s and women’s workload and drudgery in cash crop production and generates opportunities for other work. This may contribute to an increase in women’s ‘ triple workload ‘ as they invest part of this ‘ extra ‘ time into additional domestic and community activities. We also found that gender intersects with other factors to limit men’s and women’s access to information and participation in household negotiations. These findings could have implications on smallholder farmers’ decision to experiment with conservation agriculture.

Introduction

Conservation Agriculture (CA) is increasingly being advocated as a means to address food insecurity and soil degradation. CA has three interrelated principles (Haggar et al. 2009):

1. Permanent organic soil cover
2. Minimal soil disturbance from tillage
3. Diverse crop rotations, sequences, and associations

How do men and women access agricultural support services and information about CA?

- Distance affects men’s and women’s ability to attend meetings and seminar trainings.
- Men and women are commonly listed as members, but men reported that they attended a farmer association/producers group meeting or seminar training.
- There was more equity in SANREMIL meeting participation.
- Women cannot go on field trips because of their obligations in managing the household and reported, ‘ men cannot take care of children when the women are gone. ‘
- Field triaging focuses on technical knowledge and field activities and thus perceived as men’s domain.

Research Objectives

- How does CA implementation affect men’s and women’s allocation of labor to different productive, reproductive, and community activities?
- How do men and women access agricultural support services and information about CA?
- How are gendered livelihoods linked to men’s and women’s participation in intra-household decision-making and the implementation of CA?
- How could gender-based differences in access to and control over land, agricultural machinery, and credit impact the dissemination of CA?

Diverse crop rotations, sequences, and associations

Research Area

How can gender-based differences in access to and control over land, credit, and agricultural machinery impact the dissemination of CA?

- Men discuss CA with other men when they are working on their plot or visiting a neighbor’s plot.
- Women discuss CA in a greater variety of spaces including household gardens, pagodas, and markets.
- ‘ I share mostly with men because men control the upland cultivation and have the information and know about the supplies that are needed. ‘
- ‘ I talk about CAPS mostly with women because it is mostly women at the Pagod market. ‘

Example of a man’s participatory map

Example of a woman’s participatory map

Methods: Focus Group Discussions and Household Visits

Two FGDs held separately with men and women (26 men and women interviewed separately)

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- We found that conservation agriculture has the potential to decrease men’s and women’s workload and drudgery in cash crop production and generates opportunities for other work. This may contribute to an increase in women’s ‘ triple workload ‘ as they invest part of this ‘ extra ‘ time into additional domestic and community activities.

- We also found that gender intersects with other factors to limit men’s and women’s access to information and participation in household negotiations. These findings could have implications on smallholder farmers’ decision to experiment with conservation agriculture.

Conclusion

- Men discuss CA with other men when they are working on their plot or visiting a neighbor’s plot.
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- Even in decisions that are made jointly there are clear gendered differences in men’s and women’s participation in farm management decisions.

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Gender-based constraints to CA

- Land tenure insecurity especially for women
- ‘ Extra time ‘ and women’s triple workload
- Limited access to agricultural training and support services in the field
- Lack of access to credit
- Importance of labor to production

Gender-based opportunities to CA

- Farmer interest in new technologies
- Complementary roles in household decision-making
- Joint land ownership

Development recommendations

- Build upon existing information pathways to ensure men and women both have access to agricultural training and support services.
- Incorporate information beyond the technical components of CA applied in the field to include decisions made in the home that affect field practices.
- Identify who within the household makes what kinds of decisions.
- If decisions are made jointly, ensure that men’s and women’s concerns and interests are addressed.
- Thinking spatially can help conceptualize the interconnectedness of the multiple components of gendered livelihood.