Female Land Rights and Farm Income in Paraguayan Agriculture

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February 12, 2007

Abstract

This paper is an assessment of the impact of women’s land rights on agricultural productivity in rural Paraguay, building on the comparative work done by Carmen Diana Deere, Rosa Luz Durán, Merrilee Mardon and myself on Brazil, Peru and Paraguay for the World Bank. We found that households with female land rights had higher net non-agricultural incomes, but lower net agricultural and net household incomes. Land rights for women are key determinants in women’s and household welfare in rural settings throughout the developing world, as research on land and gender issues in economic development has shown. Why then, should female land rights lead to adverse outcomes in terms of agricultural incomes?

This paper is an attempt to explain lower agricultural incomes in households with female land rights. I do this by investigating differences in crop yields, crop specialization and farm activity specialization by owner-operated rural farms with and without female land rights. I find that households with female heads and female landowners have distinct agricultural production patterns compared to households with dual heads or male heads and with male landowners, planting subsistence rather than cash crops and engaging in livestock and dairy production rather than planting crops. Female-headed households have higher land productivity and rates of return on assets than dual-headed households, while those households with female landowners have lower productivity and rates of return. These results indicate that ownership of land is insufficient to ensure women’s welfare: effective control over land is key.