

"International Federation of Agricultural Producers" Mayıs 2002 Kahire Kongresinde sunulan tebliğ.

## **WOMEN IN TURKISH AGRICULTURE**

Dr. Özlen Hiç-Birol

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### 1. Agricultural Sector in the Turkish Economy

I would like to begin by presenting some basic statistics concerning the place of the agricultural sector in the Turkish economy.

Turkey had a total population of 66,8 million in mid-2001 (est.) and a population growth rate of 1,51%. It is a young population with 41,5% in the age group 3 - 20. Rural population is 35%, urban population is 65%. An additional population of about 3,5 million lives abroad, of which about 3 million is in the European Union.

Per capita income in 2000 was \$2,693 [State Planning Organization (SPO) *2002 Program*, p. 177]. This figure is corrected for the rise in foreign exchange rates following the economic crises in November 2000 and February 2001, after which the exchange rates were left to float and rose sharply.

In the 5 years 1996-2000, the average yearly growth rate of GNP was about 3,9%, that of GDP 4,0%. It was about 3,9% for agriculture, 4% for industry, 4,6% for services.

The share of agriculture in GDP in 2000 was 13,5%, of industry 28,3%, services 58,2% (all above figures from SPO, *op. cit.*).

In 1999, crop area sown was 18,448 thousand hectares, crop area fallow 4900. In addition, vegetable gardens were 790, vineyards 530, orchards 1,404; olive groves 600 and forests 20,703 thousand hectares [State Institute of Statistics (SIS), *2000 Annual Statistics*, p. 272].

In 2000, total civilian labor force was 22,029 thousand, total civilian employment was 20,578 thousand with 7,187 (34,9%) in agriculture, 3,733 (18,2%) in industry and 9,658 (46,9%) in services. Unemployed was 1,451 thousand (6,6%), under-employed 2,043 (7,0%), total unemployed and under-employed 3,494 (13,6%) [SPO, *2002 Annual Program*].

A comparison of sector shares in GDP and employment indicates that the value added per employment was about 4 times as big in industry as compared to agriculture; in services it was 3,2 times as big. This difference stems from a much higher level of capital usage and a much higher technological level in industry compared to agriculture. In addition, in agriculture we have considerable disguised unemployment as well as seasonal unemployment.

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\* TZOZ, Kadın Çifçiler Komisyonu Başkanı; BOĞAZIÇI ÜNİVERSİTESİ, İ.İ.B.F. Ekonomi Bölümü part-time Öğretim Görevlisi

Region is the least developed. But the population there is also fractional due to internal migration. The recent efforts to realize the "Southeastern Anatolian Project", however, have given a new acceleration to the Southeast; though much of this project still remains to be completed.

## 2. Women in Turkish Agriculture

We should begin by noting that women in general have a lower education level compared to men. The ratios for women are lower compared to European and developed countries but definitely higher compared to many of the less developed countries in Asia and Africa.

The overall literacy and illiteracy rates are summarized in **Table I** below [SIS, *Household Labor Force Questionnaire for 1999 October*]. Note that discrepancies between figures exist and classified as unknown or undetermined.

**Table I: Literacy and Illiteracy for Population ages 6 +, Oct. 1999\***

	Total (T)	Males (M)	%	Females (F)	%
<b>Total</b>	55,207.9	28,126.3	50,9%	27,081,6	49,1%
<b>Illiterate</b>	8,276.6	2,537.0	30,7%	5,739.6	69,3%
<b>%</b>	15,0%	9,0%		21,2%	
<b>Literate</b>	44,692.2	24,545.8	54,9%	20,146.4	45,1%
<b>%</b>	81%	87,3%		74,4%	
<b>Unknown</b>	2,239.1	1,043		1,195.6	

\* Source: SIS, 1999 Oct. Household Labor Force Questionnaire

It is clear from **Table I** that illiteracy rate is higher for F than for M. Of total illiterates, 69,3% is F, only 30,7% is M.

The 1999 Oct. Questionnaire results have not yet been cross-classified into urban versus rural population. The latest such cross-classified information goes back to 1990, which shows that literacy and educational level among urban women is higher compared to rural. In the SPO, *2002 Annual Program*, however, it is noted that for the year 2000 literacy ratio for F is 78,4%; this ratio is 85,2% for F in urban areas, 67,6% for F in rural areas [p. 162].

Furthermore, literate F in general have a lower educational level than men, as is given in **Table II**.

**Table II: Literacy Among F and M by Schools Graduated, ages 6 +, Oct. 1999\***

	M	F
<b>Totals</b>	24,545.8	20,146.4
<b>Literate without Diploma</b>	3,684.9	3,644.6
<b>Graduated from Primary School</b>	11,871.0	11,125.2
<b>Graduated from Junior High<sup>1</sup></b>	3,544.2	2,060.9
<b>Graduated from Lyceum</b>	3,703.0	2,339.1
<b>Graduated from University</b>	1,525.6	849,3
<b>Unknown</b>	271.1	127.3

<sup>1</sup> Note that since 1997, the primary education has been raised to 8 years to include 5 years primary and 3 years former junior high. Thus, we have today only lyceum 3 years, which is contemplated to be raised to 4 years.

\* Source: SIS, *op. cit*

Again, though cross-classification into urban and rural is not available, former statistics indicate that the level of education in rural areas (comprised mainly but not solely of agriculture) is lower.

**Table III** gives a summary of labor force employed by professional status, cross-classified into agriculture (plus forestry, hunting and fishing) and non-agricultural sectors (including industry and services sector). As noted by SIS, small discrepancies exist in the figures given.

**Table III** gives in broad outline the position of women in the labor force employed. First, it should be noted that a much greater percentage of total women in rural areas work although they are less educated than women in urban areas. In contrast, urban women, though with a higher literacy rate and a higher education participate very poorly.

For instance, in agriculture, with total labor force 8,839 thousand, 54,5% is M, 45,5% is F. In non-agricultural sectors with a total employment of 12,807 thousand, 84% is M, only 16% is F.

By the same token, most of the women who are employed work in the agricultural sector. Total F employed was 6,070 thousand; F working in agriculture comprised 66,3%, F working in non-agricultural sectors 33,7%.

But most women employed in the agricultural sector are classified under "unpaid family workers" (3,512, i.e. 87,3% of total 4,024 thousand). "Self-employed" F in agriculture was only 343 thousand (8,5%). In contrast, of M working in agriculture, 3,015 out of 4,815 thousand, i.e. 62,6% was "self-employed"; 1,491 thousand i.e. 31% were "unpaid family workers".

Table III: Employment by Professional Status, Total, Male and Female, Ages 12 +, Oct. 1999\*

	T	M	F
<b>TOTALS</b>	21,644	15,574	6,070
<b>Regular Employees and Casual Employees</b>	9,710	7,841	1,869
<b>Self-Employed</b>	6,456	5,888	567
<b>Unpaid Family Workers</b>	5,480	1,845	3,634
<b>AGRICULTURAL SECTOR TOTALS</b>	8,839	4,815	4,024
<b>Regular Employees</b>	479	310	169
<b>Self-Employed</b>	3,357	3,015	343
<b>Unpaid Family Workers</b>	5,003	1,491	3,512
<b>NON AGRICULTURAL SECTOR TOTALS</b>	12,807	10,760	2,046
<b>Regular Employees</b>	9,229	7,532	1,699
<b>Self -Employed</b>	3,097	2,872	224
<b>Unpaid Family Workers</b>	477	356	122

\* Source: SIS, *op. cit*

**“Regular employees and casual employees” in agriculture is a very small figure both for F and for M.** This indicates that the overwhelming majority of farming is small size and carried in family units. The number of big farms employing regular employees must, correspondingly, be a small percentage. Note that this is not a hundred percent parallel to the distribution of landownership. The custom of renting land enables many farmers owning insufficient or no land to continuously rent land and carry on farming. The more successful end up eventually buying plots of land.

For lack of time, I will not go here into the position of women in the non-agricultural sectors. The statistics indicate, however, that in the higher echelons,

such as administrators, managers and executives, the number and the share of women are very low (9,1%). Among scientific and technical personnel, it is better but not satisfactory (33,6%) [SIS, *op. cit.*].

Unemployed and underemployed (those working less than 40 hours a week, those seeking another job because of low wages and those seeking another job because not working in his/her occupation) do not show any conspicuous bias concerning sex. This indicates that women in urban areas are neither employed but nor are they seeking employment.

**The above statistics concerning the status of women in the agricultural sector may imply that they have a very inferior position compared to men. But, in actual fact, though there are no reliable researches made on this subject, observations indicate that women in villages in farming are not as inferior within the family as the above statistics may imply.**

This is particularly true of the relatively richer regions with relatively more educated population, such as the Marmara, the Aegean and the Mediterranean.

- **Firstly, there is the general custom that men do all the physically harder work, including working with tractors and with various farm machinery. Women do the jobs that require less physical strength and less technical skills** such as hoeing, gathering of cotton, vegetables, etc., looking after the animals, milking, sometimes pruning of dead twigs and, of course, looking after the children. They may work in their own small farm or the land rented by their husbands and sons, or else they may do all this work for larger farms as casual employees and earn extra money for the family. They may also do knitting and weaving in villages where there is such an opportunity. Men, too, may get additional daily work with pay in other and large farms as casual employees for extra money for the family.

A similar pattern can be seen in the Black Sea Region. Women in agriculture in that region also do the more tedious jobs in raising tobacco, tea and hazelnuts. Men do the harder work; they also work outside in fishing, building boats, manufacturing of weapons, or else they may be employed in non-agricultural jobs in towns or cities.

Men from the poorer provinces in the Eastern Region also come to the richer regions, such as the Mediterranean, to work as casual employees for definite periods during the year.

- **Secondly, there is no hard, fast custom, including religious custom, to force women in agriculture to an inferior position in the family.**



**In fact, forceful and wise women can have the first voice in the agriculture-based rural family.** Because of the nature of their work, women in agriculture do not veil or cover themselves up. Though fully dressed in a customary way, their heads and hairs are open. During winter, to protect themselves from cold, they may wear headscarves not covering, however, their faces. **It is interesting sociologically that religious fundamentalism and religious orders generally find opportunity to thrive in small towns or in city slums, in families in the non-agricultural sectors.** Women there generally do not work and in accordance with the wrong interpretation of religion, are generally assigned an inferior place in the family. Much depends, however, on the particular town they live, to what society their husbands are opened, whether they are Alevi or whether they are in the Eastern Region, with still strong tribal and religious ties.

In closing I would like to make two important points concerning the status of women in Turkey, in general and in agriculture.

- **Firstly, Atatürk accorded women large civil rights when he founded the new Republic in 1923.** These included monogamy (single marriage), the right to enter political elections and to vote, the right to work, equal rights to inheritance, equality before courts as witnesses, etc. The new Civil Code accepted by Atatürk and the Parliament at the time was taken from Switzerland. He made primary schooling compulsory to all. Thus began the long march of women from nearly 100% illiteracy; similarly, literacy began to increase rapidly in men, too. Political rights granted to women at the time were ahead of most European countries. Atatürk had fully appreciated the contribution that women had made to the War of Independence, including carrying of ammunition and weaponry to the soldiers in the fighting zones. He also realized that to establish a modern society, women must have equal rights and status.

The status of women continued to be improved and raised to European levels. But rights accorded by laws are not always fully implemented; because of customs and religious fundamentalism. The latter mistakenly assigns an inferior place to women, although they clamor for the "right of women" to veil themselves.

The very recent religious convention by the Directorate of Religion, however, decided that women could pray in mosques and in funeral ceremonies; that they are equal as witnesses, that physical torture of women is not allowed by religion.

- **Secondly, there are many governmental institutions and programs carried by the government, sometimes with aid from the World Bank, to help women in agriculture, or women in general.** These include the Family Planning Program, institutions to help childbirth, programs concerning



general health; reestablishment of a General Directorate on Research about Family, etc. Many of these, however, are not yet very effective.

Similarly, many nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in the cities do a very good job of helping divorced women, fighting against violence shown to women by their husbands, helping the children of mothers who work, etc. But they are not as widespread, hence effective, as one wishes them to be. Note here that nearly none of these NGOs are much concerned with "feminism" as in the USA or Europe, but with hard core problems women actually face in their daily lives; also including, of course, their intellectual enlightenment.