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# **Women's Role in Agriculture and Gender Related Issues in Syria**

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# Executive Summary

This paper will articulate several aspects concerning the situation of women in Syria especially in rural areas. In addition, it highlights the gendered relationship among men and women in several spheres. This paper has been divided into seven components. The first one is an introduction that gives an overview of the situation of women in general and gender issues that constrain women progress. Second component demonstrates gender and population demonstration such as Syrian population trends during the last three decades, the percentage of women vice men, mortality rate, fertility rate, and population growth rate. The third component is about the Syrian legislation and laws concerning women workers and gender differentiation in income earning and some biased rewards in favor of men. Fourth chapter presents statistical data about women's contribution in the economy, women's unemployment rate, women's contribution in agriculture and gendered agricultural function. The fifth component describes women's access to the pentagon assets that represent the five capital assets, which are financial, human, social, physical, and natural resources, and to what extent women access to those capitals. In addition, it has been adopted by Sustainable Livelihood Approach to assess women's possessing of productive resources. The sixth component of this paper exposes to governmental and non-governmental organizations that operate on women issues in Syria. The final component discuss a group of obstacles that face women and concluding some conclusions and recommendations that should be considered by decision makers and planners to push women's vehicle towards development and progress.

Below are some highlighted points and statistical data is summary form:

- Women and men are differ in work they do, income they receive, the roles they are given and the relationships that they share
- Since 1970, the issues of empowerment and advancement of women have been high on the Syrian government's agenda of development priorities
- The Syrian population actually living in Syria amounted to 17.550 million inhabitants in mid 2003
- The raw birth rate fell from 28.8 per thousand in 1994 to 26.8 per thousand in 2003, whereas, the raw mortality rate dropped from 33 per mill in 1994 to 24.5 per mill in 2003
- Fertility rates have decreased among women (15-49 years) from 7.5 in 1970 to 6.8 in 1981 and from 4.2 in 1993 to 3.8 in 2001
- Syrian legislation is rooted in important principle, gender equity, which have full citizenship rights, although there are some existing laws that differentiate duties and rights by gender
- The state removes the restrictions that prevent women's development and participation in building the society
- All women are entitled to eight weeks paid maternity leave with additional leave possible at less pay. The government also provides national childcare for a small fee in schools and workplaces
- Female unemployment jumped from (4.3%) in 1991 to (24.1%) in 2002.

- A slightly higher unemployment rate was noticed among urban females compared with rural women (24.4% for urban and 23.9% for rural).
- The average of total monthly wages in 2002 amounted to 6100 S.P. for men versus 5703 S.P. for women, with a (400) S.P differences
- There is a tangible rise in the total rate of economic activity in the period of economic activity in the period of 1999-2002, where it rose from (22.6%) in 1994 to (52.5%) in 2002
- Most statistics do not consider the economic value of a woman domestic's work. However, Syrian women contribute to 70% of agricultural activities
- More than one third of rural women who are employed outside the home are illiterate (36.3%)
- The highest percentage of female employed at home who could read, write is (28.7%), and who have elementary certificate come next.
- The aggregate illiteracy rate, in Syria, for 2003 reached 23.1% (36.1% for females and 10.3% for males)
- The overall estimate for mortality rates among mothers is high (107 deaths for 100,000 live births)
- Maternal mortality rates declined from 2.4% to 1.8% over the past fifteen years (on average 1.6% per year)
- Female wage-earners rate decreased from 67.8% in 1981 to about 65.6% in 1994, and then it fell to 37.7% in 2002
- Holders were 94.7% male, while the female holding percentage was about 5.3%
- Male agricultural holders owning sheep amounted to 96.4%, while the female percentage was just 3.6%
- Males are dominant in the possession of agricultural machinery (99%). Only 11 women possess agricultural machinery, with nine of them possessing their own tractors
- More than 70% of women workers earn income wobbles between 2000 SP in minimum and 4000SP in maximum
- 56% of households are provided with piped water and 92% with electricity. While, only 29% of households are connected to a modern sanitation network
- There are a large number of organizations operating in Syria at the governmental and non-governmental level.

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# 1. Introduction

The imbalance between the essential roles of women and their limited opportunities is undermining efforts to reduce poverty. Women do most of the farm work, planting, weeding and harvesting crops, as well as tending livestock. They also spend long hours performing farm and household chores like collecting firewood, preparing meals and caring for children, which makes their typical day much longer than men's. Adding to their burden, women are increasingly left as sole caretakers when men die or migrate to cities in search for work.

Yet women have fewer assets than men that they could use to improve their lives. Women are less likely than men to get an education. They are often not able to own or to inherit land, and they have more limited access to credit, market and technology. Women may have fewer legal rights than men, and they often have little or no say in decisions that affect their lives. However, unless the obstacles that prevent women from realizing their potential are removed, it will be difficult if not impossible to achieve the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. When a woman is educated, her children tend to be better fed and healthier. When a woman earns income, she is more likely than a man to spend it on improving the well-being of the family. Women also command more respect in their homes and communities when they generate and control their own income. This can build their self-esteem and lead to a more active role in both public and family decision making. The improved status of women leads to a number of benefits, such as better child nutrition.

A major challenge is to modify traditional views on gender roles. This will require the support of men. When men realize that greater equality translates into greater prosperity for all, they may become part of the solution. In addition, girls are often kept out of school to help in the home, or because families with little money believe, a boy's education is a better investment. In some regions, it may not be accepted that girls mix with boys, or leave their village. In addition, girls may drop out early because they marry at a young age. This is part of a cycle in which lack of education, a large family and other factors combine to create the conditions that keep women in poverty. By contrast, countries that have achieved the quickest economic growth are those that have closed the gender gap in education the fastest. When women farmers have access to knowledge and technology, crop yields increase significantly. When women are educated, they have higher self-esteem, and this brings a host of benefits. Through being informed, they can be in a better bargaining position when negotiating prices for their crops. Educated women are also more likely to have greater control over their sexual lives, so they can protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies (Women, IFAD, leaflet).

This paper will attempt to review the present and potential roles for women in the economy, then in the agriculture linked with the Sustainable Livelihood Approaches (SLAs), focusing on the main problems that rural women face.

## 1.1 Gender Issues in Syria

The lives of women and men, the work they do, the income they receive, the roles they are given and the relationships that they share are all shaped by social and traditional norms, which treat women and men differently. Truly, we live in a world where gender matters. Such norms and traditions, and the ideas that underpin them, are also manifested in laws, institutions and economic and social structures, such as the family and the job market. But the gendered responsibilities and rewards of participation in society are not only different for women and men; they are usually inequitable (UNDP Human Development Report, 1995). Understanding

the ways in which gender differences are deployed to construct this reality of marginalization is necessary if efforts to address inequity and inequality are to be successful.

Syria as a part of this world, which underwent to political, economic, and social evolutions that impact woman status, Syrian society has witnessed this transferring and had led to create new types of social relationships concerning woman. Due to intellectual and ideological orientations in the country, had made a noticeable development to woman life comprising all domains.

Since 1970, the issues of empowerment and advancement of women have been high on the Syrian government's agenda of development priorities. This was crystallized in the government's concrete commitment towards the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCO) held in Beijing in 1995. That platform calls for enhancing women's status, removing all obstacles hindering their effective involvement in all spheres of life, and adopting gender equity, equality and women empowerment approach as vehicles to realize sustainable development. Henceforth, the government has taken all measures to put the Platform for action in place. A National Women's Committee (NWC) was established in 1995 with members from all involved ministries, popular organizations, trade unions and line ministries. Women's committees were also established in a number of trade unions, including the Working Women's Committee, Women Engineers Committee and Women's Committee in the Bar Association. Rounding out these efforts was the establishment of Women Unites within the Ministries of Agriculture (MOA), Labor & Social Affairs (MOSA), the State Planning Commission (SPC), and the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) ('Syrian Arab Republic, National Report, 2004, +10 post Beijing').

In collaboration with the concerned governmental and nongovernmental bodies, the National Women's Committee formulated in 1996 the National Women Strategy that was consolidated in the 9<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Development Plan, which has incorporated, for the first time, an ad hoc chapter on women empowerment issues and concerns, and the means of translating them into national and sectoral work plans that include monitoring mechanisms and progress-evaluation indicators.

During the period 1996-1999, the National Committee carried out the first phase of the post-Beijing follow-up project. The second phase (1999-2001) executed by the General Women Union (GWU) aimed, among other things, at:

- Strengthening national capacities;
- Building institutional capacities;
- Gender integration;
- Strategic development;
- Reshuffling the National Women's Committee (NWC) and drawing up its by-law;
- Activating the role of the NGOs;
- Conducting gender auditing studies interim ten years after the Beijing platform.

In the interim, women empowerment issues were placed high in various cabinet's statements, which spelled out the incessant support to further deepen the role assumed by women, enhance their contributions in all domains, and upgrade their intellectual and social development. They have maintained the importance of protecting childhood, promoting the role of the family as the nucleus of the society, updating vocational education and training, activating employment bureaus, reforming the wage regimes, expanding the scope of social and health services, enhancing services provided to orphans, the elderly, and the handicapped, reactivating the role of NGOs, promoting voluntary work, etc. Of equal importance has been the issue of revising and updating laws and legislations.

### 1.1. 1 Gender and Population

The population actually living in Syria in mid 2003 is estimated at about 17.550 million, the high growth rate in the country regarded as one of the main obstacles for development. However, the constant decrease of the total fertility rate recorded during the two recent decades, which is currently estimated at 3.8 births per woman totally, contributed to decreasing the population growth rate to 2.5% in the period 2000-2005, with a rate of 2.6% in urban areas during the same period. That situation can be viewed as one of the most important demographic trend, which requires extremely important population policies. On the other hand, one of the significant features of the Syrian economy on the total rate during the last three decades, as indicated by estimates of various sector; regardless of fluctuations during that period, is that Syria maintained relatively high rates of expenditure on social services, and consequently, realized positive steps in the various aspects of social care as in health care and education.

The population age and sex structure is currently different from what it had been before because the rate of children under 15 years actually dropped in 2003, more than ever, whether for total rate or for males and females, in favor of the labor-aged population (15-64 years). The total rate was 48.4% in 1981, it then decreased to 39.6% in 2003, but for males it fell from 48.6% to 39.9% and that of females fell from 48.3% to 39.2%. (*Family health survey, 2001 statistical abstract 2003/Central Bureau of statistics, Syria*).

As for the share of the population below 5 years, this percentage is regarded as an approximate indicator of women's burden of children. Data indicate the decreasing charges, which women endured in taking care and bringing up children between 1994 and 2003 as a result of a drop in the fertility rate. The total percentage of the population below 5 years fell from 19.3% in 1981 to 12.4% in 2003. For males it decreased from 19.3% to 12.2 in the same period, and for females, their percentage decreased from 19.4% to 12.2% in the same period.

The percentage of population of the age group (15-24 years) rose from 19.7% in 1981 to 22.2% in 2003; the percentage of males from 19.7% to 22.9% and the percentage of females increased from 19.6% to 21.6% in the same period.

As for adolescents, the total percentage of adolescents (10-19 years) increased from 24.8% in 1981 to 26.3% in 2003; the male percentage from 25.1% and to 27.5% and the female percentage from 24.5% to 26.3% for the same years.

However, the percentage of population of age group (+65) rose from 3.3% in 1981 to 3.6% in 2003. The male percentage went up from 3.2% to 4.2% but the female percentage remained around 3.1% for the same period. The number of women of the group age (+65) per 100 men reached 93.1 in 1981 then it fell to 67.1 women in 2003.

The population growth depends on various elements some of which are direct ones such as birth, death and migration, which may have either negative or positive effects. Moreover, there are certain other element having indirect effects such as late marriage and application of the family planning methods that have an impact upon fertility. **Table-1:** Population Number (1991-1994) & Estimate of 2003 by Sex (000)

<b>Years</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Total</b>
1981	4622	4424	9046
1994	7049	6733	13782
2003	8979	8571	17550

Source: Censuses of 1981-1994 and Estimate of 2003, CBS, Syria

As for fertility rate, fertility is one of the most important elements of population growth, which demonstrates the reproductive behavior modes leading to population rate change. The censuses and specialized demographic surveys showed that the high fertility rates seen in the sixties

slowly and gradually decreased during the seventies, and then actually dropped significantly in the late nineties. That is an indication of the significant changes that happened to the traditional high fertility rates and the inclination to need a more moderate rate. The total women's fertility rate, which illustrates the number of birth during a woman's life, fell from 6.8 births in 1981 to 3.8 in 2001. On the other hand, the prevalence of using family planning means contributed to decreases in child birth. The rate of using those means jumped from 39% in 1993 to 46.6% in 2001.

The socio-economic developments that the country has witnessed, led to a modification in reproductive behavior and made it tend towards moderation. Some of those developments were increase in urbanization, women's educational standards, bachelorhood, use of family planning and women's contribution in economic activities. But the rate of marital fertility, which illustrates the number of living births per married women, or previously married, during her reproductive life, is still high although it decreased from 10.7 births in 1981 to 6.6 births in 2002

The concept of having a large number of children to support the family's activities has changed into the idea that too many children over burden the family. Therefore, the rate of women willing to have another child fell from 44.3% in 1993 to 33.5% in 2001.

The decline in the fertility rate promoted a decrease in the rate of population growth, which fell from 33 per mil in the early nineties to 25 per mil at the beginning of the third millennium.

### *1.1.2 Policies and Legislations Related to Syrian Rural Women*

#### *1.1.1.1. Policy*

In the early seventies, women had already been granted equal rights under the Syrian constitution, especially with regards to education, employment, social security and welfare services. In fact, national plans and development strategies had not yet fully recognized the real contribution of women to the economy. However, in addition to the lack of institutional support for rural women, only a very small number of projects and programs were designed to target rural women. Consequently, most organizations and institutions dealing with rural women had no/or very few women employed at the policy-making level and very few women professionals existed to promote the cause of rural women. Indicators such as illiteracy, deteriorating health conditions, and the increase of female-headed households, as well as the lack of women's access to economic structures and productive processes (credit, land, education, technology, information, training, etc.), reflect the extent to which rural women in the early ninetieths have still been neglected in the development efforts

Syrian legislation roots an important principle, gender equity, which have full citizenship rights, although, there are some existing laws differentiate between duties and rights by gender, especially, law of personal status and labor law.

#### *1.1.1.2. Labor Laws*

Reference to the constitution issued on 13th March 1973, there were two articles highlighted women's right in the labor law.

#### **Article 36 (work):**

- a) Work is a right and duty of every citizen. The state undertakes to provide work for all citizens.
- b) Every citizen has the right to earn his wage according to the nature and yield of the work. The state must guarantee this

- c) The state fixes working hours, guarantees social security, and regulates rest and leave rights and various compensations and rewards for workers.

#### **Article 45 (women)**

The state guarantees women all opportunities enabling them to fully and effectively participate in the political, social, cultural, and economic life. The state removes the restrictions that prevent women's development and participation in building the socialist Arab society.

The Arab Ba'th Socialist Party has ruled Syria since 1963. The party, which utilizes women as a political base of support, has promoted gender equality. In the 1970s, women were actively recruited into the armed forces, which included a female special parachuting unit. At the same time, Syria remains an Islamic country with a strong commitment to religious tradition. Deeply felt social codes discourage women from entering the public realm or making political demands. While a minority of women has entered the workforce and politics, the majority continues to live a traditional lifestyle.

All women are entitled to eight weeks paid maternity leave with additional leave possible at less pay. The government also provides national childcare for a small fee in schools and workplaces

As for labor law, the consolidated labor law no 91 of 1959 has organized labor's relationships and employment in private sector

Some of labor's laws give women workers a distinction concerning their parity's role; nevertheless, there are some conditions, which restrict women to practicing some jobs or professions, and here are some preventing provisions:

- Women are prevented to working from 8 in the evening and 7 in the morning
- Women are prevented to practicing jobs that threaten their health or ethics
- Women working in agriculture are prevented from working at night, except in harvesting time. In addition, they have the same right in maternity leave as their women workers counterpart, and the employers have to provide centers for children rearing if the number of employees exceeds 100 woman.

##### *1.1.1.3. Unemployment Rate*

Certain changes have taken place in male and female unemployment in 2002. For males, there were distinct variation ranging from (4%) to (8.2%) during the period of 1981-2002, but there were sharper changes in percentage of female when it jumped from (4.3%) in 1991 to (24.1%) in 2002. The figures in table-2- denote variant changes but the gap between males and females was still over twofold. In addition, the figures also demonstrate a higher unemployment rate among urban females as compared with rural women. Accordingly, the gap between the two sexes grew larger during that period in both rural and urban areas.

**Table-2:** Unemployment Rate of Population (+15 Years) By Sex and Areas in 1994-2000-2002

Year	Urban Areas		Rural Areas		Total	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1994	6.1	10.6	6.6	11.6	6.3	11.1
2000	7.5	28.1	7.0	13.4	7.3	18.5
2002	7.0	24.4	9.7	23.9	8.2	24.1

Source: Syrian Censuses 1981-1994- Internal Migration Survey 2000s.Labor Force Survey 2002.

According to the survey done by the Central Bureau of Statistics 1995, No tangible changes in unemployment occurred among men between 1970 and 1995, whereby the rate ranged between 4% and 4.5%. In contrast, among women, the rate of unemployment increased from 4.4% in 1970 to 11.6% in 1995. The gender gap was more elevated among the urban population, whereas women were four times more likely to be unemployed in comparison to men. Labor force participation rate for women was 12.3% in 1998 against 48.9% for males. With regard to employment, Syria faces a serious challenge to accommodate a potential net entrant in the labor market of 382.0000 every year during 2000-2005. ( *Reem Al-Jabi, The Effect of Globalization On Arab Women Workers, Unemployment rates, Page 5*) CBS statistics in 1998 indicate a high rate of less than 25 years old unemployment (19.9% for male and 19.7% for females), with 68% of workers earning less than US\$100 per month in 1997. Poor salaries induce some 43% of state employees to seek second occupation.

Major gender gaps are noticed for most occupational groups, especially those of engineering, trade, management, and services. Comparable proportions of women and men were involved in agriculture, professional fields of arts and sciences, and clerical work.

Employees: in the year 2000, comparable proportion of active women and men were employees (48.3% and 51.7% respectively). Significant variations were noted however by sector of economic activity, whereas women were much more likely than men to be in the services sector (90.9% vs. 59.1%). This was not the case for the two other sectors.

#### 1.1.1.4. Income Differentiation

Syrian legislations and laws pertaining to wages do not make any distinction between men and women. But due to the difficult nature of certain professions that are sometimes performed by men as compared with those of women, their average wages are higher in most economic activities. Table demonstrates the total monthly average wages in 2002 amounted to 6100 S.P. for men versus 5703 S.P. for women, with a (400) S.P. variance. Yet, the highest variation of wages comes in favor of men working in transportation, storage and communication, which amounts to (1784) S.P. on the other side, females working in commerce, hotels and restaurants earn more money than men because most of them are highly qualified as compared with males.

**Table-3:** Average of the Total Monthly Wages in 2002

Economic activity	Male (SP)	Female (SP)	Total (SP)
Cultivation/fishing/forestry	4926	4806	4870
Industry	5886	4730	5801
Building/ construction	5826	6309	5836
Commerce/hotels/restaurants	5787	5904	5792
Transportation/storage/communication	7208	5424	7121
Finance/insurance/real estate	6997	5739	6619
Services	6441	6105	6347
Total	6100	5703	6029

Source: Syrian Labor Force Survey 2002

Women don't receive equal wages to men's for the corresponding tasks, in the systematic and non systematic private sector. In addition, women suffer from trickery on protection laws and

heterodoxy bias interpretations of these laws to diversion the positive vigor that is in favor for women. A survey of labor market in Syria 1995, found out that the average salary in the main profession amounted 4200 SP, 3736 SP for females while was 4300 SP for men. Moreover, a field study was conducted on rural women work at the informal sector and that study pointed out that the average wages in nonsystematic sector amounted 4080 SP per month for women, while it amounted 6332 SP for men in the same sector. Therefore, the gender gap between women and men wages reached more than 50% of woman worker in the same sector.

**Table -4:** Relative Wages According to Activities and Sex (2003).

Economic activity	Sex	Salary categories						Total
		-5000	5001-6000	6001-7000	7001-8000	8001-9000	+9000	
Agriculture	Male	66.4	9.8	8.1	7.2	2.6	5.9	100
	Female	96.8	1.6	1.2	0	0	0.4	100
	Total	80.3	6	5	3.9	1.4	3.4	100
Industry, electricity, water, and gas.	Male	43.2	17.8	10	13	6.3	9.9	100
	Female	69.8	11.1	10	4	100	4	199
	Total	45.2	17.3	10	12	5.9	9.5	100
Building contracture	Male	46.5	20.6	12	8.9	4.4	8	100
	Female	66.7	25	8.3	0	0	0	100
	Total	46.8	20.6	12	8.8	4.4	7.9	100
Business, services	Male	52.9	14.9	6.8	9.8	4.2	11	100
	Female	89.4	0	0	5.3	5.3	0	100
	Total	54.2	14.3	6.5	9.7	4.3	11	100
Communication and transportation	Male	18.9	16.2	15	17	11	21	100
	Female	51.9	10.3	21	10	3.4	3.4	100
	Total	21.3	15.8	16	17	11	20	100
Finance, real estate, insurance	Male	32.2	8.1	15	13	9.7	23	100
	Female	50.1	8.3	8.3	8.3	0	25	100
	Total	35.1	8.1	14	12	8.1	23	100
Other services	Male	28.2	13.6	14	17	13	15	100
	Female	26.6	20.8	17	18	13	4.5	100
	Total	27.7	15.4	15	17	13	12	100
Total	Male	38.6	15.8	12	13	8.5	12	100
	Female	48.5	14.9	12	12	8.4	3.6	100
	Total	40.4	15.6	12	13	8.5	11	100

Source: CBS, 2003

According to the CBS 2003 survey primary results on Syrian household income and consumption, average wages wobble from less than 5 to 9 thousands SP (table 2). Around 40% of the total labor earns less than 5 thousands sp indicating the share of unskilled labor. And 80% of laborers working in the agricultural sector (out of which 97% are females) do not earn more than 5000 SP.

#### 1.1.1.5. Legal Instruments and Heritage and Law of Personal Status

Although Syrian law of personal status is more advanced, it still suffers many of constraints (Law no. 31 (1980): allow women to keep possession of land, which they inherit or purchase through land reform). However, great gender discrepancies exist in the legal system, therefore; under the existing Personal Status Law, women are treated as dependents. This dependency is extreme in cases of marriage and divorce. However, women are given equal rights in the public sphere and carry the same duties as men, which in turn create a dichotomy in existing laws. Namely, women are assumed to be dependent and passive in the private sphere, while they should be independent and aggressive in the public sphere. Moreover, other forms of legal gender discrimination are observed in the criminal law (such as unequal treatment in the penalty for adultery or the tacit permission of honor killings).

Islamic law, or Shar'ia, gives women explicit economic rights such as ownership of land, livestock and other property, either through purchase or through inheritance. Moslem women have the full right to be involved in economic transactions such as trading and commerce.

Civil law in Syria stipulates that all citizens, irrespective of sex, are treated equally before the law. A number of important laws have been passed specifically to increase the rights of women and improve their access to education, employment and health, and provide them with legal instruments to obtain land, credit and other productive inputs. However, in spite of these laws, and the fact that there are no major legal handicaps that prevent women from obtaining productive inputs, women continue to have limited access to productive resources and services due mainly to conservative traditions and practices. This is more acute in rural than in urban areas, where stronger and more conservative traditional cultures dominate, and where the ability to enforce the law is more difficult. Consequently, women's access to these inputs remains extremely limited.

As for decision making among household matters, man and woman are traditionally involved in taking decision upon many household's concerns. According to what husbands and wives saying, wives absolutely have no word regarding educate or marriage their sons and daughters. Moreover, wives agree that husbands take most of decision, whether concerning the desired children number, or how household income demeanor. But, there is a big contradiction in perspective concerning children rearing, where the wives insist that they are decision makers in this matter

## 2. Women's Role in the Economy

The role of Syrian women in the economy is growing and expected to grow further due to the high population growth, environmental changes, internal and international male migration. However, the government of the Syrian Arab Republic has exerted tireless efforts to advance the status of women and widen their active involvement in the overall development process. This is clearly established in the government's set policies of increasing women's participation rate in the workforce from 18.3% in 2000 to 20.1% by the end of 2005 and women's involvement in the economic activity from 12% to 13.3% for the same period.

Women participate in the different activities of the national economy. Actually, there were some changes in the nature of activities that women perform and in their contribution rate in economic activities recently. All of that has made a good impact on the living standard and the familial and individual situation of women. However, women's traditional roles regarding household works, taking care of the family, and children upbringing, in addition to the difficulties stemming from the prevailing customs and traditions that still restrain their broad entrance into the labor market, where various gaps exist in certain professions and activities. This chapter demonstrates issues related to women's contribution in terms of the size of the labor force, workers distribution according to economic activity, professional structure, workers' financial situation, and prevalence of unemployment.

**Table-5:** Percentage Distribution of Population (+15) According to Sex and Involvement in Economic Activity in (1981-2002)

Sex	1994			2002		
	Active	Inactive	Total	Active	Inactive	Total
Male	38.7	61.3	100	80.1	19.9	100
Female	5.8	94.2	100	23.2	67.8	100
Total	22.6	77.4	100	52.5	47.5	100

Source: Syrian Population Census, 1994  
Labor Force Survey, 2002

Data demonstrate that there is a tangible rise in the total rate of economic activity in the period of economic activity in the period of 1999-2002, where it rose from (22.6%) in 1994 to (52.5%) in 2002 that is to say more than two fold. Likewise, data demonstrates considerable development of the rate of women's economic activities which increased four times during the period 1994-2002 that is from (5.8%) to (23.2%). In spite of this development, the great majority of women are still outside the labor market. Furthermore, the table illustrates that the rate of male economic activity is much higher than that of females for it reached more than three fold in 2002: (80.1%) versus (23.2%).

The raw average of economic activity represents the total labor force of the whole population. Table -6- shows that there were some variance occurred to that average during the studied period (1981-2002). For females, a substantial rise was recorded between 1981 and 2002; it rose from (4.1%) to (14.2%) at an estimated increase of (34.5%). As for males, the rate increased from (42.20%) to (48.30%) in the same period, at an estimated rise of (11.1%).

**Table-6:** Raw Rate of Economic Activity of (+15) According to Sex in (1981-2002)

<b>Years</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>1981</b>	42.2	4.1	23.6
<b>1994</b>	41.2	6.4	24.3
<b>2000</b>	47.4	12.3	30.3
<b>2002</b>	48.3	14.2	31.9

Source: Syrian Censuses 1981-1994- Internal Migration Survey 2000s-Labor force Survey, 2002.

Through a comparison between males and females contribution in the labor market during the same period, it can be noticed that females started to enter that market at higher rates, and their contribution rate multiplied 3.5 times in 2002 as compared with 1981.

The refined rate of economic activity relates labor force to the targeted population and those who are expected to enter the labor market that is why it is more accurate and more important than the raw rate. Table -7- illustrates the refined rate of economic activity of the population (15 years and over) according to gender in 1994 and 2002.

**Table-7:** Refined Raw Of Economic Activity of the Population (+15) According To Sex 1994-2002

<b>Gender</b>	<b>1994</b>	<b>2002</b>
<b>Male</b>	70.4	80.1
<b>Female</b>	10.4	23.2
<b>Total</b>	40.9	52.5

Source: Syrian Population Censuses Of 1994: Labor Force Survey 2002

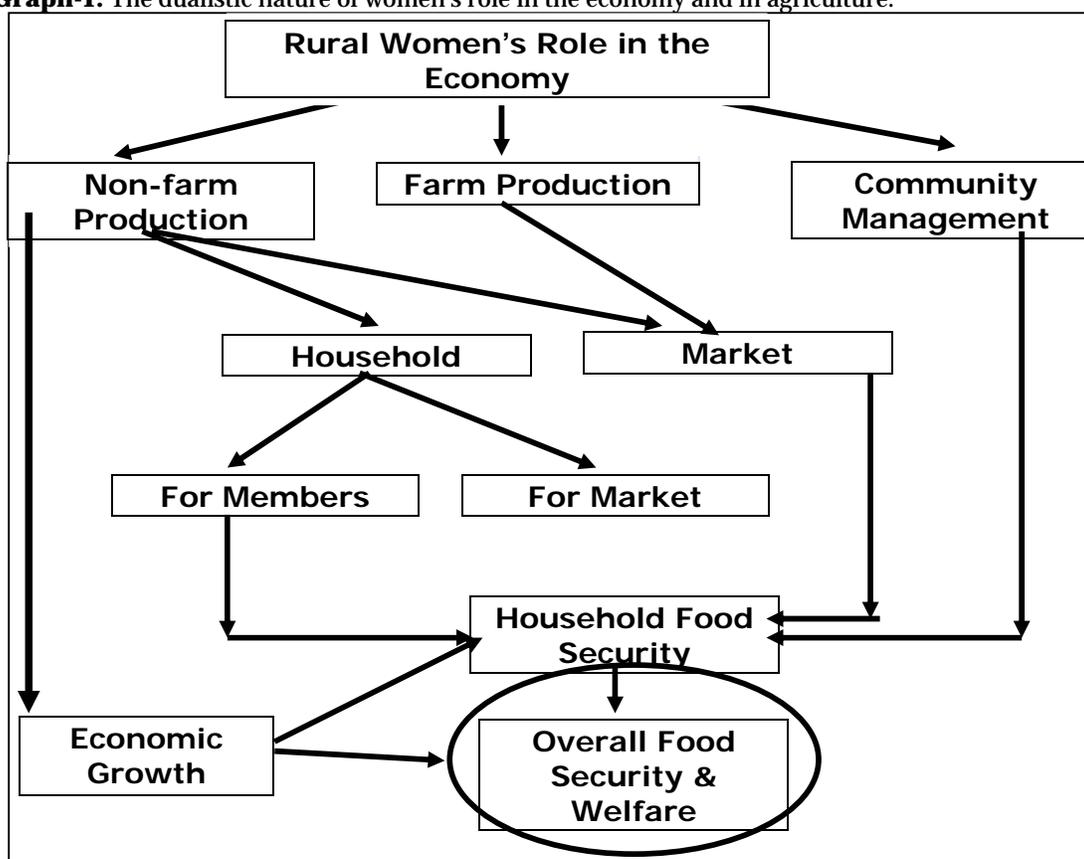
Data indicates the remarkable rise of the refined rate of economic activity in 1994 and 2002 for males and females. When considering the females rate, it is noticed that it has attained a significant rise in 2002 as much as twice the rate of 1994, as it was (23.2%) in 2002 and (10.4%) in 1994. that is to highlight the importance of providing more opportunities for women to enter the labor market at higher rates.

Most of statistics do not consider the economic value of woman domestic work, so that create discrimination in calculating the economic activity rate of females. So, if we consider women work at house, in addition to her work in public life, we find that the economic activities of females will be much higher than male's economic activities. Moreover, most of women are classified as not active economically (90% of females population at ten years old and over with 34.5% of males), which is attributed to males who are not active most of time because of school joining. While, females most times are paterfamilias so that they are not active economically, (percentage of females who are paterfamilias reached 62% in the urban areas and 66% in the rural areas)

### 3. Women's Role in Agriculture

Women are heavily involved in agriculture. Half of the Syrian's population lives in rural areas, and agriculture engages about one third to one-half of its workforce. Syrian women contribute to 70% of agricultural activities. The percentage of female agricultural workers increased from 28.4% in 1994 to 58.8% in 2000, but it decreased slightly to become 58.1% in 2002. Thus, because of high rural population growth rates, the lack of jobs in rural areas, low wages in agriculture, and the seasonality in the demand for agricultural labor. Rural areas in Syria suffer from very high male temporary and permanent urban-to-rural migration as well as immigration from the poorer countries to the Arab Gulf Countries. Consequently, women farmers have increasingly found themselves becoming major contributors to the agricultural labor force, the majority of who work for very long hours all year long as unpaid family's labor.

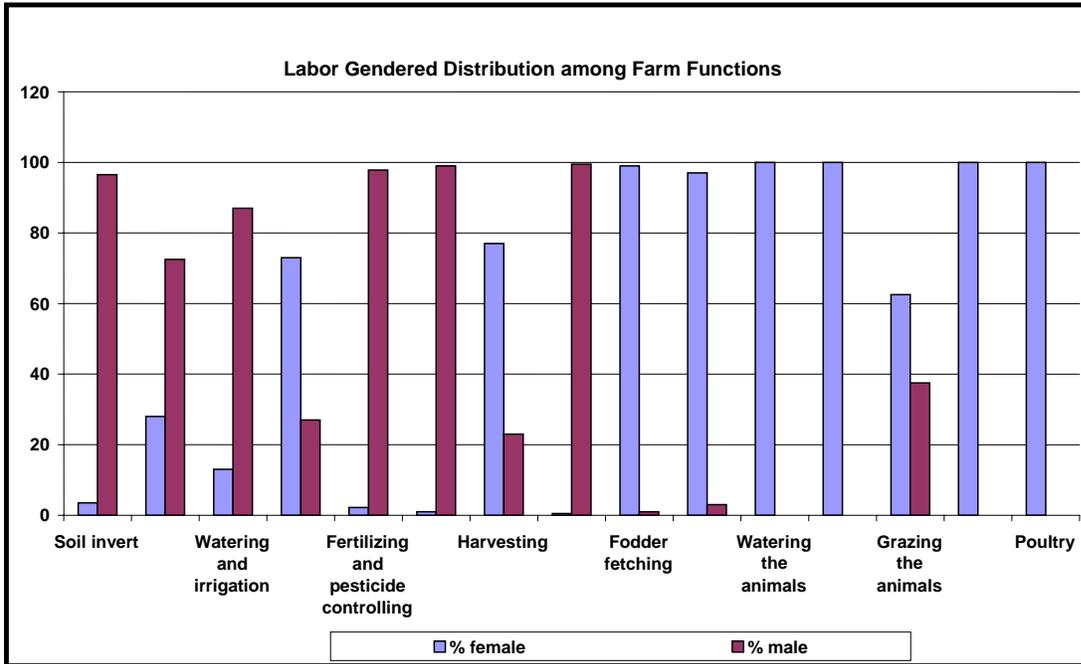
**Graph-1:** The dualistic nature of women's role in the economy and in agriculture.



In addition to women labor in agriculture, they play a significant role in agricultural and food production and in household food security, both as paid and unpaid labor, performing essential chores such as sowing, weeding, harvesting, animal husbandry, cleaning, fetching water and firewood, baking, cooking, sewing, child rearing, etc., to ensure the livelihood of the farming household economic activity rate. Whilst, women could access to some resources and advantages, but their ability to dispose of it still bounded. Due to traditional gender role led to tangible gender gaps that concern the economy, education, health, and accessing other services.

Graph-2- represents the gender division of farm functions (household survey by FAO and MAAR, 1995), which also illustrate that women perform tasks, which require intensive work, patient and not mechanized.

**Graph-2: Labor Gendered Distribution among Farm Functions**



Source: Empowering Woman Unit's Database

## 4. Women's Access to Pentagon Assets

### 4.1. Rural Women's Access To Human Capital

#### 4.1.1. Educational Status of Rural Women

More than one third of rural women who are employed outside home are illiterate (36.3%). However, we noticed that rural females who have craft certificate represented (15%) of total female employed, comparing with 4% only of males. The highest percentage of female employed at home who could read, write is (28.7%), and who have elementary certificate come next. Table-8- shows the educational status among rural people in 1994.

**Table-8:** Rural Employees According To Age, Sex, and Educational Status in 1994

Educational Status	Outdoor Workers			Indoor Workers		
	Males	Females	Gender Gap	Males	Females	Gender Gap
<b>Illiterate</b>	20.3	36.3	16.0+	36.3	18.6	17.7-
<b>Read &amp; Write</b>	32.2	18.6	13.6-	35.8	28.7	7.1-
<b>Elementary</b>	24.5	15.2	9.3-	24.4	22.7	1.7-
<b>Preparatory</b>	9.8	6.9	2.9-	6.8	7.9	1.1+
<b>Secondary(General)</b>	6.1	5.7	0.4-	4.0	2.6	2.6-
<b>Secondary (Technical)</b>	4.2	15.3	11.1+	1.2	0.7	0.5-
<b>University+ over</b>	3.3	3.0	0.1-	1.4	0.4	1.0-

Source: Calculated by Women Empowerment Unite

The aggregate illiteracy rates, in Syria, 2003, reached 23.1% (36.1% for females and 10.3% for males), but the illiteracy rate in the rural areas is higher (34%), especially among females (44 %) comparing with males (16%), with gender gap (+18).

The rate of women-headed households is about 9% with approximate rates in both urban and rural areas. And the rate of women-headed households with presence of their husbands is 1.7%. But it is noticeably that women generally head relatively small-sized households, so that the rate of women-headed households with 1-4 members reaches 67% while this rate drops to 9% when a household is composed of more than 7 members. The same rates for male household-heads amount to 31.5% and 25% successively. (Syrian Labor Force Survey, CBS, 2002,). The following table illustrates the distribution of household-headed according to sex and family member's numbers.

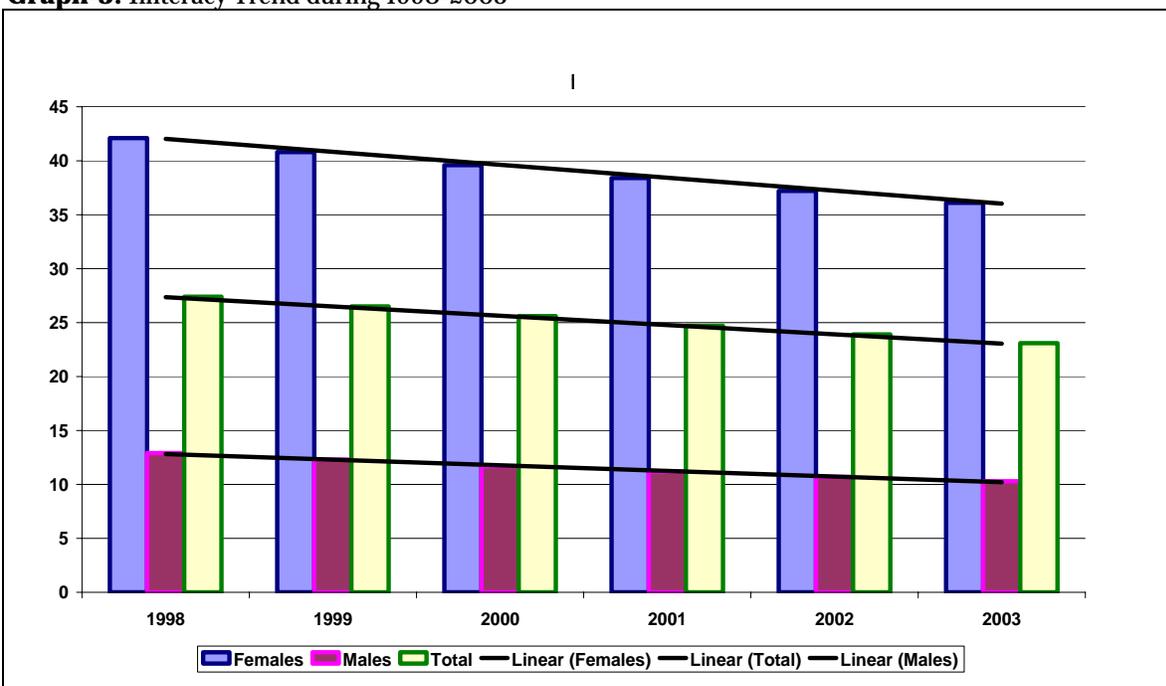
**Table-9:** Percentage Distribution of Households According to Head of Household and Size

No. of Family Members	Head of Household		
	Male	Female	Total
1-4	31.5	66.9	34.6
5-7	43.5	24.3	41.8
+7A above	24.9	8.9	23.5
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100

Source: Syrian Labor Force Survey 2002/CBS

The following graph shows illiteracy trend during 1998 to 2003 period in Syria, and it illustrates the declining illiteracy rate due to more efforts has been paid in this domain.

**Graph-3: Illiteracy Trend during 1998-2003**



Source: ILO: 2003-2004 Key indicators of the Labor Market (Geneva, 2003)

Finally, these rates sharply decline among both, rural and urban females at higher educational levels. Moreover, agricultural workers in rural areas receive very little technical training, so that only 2.1% who receive any sort of training (2.3% of males and 1.2% of females).

Gender gaps reached the highest rate in age group 30-60 year. And still notable that 34% of teenager girls, 10-19 year, are fully illiterate. Furthermore, that percentage is much higher for rural teenager girls. Therefore, it is understood in the light of fact that teenager girls in that age group provide 42% of women labor. Since it is believable that it is not profitable to educating girls, according to parent's point of view, they will get married leaving their households, while, educating boys will provide economic security to their parent's anecdotage.

Gender distribution estimations show that elementary education in rural schools and constitute 45.6% of total students. Namely, gender gap is not more than (-4.4).

As for higher education level, female student at preparatory and secondary level constitute 46% Of overall students (43% rural- 49% urban). Moreover, female students' percentage is estimated about 46% in preparatory school and 47% in secondary schools.

As to intermediate and high institutes, which belong to agriculture and agrarian reform ministry, they are divided into two veterinarian institutes, and 9 agricultural institutes. Female students constitute 16% of overall veterinarian students and 34% of the ninth overall agricultural institutes.

However, female students' rate, at university level, reaches 42% of total students. Moreover, female's rates enrolled in education and dropped-out rates show that when enrolling rates are increasing, dropped-out female rates are highly increasing too.

#### 4.1.2. Women's Share in Training Opportunities

Women are often not identified as target group for technical training. Cultural and social restrictions in addition to time constraints make it impossible for them to travel to training sites or to take long absences from home in order to attend courses. Women often do not hear about

training opportunities because of limited contracts with technicians, extension staff and organizations in general.

There was a briefing session held on gender and development in Syria, and that session focused on ways of enhancing the role of gender in future projects carried out by the European Union. One of questions that were exposed if we have a young woman and a young man with the same qualifications applying for a job, who is more likely to get the job and why? All answers were that is most likely for the man to get the job for several reasons including; that women are obliged to put marriage and children as a priority. Therefore, when a working woman gets married, she either leaves to become house wife or to travel with her husband. Then she becomes pregnant and needs medical leave and then maternal leave and time to look after the child. This would make an employer reluctant to employ a young woman and to give her any kind of capacity development that they might” invest” in latter. So the second question was what do we do to help these young mothers who have the responsibility of looking after the household and children, and desperately need a job? It was agreed that tradition and not the laws that binds women from achieving capacity development for better chances in the labor force. Therefore for any society to achieve the wanted success, women issues must come as a priority. The objectives of the session, as mentioned, were to ensure integration of gender dimension in future EC projects. This is done by carrying out gender analysis on the main projects including; Reform of the health sector, support to vocational training and the higher institute of business administration and sectoral modernizing facilities. The participants worked in groups to answer the following questions; what are the important gender disparities that can be traced in each project? What are the dimensions that lead to this inequity? What can be done to reassure the fair participation of women in the project? Is implementing the quota system, of giving equal opportunity for men and women, a solution to break the social stereotype for job discrimination? Some agreed that this could be a solution that can reduce the gender gap in employment. Whereas others saw it a risk that may keep the right person, or give unskilled people access to a job they don’t deserve. Therefore, special training skills should be developed to focus on building the capacity of the national institutions in supporting enterprise development for both urban and rural women, as well as obtaining a thorough understanding of women’s economic and social rights and advocacy skills to raise public awareness of women’s rights in the context of the work.

The following table demonstrates the number of training courses and the trainees according to gender and percentage of females participation in the years 1994,2000,2001, and 2002

**Table-10:** Training Courses Attended by Women

Year	Training courses for male peasant		Training courses for female peasants		Total trainees	Rate of female trainees
	No. Of courses	No. Of Trainees	No. Of Courses	No. Of Trainees		
1994	160	2757	143	2590	5347	48.4
2000	523	9158	492	8762	17920	48.9
2001	439	8322	568	10531	18853	55.9
2002	513	9041	501	9466	18507	51.1

Source: Syrian Census 1994; Finding of Labor Force Research 2001-2002; Internal Migration Survey 2000

#### 4.1.3. Health Status of Rural Women

Parity is an essential task for women in rural societies. Therefore, high women fertility lead to women health exposes to healthy dangerous risks, especially, where health unawareness is not exist. Furthermore, mortality rates among overall mothers are estimated high (107 deaths for 100,000 births, a child still alive), even though, this rate is much lower comparing with similar countries in the region.

Syrian's National Reproductive Health Strategy sets out its objectives in line with the objectives of international conference, the national population strategy and the ministry of health strategy

(2001-2020). Over the past few years, women-related health indicators have improved significantly. Maternal mortality rates dropped from 143 per 100.000 live births in 1990 to 107 in 1993 and to 65.4 in 2002. Infant mortality rates declined from 0.024 to 0.018 over the past fifteen 15 years (on average 1.6% per annum). The percentage of contraceptive prevalence rate increased from 40% in 1993 to 46.6% in 2002. (Syrian Arab Republic, National Report, 2004).

Under this framework, the government has initiated providing RH services, especially in the under-served areas, in close cooperation with the United Nation Population Fund (UNFPA). There is no tangible gender gap upon children deaths, in fact, females are more lucky from biological point to stay survive than males.

Food status of rural children indicate, this a good indicator of poverty, that 28% of them are suffering malnutrition (12.5% suffer overmuch malnutrition and 15.1% moderate malnutrition). In other word, gender gap in this context, is not considered, whereat, 25.8% of girls suffer malnutrition and 27.8% of boys.

#### 4.2. Rural Women's Access To Financial Capital

The wage earners constitute the highest rate in the distribution of economic activities according to employment status for men and women. The percentage of wage earners varied during the period (1981-2002) as denoted in table-9-. The percentage of female wage earners decreased from 67.8% in 1981 to about 65.6% in 1994, then it fell to 37.7% in 2002. Opposite to that decline, there was rise in the percentage of female workers for family without pay, which was 18.8% in 1981 and then increased to 41.9% in 2002. Furthermore, no remarkable changes were noticed in the percentage of female employers during the period 1981-2002, but the percentage of female self-employed fell from 12.1% in 1981 to 10.5% in 2002.

**Table-11:** Percentage Distribution of Workers (+15) According Employment Status & Sex in 1981-2002

Employment Status	1981		1994		2000		2002	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	female
<b>Business Owner</b>	4.4	1.3	10.8	3.6	6.1	1.0	10.0	1.3
<b>Self-employed</b>	27.5	12.1	24.8	11.7	26.3	5.0	31.5	10.5
<b>Wage Earner</b>	62.5	67.8	57.3	65.6	57.4	46.8	48.0	46.3
<b>Unpaid Worker</b>	5.6	18.8	7.1	19.1	10.2	47.2	10.5	41.9
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Syrian Population Censuses of 1981-1994: Findings of Labor Force Research 2002; Internal Migration Survey 2000

Women, especially in rural areas, contribute in agricultural activity, but despite that they are distinctly depended on at a rate of 0% as they do not hold more than 5% of land. The findings of the most recent agricultural census in 1994 show that the number of agricultural holders amounted to 614000, with an increase of 26% over the previous census of 1981. The male holders were 94.7% while the female holding percentage was about 5.3%. However, the total average holding area in Syria reached 83.000 Sq/m for males and 58.000 sq/m according the census of 1994. The following table illustrates the agriculture holding percentage for males and females, average holding area according to provinces and the rate of women's contribution to agriculture in 2002.

**Table -12:**Percentage Distribution of Agriculture Holders according To Sex, Average Holding Area In The Provinces And Women's Contribution In Agriculture In 2002

Province	Agricultural Holders		Rate of Holding		Contribution Rate %
	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %	
<b>Damascus</b>	91	9	27.9	25.1	19
<b>Rural Damascus</b>	95	5	33.0	19.5	31
<b>Homs</b>	95	5	81.3	65.4	41
<b>Hama</b>	95	5	66.1	58.6	49
<b>Tartous</b>	95	5	18.2	15.5	33

<b>Lattakiya</b>	95	5	19.7	15.5	35
<b>Idleb</b>	91	9	56.0	32.4	50
<b>Aleppo</b>	97	3	120.8	97.8	28
<b>Al-Raqqa</b>	96	4	259.8	177.0	30
<b>Dier-Al-Zoar</b>	95	5	53.5	19.6	56
<b>Al-Hasaka</b>	96	4	173.4	160.9	30
<b>Al-Sweida</b>	89	11	76.6	59.3	45
<b>Dara'a</b>	91	9	7.9	53.2	38
<b>Al-Quneitera</b>	94	6	40.1	31.5	46
<b>Toal</b>	95	5	82.5	57.4	40

Source: The Findings of Labor Force Research, 2002

In addition, the average of land possessing is estimated about (80.4 Donum for males and 57.7 only for females) of arable land. The highest average land possession for male is in Al-Rakka (260 Donum, but for female, the highest one is (177 Donum) in the same governorate.

Women constitute only 5% of agricultural assets holders; therefore, the highest concentration of women holders is in Sweida (11%), Damascus, Idleb, and Dar'a come next (9%) of overall holders in each previous governorates.

The mainstreaming type of land ownership is to both, males and females; more than 90% of all holders are of land tenures (93%). Consequently, land tenures are divided according gender as follow: 95% for males, 5% for females. As for leaseholders, who don't possess land; constitute only 7% of aggregate possessors. And they are divided according to gender between 93% males and 7% of females.

The findings of the agricultural census of 1994 demonstrate that the percentage of male agricultural holders owing sheep amounted to 96.4%, while the female percentage was just 3.6%, but the variations in the percentages of males and females owing cows and goats remained the same, unlike the poultry whose female owner percentage has slightly increased. The following table shows the number of agricultural holders and the percentage and average ownership of livestock according to sex.

**Table-13:** Number of Livestock Owners and Average Animals per Owner According to Sex in 1994

<b>Livestock Ownership</b>	<b>Male Owners %</b>	<b>Female Owners %</b>
<b>Sheep</b>	96.4	3.6
<b>Cows</b>	96	4
<b>Goats</b>	96	4
<b>Chickens</b>	95	5
<b>Poultry</b>	99.7	0.3

Source: Syrian Census 1994

Moreover, female's possession of livestock is constricted extent, for example:

- 41% of females, who have sheep, possess 1-9 heads in average, comparing with 31% of male possessors.
- 68% of female, who have cows, possess around 1-2 heads, comparing with 63% of male possessors.
- 40% of female who have goat, possess around 1-2 heads comparing with 25% of male one.
- 44% of female who have poultry, possess around 1-9 hens comparing with 38% of male one.

Women are completely responsible for livestock and poultry functions, except grazing, so that males have some proportion of that task (37.5%), but for other agricultural production, females participate in all its steps. Therefore, the main contribution of women is weeding and harvesting (those tasks require a lot of patient and bearing). But, women are absent from marketing function (only 0.5% of cases), and although women perform many tasks in agricultural production, they have no access to resources and benefits.

More than half of employees work in agricultural sector between (43-48) hour weekly (53% for both males and females with very few positive addition for women workers), but the other gender gaps are very few and no need to be mentioned.

Moreover, women are heavily involved in most household burden. They are fully responsible for; house cleaning, children rearing, firewood fetching in 56% of household, and backing in 77% households. Regard to males, (fathers and sons) they dominate over marketing function (in 91% of households).

Possessing land, livestock, and agricultural machineries not only mean accessing to economic resources, but also controlling over them too. Syria is one of very few countries, which have tried to estimate agricultural ownership based on gender, and the resulted view was terrible. Although, women perform many tasks in agriculture, their controlling over resources is at the lowest level.

Agriculture is the main craft for most of possessors (70%), defense (9.4%). As for males, agriculture is the main craft for 69% of holder's defense and building supervene (10% for each). In contrary, the main craft for most of women holders is agriculture (96%), and the highest concentration of them is in Deir-ez-Zor and Al-Hassakeh )99%(, and the lowest one is in Damascus (86%).

Regarding educational level, more than one third of assets possessors' are illiterate (36% males and 39% females). The second third are nearly can read and write only (33% males and 28% females). The highest percentage of illiterate and similar to illiterate females, who are assets' possessors, is in Idleb (34% with 38% of males) in Aleppo, similarly.

In addition, males are dominating in possessing agricultural machineries (99%), while, only 11 women possess agricultural machineries, 9 of them possess their own tractors.

On the other hand, distribution proportion of rural workers according to salary group, show that more than 70% of women workers earn income wobbles between 2000SP in minimum and 4000SP in maximum, namely, (40\$ and maximum80\$), comparing with only 41% of males.

Moreover, more than 30% of rural women workers earn about 40-60\$ comparing with only 9% of males, therefore, it is clear from table -3- that rural women workers are concentrated at lower income range, so that indicates to gender discrimination among salaries. This type seems to be clearer when monthly income average is monitored according to economic sectors.

### **4.3. Rural Women's Access To Social Capital**

Women's contribution in the society is deeply decided through being able to accessing and conducting resources. In this context, resources are inclusively defined by the accessing and conducting the economic, social, and cultural resources. In addition, the situation of woman is decided through her accessing to decision-making position, whether at home or at public life level. As if a very few of Syrian rural women are participating in decision-making, that does not mean that their requirement and needs are blenched in their priorities.

As it is expected, more than half of employee women at house and outside house are unmarried with positive gender gap for who are employees outside house accounted (22.1) and the employees at home accounted (29) at unmarried group. Economic activities rates decline sharply after marriage, because of domestic burden, parity, and children rearing.

Woman situation is improving when she equally with man, is contributing in decision-making Process, whether in practical life or inside household. Syrian government supports integrating woman into society, but woman participation rate still low. Therefore, woman participation in public life could be measured through some indicators such as: women ratio at the people's assembly and the highest positions alike at the state, privet sector, or in civil society.

The participation representation of women in all state departments, though rural women do not have notable role in decision making inside their household. However, decision-making is specific distinction has essentially given to males.

As for decision making among household matters, a survey showed the situation that man and woman are traditionally involved in taking decision upon many household's concerns (FAO and MAAR report, 1999). According to what husbands and wives saying, wives absolutely have no word regarding education or marriage their sons and daughters. Moreover, wives agree that husbands take most of decision, whether concerning the desired children number, or how household income demeanor. But, there is a big contradiction in perspective concerning children rearing, where the wives insist that they are decision makers in this matter (90%), whereas, most of husbands (87%) believe that they who are undertaking this task.

#### **4.4. Rural Women's Access To Physical Capital**

The lack of adequate physical and institutional strictures such as transport, communication, research and extension and marketing infrastructure in the rural areas is another constraint in Syria. Fragmented land holdings decrease and limit the efficient use of technology, thus constitute a serious barrier to production growth.

The estimations that drawn of 1994 census, demonstrated that in the rural areas, 56% of households are provided with piped water, and 92% electricity supply. While, only 29% of households are supplied with modern sanitary net, therefore, this data have many complies on women domestic burden, in particular, that concerning water fetching and using fuel for cooking.

#### **4.5. Rural Women's Access To Natural Capital**

A field study was conducted at Jabal al-Hoss, in rural Aleppo, 2003, and was focusing on the gender concept among the community in that areas, regarding women having their right in heritage. The study revealed the inferior look to the role played by women in society and diminishing their share in multifaceted social and economic domains. Therefore, women are not given choices of financial empowerment, and being undermined in managing these choices, when available. Moreover, women have to work in the land, but they are not permitted to own it. In addition, owning transport means and agriculture wells is completely not permitted, while owning jewels and money is wider

As for the relationship between men and women working and possessing, the study showed that women work in the house or in the village is popular. A woman is not considered a worker if she does not work outside her village. In this case, (when she is a worker) she has not given the right to choose where to spend the money but has to get the father or husband agreement if she is married in order to spend it. Moreover, the study presented the community's attitude towards depriving women from their right to inherit; women's claim for their right to inherit is socially rejected. At the end of that study, there is a large difference between the required role of women and their social position. In order to enable women to actively participate in the development process, they must learn and be aware of their rights, and how to improve their living conditions. (Field study on women's role and heritage, UNDP, Syria regional, culture,7/2/2003)

#### **4.6. Governmental And Non-Governmental Organizations that Work with Women Issues In Syria**

There are a large number of organizations operating in Syria at governmental and non-governmental level. First, one is the Women General Union, which has been established since 1963. Second, the establishment of Women Units within the Ministries of Agriculture, Labor & Social Affairs, the State Planning Commission, and the Central Bureau of Statistics. In addition,

a National Women's Committee was established in 1995 with members from all involved ministries, popular organizations, trade unions and line ministries. As for non-governmental organizations, there are also numerous of them that work in development field in general and have taken women development as important component in their agenda such as: (FAO, IFAD, WFP, UNDP, WB, Aga Khan Network for rural development, FIRDOS, and others). The number of rural projects and their beneficiaries are most often quite small. The scope of these projects is usually limited to small-scale income generating efforts and educational and vocational training. Very few directly address the needs of women in crop and livestock production, and in developing and introducing appropriate technologies for women to alleviate their work burdens.

- IFAD has supported projects in Syria, which have provided a large number of rural women with loans for on and off-farm activities through the following projects: southern agricultural development project (phase ii), agricultural development project in the middle and costal areas, Jabal Al Hoss project, Al-Badia project, and Idleb project.
- WFP cooperated with FAO in the implementation of micro-finance activities, jointly supporting training courses and income generating activities for rural women in Syria. In addition, IFAD provided loans to begin the activity and WFP provided food aid for the first year of activity.

## **5. Obstacles of Women Development**

- Weakness of women holding of agricultural productive resources such as land, animals, and machinery;
- Women absence from decision making process, either inside or outside home;
- Women perform all un-mechanized agricultural tasks; in addition; they perform multiple tasks that concern household and farm activities, which add more burden to them;
- Women workers in agriculture suffer from high illiteracy rate among them and drop-out of schools;
- Women earn less wages, especially in joint, informal and private sector;
- Women do not know their legal rights;

## **6. Conclusions and Recommendations**

From obstacles mentioned above, number of guidelines is needed to focus more closely on issues related to the production, dissemination and utilization of information on rural women to enhance gender equality and food security, which are stressing in particular:

- Enable women to own productive resources and benefits to improve women participation in agriculture;
- Support women to get and control over the resources and benefits through: increase women's participation in decision making position; train rural women on leadership skills;
- Improve women production and their skills in agriculture by alleviate women's domestic burden and encourage women to utilize new agricultural techniques;
- Integrate gender concept in all policies, programs, and projects of the Ministry of Agriculture through coordination with agriculture directorate at national level to make sure that gender concept introduced in all the policies and plans of the Ministry of Agriculture; in addition to conduct discussion with other organization other than the ministry in order to coordinate the relevant policies;
- Increase awareness of the decision makers and planners about women empowerment concepts ;
- Removing all obstacles hindering women's effective involvement in all spheres of life, and adopting gender equity, equality and women empowerment approach as vehicles to realize sustainable development
- The mobilization of all stakeholders, including rural women and men, at all levels and all stages of the information process;
- The use of methodologies that take gender specificities into account, and of participatory and decentralized approaches;

- Conduct national surveys on rural women and time-use surveys to determine the respective contributions of rural men and women and identify the obstacles to food security and gender equality;
- The training of data producers and users and linkage between the two to identify information needs and solutions;
- The selection of economic and social indicators, the setting up of databases on rural men and women at regional and national levels, and a monitoring system, for example the establishment of an observatory for women entrepreneurs;
- The establishment of information networks and the creation and reinforcement of communication channels among rural women themselves and between rural women and government planning institutions, through the extensive use of the media;
- The development of sensitization, mobilization and advocacy activities in favor of rural women, such as the celebration of World Rural Women's Day, for policy-makers and the general public.
- Empowering rural women by giving them the right to speak and greater visibility, while increasing their representation in political and professional arenas;
- Building the technical skills of rural women so as to reduce their workload, increase their earnings and enable them to become active stakeholders in the development planning process;
- Adopting legal and administrative measures to improve social benefits and basic health facilities in rural areas and to facilitate the access of rural women to productive resources, such as land which is the key resource for agricultural production;
- Facilitating the access of rural women to basic services and resources, such as education at all levels, training, literacy, technology and information to enhance their vocational skills;
- Providing special support, such as credit, under poverty reduction programs so that rural women can set up their own enterprises and income-earning activities, in particular in the smallholder sector.

Finally, the society and men must be aware of the importance of participation in changing the ancient perception of women's role and their rights, through a complete and comprehensive process to liberate women socially and gradually so as to be man's equal and on-foot partner in development operations of the society.

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