

Gendered challenges of bargaining in agricultural value chain in the Eastern Gangetic Plains

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Background: Eastern Gangetic region

- ❖ Eastern Gangetic Plain (EGP) region is one of the poverty stricken and densely populated belt in South Asia.
- ❖ Farmers are influenced by climatic stress, gendered agricultural systems, and deeply entrenched socio-economic inequalities amongst class, caste, ethnic group and tenancy types.



Gender division of labour in EGP

Photo source: Dipika Das

Problem Statement

- ❖ Smallholder women farmers are unable to produce more than a marginal surplus.
- ❖ Smallholder women farmers are the main producers for value chain, often find difficult to take more profitable roles as producers, sellers and processors.
- ❖ Agrifood supply chains generally persist bargaining imbalances among farmers and their upstream and downstream partners.
- ❖ In the farming household, gender inequalities are complementary and supportive to maintain joint coping practices potentially marginalise women farmers in agricultural value chain.
- ❖ Smallholders women often exhibit lower bargaining power considered as one of the important quality to actively participate in the supply chain

Literature Review

- ❖ Bargaining power is considered as an essential quality for farmers, but less attention on how women smallholders are bargaining in their new roles in agricultural value chain was observed.
- ❖ Agrifood supply chains generally persist bargaining imbalances among farmers and their upstream and downstream partners but the underlying causes as well as the management for this had been least explored.
- ❖ Substantial research on value added agricultural and its potential to empower farm women in the African subcontinent had been made yet examining such area in the EGP has received much less attention.
- ❖ Collective farming is economical in strengthening resource poor farmers yet it is least explored how smallholder women's contribution in a group is influenced by the existing power relations.
- ❖ Research on Gender and agriculture, women in value chain, women intrahousehold bargaining power had been conducted however there is gap in literature to establish relation between women smallholders bargaining power in agricultural value chain.

Research Question

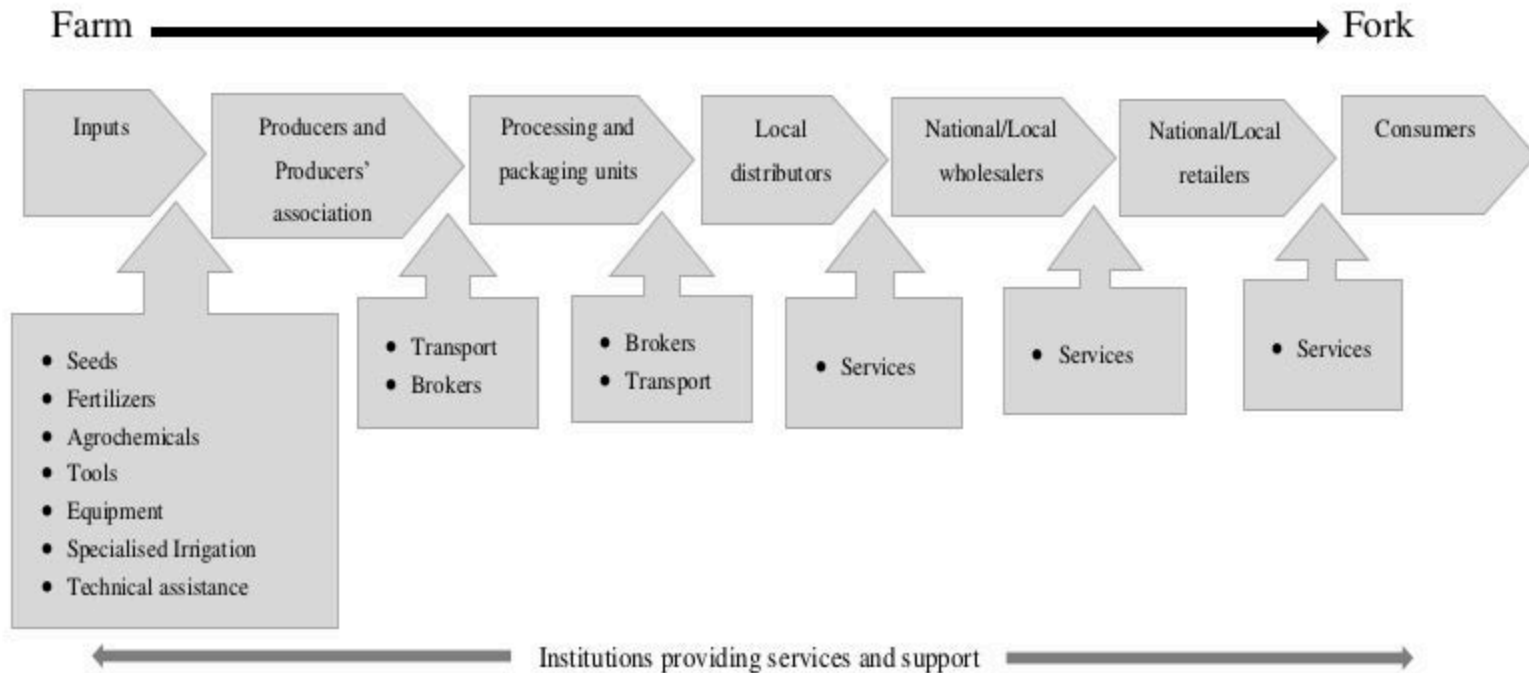
- ❖ How do gender norms constraint or facilitate the women smallholder farmers bargaining process to participate in different channels of agricultural value chain of Eastern Gangetic Plain?



Women smallholder farmers in EGP India site

Photo source: Dipika Das

Agricultural Value Chain



Source: Urquidi (2010) cited in (Soundarrajan & Vivek 2015)

Figure: Actors in the agricultural value chain

Bargaining Power

- ❖ “Bargaine” – “haggle for price” French word, 14th century,
- ❖ “Negotiation process that uses power to achieve bargaining objective” (Martin 1992)
- ❖ “Fallback or breakdown position that one can achieve if the household dissolves” (Agarwal 1997)

- ❖ The Bargaining power in the household is often hidden involving game theory or emotional manipulations (Locke & Okali 1999).

- ❖ The complex process of bargaining involves understanding of how bargainers perceive, use, and manipulate power, hence notion of dependence is at the centre. It is tactical and subjective in nature (Bacharach & Lawler 1981).

- ❖ For this study: “the ability of women smallholder farmers in the agricultural value chain to use their agency in order to influence decision making and to control a fair share of farm income with their ability to choose.

Agricultural production & market system from study site



1. Field site and Local farmers working on their farmland



2. Local farmers on their farmland



3. Women Farmers harvesting potato in Madhubani site

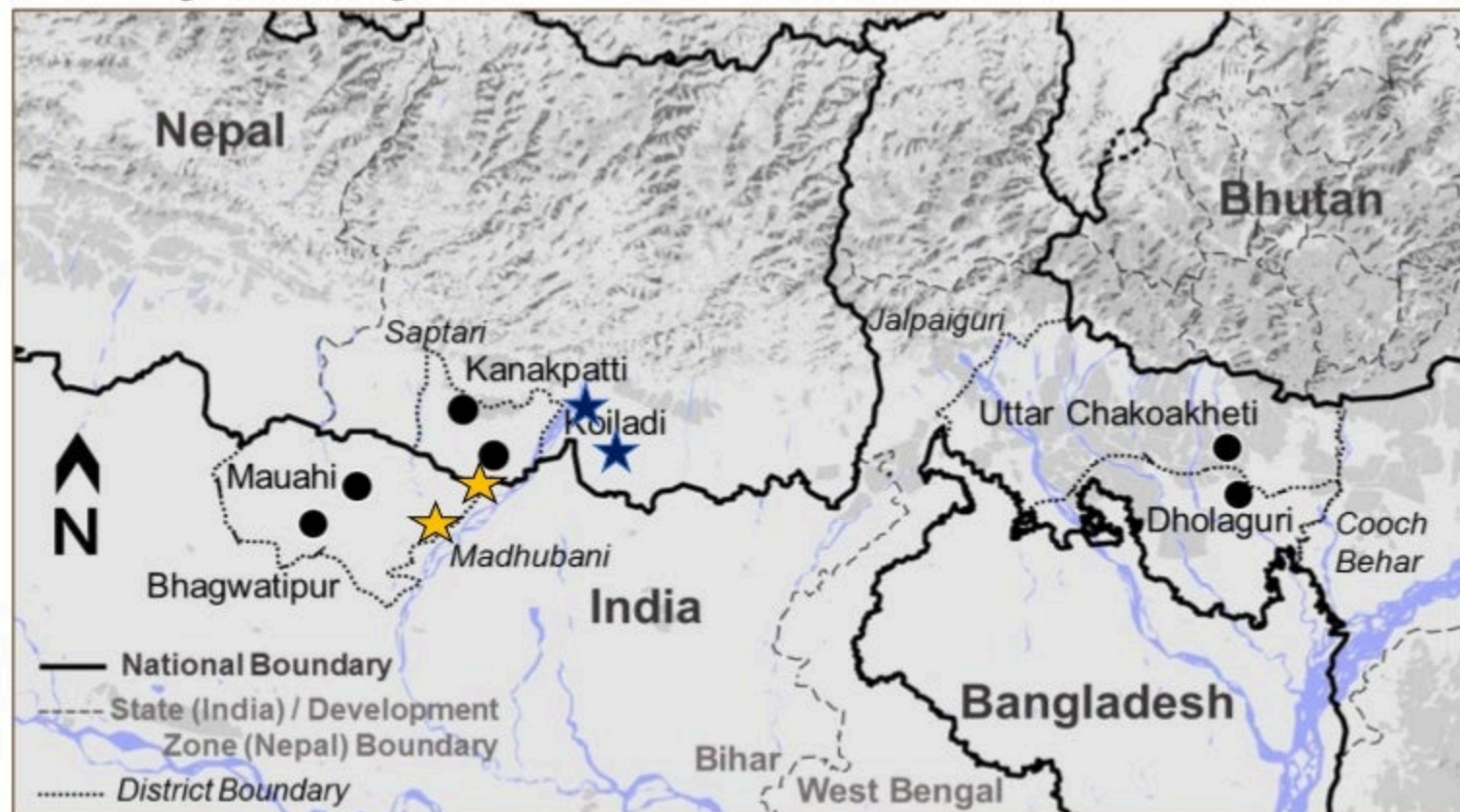


4. Weekly local market Haat of Traffic Chowk, Kanakpatti Saptari

Study sites in Eastern Gangetic Plains

The study was implemented in four villages of the Eastern Gangetic Plains, Kanakpatti and Koiladi in eastern Nepal and Bhagwatipur and Mauahi in northern India from Dry season Irrigation for marginal and tenant farmers.

- Study sites**
- ★ Kanakpatti & Koiladi (Nepal sites)
 - ★ Mauahi & Bhagwatipur (India sites)



Methodology

- ❑ A qualitative research approach used to collect 60 interviews and 4 focus groups discussions from the sites. Women farmers, male farmers, leaders, elderly farmers, input suppliers, middleman were interviewed. Observation of the market activities was made.

Findings

- ❑ On farm power relations existed
- ❑ Linkage between gender, productive resources and bargaining power

A women farmer (35) in EGP, Nepal, said “I know it is unfair that despite equal contribution I did not receive any of cauliflower seedlings while working in a group, but I cannot go and fight (bargain) with the person who did all those. He is men, a rich person and has all the agricultural resources eg. Oxen-plough and tubewell that I lack and will definitely need to lend from him because he is closest to my farm. I lost my husband and father-in-law in past years, now as we are only women in our family, I try to focus not to get involve in controversies and focus on farming and my child’s education”.

❑ Patriarchy as an important reason for women's lesser bargaining.

A 35 years woman in Koiladi, Saptari said, "I am married for 18 years now, but I have never talked with my FIL and I usually tell to my MIL or my husband if I have to say something to my FIL. I should show respect and not call husband or FIL or any elders by their name. Those are virtues taught by my parents. I listen to what my elders say and this also help to avoid arguments".

An 40 year women noted her husband as her master and said, "Malik ke naam koi lettai" how can I call my Master by his name".

- During the peak time in farming like planting, harvesting, transporting, every member in a farming household has to contribute in farming in their capacity. It was observed that in such situation girl child is most often restricted to go to school to provide a helping hand while a boy child becomes the privileged.
- Less value to girl child- girls as liability, early marriages of girls gives very less opportunity to women to develop their career and skills for survival. As a result women's, dependency on their in-laws and husband increases that eventually influences women's bargaining power. The cultural belief of husband being at higher position in marriage provides unequal position to women that disadvantages wife in many instances like in decision making, ownership of property, involvement in economic, control over resources.



Knowledge Challenges

Women farmers are bargaining but having less knowledge on the subject.

Input supplier, 43 years from Koiladi mentioned, “ Women farmers are growing in number in Saptari. Now a days when they come to sell their vegetables or yield to local market they also visit to the input suppliers. They purchase fertilisers, chemicals, hybrid seeds etc. when we say price to them most women bargains, but we cannot reduce price of everything according to what they say. I usually give guaranty on seeds and pesticides but sometime when women nag very much on price I offer them lesser price product. Some women also prefer to buy lower cost product compromising the quality. In compared to men women have less knowledge on generic name and brand name of products. They usually ask the male farmers before coming to shop. Some women send their children due to other burden of work or being unable to ride bicycle.

Market and Mobility Challenges

❖ Culturally males are advantaged to enjoy mobility

A 31 years women in Kanakpatti mentioned, *“Despite, I can prepare tea for my husband at home, he enjoys having tea at the chowk (market). Almost everyday he goes to the market and also have tea time chat with his friends. This has been a trend in our village. While if woman does so she will be considered as bad. Market is considered as male’s place”*.

A 50 years Dalit women in Koiladi believes, *“how can women be equal to men? Men are always intelligent than women due to their exposure and experience”*.

But when she was asked if women also get the same opportunity as men to visit then would she have same knowledge as men, *“she says she could gain knowledge but even though people do not value woman’s knowledge and still keep men as superior”*.

A 45 year women in EGP Madhuban, said, *“we are poor people we cannot afford motorbike and car, we have a bicycle that my husband rides. Women with virtue do not ride bicycle. It is not good for women to divide legs to ride”*.



- Women are very good at bargaining.
- A women said, *“if I send my husband to buy vegetables the quantity of vegetables he will bring for NRs. 200, I can bring in just NRs. 150.”*
- Haggling for price is often considered as women’s quality and men avoid to bargain.

BUT

- A middleman visiting the village said, *“women are often found dealing with the items of less price but when it comes to the item that costs more like in thousands, women ask husband to deal and then it is difficult to bargain with men because they know the market price. If there is no men at home, it is easy for me to convince women to sell their products in cheaper rate”.*

Technology unfriendliness

- ❑ Use of agricultural equipment is more practiced by men.

In Koiladi, a 52 years male farmer said, *“No matter how many time woman are taught to use pumpset they are unable to operate. Operation of pumpset is not just switching on and off. It also needs technical knowledge as well as courage”*.

A 29 years woman farmer in Madhubani says, *“I always ask my husband to operate pumpset for our farm. I can not even push to start the engine very hard like men. It needs a lot of strength”*.





Agency used by women

- A woman in Saptari said, *“My husband and I jointly work on our farm. I farm on ours and rented land. We are introducing vegetable farming and this brought excellent outcome. we build concrete house last year from our agricultural benefit by selling egg plants only in one season. My mother-in-law stays at home and take care of family when we are at farms.”*
- A 32 years Dalit woman from excluded class said, *“Participation in agriculture is new to our community but this has brought better economic status to us. Earlier we used to harvest forest wood for our survival, it needed lot of hardwork but still we did not had enough money to buy food for my family. I manage by work division at family. I go to buy seeds and fertilisers by myself. If I face any problem I meet extension officers”.*

Conclusion

- Deep rooted gender and cultural issues restricts enabling women smallholder farmers to fully participate in the agricultural value chain.
- Lack of critical thinking by women farmers potentially favours reproduction of biasedness
- Women having access to resources when exercise their agency are creating new role model in farming and are challenging the gender norms

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Acknowledgements



Thank You!

*Koiladi Village, Saptari Nepal
Photo Source: Dipika Das*