

Women's empowerment
through seed improvement and seed governance:
Evidence from participatory barley breeding in pre-war Syria

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Research paper

“Women’s empowerment through seed improvement and seed governance: Evidence from participatory barley breeding in pre-war Syria”



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Background: Syria and PPB

- Agriculture main livelihood for rural poor
- 2010: 2 to 3 million lived in extreme poverty
- Feminization of agricultural labour
- 1996 PPB started to improve barley and wheat
- 1996-2006 the PPB programme had not succeeded in involving women
- PPB impact: 'empowerment' and 'good seed'

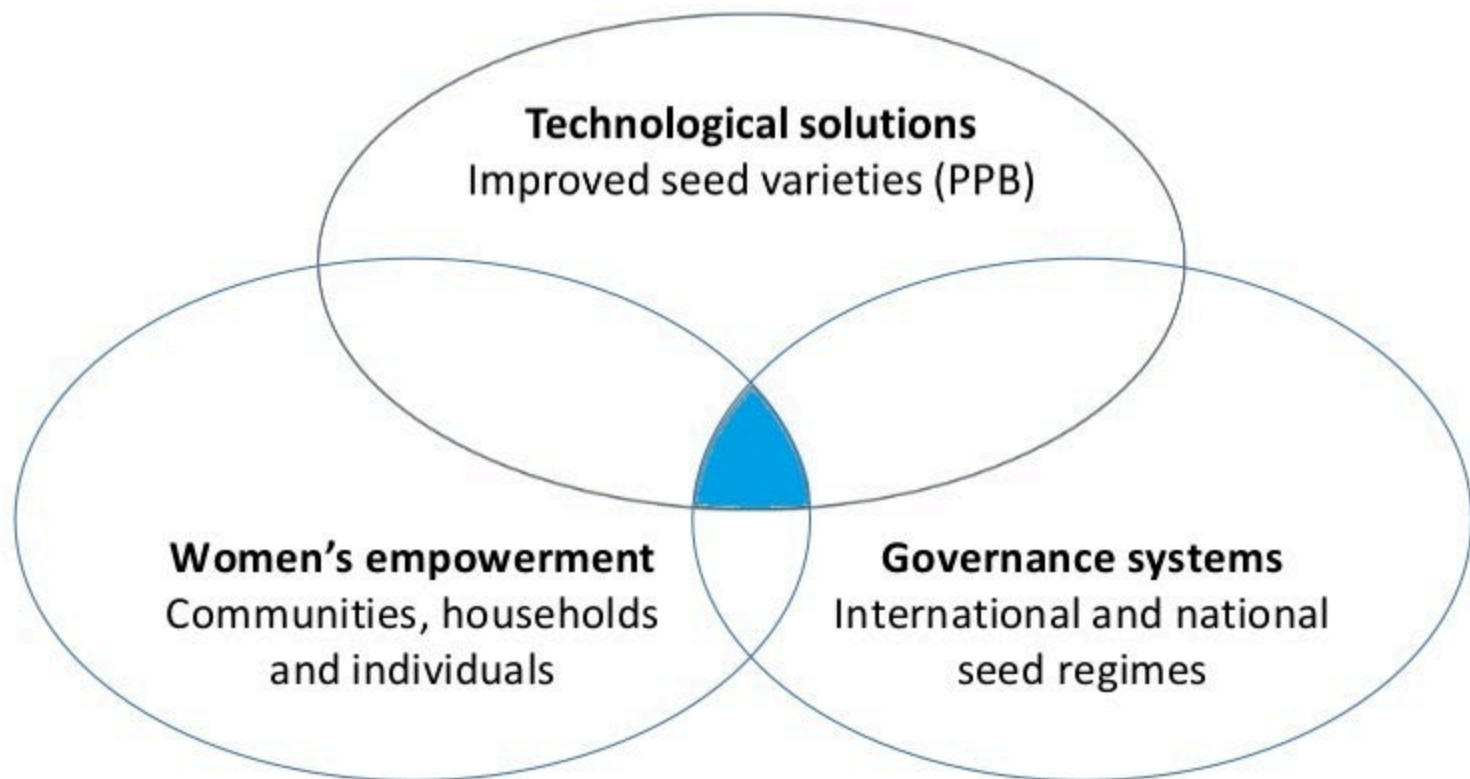
Research overview

How involvement in a Participatory Plant Breeding (PPB) programme affected the empowerment of selected women farmers in Syria and vis-à-vis seed-related regimes

Collaboration: Intl. Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) and Wageningen University

Years: 2006-2011

Conceptual framework: 3 main pathways to food security



Participatory plant breeding (PPB)

Science-based procedure where plant breeders, researchers and farmers collaborate to produce locally-adapted varieties that meet farmers' needs and priorities



Seed governance

Rules, traditions, institutions and behaviours by which resources are managed and power is exercised, in ways that affect individuals' access to and control over seed
(adapted from EC 2003)

Empowerment

A process by which an individual acquires the capacity for self-determination, that is, the ability of living the life that she or he has reason to value
(adapted from Kabeer 2010; Sen 1990)



Selected indicators of empowerment

Diagnostic study in 2006:

- Why women were absent from PPB to date
- Participatory exploration of meaning of empowerment
- Participatory identification of meaningful indicators:

1 Identity

2 Distribution of resources

3 Access to opportunities

4 Decision-making



3 principles of self-determination
(Santarius and Sachs 2007)

Research Questions

Can PPB effect women's empowerment? if yes, how?

1. How should PPB relate to the existing gender division of labour to enhance women's empowerment?
2. How can involvement in PPB affect the gender biases in local understandings of 'farmers'?
3. What affects the respondents' access to and control over PPB seed?

Methodology and methods

Exploratory small-N research

3 villages: 12 respondent women (plus 6-15), 24 men

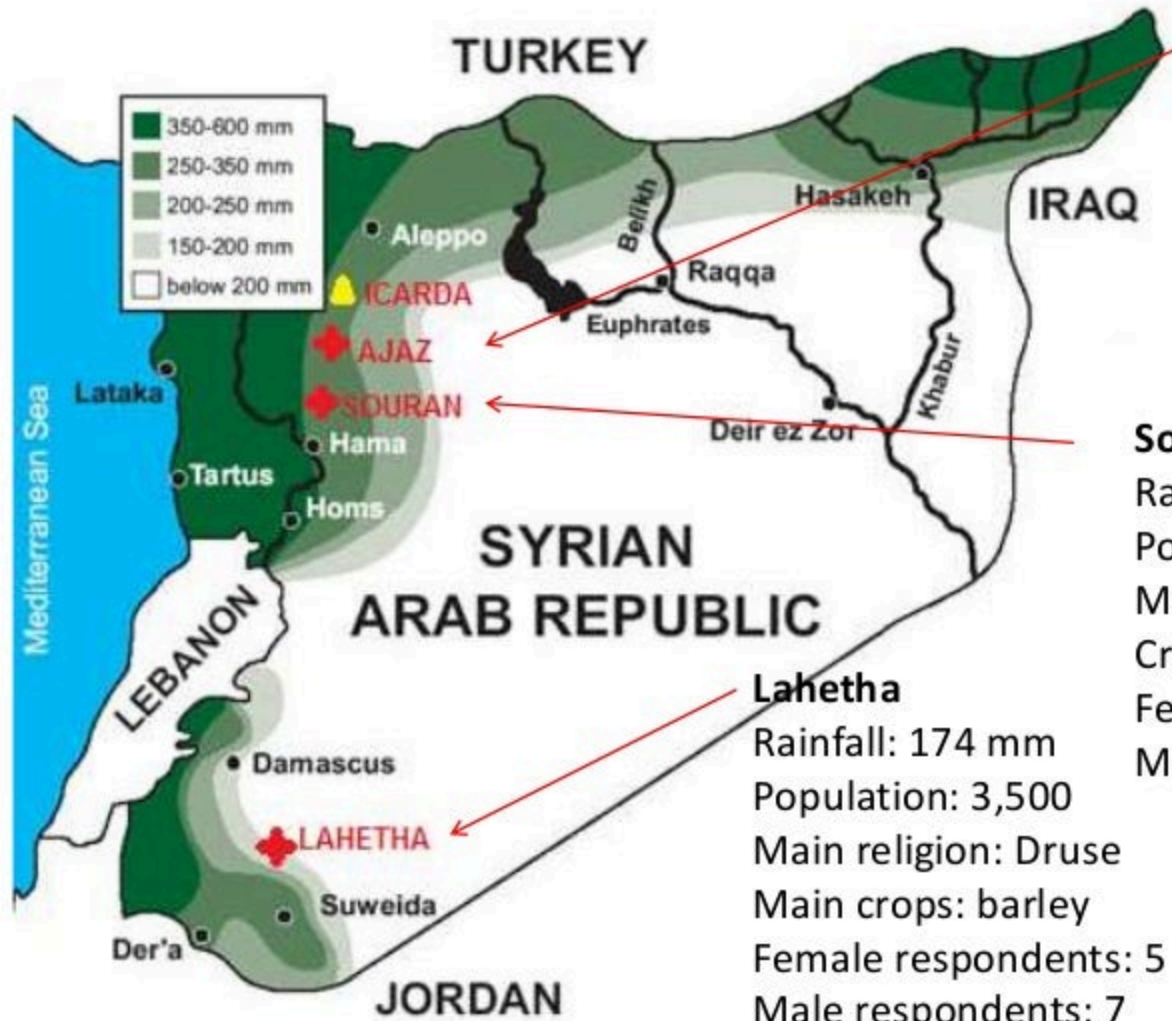
Weekly meetings, 6 months a year: 2007-2008, 2009, 2010, 2011

Methods: semi-structured interviews, family structures, activity charts, matrix analysis, rich pictures, sustainable livelihood framework, participant observation, key informant interviews on seed governance

Complementary activities:

- Diagnostic study (2006)
- Action research within PPB activities (2006-2011)

Research villages



Ajaz

Rainfall: 320 mm

Population: 550

Main religion: Sunni Islam

Main crops: barley, wheat

Female respondents: 5

Male respondents: 12

Souran

Rainfall: 300 mm

Population: 32,000

Main religion: Sunni Islam

Crops: barley, wheat, chickpea

Female respondents: 2

Male respondents: 5

Lahetha

Rainfall: 174 mm

Population: 3,500

Main religion: Druse

Main crops: barley

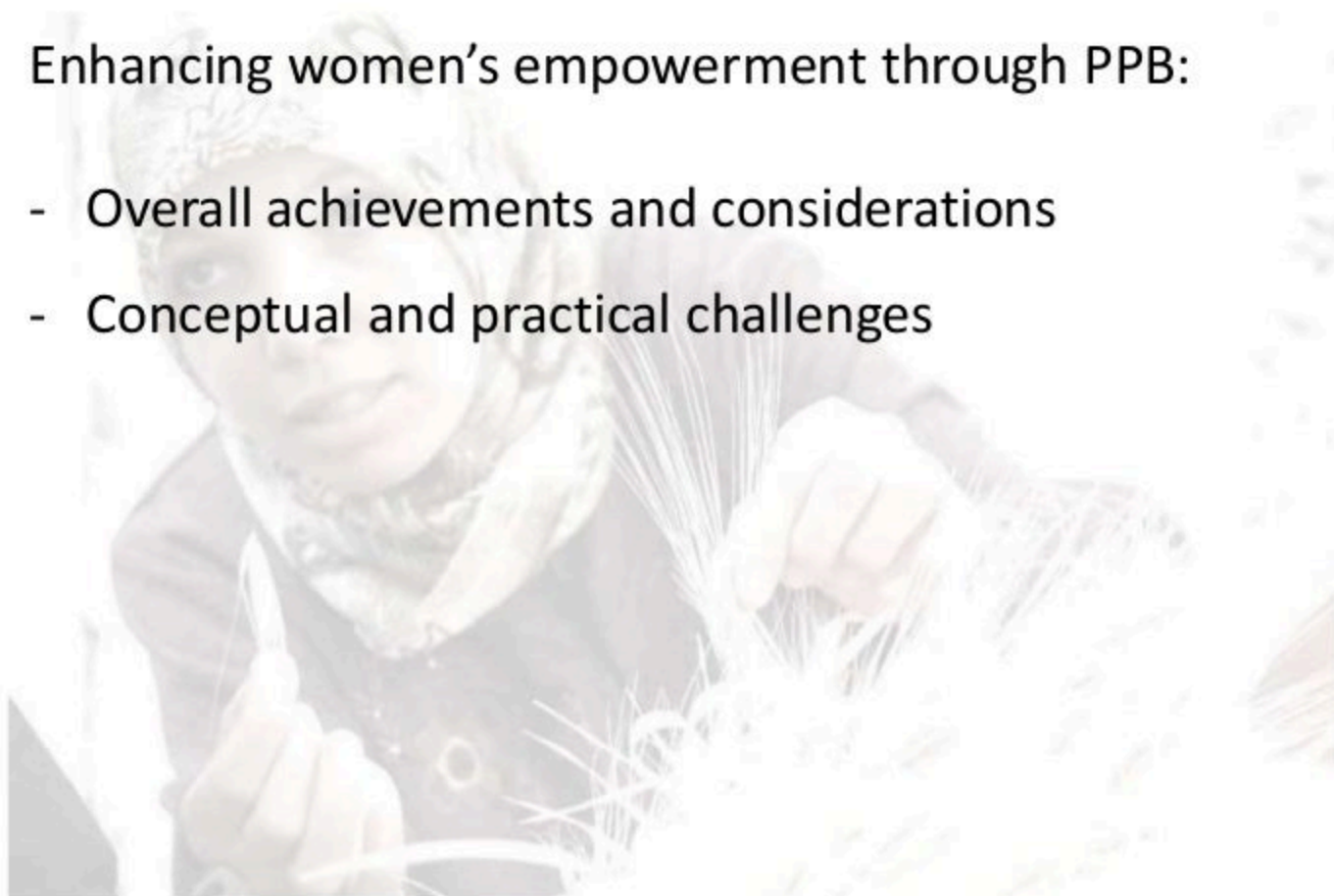
Female respondents: 5

Male respondents: 7

Main findings and discussion

Enhancing women's empowerment through PPB:

- Overall achievements and considerations
- Conceptual and practical challenges



Overall achievements and considerations

- Gender-responsive PPB can empower women farmers by:
 - Enhancing women's recognition as farmers
 - Providing good and relevant seed and information
 - Opening up opportunities to earn a living
 - Enhancing their decision-making in agriculture
- Empowerment is a non-linear and individual process that needs to be explored quantitatively and qualitatively
- Gender-blind seed policies can undermine progress on empowerment

Galiè A. 2013: 'Governance of seed and food security through participatory plant breeding'. *Natural Resources Forum (NRS)*, 37, 31-42.

Galiè A. 2013: 'Empowering women farmers'. *Frontiers: a Journal of Women Studies*, 34, 1, 58-92.

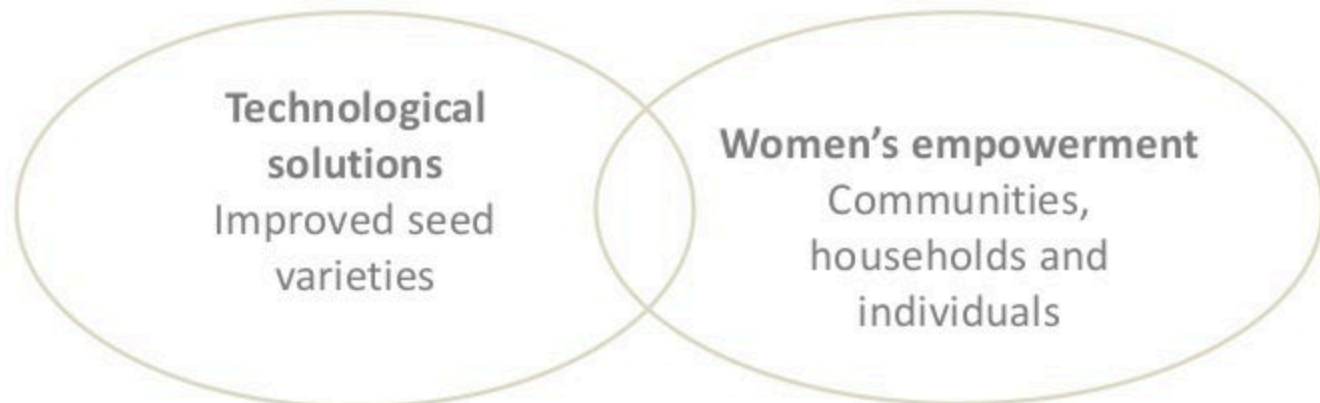
Gender roles: true or false?

- 'Idealized' vs 'actual' gender roles
- Deviance from norm publicly denied but practically accepted when performed with due respect to consensus norms
- Recognition and identity affect life chances and access to and control over resources
- 'Idealized' served to 'normalize' unconventional performances

Women's empowerment
Communities, households and
individuals

Transforming or re-inscribing gender roles through PPB?

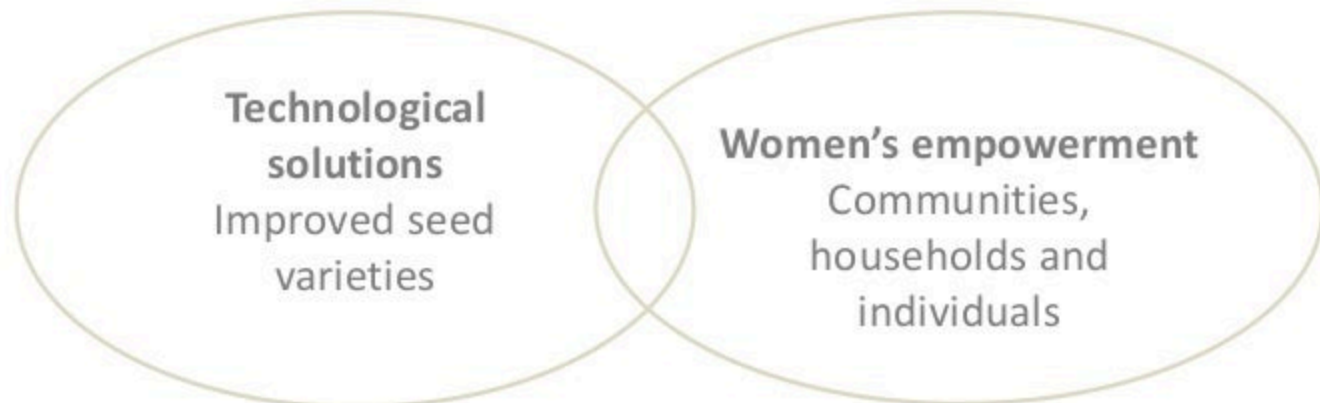
- Reproduce gender division of labour or open opportunities for new/inspirational roles?
- Enhancing the public recognition of women's roles as 'farmers' or preserve façade and address deeper biases?
- Rely on abstract gender equity principles or on lived realities?



Empowering gender analysis?

This very study became:

- Platform to question norms / offer a reflexive vantage point
- Platform for gendered self-governance



Seed governance and women's empowerment

- Intl agreements on governance of natural resources generally gender-blind
- Convention on Biological Diversity and Intl Treaty (ITPGRFA) recommend states to develop gender-sensitive policies
 - ⇒ gender-blind policies
 - ⇒ customary rules prevail





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