

Breaches of Gender Relations in Agricultural Cooperatives in Camagüey Municipality, Cuba

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Abstract

Context: Gender relations involve every human process. The creation of cooperatives in Cuba, especially in the municipality of Camagüey, is critical to dynamize the economy and promote productive techniques in the sector; the participation of men and women in this process is highly significant.

Objective: to identify manifestations of gender relations through the outcome of research conducted in two cooperatives in the municipality of Camagüey, and reduce or eradicate the existing breaches that hinder equitable, stable, and sustained development in that sector of the Cuban economy.

Methods: A methodological approach (quantitative and qualitative) was used in the research. Non-participatory observation was used as well, which enabled a comprehensive glance of this aspect, by complementing quantifiable data. The presidents of both cooperatives were interviewed, and the life records of four members (two men and two women) were written. A 21-item survey was applied under the right conditions. Every statistical analysis was made using IBN SPSS, version 23-2015.

Conclusions: This study corroborated the existence of manifestations, such as breaches in gender relations which should be addressed, and to propose actions for reduction or elimination.

Key words: gender breaches, gender relations, cooperative formation.

Introduction

In most countries, women are in a position inferior to men in terms of cropland ownership and access to the income they generate, in spite of the large amounts of edible foods they produce, and the role they play in supporting and sustaining their families. (United Nations Organization for Agriculture and Food, 2015)

The Rome Declaration at the United Nations World Summit on Nutrition (1996) claimed that the role of women was pivotal to guarantee food safety, therefore, employed women could play a fundamental role. The plan of action for gender equality (2007–2013, United Nations Organization

for Agriculture and Food) (2007), approved by the 34th Session of FAO (November, 2007) reaffirmed the need to increase equality between men and women as an essential requisite to fulfill the mandate of the organization. In that context, FAO defined one of its strategic goals as the promotion of equal job opportunities and living means in rural areas. (Ballara & Parada, 2006, p 1)

Agriculture is the main source of employment and income in rural areas of developing countries, where most hungry and poor people live. Rural women play a key role in agriculture, by increasing food and nutritional safety, as farmers/producers, workers, and entrepreneurs. However, rural women have less access than men to resources and opportunities which

are needed to become fully productive in agriculture, and guarantee food safety, nutrition, and wellbeing of their families and future generationsⁱ.

Closing the gender breach in agriculture is not an easy task, but there are still other opportunities to seize, and sometimes, simple interventions may become very effective. Within the existing culturing standards, carefully designed strategies, policies, and projects can be implemented in the public and private sectors, so that women and men are both equally benefitedⁱⁱ.

The rural population in Latin America and the Caribbean amounts to almost 121 million people, approximately 20% of the total population. Out of it, 58 million are women (48% of rural population), whose contribution is critical, both to produce foods and in general economic development in the region. (Ballara & Parada, 2006, p. 2)

From a gender perspective, in Cuba, the national laws have tackled the recognition of different needs, interests, and problems of men and women, and their relations, which are recognized by international bodies, making Cuban men and women very proud. On the island, the participation of women in farming cooperatives is still restricted in relation to men. The promotion of job opportunities for women is limited and not very appealing, due to the low salaries and contents. Nevertheless, one of the strongest motives expressed by women to reject jobs is their obligations in the household; they must fulfill the natural role of family caregivers, even though they produce from their homes, including their reproductive function (Almaguer 2016 p.76). These elements are breaches to be considered.

In the municipality of Camagüey, province of Camagüey, men and women work at cooperatives from the National Association of Small Farmers (ANAP). Women's labor and participation in different productive processes are acknowledged by society, but still important is that there are still breaches of gender relations that hinder greater and better participation of both sexes in higher productive results. Hence, the aim of this paper is to present the outcome of research done in collaboration with the provincial offices of ANAP, in order to identify the existing breaches in gender relations at two cooperatives in the municipality of Camagüey, and find viable solutions that reduce or eliminate them as a way to raise productive results.

Materials and methods

This study was done thanks to an agreement with the National Association of Small Farmers in the province of Camagüey, using funds provided by an institutional project from the Agrofood Research Line at the University of Camagüey.

A methodological approach (quantitative and qualitative) was used in the research. A survey was

applied to workers from Antonio Suarez Cooperative of Credits and Services (CCS) in Altagracia. Out of the 80 individuals interviewed, 67 were men (83.7%), and 13 were women (16.24%). At the Hugo Camejo CCS, 61 individuals were surveyed: 50 men (81.9%) and 7 women (11.4%). This instrument was applied under the optimum conditions, which encouraged all participants to answer the questionnaires adequately. The presidents of both cooperatives were interviewed, and the life records of four members (two men and two women) were written. Non-participatory observation was used as well, which enabled a comprehensive glance of this aspect, by complementing quantifiable data. Every statistical analysis was made using IBN SPSS, version 23-2015.

Results and discussion

The scientific panorama of the last decades includes an important category whose analytical value has gone beyond the initial perspectives: **Gender**.

According to Marcela Lagarde in her work: Gender and Feminism, Gender “[...] analyzes the historical synthesis between biology, economy, society, the law, politics, psychology, and culture; which implies sex, but does not run out of grounds”, (Lagarde, 1996, p 56). It is the network of beliefs, traits, attitudes, feelings, values, conducts, and activities that make women different from men, as a product from a historical process of social construction. Moreover, it is determined by tasks, functions, and roles assigned to women and men, during their private and public lives.

Gender relations must be equal in the distribution and organization of roles both in private and working lives, in deciding responsibilities and access to resources. (Almaguer, 2009, p 186). These are context-dependent, change from one country to another, from region to region in the same country, and from family to family, and it also depends on household structure. They are not static, but evolve depending on the economic, legal, and environmental situations, among others. They interact with other social relations (age, social class, religion, ethnicity, race, and physical and mental capacities), which influence on activities and responsibilities of men and women, their status, opportunities, and obstacles that must be faced in life. They are relations of power. Whether private or public, institutions like the family, marriage, entities, religion, and the school, reflect and perpetuate gender relations.

No organization is exempt from gender considerations. Their identity determines, largely, the way of integrating gender approach. There are people in every organization that support or oppose gender equality. The issue is knowing if in the name of equality, identical labor conditions should be applied to men and women, or if organizations ought to change to adjust to the particularities of men and women.

Particularly, in Cuba, after the triumph of the revolution, legal mechanisms have been adopted to create better economic, political, and social conditions in favor of women. The issue of gender is colored by subjectivity, the lack of knowledge, concentration, and sensitivity of some individuals and institutions. Concerning gender, it is important to go through all the state policies rooted on their social background.

In more than 50 years of revolution that have influenced society, the correspondence between law and reality has gradually been positively transformed, though not enough. Between 2014 and 2016 the results of promotion policies in favor of gender equality was undeniable, which positioned Cuba in a privileged place in the region. The analyses of several sources can prove it.

Life expectancy at birth of Cuban women is 80.45 years; the direct mortality rate among mothers is just 21.4 per a hundred thousand children born, one of the lowest in the world; women account for 48% of the total number of workers in the civilian state sector, 46% holding high posts; 78.5% of the health personnel; 48% of researchers, and 66.8% of highly qualified workers, both technically and professionally. On average, women reach 10.2 academic grades, and they are 65.2% of graduates in higher education. (Castro. 2015).

Overall, 48.86% of the Cuban parliament is made up of women, the second in the Americas, after Bolivia, and the fourth in the world; 43% of the members of the Council of State; 42% of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba; and 43% of professional cadres in that organization. (Castro, 2015). In turn, the Cuban government is constituted by eight ministers and 44 deputy-ministers who are women; in 5 of the 15 provinces, women hold the top posts of the Communist Party. (Castro, 2014)

The country has more than 405 town councilors who are women (34.9%), 546 presidents of People's Councils (37.6%), 66 presidents of Municipal Assemblies (39.2%), and 9 presidents of Provincial Assemblies (60%) (Fernández, 2015).

The health care sector in Cuba employs 490 thousand doctors, technicians, and the like, of which 70% are women. A similar percentage is observed in the rest of professions (Guevara, 2014).

Cuban women receive the same salary as men for equal work, and they have the right to receive pension due to widowhood, partial or total disability, as well as paid maternity leave until a year after the baby is born. Women have the right to land ownership, bank credits, access to free and universal services in education and health care, and enjoy sexual and reproductive rights. (Amarelles, 2016)

The insertion of Cubans as beneficiaries and active protagonists qualifies as one of the most successful

social phenomena that ever took place in the country. In 1995, unemployment in women was 13%, but today it is 3.5%. Today, women make up 48% of the total people employed in the civilian state sector, and 47% holds high posts in the government. Their presence in the parliament is 48.86%, and their representation in the Council of State increased to 45.2%. (Amarelles, 2016)

The above mentioned figures highlight the important and growing participation of women in the economic, social, and political life of the country, and in the layout and implementation of public policies. Nevertheless, it is important to continue to change the cultural patterns in relation to child care sharing between men and women, and the presence of women in important government posts, which continues to grow, just mention a couple of examples.

These statistics show how high women responsibilities are as a result from their achievements in the Cuban society, even when they still do not hold key posts in the national government.

In the last two decades, a moderate increase has taken place in the number of women who have accessed managing posts. Although these are quantitative data alone, it must be a starting point to achieve higher women empowerment in politics and the society. Equality will not be reached if women do not assume the same responsibilities as men, the same rights and duties, such as the distribution of power, income, ways of organizing labor, time utilization, and others. (Almaguer & Torres, 2011, p 87)

The structural inequality between men and women cannot be regarded as natural, but as the result of a power structure around the inequalities of a marked patriarchal order which is still being reproduced in society.

It is important to add that the methodological indications conceived by the main team of the project were implemented in the design and application of the survey. This report is an approximation to the principal trends expressed by farmers at different social and working, domestic and habitual, and health contexts, at Antonio Suarez CCS.

The analysis of the instruments applied showed a group of manifestations and breaches in gender relations which can lead to a number of conclusions that should be evaluated in order to achieve deeper and more precise reduction or eradication, from the establishment of action proposals.

The breaches identified by the research team are listed below:

- Dominance relations from men to women.
- Gender discrimination manifestations in some activities.
- Violence between genders.
- Limitations in women empowering.

- Factors of cardiovascular risks.

To identify them, the individuals implied in development and assimilation of social, production, and family relations in their residences and workplaces build up ideals and reflections that lead to contradictions, violence, and discrimination, permeating this process in daily practice, the household, and labor relations. The grouping of results includes the essence of the criteria of participants, who live in a very specific context, such as the cooperative sector.

A detailed study of the general data resulted in that out of the 80 individuals interviewed, 67 were men (83.7%), and 13 were women (16.24%). A considerable percentage of the sampled individuals was 31-49 years of age (37.5 %), whereas the number of people between 50-60, and older, were 57 (71.2 %). This figure must be considered in studies on aging in this important sector for the local and national economic development of the country.

The tendency to hold important managing posts continues to favor men. Although the number of managing posts in the board of directors are the same for women and men (4), for 10% of women, the basic organization comprises 1 woman and 2 men, representing 3.7% of women. It can be inferred that men account for 8.7 %, whereas women hold 7.5 %.

The surveyed individuals said that their chores are shared in the household. Men acknowledge this indicator as positive (75%), whereas women refer to a lower incidence (13.75%). The outcome, however, reveals that in some households, the distribution of chores is not always balanced, and some activities are more inclined to be done by women, like cleaning, ironing, and doing the dishes.

Significantly, neither women nor men do the household chores in the presence of children, though both parents agree to take their children to school. In this last aspect, men's position is more balanced than women's, as most responses say that men usually do this activity.

As to managing, 56.2 % of men said that both sexes can assume this responsibility well, whereas 10% of women agree. Therefore, 66.2 % of the sample assumed that men and women can be managers. Likewise, the surveyed individuals said that both men and women are qualified to manage. Accordingly, women accounted for 10%, and men represented 48.7 %, for a total 57.5 % in the sample.

In relation to managing styles, an important group of people did not express any criteria (32.5 %). Meanwhile, a collective managing style was recognized in the responses, stating that any person from either sex can implement it.

The criterion that justifies the selection of collective management considers the capacity for communication, listening to others, making collective

decisions, and working as long as needed. These are mostly men's criteria (50%). Women's criteria are not any different, but they call for the need to make collective decisions (7.5 %).

Other criteria should be emphasized, according to the results of the surveys. All the stakeholders said that women do not have the optimum conditions to become part of farm work, they tackle on the need to have access to some sort of transportation that facilitates farm work, as well as an office with optimum conditions to manage organization, control, and follow up.

Scientific observation was the method used to corroborate the results of the surveys. It was demonstrated that, though the individuals interviewed said there were no differences and discrimination, and that sex does not matter to work a job, or that women and men have the same opportunities to hold managing posts, men assumed macho-male chauvinistic expressions, like "a man above all" and "women are the weaker sex because they're women". Moreover, the membership is overwhelmingly made of men, and no practices are recognized to stimulate and capture women for work in the cooperative. Although men said that women are capable of managing, they also expressed contradictory statements, such as, "women can run the cooperative like men, but to run this one, you have to have a strong hold, like men can", or "when a man stands to talk, the others must shut their mouths just out of respect for another man".

At the Hugo Camejo Cooperative of Credits and Services, in Yaba, Camagüey, these results are studied in order to identify the breaches in gender relationships, both in production and in the household and society, which allows for a sensitization and training plan.

The breaches identified by the research team are listed below:

- Relations of women subordination.
- Gender discrimination. Men discriminate women in different situations of their public and private lives.
- Gender violence of men to women.
- Absence of women empowerment in different cooperative responsibilities.
- Factors of cardiovascular risks.

A thorough study of the cooperative's general data states that out of 61 individuals surveyed, 50 men (81.9%) and 7 women (11.4%); four women did not define their sex (6.5 %). The population between 18 and 30 years of age was 7 (6 men, 1 woman); 31-49, 20 people (18 men and 3 women); 50-60, 18 people (15 men and 3 women); over 60, 14 men. The prevailing age was 31 to older than 60 years, men were the most represented, which is an essential data to be considered in aging studies of this important economic sector.

Men hold most managing posts (4) as opposed to women (1), accounting for 6.55% men and 1.63% women in the board of directors. Four men (6.55%) and one woman (1.63%) hold posts in the ground organization.

The surveyed individuals said that their tasks are shared in the household. Women perform these tasks, 37 do the dishes (60.6%), 37 cook (60.6%), 36 iron (59%), 33 do laundry (54.0%), 19 run errands (31.14%), 23 take and pick up children from and to school (37.7%), 33 clean (54.0%), 14 bring drinking water (22.95%), 24 perform school activities (39.3%), 20 buy food (3.27%), 25 go to school meetings (40.9%), and 8 do other things (13.1%).

Men: 30 do the dishes (49.1%), 31 cook (50.8%), 31 iron (49.1%), 8 iron (13.1%), 18 do laundry (29.5%), 51 run errands (83.6%), 21 take and pick up children to and from school (34.4%), 27 clean (42.6%), 43 bring drinking water (70.4%), 24 perform school activities (39.3%), 48 buy food (78.6%), 32 go to parents' meetings (52.4%), and 7 do other things (11.4%).

Men acknowledge this indicator as positive (75%), whereas women refer to a lower incidence (13.75%). The outcome, however, reveals that in some households, the chores are not always balanced, and some activities are more inclined to be done by women, like cleaning, ironing, and doing the dishes.

As to managing, 24.5 % of men said that both sexes can assume this responsibility well, whereas 10% of women agree. Therefore, the majority of the sample assumed that men and women can manage. In the same order, the surveyed individuals said that both men and women are qualified to manage.

In relation to managing styles, 10 people did not express any criteria. Meanwhile, a collective managing style was recognized in the responses, stating that any person from either sex can implement it. It was expressed by 15 men (24.5%) and 1 woman (1.63%). However, 23 men chose the male style (37.7%), and 4 chose women's (6.55%)

The criterion that justifies the selection of collective managing style (49.1%) referred to working limitless time, being communicative, making joined decisions (31.1%), no time for rest (26.2%), and working with many men (24.5%). These are mostly men's criteria (81.96%). Women's criteria are not any different, but they call for the need to work without time limit (6.55 %).

Other criteria should be emphasized, according to the results of the surveys. The stakeholders expressed that the conditions for women to join farm work are not appropriate, with the following trends: 13.1% of men and 16.3% of women consider that women lack the quality to rule over men, there are inadequate working conditions for women according to men (11.4%). Interestingly, 21.3% of men said that

women should take care of the husband, like 2 of the 7 women in the sample (28.57%). Ruling over men and women, only 6.55% of men and 4.91% of women expressed their willingness to it, and 32 men (52.4%) expressed several reasons not to; 12 men and 3 women did not give any response (25%). Regarding the conditions to managing and family support, 24.5% and 14.7 % of men checked these boxes, respectively.

Evaluation of working conditions showed that the following trends: need for working tools by men (36%), and women (6.55%); tractors, men (49.1%) and women (4.91%); transportation, men (40.9%), and women (3.27%).

Several productive and managing activities have stereotyped the participation of women, which contrasts 45.9% of men and 8.19% of women who refer to the need of working together. These stereotypes are marked by responses such as, women are not strong enough to work in agriculture (18.1% of men); women lose their womanliness by working in productive areas (52% of men); both have the same opportunities to perform productive labor (63.9% of men and 9.38% of women), however; men and women perform productive work equally (65.5% of men); sex does not matter to perform quality and efficient work (63.9% of men and 11.4% of women).

Besides, when it comes to interpersonal relations, men preference is based on consensual relations (80%), mediating (64%), tolerant (58%), dialogic (54%) democratic (48%), and cooperation (46%). Women only highlighted dialogic (42.85%), respectful (70%), tolerant (57%), and democratic (85.7%) relations.

The analysis of the last breach evaluated (cardiovascular risk factors), it is important to perform some assessment; from a sanitary standpoint, there are limitations in the perception of the risk of acquiring a disease in both sexes, and the lack of self-care in the general population of the two cooperatives evaluated.

After 60 years of age, both men and women "learn about their hearts"; however, on average, women undergo their first heart episode 8-10 years after men (52 vs. 62, respectively). Menopausal women have a natural estrogen protection for cardiovascular disease, which is lost in the fifth decade of life, when ovaries cease to function, which is the most reasonable explanation to this phenomenon. In recent years, the occurrence of heart disease in women is showing a different rate, due to changes in the lifestyle of modern women, along with the association of social and physio pathological risks. (Salles, 2016, p 54)

Hypertension is the greatest risk factor of the general population in terms of vascular entities; namely, acute coronary syndrome, heart and renal insufficiencies, cerebral-vascular disease, and sudden

death (García 2017, p 45). The study showed their occurrence in 35% of farmers of either sex. However, hypertension was more common in women than men, particularly in menopausal women (over 50 years of age), linked to lower production of nitric acid, known to be a relaxing factor derived from the endothelium. At this stage, women tend to obesity, which leads to metabolic syndrome, increasing the lipid profile related to cholesterol and its subfractions (low-density lipoproteins (LDL), cholesterol, lipoprotein A, and hypertriglyceridemia. In their sixties, women usually are fatter than men, which was seen in 66.4% of all the surveyed women.

Cigar smoking was a transforming risk factor in 27% of cases. The risk of smoking women of suffering a cardiopathy is ten times higher than in men. Active smokers have a clear dose-response relation between the number of smoked cigarettes and the risk of vascular affection, which increases 2.5-fold in women who smoke 1-4 cigarettes a day, starting at the beginning of menopause until two years before, in contrast to non-smokers.

Diabetes mellitus is a significant predictor of global cardiovascular risk. Additionally, the young diabetic women lose hormonal protection if they are smokers. Overweight women (weight greater than 25 kg·m² sc) and over 45, have more chance to suffer from diabetes mellitus type 2 and its complications than men. A prevalence study showed 10.2% for diabetes.

Lastly, and less mentioned, there are time-biological related aspects that lead to vascular disease. The circadian rhythm guarantees individual adaptation to the succession of days and nights, for which the individual is regulated according to signs from the environment, such as light, darkness, wakefulness and rest, or fast and ingestion, which establish vital modifications toward lower biological performance. The physiological reduction of blood pressure, from 10% to 20%, at night, is known as the dipper pattern. However, a blood pressure monitoring study of outpatients showed that 32% underwent a non-dipper pattern; in other words, the blood pressure did not decrease at night, which was associated to physical stress and inappropriate lifestyles that cause time-disruption states (de-synchronization of internal biological rhythms, and the 24 natural hours).

Conclusions

The study conducted at the cooperatives summarized the following considerations:

- Overall, both women and men share a macho male view of the household chores.
- The criteria related to the household show insufficient vision and domain of gender approach.
- The possibilities men and women have to practice managing activities are recognized.

- The results in terms of collective managing is regarded as positive.
- All the necessary conditions for women's labor are not created in the countryside.
- Family support and understanding is essential to perform farm work and managing at the cooperative.
- Several criteria refer that men should understand that being subordinate to women does not affect the productive process or managing styles and social relations.
- The most commonly heard opinions referred to gender discrimination are,
 - “Crop farming can be done by women”.
 - “Inequalities between men and women are marked by physical differences”.
 - Respectful and cooperation work relations are recognized.
- Other elements pertaining to work conditions that may help organize input planning for farming in the province are expressed. In that sense, recommendations like,
 - Greater support from ANAP.
 - Improved working conditions in the fields.
 - Existence of inputs like transportation, tractors, proper offices, and adequate tools.
- The lack of predictors that deviously or explicitly occur in adult patients, especially if they are associated to age increase, high blood pressure early in the morning, changes in the circadian rhythm, diabetes mellitus, obesity, dislipoprotein, and smoking, create a problem that should be addressed to ensure life quality and healthy aging of farmers.
- Actions must be implemented to cope with the breaches and manifestations of gender discrimination in the personnel of the cooperatives studied. Therefore, creating higher sensitivity and offering job training may become a way to reduce or eliminate the breaches found.

Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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