

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN ABACA FARMING: A CASE IN BAYBAY LEYTE, PHILIPPINES

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Abstract

This study examines the involvement of women in abaca farming activity at various phases. Selection of the respondents was done by simple random sampling, and the data were collected using survey questionnaire. The data were analyzed using descriptive analysis, which included frequency counts, percentages and mean. According to the findings, women participated in all aspects of abaca farming, however men are more heavily involved than women because it is a labor-intensive livelihood. Women were commonly involved in abaca-related decision-making, as well as in the sale of abaca fiber and the management of abaca farm earnings.

Key words: women, abaca farming, gender roles

INTRODUCTION

In the global abaca market, the Philippine abaca industry was a major player. The Philippines provides 80% of the world's abaca demand [14]. It has become a source of income for more than 1.5 million Filipinos who rely on it either directly or indirectly for a living [6]. Women have important contributions to agriculture, according to numerous studies. Many studies have been done to detect the trends of working female labor in agriculture, but none looks at the role of women in abaca farming. As a result, this research was carried out to fill the gap. Thus, this study was conducted to determine the function of women in abaca farming and to comprehend the roles of men and women at various phases of the abaca farming process.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Location of the study

The study took place at Baybay City, Leyte, Philippines. It is situated at approximately 10°41' North, 124°48' East, in the island of Leyte. Elevation at these coordinates is estimated at 2.0 meters or 6.5 feet above mean sea level [13]. City of Baybay has a total land area of 46,050 hectares, and is known

to be one of the largest in terms of land area in the Eastern Visayas region. It is divided into ninety-two (92) barangays, composed of 24 urban barangays and 68 rural barangays [3]. The climate is often humid, with no identifiable seasons and its topography is generally mountainous in the eastern portion as it slopes down west towards the shore line. Farming and fishing are the most frequent sources of income in this predominantly agricultural community [18].

Data collection and sampling technique

The abaca farmer respondents were selected using simple random sampling, with each abaca farmer in Baybay City having the same chance of being selected as samples for the study [9].

The survey instrument was pre-tested prior to the collection of the respondent's profile, and other farming related activities.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, which included frequency counts, percentages, and mean. Covid-19 virus protection was observed using health standards such as wearing of masks and keeping a 2-meter distance while doing the interview.

Data analysis was made using Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) v.20

while Microsoft Excel 2017 was used in the construction of charts and graphs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Profile of the abaca farmer respondents

Men worked in abaca farms for a longer period of time than women; men worked for an average of 19 years, while women worked for about 11 years (Table 1). This translates that men have been farming abaca since they were younger, but women joined them later due to pregnancy, childbirth, and child raising [4]. Male farmers are 55 years old on average, whereas female farmers are 36 years old. Women farmers, on the other hand, have higher level of education than men. Women, on average, completed second year high school with eight (8) years of formal education, whereas men had only primary education with six (6) years of formal schooling and none of the respondents had even reached tertiary education.

Table 1. Profile of the abaca farmer respondents, by sex

Variables	Female	Male
Years in abaca farming	11.27	18.55
Age	36	55
Years of education	8.42	6.33

Source: Author's calculation and analysis (2022).

Role of men and women in abaca farming

Agricultural trainings are relevant in any farming activity. It allows the farmers to incorporate the latest scientific advances and technology tools into their day to day operation [8]. These trainings may improve farmers' skills and knowledge in areas such as planting techniques, irrigation, pesticides, crop rotation, and crop storage after harvest. These skills enable farmers to improve yields, and protect their crops against weather-related shocks [11]. Based on the findings, it appears in Fig. 1 that men (48.1%) are more likely to take abaca related trainings than women (44.4%). Men chose to take part in this activity because they were mostly involved in the abaca planting tasks. In their training sessions, farmers were taught some measures on how to be more productive in their farms like eradication of abaca bunchy top virus or

ABTV that had wiped away abaca plantation [12]. Also, men become more responsible in the decision-making about abaca farming (81.5%) since men performed the majority of abaca farming related activities.

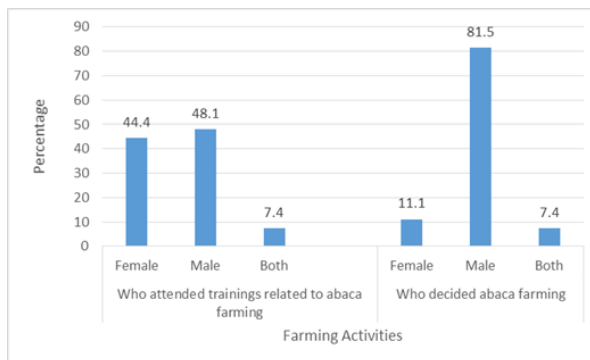


Fig. 1. Attendance to trainings and decision-making in abaca farming, by gender

Source: Author's calculation and analysis (2022).

As reported in Fig. 2, male abaca farmers primarily took charge in planting the abaca seedlings (66.7%) while seldom it is done by both male and female (33.3%). Women are involved in various stages in abaca farming such as planting (3.7%), plowing the soil (3.7%), and weeding (3.8%). The initial harvest of abaca fiber takes place between 18 and 24 months after planting [5]. During this period, the abaca fiber will go through several stages such as fiber extraction, drying, grading, and baling where men frequently assume responsibility on these stages (69.2%) [1].

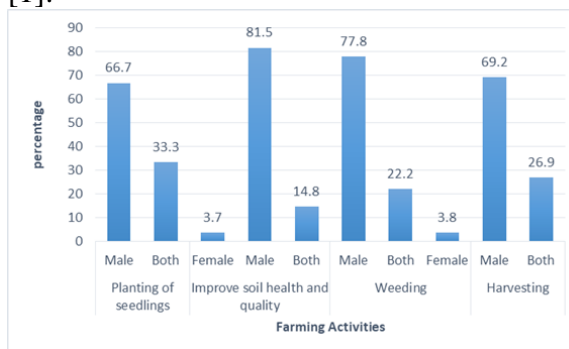


Fig. 2. From planting to harvesting related activities

Source: Author's calculation and analysis (2022).

After harvesting and getting the fiber ready for sale, the choice of buying station is considered. Selection of buying station for abaca fiber is essential in the every farm household since it leads to an impact in their

earnings. Different buying outlets have varied buying prices, some of which are low while others have higher buying price. As presented in Fig. 3, male abaca growers usually decides where to sell the fiber (81.5%), seldom female (7.4%) take part on this decision making, whether to sell it to licensed traders in the city or in buying stations within their community or barangay. Meanwhile, the men (76.9%) will usually bring the fiber to the abaca buying station since this is a labour intensive activity.

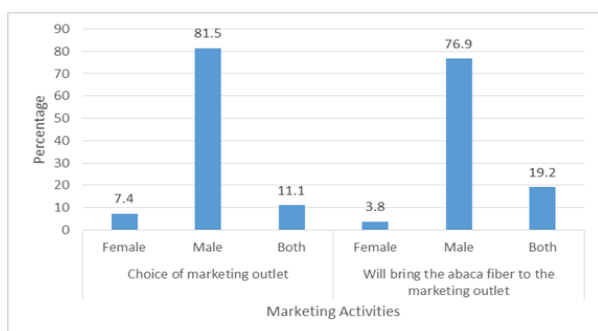


Fig. 3. Marketing related activities in abaca farming
 Source: Author's calculation and analysis (2022).

In farming, one of the first steps to be successful is keeping well-maintained, accurate records and establishing a sound record-keeping system. Keeping accurate records has its benefits, like helping farmers plan for his/her future farming activity [15]. Based on the results of the study, men do the majority of the record keeping since they are more actively involved in abaca farming activities (62.5%). After the fiber is being sold, women, keep the earnings (57.7%) for they take charge in managing the household incomes [16] (see Fig. 4).

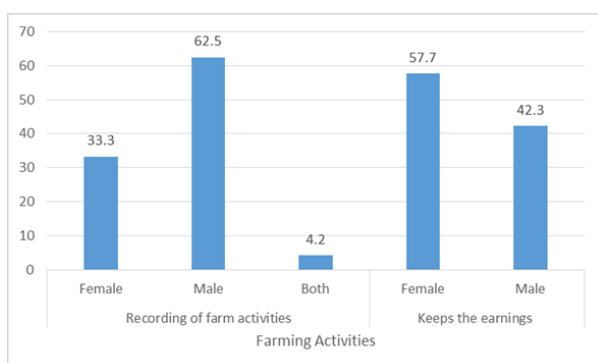


Fig. 4. Record keeping and managing the earnings
 Source: Author's calculation and analysis (2022).

Women's participation in abaca farming

Market outlet selections for abaca fiber are household-specific decision and various factors have to be considered as a basis for such decision. As shown in Fig. 5, licensed trading stations are the choice outlet for abaca fiber of nearly three-quarters of women abaca farmers (70%). Baybay has two (2) licensed abaca trading stations: Ching Bee Trading Corporation (CBT) and Specialty Pulp Manufacturing, Inc. (SPMI) [2]. Women farmers preferred selling their fiber to these licensed traders because it offers them higher buying price than other stations. However, they would have additional expenditures for labor and transportation since abaca farms are located very distant from the trading station. Farmers usually have to travel for over an hour, on average, to reach the city where these trading stations are situated. Other women farmers said that they are discouraged from selling their fiber to these licensed traders due to added costs, despite the fact that it will make them more income. With this, they preferred selling their abaca fiber to the buying stations within their community or *barangay* (30%).

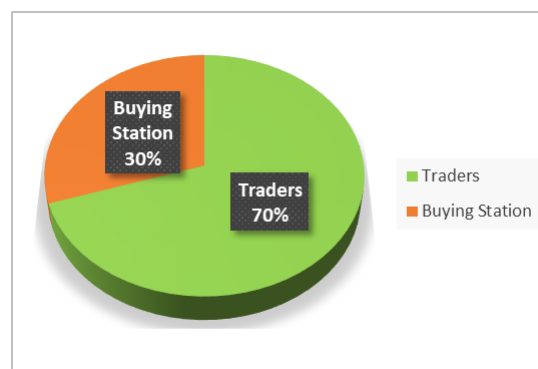


Fig. 5. Women's choice of buying station for abaca fiber
 Source: Author's calculation and analysis (2022).

Various reasons were cited by the abaca farmer respondents in choosing where to sell their fiber however only two (2) are discussed in this section. As illustrated in Fig. 6, women's main motivation for choosing a marketing outlet for their abaca fiber is the buying price (60%), they prefer bringing the fiber to buying stations with high buying price. Even though it will cost them time,

money, and effort, they will do so. Other women abaca farmers said that they will bring their fiber to their regular buyer or *suki* (40%). As an advantage of being the frequent buyers, they can go to them whenever they are in financial need as long as they agree to sell their fiber to them but of slightly lower price. At times, other farmers who owed money to those buying stations may be forced to sell their fibers to them.

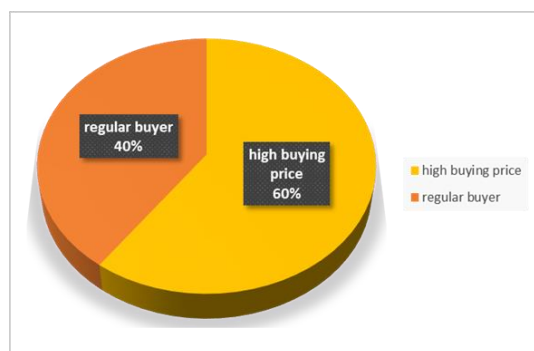


Fig. 6. Women's reasons for the choice of marketing outlet
 Source: Author's calculation and analysis (2022).

In managing the abaca farm households during crisis (Fig. 7), women preferred using savings (55%), and they pursue credit as their second option (36%) while their last resort is selling of assets (9%). Examples of the assets of the family are appliances, farming tools and equipment and vehicles (e.g. motorcycle).

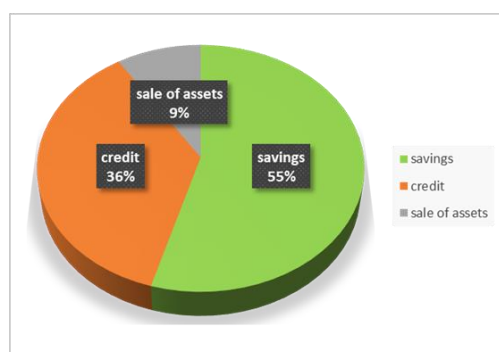


Fig. 7. Distribution of how women manages their household expenses
 Source: Author's calculation and analysis (2022).

There is a variety of expenditures that may apply to any agricultural operation such as agricultural inputs, equipment rental, transportation charges, and many other [7]. However, farmers' access to funds can be challenging at times, and borrowing money

may be their only alternative. In this section, borrowing sources are described where women abaca farmers preferred to borrow from their family and friends (56%) because they may get the money without paying interest and without having to put up any collateral, as long as they promise to pay back the money in a specified period of time. This condition can sometimes lead to relationship problems when failing to pay the debt on time. Meanwhile, roughly 22% of women abaca farmers have taken out loans from banks. Informal money lenders are rarely chosen because of their high interest rates, these interest rates may vary depending on the lender (11%). Banks' strict collateral requirements and long loan processing times encourage people to turn to the informal sector, where loan approvals are based more on trust and personal relationships [10]. Lastly, digital lenders were also considered, although only a small number of them have chosen this option (11%). Digital lending is a technology that allows financial institutions to increase productivity and loan profits while providing quicker service at the point-of-sale (POS) [17].

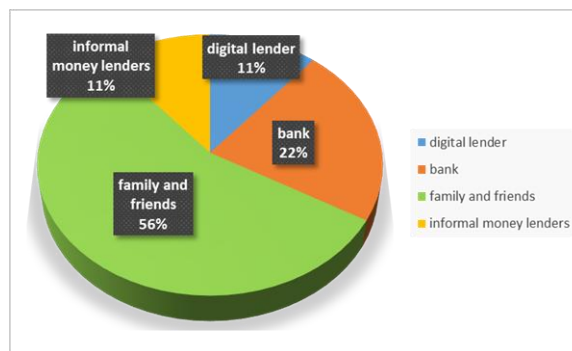


Fig. 8. Distribution of women's preferred source for borrowing money
 Source: Author's calculation and analysis (2022).

CONCLUSIONS

Abaca farming is a labour-intensive activity, hence men are more extensively involved in it. However, women play an important role in abaca farming at various phases. Women are typically involved in decision-makings, particularly when it comes to marketing outlets and financial resources needed for farming. They also participate in the selling of

abaca fiber and they take charge in managing the earnings since women are known to be household managers.

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