

SDC 2019 Annual Meeting Abstracts

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Title: Labor scarcity and women's role in agricultural production: Evidence from Bangladesh



Migration reduces labor availability in rural areas, which can affect the production process among smallholders for labor-intensive crops. Gendered migration, for example by men, may have further implications for women left behind. Women may take over tasks from men or may become empowered to make more decisions about production and within-home processing. This paper analyzes the relationship between labor availability, women's agricultural value chain involvement, and associated empowerment outcomes. Specifically, we study whether women's roles within the jute value chain in the Southern Delta region of Bangladesh change as the availability of male labor declines. We examine whether changing labor availability affects women's empowerment and gender wage gaps, and we provide broader recommendations for analyzing gender outcomes in panel and event studies. The analysis uses a panel sample of 1,500 smallholder households from 50 villages, measuring a wide range of gender disaggregated variables over three survey rounds between 2016 and 2018. The surveys use a Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) to measure women's empowerment. We also collected, by stage of jute production, the amount of male and female household labor used, the amount of male and female hired labor used, and any wages paid to these male and female laborers, which are used to measure gender wage gaps. In producer households, we find low rates of women's empowerment, driven by a lack of women's autonomy in jute production and a high workload outside of agriculture. We observe strong gender differentiation in tasks: if women participate in jute production, they tend to participate in post-harvesting tasks. Although producer households use more female labor as they experience increased labor scarcity, and as they increase wages paid to male laborers, we do not observe an improvement in women's empowerment or female labor wages. Consequently, women face an increased workload and a widening gender wage gap in a context of increasing labor scarcity, limiting opportunities to empower women through the jute value chain. We conclude that more work is needed to identify innovations that help women use outmigration of male labor from rural areas to become more empowered within agricultural value chains.