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Out of the dark but not out of the cage: women's empowerment and gender relations in the Dangme West district of Ghana

Fuera de las tinieblas pero no fuera de la celda: el empoderamiento de las mujeres y las relaciones de género en el distrito de Dangme West en Ghana

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Abstract

In Ghana, strategies to address poverty among rural women have often been linked to women's empowerment programmes with credit as a core component of these. Yet, many programmes focus on the economic benefit to women without necessarily looking at the impact on gender relations at the household level and its implications on women. Using quantitative and qualitative data from the Dangme West district of Ghana, this

article shows how poverty reduction programmes with credit components can reduce women's vulnerability to poverty and empower them. But much more needs to be done to complement these efforts. The study shows that women beneficiaries as against women non-beneficiaries have significantly improved their socio-economic status through access to financial and non-financial resources. This has in certain instances improved gender relations at the household level, with women being recognized as earners of income and contributors to household budget. However, some women still regard their spouses as ‘heads’ and require their consent in decisions even in issues that have to do with their own personal lives. Moreover, the improved economic status of women has resulted in a ‘power conflict’, creating confrontation between spouses. The article recommends that, as part of their programmes, assisting organizations and institutions must address ‘power relations’, the basis of gender subordination at the household level, otherwise socio-cultural norms and practices, underpinned by patriarchal structures, will remain ‘cages’ for rural women.

En Ghana, las estrategias contra la pobreza entre las mujeres rurales han estado a menudo ligadas a programas de empoderamiento de mujeres con el crédito como un componente fundamental. Sin embargo, muchos programas se centran en los beneficios económicos para las mujeres sin necesariamente examinar el impacto sobre las relaciones de género a nivel del hogar y sus consecuencias para las mujeres. Utilizando datos cualitativos y cuantitativos del distrito de Dangme West de Ghana, este artículo muestra cómo los programas de reducción de la pobreza con componentes de crédito pueden reducir la vulnerabilidad de las mujeres a la pobreza y empoderarlas. Pero se necesita hacer mucho más para complementar estos esfuerzos. El estudio muestra que, comparadas con las mujeres no beneficiarias, las mujeres beneficiarias han mejorado significativamente su estatus socioeconómico a través del acceso a recursos financieros y no financieros. En algunas situaciones esto ha mejorado las relaciones de género a nivel del hogar, con las mujeres siendo reconocidas como generadoras de ingresos y contribuidoras a la economía del hogar. Sin embargo, algunas mujeres aún ven a sus esposos como ‘jefes’ y requieren su consentimiento en decisiones incluso en temas que tienen que ver con sus propias vidas personales. Más aún, el estatus económico mejorado de las mujeres ha resultado en un ‘conflicto de poder’, creando confrontación entre cónyuges. La autora recomienda que las organizaciones e instituciones de asistencia como parte de sus programas deben tener en cuenta las ‘relaciones de poder’, las bases de la subordinación de género a nivel del

hogar, de otra manera las normas y prácticas socioculturales, sostenidas por estructuras patriarcales, permanecerán siendo ‘celdas’ para las mujeres rurales.

在迦纳，处理乡村女性贫穷问题之策略经常与以信贷为核心的女性赋权计划相连结，但许多计划仅关注女性经济利益，　却不必然检视该计划对家户层级性别关系造成的影响及其对女性之意涵。本文利用迦纳当梅（Dangme）西区的质性与量化资料，展现纳入信贷的消除贫穷计划如何减少女性处于贫穷的脆弱性并使之赋权，　但完善此一工作仍需更多努力。本研究显示，相对于非受益女性而言，受益女性透过获得金钱及非金钱的资源，大幅提升了她们的社会经济位阶。在某些情况下，家户层级的性别关系也因而获得改善，因为女性被视为工资所得者以及家庭经济的贡献者。但仍有一些女性将其配偶视为「户长」，　依附其意见做决定，　即便与自身生活相关的问题亦复如此。更有甚者，女性经济地位的提升，反而造成了配偶间的「权力冲突」。因此笔者建议，这些计划中的辅助性组织及机构必需处理「权力关系」此一家户层级的基本性别从属之议题，否则由父权结构支持的社会文化常规及实践仍然会是限囿乡村女性的「牢笼」。

关键词：迦纳当梅西区、性别、贫穷、赋权

Keywords:

Ghana　Dangme West　gender　poverty　empowerment

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Notes

1. The Millennium Declaration was signed at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, and sets out the United Nations goals for the next decade. The declaration commits member countries to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate sustainable development.

2. The Grameen bank is a micro-finance organization designed to offer credit services to the rural poor, particularly women, without requiring collateral. A group-based credit approach is applied which utilizes the peer pressure within the group to ensure the borrowers use caution in conducting their financial affairs, thus ensuring repayment and allowing the borrowers to develop good credit standing. Started in 1976 by Mohammed Yunus in Bangladesh, this approach has since become a model for many micro-finance schemes for women.

3. Opinion leaders are usually the respected members of a particular community. They are most often the community political leaders (mainly men) such as chief, elders of the chief, church leader or head teacher. In this instance, the opinion leader is an elder of the chief in the Old Ningo community.

4. To preserve the anonymity of this respondent, a pseudonym has been used.

5. This is a local textiles group.

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