

Women power on the farm

Oct 27, 2011 by Medha Chandra



Women grow more than half of the world's food. It's the unknown fact of global agriculture.

I have vivid memories of women working the fields across my travels in Asia, and find it amazing that when people talk about farmers, it's almost always about men. [In the U.S.](#), for instance, 30.2% of the 3.3 million farm operators counted in the 2007 census were women. In the [Global South](#), women remain guardians of sophisticated and extensive knowledge about traditional agricultural practices that have sustained communities over centuries. The fact is that women are the 'hidden resource' supporting much of agriculture across the globe.

PAN Asia and Pacific (PAN AP) released a [study](#) a few months ago, documenting women's roles and knowledge in agriculture in Pakistan, Thailand and the Philippines. The study highlighted women's immense knowledge and involvement in all parts of the process of growing food - from seed preparation and soil management, to pest control, to post-harvest processing and storage, to livestock keeping and animal husbandry. The depth of knowledge and experience documented by this report is impressive and long-neglected. I'm so pleased to see women farmers acknowledged in this way.

Stewards of the environment resisting corporate takeover

The study further found that women farmers are, on the whole, more environmentally conscious than men farmers and readily adopt sustainable agricultural practices. And they do so against great odds. As PAN AP's report highlighted, the Green and Gene Revolutions undermine and undervalue women farmer's knowledge as well as their control, access and rights to seeds and genetic resources. These corporate-controlled farming systems replace biodiverse, locally appropriate farm operations with patented pesticide and seed products that work only for large monocrop operations.

But just as women farmers in the U.S. are [resisting](#) the attempts of agribusiness corporations to woo them, women farmers in the Global South are coming together to [fight back](#) against corporate takeover of their knowledge and demanding recognition of their work and expertise. More power to them!

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