

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Transition Experiences of TADYA Women to Agroecological Living

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Abstract

This study was conducted using a qualitative research design to explore the experiences of women within the Tahtacıörencik Natural Life Collective (TADYA), located in the Güdül district of Ankara, as they transitioned to an agroecological way of life. Over the course of the research, participant observation was performed at various intervals, and in-depth interviews were conducted with six women. The transcribed interviews were then thematically analyzed using the Atlas.ti software. Based on the analysis, five key themes emerged: the economic empowerment of TADYA women and its broader ramifications; the transformation of the public sphere; a range of psycho-social changes; the role and influence of technology utilization; and, finally, styles of solidarity and conflict resolution within the collective. The findings shed light on the multifaceted impacts of agroecology on women's daily lives, emphasizing how these experiences can foster empowerment and catalyze broader social change. Overall, the results underscore the potential of agroecological practices to enhance women's agency, support collective collaboration, and drive a more inclusive social transformation.

Keywords: Agroecology, rural women, women empowerment, eco-friendly living

Öz

Bu çalışma, Ankara'nın Güdül ilçesinde yer alan Tahtacıörencik Doğal Yaşam Kolektifi (TADYA) üyesi kadınların agroekolojik yaşama geçiş süreçlerini ve deneyimlerini derinlemesine anlamak amacıyla tasarlanmıştır. Nitel araştırma deseni çerçevesinde, belirli zaman aralıklarında katılımcı gözlem yapılmış ve altı kadımla derinlemesine görüşmeler gerçekleştirilmiştir. Elde edilen veriler, Atlas.ti programı kullanılarak tematik analiz yöntemiyle incelenmiştir. Analiz sonucunda beş temel tema ortaya çıkmıştır: İlki, TADYA üyesi kadınların ekonomik açıdan güçlenmesi ve bu güçlenmenin çeşitli alanlara yansımalarıdır. İkincisi, kamusal alanın dönüşümünü ele almakta ve kadınların toplumsal katılım süreçlerine yeni boyutlar eklemektedir. Üçüncü tema, psiko-sosyal değişimleri içererek kadınların duygu, düşünce ve sosyal ilişkilerindeki dönüşümleri vurgulamaktadır. Dördüncü tema, teknoloji kullanımının kadınların günlük yaşamlarında yarattığı etkileri ve bunun yansımalarını kapsamaktadır. Son tema ise kolektif içerisinde deneyimlenen dayanışma ve olası çatışma stillerini irdelemektedir. Bu bulgular, agroekoloji yaklaşımının kadınlar üzerindeki çok yönlü etkisini ve kadınların güçlenme süreçlerine nasıl katkı sunduğunu gözler önüne sermekte; aynı zamanda toplumsal dönüşüm potansiyelini de ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Agroekoloji, kırsal kadın, kadın güçlenmesi, doğa dostu yaşam

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Introduction

This study explores how the agroecological lifestyle, introduced in 2013 in Tahtacıörencik village, has influenced the lives of participating women. Grounded in small-scale family farming, agroecology emphasizes eco-friendly practices, reduces economic inputs, decreases market dependency, and supports farmer autonomy.

This study highlights the principles of agroecology, discusses its social dimensions its relationship with gender dynamics. It focuses on the agroecological experiences of women in the Tahtacıörencik Natural Living Collective (TADYA), the first and only village-level agroecological initiative in Turkey. These experiences are analyzed through five key themes, informed by relevant literature. The study concludes by presenting findings and offering recommendations based on the findings.

Conceptual Framework

Agroecology, as both a scientific approach to eco-friendly food production and a social-political movement, has drawn significant attention from social scientists. This section examines its historical development, highlights its links to women's empowerment, and outlines the research questions and significance of this study.

The term "agroecology," introduced by Basil Bensing in the 1930s to describe eco-friendly crop production, now refers to a scientific discipline, social movement, and set of practices (Wezel et al., 2011). Although the term entered the academic literature in the 1930s, its historical roots lie in the agricultural knowledge and experiences of peasants and Indigenous communities worldwide. Agroecology is a liberating movement that enhances farmers' power and control over their production, fosters transformative social processes for the dissemination of agroecological practices, and ensures access to healthy, environmentally friendly food, thereby aiming for "food sovereignty" (Roset & Altieri, 2022).

Since 1992, agroecology has gained recognition within the FAO's framework, largely due to the efforts of La Via Campesina, the world's largest

transnational social movement. As a science, agroecology takes a holistic approach to the ecology of entire food systems, addressing ecological, economic, and social dimensions. As a social movement, it emphasizes family farming, short supply chains, and solutions to challenges such as climate change, malnutrition, the right to food, and food sovereignty, while supporting rural development. As a set of practices, agroecology aims to enhance ecosystems by leveraging natural processes and fostering beneficial biological interactions and synergies among its components (Kır, 2021). In all these dimensions, agroecology integrates local and traditional knowledge with modern scientific understanding.

Today, the FAO recognizes food, health, natural resources, and livelihoods not as separate domains but as interconnected and complex processes. This comprehensive approach encompasses poverty reduction, natural resource conservation, climate change mitigation, biodiversity preservation, and sensitivity to human rights and social-environmental justice (FAO, 2024).

Vandana Shiva, a prominent figure in ecofeminism, asserts that agroecology has genuine feminist roots. She emphasizes that industrial monoculture reflects patriarchal thought in agriculture and that agroecology serves as a powerful tool to counteract this by promoting gender equality (Shiva, 1993). Additionally, studies have observed that peasant and women farmers often play the role of visible or invisible protagonists in agroecological transformation processes (Siliprandi, 2015; cited in Roset & Altieri, 2022, p. 76).

According to Peter Rosset and Miguel Altieri, leading figures in agroecology, women's adoption of agroecological lifestyles is often driven by their concern for "family health and nutrition" within the household. This concern leads them to eliminate the use of agrochemicals that pose risks to human health, ultimately fostering efforts to produce healthy food. In addition, Rosset and Altieri argue that industrial agriculture reinforces patriarchal control by concentrating responsibilities and income on the male head of the family. In contrast, agroecological practices redistribute roles among family members and

provide women with independent income sources. Cuba offers a compelling example of how agroecology can reduce patriarchal power and transform social and cultural life. (Roset & Altieri, 2022, p. 77).

Beyond Cuba, other successful examples include the Farmer-to-Farmer movement in Central America (Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Honduras) and agroecological transformation initiatives in India and southern Brazil. In these cases, two key features stand out: the presence of organized social mobilization and the critical role of women's participation in advancing agroecological transformation (Cacho et al., 2021). From this perspective, the absence of field studies in Turkey that directly investigate the role of women within agroecological initiatives highlights the necessity of this research.

In Turkey, neoliberal agricultural policies, rooted in the 1980s, were shaped in line with the World Bank and European Union's liberalization agendas advocating for restructuring and privatization in agriculture, and their effects persist to this day. These neoliberal policies made farmers increasingly dependent on markets for agricultural inputs (such as seeds, agrochemicals, and fuel for mechanized farming) and forced them into heavy bank debts, leading to growing impoverishment among farmers (Keyder & Yenal, 2020).

In alignment with these neoliberal approaches, the Seed Law No. 5553, enacted in 2006 as part of the EU harmonization program, mandated the use of certified seeds and prohibited the sale and purchase of uncertified local seeds (Nizam & Yenal, 2020). This law further entrenched market dependency, particularly for small-scale family farmers, many of whom were forced to abandon their villages and migrate to cities as unskilled laborers. By 2017, the government adopted a radical shift in its seed policy, promoting the registration and widespread use of "local and national seeds." While this policy remains in effect today, during the intervening years, many heirloom seed varieties—once banned outright—were nearly forgotten in the chests of grandmothers (Göker, 2019). Currently, although national seed policies persist, government support

is directed primarily toward farmers registered in the official agricultural registry system who use certified local seeds (how these seeds are registered and reproduced remains a subject for further research) or imported seeds provided by private companies (Kurtege Sefer, 2022). Moreover, the enactment of Law No. 6360 in 2012 (Official Gazette, 2024), which reclassified many villages by stripping them of their legal entity status and converting them into neighbourhoods, has significantly increased the costs of farming and livestock production in these areas.

Considering all these processes, agroecology, which is based on small-scale family farming and aims to minimize agricultural input costs while empowering local farmers by increasing their control and authority over their own production (Özkaya & Özden, 2021), emerges as an alternative movement for Turkey. By providing a natural foundation for rural women to transition from being unpaid family labourers to gaining empowerment and autonomy, agroecology offers significant potential.

In this context, the study aims to understand how the lives of TADYA women members have transformed as they transitioned to an agroecological lifestyle. To achieve this aim, the following sub-questions were addressed:

- How has the economic life of women changed after joining TADYA, and how has this change influenced other aspects of their lives?
- How does the class distinction between a "new rural woman" and a TADYA member who has spent her entire life in rural environments manifest in terms of their agroecological transformation?
- How is women's solidarity built within TADYA, an agroecological initiative?

Studies addressing the situation of rural women in Turkey have recently focused on women's cooperatives, whose numbers have been rapidly increasing in line with the goals of sustainable development. These studies in the relevant literature primarily examine how women are affected economically, followed by psychological, social, organizational, and environmental dimensions (Vurkun Çavdar &

Atasü Topçuoğlu, 2023; Şahankaya et al., 2023). While most of these works emphasize women's empowerment, there are also studies that explore dynamics of solidarity, conflict, and exploitation within cooperatives (Kurtege Sefer, 2023). For this reason, it is crucial to understand how women are affected psychosocially, economically, and ecologically in TADYA, a collective that consciously chooses to operate as a collective rather than a cooperative.

This study aims to make two original contributions to the academic literature. First, it seeks to address the gap in the domestic literature by examining the connection between women and agroecology—a movement with feminist roots that has emerged not only as a form of agricultural production but also as a social movement. Second, it aims to fill the gap stemming from the lack of field studies exploring how the eco-friendly and environmentally conscious principles and criteria inherent in agroecology impact women.

Methodology

This study was designed to explore how the agroecological production activities carried out under the TADYA (Tahtacıörencik Natural Life) Collective in Tahtacıörencik Village, located in the Güdül District of rural Ankara, have influenced or transformed the lives of women participating in the collective. For this purpose, the research employs a qualitative approach using a phenomenological design.

Qualitative research is a methodology aimed at providing a detailed and in-depth description of individuals and cultures, uncovering the meanings people attribute to reality, as well as their understanding of events, processes, and perceptions (Kümbetoğlu, 2008, p.47). Phenomenological design, on the other hand, examines phenomena that individuals are aware of but often understand only superficially, aiming to reveal deeper meaning-making processes upon closer examination. It focuses on uncovering the ways in which individuals interpret their lived experiences, and the meanings embedded in those experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Details regarding the research field, the selection of the study group, and data analysis are provided below.

Research Field and Selection of the Study Group

In Tahtacıörencik Village, where small-scale agriculture is practiced, families have been transitioning from industrial agriculture to agroecological farming since 2010, encouraged by the Four Seasons Ecological Life Association. To facilitate the marketing of products from the village and the transfer of knowledge, the TADYA (Tahtacıörencik Natural Life) Collective was established in April 2013. Among the 18 families participating in TADYA, there are 26 adult members, 15 of whom are women. Two families have no prior connection to the village, relocated specifically to join TADYA's activities.

The study group is composed of:

1. Women who have lived in the village since birth and have never left (4 women).
2. Women who relocated to the village later as "new villagers," with no prior connection to the village (2 women).

These two socio-culturally distinct groups were selected to explore how agroecological living differs based on class-based dynamics (local villagers vs. new villagers).

The primary factor influencing the selection of the research field was TADYA's status as the first organized group in Turkey to adopt agroecological living, achieved at the village scale. Additionally, TADYA's ongoing effort to maintain its identity as a collective rather than transitioning into a cooperative was another significant consideration.

TADYA producers commit to offering only environmentally friendly products to consumers. The definition of "environmentally friendly products" is based on the agroecological production criteria of the Natural Food, Conscious Eating Network (DBB), which operates as a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS). These criteria ensure that no systemic chemical substances (pesticides, synthetic fertilizers, hormones, additives, etc.) are used at any stage of production and promote methods respectful of

both nature and human health (tahtaciorencik.org, TADYA Introduction Page, 2024).

In addition to its ecological principles, TADYA operates as a collective where every member has equal participation rights in decision-making and operational processes. Decisions are made through consensus, and in cases of disagreement, members are encouraged to persuade one another to reach a resolution. This egalitarian model stands in stark contrast to the hierarchical structure required for cooperatives, which are legally defined as "business enterprises" under Turkish law (T.C. Ministry of Customs and Trade, Directorate General of Cooperatives, 2012) and are subject to the taxation. For this reason, TADYA rejects transitioning into a cooperative.

Furthermore, aligned with agroecological principles, TADYA embraces a short supply chain, emphasizing direct, intermediary-free interaction between producers and consumers. This approach supports both its producers and "prosumers" economically, ecologically, and psychosocially, reinforcing its identity as a nature-friendly organization.

Data Collection and Participants

In-depth interviews were conducted with the selected women using a semi-structured questionnaire. Additionally, participant observation was carried out by living in the village with the families, particularly during the summer months when production activities are at their peak. The in-depth interviews were conducted between June and September 2023, while participant observation was carried out in August-September 2022 and August 2023.

After the completing the fieldwork and transcription processes, one "new villager" participant voluntarily requested to withdraw from the study. This request was respected, and the participant was removed from the sample. As a result, the number of participants decreased from 6 to 5 at the analysis stage.

The socio-demographic characteristics of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

| Participant | Age | Education Level | Marital Status | Local Or New Villagers |
|---------------|-----|-----------------|----------------|------------------------|
| Participant 1 | 56 | University | Single | New Villager |
| Participant 2 | 29 | high school | Married | Local Villager |
| Participant 3 | 57 | Primary School | Married | |
| Participant 4 | 57 | Primary School | Married | Local Villager |
| Participant 5 | 60 | Primary School | Widowed | Local Villager |

Data Analysis

Interviews conducted with the semi-structured questionnaire were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed shortly thereafter. The interviews were typically held face-to-face at the participants' homes, gardens, or the village square park. In addition to audio recordings, notes were taken using pen and paper during the interviews. These notes were incorporated into the transcripts during the transcription process immediately following the interviews.

The duration of the interviews ranged from 40 minutes (the shortest) to approximately 90 minutes (the longest).

The transcribed interviews were reviewed alongside the audio recordings for accuracy and then uploaded to the Atlas.ti software for analysis. The analysis process employed *template analysis*, a subtype of thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006, p. 79). Template analysis provides the researcher with significant flexibility by allowing the identification of key themes early in the analysis process, either simultaneously with or prior to coding.

After completing the first level of coding (120 codes), axial coding (Neuman, 2006, p. 662) was used to create subthemes aligned with the five main themes identified at the outset of the analysis. Table 2 presents detailed information on the code groups, subthemes, and main themes.

Ethics

Approval for conducting the research was obtained from the Hacettepe University Ethics

Committee. The study was deemed ethically appropriate with the letter dated April 12, 2022, and numbered E-35853172-900-00002139555. At the beginning of the interviews, participants were provided with detailed information regarding the purpose and methodology of the study, as well as the intended use of the collected data. Consent was obtained through a "Informed Voluntary Participation Form." To ensure anonymity, participants' identities have not been disclosed in the study.

As previously mentioned, this study was conducted on a voluntary basis. After transcribing the audio recordings, one participant requested withdrawal. The request was respected, and her audio files and transcripts were permanently deleted.

Women and Its Reflections," "Transformation of Public Space," "Psycho-Social Changes," "Technology Use and Its Reflections," and "Fragility of Women's Solidarity." The first and fifth themes each include two sub-themes

Economic Empowerment of Women and Its Reflections

The first aspect examined to understand how the lives of TADYA women have transformed through adopting an agroecological lifestyle was the changes in their economic circumstances. Economic empowerment of women is a fundamental factor in achieving gender equality **and transforming other dimensions of women's lives**, such as their social lives, family dynamics,

Table 2. Main Themes, Sub-Themes, and Code Groups

| MAIN THEMES | Economic Empowerment of Women and Its Reflections | Transformation of Public Space | Psycho-Social Changes | Technology Use and Its Reflections | Fragility of Women's Solidarity | |
|-------------|--|---|---|--|---|---|
| SUB-THEMES | 1.Economic Development: Women's Economic Empowerment | 2.Changes in Family Power Dynamics | Transformation of Public Space | Psycho-Social Changes | Technology Use and Its Reflections | 2.Circumstances Revealing Class Difference: Conflict Resolution |
| CODE GROUPS | 1.TADYA and Economic Development | 1.Spousal Income Management | 1.Impact of Biodiversity in Agroecology on Markets | 1.Consumer Satisfaction with Agroecological Products | 1.Technology Use and Its Reflections | 1.Internal Jealousies and Gossip in TADYA |
| | 2.Impact of Biodiversity in Agroecology on Markets | 2.Lending Practices | 2.Consumer Satisfaction | 2.Ecological Awareness and Individual Well-Being | 2.Grouping Within TADYA | 1.The Adaptation Process of New Villagers in TADYA |
| | 3.TADYA and Biodiversity | 3.Decision-Making Processes in the Family | 3.Relationship with Markets | 3. Confidence | 3.TADYA Principles and Communication Challenges | |
| | 4.TADYA and Women's Empowerment | 4.Division of Labor Between Spouses | 4.Transformati on of Spaces in Women's Empowerment at TADYA | 4.Power of Socialization | 4.Solidarity Among TADYA Women | |
| | | 5.Financial Management in Families | | 5.Reflections of Popularity | | |

Findings

The research findings are categorized into five main themes: **"Economic Empowerment of**

and relationships with their spouses.

In her study on rural development, women's labour, and the role of NGOs, Kurtege Sefer (2023) critiques the state's approach to sustainable development goals, which often views women as a

homogenous group and focuses solely on economic empowerment while ignoring the socio-economic and cultural contexts in which women exist. She warns that this approach risks reproducing traditional gender roles. In the case of TADYA, however, we observed that women's economic empowerment has shifted power dynamics within families in favour of women, increased their visibility in public spaces, and ultimately enhanced their psycho-social well-being. This transformation can be attributed to TADYA's adherence to agroecological principles as a collective and the compatibility of the village's socio-cultural structure with this transition.

As outlined in the introduction of this study, industrial agriculture often reinforces patriarchal mindsets in various ways, whereas agroecology aims to empower women and promote gender equality. Our findings indicate that similar processes are at work within TADYA. Although the TADYA women had differing levels of involvement in agriculture prior to joining the collective, all participants reported experiencing economic empowerment after becoming members of TADYA.

Women who had been engaged in agriculture before joining TADYA described how they had previously produced solely for their own household needs and earned no income from their efforts. However, with TADYA's establishment and the increasing demand over time, these women expanded their production and diversified their range of products. This shift aligned with the principles of agroecology, particularly its emphasis on biodiversity.

"For example, I used to grow just enough for myself... eggplants, cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, stuffed peppers, chili peppers, hot peppers. It was enough for my needs, for the winter stock, and for eating during the summer. After joining TADYA, I expanded the garden..." (Participant 4)

When reviewing the relevant literature, it becomes clear that women's economic empowerment is frequently pursued through women's cooperatives. However, Nizam and Yenil (2020) illustrate in their study how women

from the village of Gödence in Seferihisar achieved economic empowerment by producing and selling goods made from heirloom Karakılçık wheat in local markets. Much like the processes observed in TADYA, the women in Gödence were involved in every stage of production, from seed to final product. Additionally, drawing on the traditional knowledge of women over the age of 50, recipes were developed, and the resulting products were sold directly in producer markets without intermediaries (pp. 17–18).

Changes in Power Dynamics Within the Family

The economic empowerment of TADYA women, and for many, their attainment of financial independence, has brought significant changes to family roles and spousal relationships. One of the most striking examples of this shift is women lending money to their husbands. Prior to joining TADYA, these women were entirely dependent on their spouses for financial needs, having to ask them for money for every expense. However, with the economic independence they gained through TADYA, many women reported that their husbands now occasionally ask them for loans.

"Yes, for example, most women used to depend entirely on their husbands financially, but now they've started earning their own income. My sister-in-law, for instance, says: 'My husband asks me for a loan now. But I lend him the money and make sure I get it back the same way I gave it.'" (Participant 2)

In some TADYA families, the management of household finances has shifted entirely to the women. Before TADYA, the family's income was controlled through the husband's bank account. However, with TADYA, a bank account was opened in the woman's name, and she began managing all the income through that account. Women who previously had to ask their husbands for money for every expense have now reversed the dynamic entirely, taking on the role of allocating allowances to their husbands. This shift demonstrates how TADYA has effectively reversed power dynamics between spouses, highlighting agroecology's potential to challenge

patriarchal dominance. In our case, it underscores agroecology as a significant tool for empowering women and diminishing male authority.

As highlighted earlier, studies on women's empowerment in Turkey predominantly focus on women's cooperatives, whereas TADYA stands out as a unique example due to its collective structure. Nevertheless, a review of existing research, such as the systematic analysis by Vurkun Çavdar and Atasü Topçuoğlu (2023) examining 15 studies on women's cooperatives in Turkey, reveals that most studies agree women experience economic empowerment through these initiatives. Furthermore, this economic empowerment improves women's psychological, social, organizational, and environmental domains (pp. 58–60). Additional research on rural women's empowerment, such as studies by Akgül (2022), Kasap & Eroğlu (2021), and Gümüšoğlu (2012), also demonstrates that economic empowerment enhances women's respect and status within the family, particularly in the eyes of their husbands. What sets TADYA apart from these examples, however, is that women's increased respect within the household extends further—culminating in their full control over financial management within the family.

Transformation of Public Space

The private-public space dichotomy, a key topic in discussions on women's empowerment, remains significant for feminist movements, particularly since the 1980s (Dinçer, 2023). One of the most notable reflections of TADYA women's empowerment is evident in their use of the village coffeehouse, historically the most important public space in the village and one previously reserved exclusively for men.

Today, the coffeehouse has transformed into a space where TADYA women can freely enter and participate. It has become a venue where women and men come together to discuss issues related to TADYA, share ideas on national agricultural policies, and host agroecology training sessions. This shift illustrates the significant social changes driven by the empowerment of TADYA women.

"The women in our village now go into the coffeehouse (village coffee) and sit down. In the past, they couldn't sit there. They say, 'We go into the coffeehouse now and sit. We couldn't even walk in past. But now, for example, my sister-in-law can sit and chat with the men, like with my uncle.'" (Participant 2)

Village Coffee, considered the first public spaces of Anatolia (Çağlayan, 2012), remain in rural areas as key male-dominated venues where men socialize exclusively with other men. These spaces are traditionally places from which women are excluded, with societal expectations even dictating that women dress modestly when passing by (Ardahan, 2015). However, the empowerment of TADYA women through their shift toward an agroecological lifestyle has significantly transformed the use of the "village coffeehouse," the most male-dominated space in the community, in favor of women.

This dimension of women's empowerment revealed in our study is particularly significant. The transformation of space plays a crucial role in achieving gender equality. While many recent studies on women's empowerment through cooperatives (Vurkun Çavdar & Atasü Topçuoğlu, 2023; Akgül, 2022; Gümüšoğlu, 2012) have found that cooperatives increase women's visibility in public spaces, no direct evidence of the transformation of public spaces themselves has been identified in the existing literature.

Psycho-Social Transformations

One of the most significant processes accompanying the increased income, independence from spouses, and heightened public visibility of TADYA women is their psycho-social empowerment. This is a two-way process, making it difficult to distinguish causes from effects. Many of the women we interviewed shared that being part of TADYA boosted their self-confidence, improved their public speaking skills, and enabled them to communicate more comfortably with urban individuals—something they previously found intimidating.

In the early TADYA meetings, many women avoided speaking, preferred not to be noticed, and

struggled to express themselves even when given the opportunity. Today, these same women are often at the forefront of meetings, confidently voicing their opinions and embracing the opportunity to participate.

"...Even when I was just sitting in a meeting, my legs would tremble... but now I feel at ease. In the past, I would think, 'I hope no one asks me a question or even notices me.' Now, I just go in, sit down, and feel comfortable." (Participant 4)

A key factor in the psycho-social empowerment of TADYA women is their interaction with urban individuals. Since 2013, village tours have been organized to introduce urban residents to an eco-friendly way of life and create opportunities for them to connect directly with the farmers who produce their food. These interactions foster mutual bonds between producers and the "prosumers" (producer-consumers). Additionally, the weekly direct-to-home sales system, where each product is accompanied by detailed labelling, allows prosumers to contact producers directly via phone, providing feedback even if they cannot visit the village.

This engagement with a changing social environment helps TADYA women develop a social identity. Previously, these women primarily produced small-scale, less diverse goods for their families and interacted only within their immediate communities. Now, they confidently offer a wide variety of eco-friendly products to a broader audience, gaining visibility and pride in their work.

Studies on rural women's cooperatives in Turkey (Akgül, 2022; Başaran & Irmak, 2022; Kasap & Eroğlu, 2021; Demircan Yıldırım, 2020; Gümüšoğlu, 2012) have similarly found that joining cooperatives boosts women's confidence, improves their ability to express themselves in social contexts, and strengthens their relationships with public institutions. While women's cooperatives typically focus on promoting gender equality, female entrepreneurship, employment, and economic empowerment (Kurtege Sefer, 2024; Şahankaya Adar et al., 2023), it is crucial to adopt a holistic perspective that also considers the psycho-

social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of development (FAO, 2024).

For TADYA women, being part of an eco-friendly movement like agroecology is a critical factor supporting their psycho-social well-being. The movement not only empowers them economically but also fosters a sense of purpose and moral satisfaction through sustainable, nature-conscious practices.

Technology Use and Its Reflections

During the interviews with TADYA women, we observed that all of them, including those who were illiterate, owned smartphones. When asked about this, the women explained that they had purchased smartphones to track orders for TADYA, manage the storage of their products for winter, and explore gastronomic activities beyond the village's traditional flavours.

Even those who could not use the phones independently mentioned that they sought help from younger villagers whenever they wanted to look up recipes. This enabled them to expand their product offerings to include items such as canned foods, dairy products, pickles, sauces, and marmalades, all of which were highly satisfying to "prosumers." As a result, they were able to increase their sales significantly.

Another key factor driving smartphone use among TADYA women is the ability to photograph their products. This serves multiple important purposes. First, in line with TADYA's principles, photographs are used as evidence in agroecological audits, which are regularly planned. Monitoring the variety and quantity of products harvested from specific gardens is conducted by two TADYA inspectors during farm visits. In cases where visits are delayed, photographs are used to ensure compliance with agroecological standards.

Similarly, the production stages of canned goods, sauces, jams, bread, and jarred meals are documented through photographs and shared with producer and prosumer groups. This visual documentation aims to demonstrate adherence to agroecological principles and the use of eco-friendly methods at every stage of production. For

example, it showcases practices like using glass or paper packaging instead of plastic and implementing permaculture techniques in gardens. This approach fosters a more transparent production process, ensuring trust between producers and consumers while maintaining a commitment to nature-friendly practices.

While the use of smartphones has increased significantly among TADYA women, the same enthusiasm has not yet extended to computer use. Managing weekly order forms—a task that involves updating forms, sending them to prosumers, and closing products once stock is depleted—requires proficiency with computers. However, for women who have spent their entire lives in the village, computer use remains a challenging and intimidating process.

Although some women have taken steps toward learning computer skills and made some progress, many still find the task of using a computer and managing TADYA's order forms overwhelming. This issue highlights a key difference between women who have always lived in the village and those who have relocated there later in life. Women who joined TADYA after moving to the village tend to have greater confidence in using computers and are more comfortable handling tasks like order management. Meanwhile, lifelong village residents remain hesitant—perhaps, as one of them put it, "lacking courage"—despite the full trust placed in them by their more experienced peers.

When examining studies on rural women through the lens of cooperatives (Başaran & Irmak, 2022; Kasap & Eroğlu, 2021; Demircan Yıldırım, 2020; Gümüšoğlu, 2012), there is a notable absence of data on how cooperatives influence women's use of technology. However, within feminist literature, we encounter critical studies addressing the masculine nature of technology, rooted in the dichotomy of the feminine (nature) and the masculine (science) (Savcı, 1999; Shiva & Mies, 2019).

In this context, the TADYA example demonstrates that agroecological living has increased women's engagement with technology. This aligns directly with Shiva's (1993) argument

that agroecology, in contrast to industrial agriculture, has feminist roots. TADYA's experience highlights how an eco-friendly framework can challenge traditional gendered associations with technology and foster women's technological empowerment.

The Fragility of Women's Solidarity

During our participant observations and interviews, we noted both the presence and fragility of women's solidarity within the largely female-led TADYA collective. Agroecology, grounded in Paulo Freire's 1970s "constructivist education" model, emphasizes non-hierarchical, horizontal communication, where "dialogue" is seen as an existential necessity (Freire, 2019, p. 108). However, achieving this awareness and creating a non-oppressive, liberating discussion platform is challenging within the constraints of existing cultural norms.

Although the focus on women's cooperatives in studies addressing rural women in Turkey is well-justified, it is worth noting that cooperatives, by legal definition, are hierarchical structures. This often complicates the idea of equal participation and decision-making among members (Kurtege Sefer, 2023). In contrast, TADYA functions as a collective aligned with agroecology's constructivist learning model, and its members occasionally receive "non-violent communication" training. However, the process of behavior change among TADYA women has been slow and challenging.

While we observed a degree of solidarity and mutual assistance among TADYA women, particularly within smaller subgroups, the collective often experiences intense conflicts that overshadow collaboration. These disputes tend to occur more frequently during activities like preparing weekly orders rather than during collaborative tasks such as cutting noodles, making stuffed vegetables, or producing tarhana. At times, these conflicts escalate to the point where some members avoid attending meetings altogether, despite these gatherings being intended as social opportunities.

Our analysis identified three primary causes of these conflicts: jealousy/envy, ineffective communication, and group dynamics. These factors are deeply intertwined and are better understood as a complex, self-reinforcing cycle. For instance, conflicts often arise when a member earns more money from weekly sales or offers a greater variety of products than others. Unresolved interpersonal issues from the past further exacerbate these tensions.

Another source of conflict stems from TADYA's principles and criteria. Based on DBB's agroecological standards, these principles clearly outline how the collective should operate, including collaboration, task distribution, monitoring processes, announcements, and sales. They also emphasize the importance of "non-violent communication" throughout these processes (TADYA, 2024). Despite these guidelines being clearly communicated to every new member, disputes still occur during product preparation or in response to consumer feedback. These conflicts reveal the underlying challenges in maintaining solidarity within the collective while adhering to agroecological principles.

Our observations revealed that other significant causes of conflict among TADYA women include gossip, indirect communication, and reliance on uninvolved third parties to address issues. When asked why they avoid direct communication or resolving issues with the person involved, many TADYA women explained that they are either relatives or childhood friends with one another. This closeness creates a fear that direct criticism might "escalate the issue," leading to larger conflicts.

During participant observations, it became clear that when a problem arises involving a member, others often discuss the issue with someone they feel close to, but when interacting with the person involved, they act as if no problem exists. This behaviour has normalized cliques and exclusions among members, making them an expected aspect of group dynamics.

This situation highlights that for TADYA women, solidarity and conflict coexist on a fragile foundation, underscoring the need for further development in managing interpersonal

relationships. When asked about conflict resolution, the women acknowledged that conflict is a normal part of their collective experience. They expressed their commitment to addressing conflicts and improving their "non-violent communication" practices. Many reflected on past experiences, recognizing that suppressing or ignoring issues led to more significant problems later. As a result, they are motivated to prioritize finding pathways to solidarity over avoiding conflicts.

"It's normal within TADYA; things are resolved or being worked on. Nothing is swept under the rug without resolution... Otherwise, it piles up and eventually explodes in unexpected ways. So, we'll find solutions; we'll talk it out." (Participant 2)

While literature on women in cooperatives often highlights solidarity and unity (Başaran & Irmak, 2022; Demircan Yıldırım, 2020), the dynamics observed among TADYA women show that even when working toward the same goal, women are not a homogeneous group. For the members of TADYA, a nature-friendly collective, progress happens not *despite conflict* but *alongside it*. Conflict can become a pathway for growth only when everyone has an equal voice and value within the group. In such an environment, conflict is seen not as a barrier but as an integral part of collective development.

Class Differences and Conflict Resolution

When designing our research, we aimed to explore how class differences between a "new villager" member of TADYA and women who have lived their entire lives in the village would influence agroecological transformation. These differences became apparent in their approaches to conflict resolution. One participant, who had no prior direct connection to rural life and previously worked as a high-ranking executive in the city, moved to the village motivated by a desire for healthy, clean food. Initially a prosumer of TADYA, she eventually relocated to the village, purchasing a 20-acre vineyard and building a

home for her family that aligned with the village's traditional architecture.

This participant, who maintains a certain distance from both conflicts and closer relationships within the group, finds the dynamics among the long-time village residents of TADYA to be highly complex. She noted,

"They've been here for so long. I can't really understand them. One day they're fighting, and the next day they act as if nothing happened. For me, if I had been in such an intense argument, it would mean the end of the relationship. But that's not how it works here."

She also admitted to avoiding interactions she feels unprepared to handle.

While primarily focused on managing her vineyard, this participant and her family also remain active as TADYA prosumers, sourcing all their vegetables, grains, and legumes from other TADYA producers. Additionally, they provide feedback within the TADYA network to support producers in improving their practices.

Globally, the "new peasantry" movement has sparked optimistic perspectives about its potential to reshape agriculture (Ploeg, 2018; Özkaya, 2016). However, in Turkey, there are contrasting views, with some arguing that this movement does not hold the same promise (Aydın, 2016). While the forms of new peasantry vary across cultures (Ploeg, 2018), the TADYA example suggests that agroecological practices play a significant role in nurturing this movement. This highlights the potential of agroecology to bridge class differences and promote sustainable, inclusive agricultural practices.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of this study, which explores the impact of agroecological practices on women through the case of TADYA, indicate that an agroecology-oriented movement plays a significant role in empowering women economically and psycho-socially. It also enhances their use of public space and integration of technology into their lives. TADYA's model shows

key similarities with rural women's cooperatives, especially in terms of economic and psychosocial empowerment, as well as increasing the visibility of women in the public sphere. However, TADYA's uniqueness lies in two main aspects.

First, TADYA is deeply rooted in agroecology, which not only promotes sustainable agricultural practices but also aligns with a nature-friendly and environmentalist ethos. This emphasis on environmental sustainability enriches the women's relationship with the land, allowing them to connect with nature and embrace practices that benefit the environment, such as permaculture, organic farming, and agroecological principles. This ecological focus gives the women of TADYA a sense of belonging to a movement that goes beyond economic gain to embrace broader ethical and environmental goals.

Second, TADYA operates as a non-hierarchical collective, fostering equality and inclusivity. Unlike many traditional cooperatives that are structured around a formal leadership hierarchy, TADYA's non-hierarchical structure fosters a more egalitarian and participatory environment. This allows for a more democratic approach to decision-making, where all members, regardless of their experience or background, have an equal say. The absence of a rigid hierarchy facilitates the development of solidarity, although challenges related to conflict resolution and communication persist, as observed in the study.

These two factors—agroecology as a guiding principle and a collective, non-hierarchical organization—distinguish TADYA from other rural women's cooperatives. They contribute to a distinctive empowerment process for TADYA women, fostering both economic independence and a sense of collective identity within the context of sustainable, community-driven agriculture.

In conclusion, the case of TADYA suggests that agroecology can be a powerful tool for women's empowerment in rural settings, offering opportunities not only for economic development but also for enhancing social cohesion, environmental consciousness, and the use of technology. The collective model, combined with agroecological practices, provides a unique framework for women to navigate and transform

their social, economic, and cultural realities, despite the challenges that inevitably arise in such processes.

Recommendations

Considering the current local and global conditions, agroecology emerges as a significant tool for achieving social and environmental justice. As the findings of this study demonstrate, agroecology can be considered an alternative model for promoting gender equality, reviving traditional knowledge at risk of being forgotten, producing through eco-friendly methods, and ensuring access to healthy and clean food.

For this reason, to encourage more farmers to adopt an agroecological lifestyle:

- Policy Integration: Agroecology should be incorporated into national and regional environmental and agricultural policies. This includes providing incentives for sustainable farming practices and creating frameworks to support agroecological transitions.
- Establishment of Agroecology Schools: Specialized training centers should be developed to disseminate agroecological knowledge and practices. These schools can serve as hubs for education, skill-building, and the exchange of traditional and scientific agricultural expertise.
- Support for Women Farmers: Women farmers should receive targeted support, such as scholarships, grants, and mentorship programs, to encourage their participation in agroecology schools and initiatives. Empowering women as key actors in agroecology can strengthen rural communities and promote gender equity.

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