

NOTE 4: Integrating Gender into Rural Advisory Services

Compiled by: **Kathleen Earl Colverson, July 2015**

There is plenty of information available in the public domain that covers various aspects of extension and know-how about new methodologies for implementation. However this information is often scattered and presented in complex academic language. Hence practitioners, who often have very limited time and/or may only have basic formal education, find it difficult to make use of this information.

The Global Good Practices Initiative aims to bridge this gap by providing information about extension approaches and methods in easy-to-understand formats. As part of this effort, it makes "Good Practice Notes" available to all on a downloadable website. This Note contains one of the extension methods included in this series.

Introduction

Rural women's roles and contributions to agriculture remain undervalued and neglected by the sector's policy-making and implementation processes. Women typically are involved in many aspects of the agricultural value chain, often contributing anywhere from 25 to 75% of the productive labour. However, they generally have less access to rural advisory services (RAS) than men. They also have less access to agricultural inputs, such as fertilisers, technologies, and veterinary services, which reduces their overall productivity. This is particularly a problem in countries in Africa, where women's agricultural involvement varies from about 30% in the Gambia to 60–80% in Cameroon.¹ Despite the evidence accumulated over several decades on women's multi-faceted roles in farm-based livelihoods, and the need to support them, men are frequently still considered as the 'lead' farmer in a household, and RAS focus on their market-oriented interests. Women are often still seen as farmers who are primarily interested in feeding their household, rather than as active participants in the commercial value chain. Women play a crucial role in the distribution of both food and non-food household resources that determine the food security of the household. In a variety of contexts around the world, increasing the resources that women control has been shown to improve the nutritional, health, and educational outcomes of their children.² Nonetheless, in many communities, women continue to face gender-based constraints that limit their ability

to access agricultural information and opportunities, thereby limiting the family's potential to be food secure. Increasing women's access to extension services and agricultural inputs is critical to ensuring family and community food security.

Philosophy and principles

Integrating attention to gender issues into RAS is based on the knowledge that "[C]losing the gender gap in agriculture could increase yields on farms by 20–30%. This could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4%, reducing the number of hungry people in the world by 12–17%.³ Integrating gender into RAS can have benefits at multiple levels. At the household level, increasing women's access to inputs will improve their agricultural productivity. At the organisational level, engaging more women in cooperatives and farmer associations can increase organisational effectiveness and has the potential to better address issues of concern to women farmers. Integrating gender issues at the policy level has the potential to increase the economic involvement of half the population and contribute to improving overall household food security.

Providers of RAS are challenged to cover multiple topics in their work (e.g., developing farmer cooperatives, addressing climate smart agriculture, and integrating gender and nutrition into agricultural programming). These issues must be addressed in some capacity, but it is

¹ Anriquez, G., Croppenstedt, A., Doss, C., Gerosa, S., Lowder, S., Matuschke, I., Raney, R. and Skoet, J., 2010. *The role of women in agriculture*. ESA working paper No 10-03. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

² Quisumbing, A., 2009. *Do men and women accumulate assets in different ways? Evidence from rural Bangladesh*. Background paper prepared for the FAO State of Food and Agriculture 2010. Rome: FAO.

³ FAO, 2011. *The state of food and agriculture: Women in agriculture, closing the gender gap for development*. Rome: FAO.



important to recognise that all work with farmers should be based on the principles of *participatory facilitation*, which include the following:

- **Learning from the people:** Recognise the value of local knowledge and people's ability to solve their own problems.
- **Discussion and sharing of experiences:** 'Outsiders' (RAS) and 'insiders' (community members) share their knowledge and experiences and analyse problems from different perspectives.
- **Involvement of all within the community:** Facilitate a learner-centred process that involves all community members, including different ages, religions, and socio-economic statuses.
- **Outsiders are facilitators:** Create a 'learning environment' together. Facilitators should not lecture or talk down to the community even if they are experts in their subject matter.
- **Practical orientation:** Problems are investigated together with the community to achieve practical solutions.
- **Triangulation:** Information is studied from various sources using different methods; findings are repeatedly checked to validate results.

Integrating gender into RAS – key considerations

When integrating attention to gender issues with a group of stakeholders (RAS clients and beneficiaries) it is important to consider the 'six W's':

- **Who is present or who is not present?** For example – when entering a meeting for the first time – are there both men and women present? Are they of different ages? Different socio-cultural backgrounds? You can't have a successful agricultural innovation if part of the target population is missing. When studying the agricultural system, this type of question helps identify all potential stakeholders, including men and women, boys and girls, local authorities, government or non-government organisations (NGOs), etc. An example of this would be conducting a network analysis of all participants who might be affected or involved with an agricultural project and using that information to determine who to invite to a meeting so that all stakeholders are represented.
- **Who does what?** Men and women, boys and girls have different 'gender roles' based on multiple factors including culture, age, religion, caste, etc. It is important to identify who is doing what in agricultural systems. Women frequently have greater time constraints given their multiple roles, and this can affect

the types of technologies they select, or the times they are available for meetings. In some instances, men have access to and control over agricultural resources that women do not have, which impacts who has the ability to use, or even have access to, a technology.

- **What are they doing?** Are men involved primarily in the agricultural production while women do all the processing? Are the men or women primarily responsible for childcare? Determining what they are doing will help in designing appropriate technologies or interventions tailored to the needs and wants of men and women. If the technology or innovation is appropriate to their needs, it will improve the chances it will be adopted and scaled up in the future. The Activity Profile⁴ is a tool designed to help solicit responses to this question.
- **When are they doing it?** Men and women are responsible for different activities that occur at different times of the day or year. If you are planning a workshop in the morning, women might not be able to attend if they have household responsibilities that conflict with the meeting time. This is also important to consider when women and men may be engaged in an agricultural activity such as planting or harvesting and they might be unable to participate in the research. Simple tools such as the 24-hour day activity clock or seasonal calendar are available to assist with this question.
- **Where are they doing it?** (e.g., farm, field, community or house). For example, in many communities men are more often responsible for marketing agricultural products off the farm, and women more likely to market smaller agricultural products from the home to accommodate watching children or other domestic responsibilities. Their primary location will affect their ability to participate in research or meetings. Consider this when you are organising meetings with stakeholders.
- **Why are they doing it or not doing it?** When collecting the above information it is important to ask this question to understand some of the underlying reasons that men and women can or cannot participate in extension activities. To accommodate all stakeholders in a participatory manner, and have programmes that achieve sustainable impact, you need to understand the gender-based constraints and opportunities faced by male and female farmers.

Capacities needed to integrate gender into RAS

Few developing countries have adequate numbers of extension agents; and men decidedly outnumber women agents. Since in some communities many women farmers are unable to attend meetings, or do not feel comfortable

⁴ <http://www.fsnnetwork.org/sites/default/files/ActivityProfile.pdf>

⁵ Ragasa, C., Berhane, G., Tadesse, F. and Seyoum, A. 2013. *Gender differences in access to extension services and agricultural productivity*. ESSP II Working Paper I. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). Available at: <http://www.ifpri.org/publication/gender-differences-access-extension-services-and-agricultural-productivity>



speaking with extension agents who are men, it is critical both to help men learn to reach women farmers in culturally acceptable ways, as well as to encourage hiring and retention of women extensionists.⁵ In addition to training more women to be extension agents, there are a number of other suggestions for increasing the number of women participating in RAS activities:

- **Meetings:** Women have multiple roles and may not be able to attend when meetings are normally scheduled, or be able to travel alone. Childcare provision should also be considered to encourage attendance. These considerations may increase the cost of extension programs.
- **Single sex or mixed sex groups:** In many countries, women are frequently more comfortable speaking in the private sphere (at home) rather than the public sphere (in meetings). It may be necessary to build their confidence in single sex groups first before engaging them in mixed sex groups to ensure their participation later. This may require different kinds of training than extension providers normally offer.
- **Extension materials and visits:** Studies show that access to extension services is consistently lower among women than men: 19% for women versus 81% for men

in Malawi, 1.13 versus 2.03 contacts in Uganda, 20% versus 27% in Ethiopia; and 8–19% of female-headed households versus 29% of male-headed households in Karnataka, India.⁶ In many instances, fewer opportunities to go to school mean women are less literate and numerate than men. Using more pictures and interactive activities to relay extension information and engaging local women to train their neighbours are methods to address these shortcomings.

Evidence of impact and next steps

Although much attention has been given to the role of education in empowering women, agricultural programmes can also play an important role. In Bangladesh, fish pond programmes that were 'gender blind' ended up reaching wealthier men, whereas fish pond and vegetable garden programmes that targeted poor women ended up empowering these women.⁷ In the long term, the programmes that were targeted to women improved the nutritional status of women and children, as well as the equality of distribution of assets between men and women, more than untargeted programmes.⁸ In Uttar Pradesh, India, Paris and colleagues⁹ demonstrated the advantages of empowering women by giving them increased decision-making authority in participatory selection of rice varieties. This strategy improved the development of varieties best suited to the environment

⁶ IFPRI. 2013. *Gender differences in access to extension services and agricultural productivity*. Available at: <http://www.ifpri.org/publication/gender-differences-access-extension-services-and-agricultural-productivity>

⁷ Hallman, K., Lewis, D. and Begum, S. 2007. Assessing the impact of vegetable and fishpond technologies on poverty in rural Bangladesh. In: Adato, M. and Meinzen-Dick, R. (eds) *Agricultural research, livelihoods, and poverty: studies of economic and social impacts in six countries*. Washington, DC: IFPRI.

⁸ Kumar, N. and Quisumbing, A. 2010. *Access, adoption, and diffusion: understanding the long-term impacts of improved vegetable and fish technologies in Bangladesh*. IFPRI Discussion Paper 995. Washington, DC: IFPRI.

⁹ Paris T.R., Cueno, A.D. and Singh, V.N. 2008. Assessing the impact of participatory research in rice breeding on women farmers: a case study in Eastern Uttar Pradesh, India. *Experimental Agriculture*, 44: 97–112.



and increased females' confidence in their decisions and opinions. More work needs to be done on measuring the impact that increased attention to gender will provide to RAS.

To tackle the underlying norms and power structures that create and reproduce gender inequalities, an extension and advisory 'facilitation system' (as opposed to a service) is required. A facilitation system emphasises not only the creation of knowledge products for dissemination to end users but also creating knowledge with those users through the process itself.¹⁰ To create such a system an effective conceptual framework is needed to understand and map the domains in which power is exercised, negotiated, and expressed. Numerous frameworks are in the process of being developed and tested, including gender transformative approaches within the CGIAR.¹¹ Various NGOs are also experimenting with frameworks that challenge gender norms and power structures, including Helen Keller International's programme on 'Nurturing Connections.'¹² Such work has the potential for having a significant impact on food security in developing countries.

Training materials

Colverson, K.E. 2013. *Closing the gender gap: a trainer's manual to integrating gender into agricultural extension services*. MEAS Training Materials. Available at: <http://www.meas-extension.org/meas-offers/training>

Further reading

FAO. 2014. *Agri-gender statistics toolkit*. Available at: <http://tinyurl.com/msux222>

IFPRI. 2012. *Gender, Agriculture and Assets Project (GAAP) toolkit*. Washington DC: IFPRI. Available at: http://gaap.ifpri.info/files/2010/12/GAAP_Toolkit_Update_FINAL.pdf

Meinzen-Dick, R., Quisumbing, A., Behrman, J., Biermayr-Jenzano, P., Wilde, V., Noordeloos, M., Ragasa, C., and Beintema, N. 2011. *Engendering agricultural research, development, and extension*. Washington DC, USA.

Reaching Rural Women website:
www.reachingruralwomen.org

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¹⁰ Farnworth, C. and Colverson, K.E. 2015. Building a gender transformative facilitated extension advisory system in sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Gender, Agriculture and Food Security*, 1(1): 20–39.

¹¹ World Fish. 2013. <http://www.aas.cgiar.org/content/gender-transformative-approach-crucial-successful-agricultural-development>

¹² Helen Keller International. 2014. Nurturing connections in Bangladesh. Available at: <http://www.hki.org/our-impact/stories/nurturing-connections-bangladesh#.VZTJh6b4ijw>