

Gender and Agricultural Extension

Background

Women are a key asset in agricultural development worldwide. On average, their labour comprises 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, ranging from about 20% in Latin America to almost 50% in East and South-east Asia and in Sub-Saharan Africa. Some sources even claim that in many African countries up to 80% of the farm labour is done by women (GFRAS 2012). In addition, many farming households in developing countries are female headed, due to male labour migration or loss of husbands to conflicts, HIV/ AIDS, etc. According to the FAO State of Food and Agriculture Report 2011-2012, women could increase yields on their farms by 20–30% if they had the same access to productive resources and training as men. This would raise the total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4%, and consequently reduce the number of malnourished people worldwide by 12–17%. These statistics highlight the obvious: women, in their numerous roles, fundamentally contribute to food security.

Agricultural extension – the provision of information, training and advice in agricultural production – is one way to tackle the hurdles that women face in agricultural production, as these services provide a means for women to learn new or improved production techniques, to receive training and advice, to organise themselves and to improve their access to inputs and markets. This empowerment in turn translates into both higher income

and improved income stability for women, which promotes their standing in the sector and increases overall food security. Agricultural extension always occurs within a specific socio-cultural setting, and as such is subject to the same power dynamics that shape gender relations and often limit women's access to resources and support. Similarly, technologies themselves, which are seldom gender-neutral, may influence power relations. Therefore, consideration of multiple aspects is required to achieve a gender-equitable agricultural extension that empowers women to contribute to agricultural production to their fullest potential. While the problem of gender inequality in agricultural extension was recognised as early as the 1970s, there has as yet not been any concerted and sustained effort to address the issue.

Its potential notwithstanding, there are a number of obstacles that face any attempt to introduce gender-equitable extension in developing contexts. To begin with, it is often difficult for women to attend trainings due to their role and position in society. A heavy workload and childcare responsibilities make it problematic for many women to take time off to join extension-related activities. In addition, in a number of African, Asian and Latin American cultures, women are not allowed to talk to male agricultural extensionists, are prohibited from leaving home alone, or are not permitted to use public transport or drive a motorbike: all prohibitions effectively prevent women from attending trainings in neighbouring villages or work as a female extensionist.



Photo left: A women owned self-organized shop in Niger provides inputs for agricultural production to its members.

Photo right: Female extension worker teaching good agricultural practices to female farmers, Simbabwe.

Best Practice

Siavonga Agricultural Development Project (SADP) and Agricultural Sector Investment Programme (ASSP), Zambia

Gender inequality in the division of labour, in ownership and in decision-making power at the household and village level was evident throughout the project area. Some of the reasons for this inequality were the labour migration of men, poverty, and women's lack of access to resources and agricultural extension. As the public agricultural advisory service was unsuccessful in meeting these challenges, agricultural extensionists were trained within the framework of the project supported by German development cooperation on various measures to empower women. Family seminars on the distribution of seeds and its effects on the protein supply and malnutrition were provided to both men and women. Within these seminars, discussions of changes in gender relations were initiated. Women were taught to articulate their knowledge, experiences and concerns, while men learned to listen. The seminars helped men and women to exchange troubleshooting experiences, and now a greater number of women participate at village meetings. The district administration supported the participatory extension approach, and has now institutionalized it successfully in four districts whose training programs for agricultural workers have been extended.

Compounding this situation is that men, traditionally regarded as the head of the household, are often automatically the recipient of new information. The key question 'Who is the farmer?' is seldom asked, and it is tacitly assumed at trainings that any knowledge men acquire will be passed on to those within the family who actually carry out the task. Unfortunately, the possibility that this information transfer may not necessarily happen, or that crucial information may be lost along the way, is rarely considered. The structure of the extension system itself adds further obstacles. First, the ability of the system to relate to women's issues is limited as the majority of extension workers are male. FAO estimates 85% of all extension workers worldwide are male (FAO, 1993 in FAO SOFA 2011-2012), while some areas exclusively employ male workers. The female extensionists that do exist often face difficulties in their workplace in terms of pay or even acceptance, making the job unattractive for prospective female applicants. Second, the topics covered do not necessarily meet women's needs. According to a FAO survey of extension organizations in 1988/1989 which covered 97 countries, only 5% of all extension resources were directed at women. (The fact

that more recent data on this topic is not available may be seen as an indication that not much effort has yet been directed towards changing the situation). Extension programmes often aim for market integration and the improvement of cash-generating activities, fields that in many contexts are the traditional responsibility of men. Women, as mentioned above, mainly focus on products for home consumption. Third, even the use of Information and Communication Technologies, often hailed for their great potential in both agricultural extension and marketing, can on occasion further cement inherent gender inequality: e.g. when household heads retain control of the mobile phone or when illiterate women are unable to use SMS-services. Last but not least, extensionists themselves – whether public or private – are often not sufficiently aware of or trained in gender-related issues. Their training, usually of a technical nature, has not equipped extensionists with the tools, training methods and approaches necessary to address gender inequity and overcome its negative impact on agricultural productivity.

The Global Forum for Rural Advisories Services (GFRAS) has recognized the importance of gender equality to increase agricultural production, and has set up an international working group – including experts from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH – to work on a policy concept addressing this issue (GFRAS 2012).

Best Practice

Gender and adaptation to climate change in the watersheds of Bolivia

Climate change has different effects on women and men. In the Bolivia watersheds project region, women are usually more dependent on the use of natural resources that are particularly affected by climate change. Around 66% of women in rural areas of Bolivia are classified as "extremely poor", and are thus particularly vulnerable to any damage to their resource base. In order to minimize the negative impacts of climate change on the most vulnerable groups in the project region, an analysis was made of the gender-specific impacts of climate change on production systems and livelihoods supported by GIZ on behalf of BMZ. Then, with women in the lead role, adaptation measures were identified and supported. Women were specifically targeted in the framework of the project, e.g. through implementation of more efficient water use patterns or cultivation of new crops, supported by the installation of simple meteorological stations for precipitation and temperature measurements headed by women.

Best Practice

Agricultural Input Supply Project (AISP), Zimbabwe

Due to the difficult economic situation in Zimbabwe, AISP was started as an emergency aid program supported by GIZ on behalf of BMZ. AISP is providing agricultural inputs, such as seeds and fertilizers, to vulnerable farmers. Most of these farmers could not afford to buy inputs for their production and - lacking other income possibilities - were food insecure. Sustainable production methods, e.g. conservation agriculture, were promoted and the public agricultural extension service was strengthened. Within the project region, up to 68% of all households are led by women. After the collapse of the economy, many men migrated to find jobs in other sectors.

Also, many women are HIV/AIDS widows. Consequently, project activities and extension services focused on female farmers as a main target group. The majority of the extension workers are women: via a group approach using a training and visit concept, extension services were implemented. Productivity, harvesting methods, and the harvest of grain and vegetables were enhanced. By the end of the project around 56% of the female-headed households who took part produced more than needed for self-sufficiency, and thus gained additional income. Due to sustainable production methods, food security was enhanced and production risks were reduced. All farmers, but particularly female farmers, further strengthened their income and overall situation with participation in community activities, e.g. saving clubs.

Steps to Action and Best Practices

Promoting gender equality has been a fundamental principle of German development policy for many years. The following steps to action and best practices from concerned projects - implemented by GIZ on behalf of German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) - have proven to be successful approaches and helpful starting points to increase women's access to agricultural extension services.

Include gender aspects on different levels

Support to the development of gender-sensitive approaches and the inclusion of gender aspects on different levels include:

- Strengthening the participation of women in political bodies by providing training or education; and by promoting the employment of women candidates for government positions at regional, national and ministry level, particularly in the public agricultural extension services and in the Ministry of Agriculture.
- Providing financial and advisory support to female representatives from farmer groups or associations to participate in policy formulation and in administrative decision-making bodies, to enable women to raise their concerns as well as sensitize and influence policy-makers to their needs.
- Working on gender-related issues with entire rural communities, rather than addressing only the women. A particular focus is awareness-raising for men on the potential benefits of gender equality for agricultural productivity.

Develop gender-sensitive approaches in extension

On behalf of BMZ, GIZ assists the development of gender-balanced extension services through the following activities:

- Assisting and supporting public and private extension services to improve the quality of their services and adapt them to women's needs: e.g. introducing gender-sensitive extension approaches; considering women's time-constraints in the planning of trainings; providing training content that is relevant to women; introducing gender-disaggregated indicators to monitor extension-impact; sensitising extension agents to gender-related issues; and promoting the employment of women in agricultural extension services.
- Implementing activities that raise men's awareness of their own position of power and the negative impact of gender inequality on agricultural production.
- Providing advice on family and inheritance law as a prerequisite for the protection of land use rights of women.

Stumbling Steps and Lessons Learned

- Anchoring gender issues in policies and programmes of governments, agricultural ministries, agricultural extension services and NGOs is a necessary prerequisite to overcome gender inequality in agricultural production.
- Strategic partnerships between women's organizations and government institutions help to improve women's land and resource access rights.
- Working with entire rural communities (i.e. not only women) and raising men's awareness of the benefits of gender-equality for agricultural production helps to overcome resistance to the social change that a gender-equitable extension might entail.
- Via provision of professional training on gender issues, extensionists can become models for gender-sensitive and participatory communication within farming communities.
- Female extension workers are often in a better position to help female smallholder farmers adapt/adopt innovations.



Frederik Oberthuer
frederik.oberthuer@giz.de
T +49 6196 79-62 33
I www.giz.de

Photo left: Agricultural extension in Ivory Coast.
Photo right: Afghan women discussing good stable conditions for livestock.

Incentives can help motivate women to work as agricultural extensionists. Current extension workers can be models for career plans of young girls.

- Supporting internships for female students from agricultural colleges in extension offices and agricultural departments have proven a successful way to increase the number of women extensionists.
- There is a need to implement extension approaches and tools that consider the specific interests and opportunities of female household heads and spouses.
- There is also a need to enhance the access of women to information on land rights, agricultural inputs and resources such as credits and financial services. Gender-equitable extension services provide the means to do so.
- Care should be taken to not reinforce gender stereotypes and household roles. Men are not necessarily the predominant gender involved in cash crops, for instance, as a great variability in control and co-operation is often found. Any effort to make extension services more gender-equitable should therefore be tailored to its specific socio-cultural setting.

3. How can agricultural extension be used to promote the political participation of women in rural decision-making bodies and female-farmer organizations?
4. How can gender, an important cross-cutting issue, become a conceptual and programmatic element of agricultural advisory authorities?
5. To what extent does the content of the extension activities address the specific situation and needs of women?
6. What are possible options to deploy more female extension workers and to qualify them for managerial functions?
7. Women are confronted with barriers in the application of new knowledge, e.g. when the unavailability of land rights for women makes it risky for them to invest manpower and resources in land-improvement measures. How can these obstacles be overcome through agricultural extension?
8. How can men's awareness of the benefits of gender equality for agricultural production be raised?

References

- FAO: The state of food and agriculture – Women in agriculture, Rome, 2011.
- GFRAS: Gender Equality in Rural Advisory Services- A GFRAS Working Group Concept Note. Lindau, 2012.
- FAO: Bridging the gap, FAO's programme for gender equality in agriculture and rural development, Rome, 2009.
- FAO: Mobilizing the potential of rural and agricultural extension, written by Ian Christophlos, Rome, 2010.

Questions to be answered in gender studies

1. To what extent do household structures and (gender) hierarchies in marriages, families and villages influence women's access to agricultural extension, as well as opportunities to implement any new knowledge and innovations?
2. How can the gender expertise and gender sensitivity of agricultural extension workers be strengthened?

Published by

Deutsche Gesellschaft für
Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH

Registered offices
Bonn and Eschborn, Germany
Sector Project Rural Development and
Sector Project Sustainable Agriculture
Dag-Hammarskjöld-Weg 1-5
65760 Eschborn, Germany
T +49 61 96 79-14 42
F +49 61 96 79-11 15
rural.development@giz.de
www.giz.de

Layout

Gitta Bender, bender graphicdesign, Stuttgart

As at

September 2013

GIZ is responsible for the content of this publication.

On behalf of

**Securing food.
Harvesting the future!**

Federal Ministry for Economic
Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

Division

Rural development; agriculture; food security

Addresses of the
BMZ offices

BMZ Bonn
Dahlmannstraße 4
53113 Bonn, Germany
T +49 228 99 535 - 0
F +49 228 99 535 - 3500

BMZ Berlin
Stresemannstraße 94
10963 Berlin, Germany
T +49 30 18 535 - 0
F +49 30 18 535 - 2501

poststelle@bmz.bund.de
www.bmz.de