

Principles for integrating gender into agriculture-based projects

1. Introduction – Going beyond Gender Stereotypes

Gender is an often-used word, the meaning of which is not clearly defined. However, for purposes of the present document gender refers to social characteristics of men and women, such as for instance their different roles within the family or in farming and the types of behavior expected of them (for instance, women are gentle and faithful, men are strong and free). Our task as scientists is to think beyond the stereotypes of both genders in order to be able to help facilitate social change. Thus, ignoring the possible gains from changing the stereotypes means a loss of a major opportunity to effect positive change.

Gender-sensitive means being sensitive to the different needs and roles of the two sexes and to the constraints that the above-mentioned social characteristics impose on them (for instance, men have to be seen to be the boss; they do not perform menial tasks. Women may not be permitted to carry out certain sorts of jobs or to ride a (motor)bike). Women tend to remain invisible and be conceptualized as belonging to a domestic setting. Therefore, they are rarely considered as professionals – men are chefs, women cook, men are tailors, women sew, etc.

Since women are conceptualized as domestic beings they are seen largely as wives and mothers and helped to do such tasks better but not seen either as persons in their own right or as wage earners. Similarly men are rarely considered in regard to their families. They are considered to be the wage earners and it is assumed they use their wages for the benefit of their families and feel responsible for them. This is often not the case.

The result is that men's roles within the family tend to be ignored and women's roles in settings outside the home are often neglected, and they tend to be overlooked in many professional fields, including agriculture. Often a gender-focus is synonymous with consciously including women, rather than looking at the different positions of the two sexes. Of course, it is often necessary to make an extra effort to include women in order to make them visible. For instance, most people reading the word 'farmers' will conceptualize them as men. It is only if one reads - women or female farmers or men and women farmers, etc., that one thinks about women being there at all. But it is not enough simply to include women. Their special contributions, their particular needs, their different constraints and types of work, their distinct knowledge base on agriculture and other matters – all of these need to be taken into consideration when planning and implementing projects and all of these will differ according to the socio-economic and cultural setting.

Bear in mind that the latest USAID guidelines on gender consider that ALL projects should be gender sensitive and work with women as well as men unless justification is explicitly provided to explain why this cannot be so. The fact that you are carrying out technical agronomical experiments does not mean that your projects are automatically gender neutral. Almost always there are aspects of scientific work that affect men and women differently, even if this merely

relates to the sex of the farmers used in the field trials or of the scientists carrying them out. Women often approach science differently from men (Schiebinger 1989, 1993, 1999). Therefore, including women scientists in your project and taking their particular approaches into consideration can enrich the research experience and results.

When we hear the word farmer we usually imagine a man and often, therefore, forget that women are also professional farmers and that we need to work with them as well as men. The fact that women's mobility is often under their husbands' control, or that women were nowhere to be seen when you went to discuss your trials with the farmers does not release you from your obligation to include them both in any trials and any dissemination of information.

Ignoring women farmers' knowledge means the loss of significant information on agricultural practices since women often farm different crops or at least do their farming in different ways. They may know many more varieties or use integrated cropping systems that can be a first step in a sustainable agriculture program. Women's specific activities are often ones that give them significant daily contact with the land, so that they may have observed phenomena that are unknown to men, whose work may be more irregular (Sachs 1996).

2. Working alongside farmers

If we expect farmers to adopt technology, this has first to correspond to their perceived needs and secondly, they need to be involved in the development and testing through farmer-centered field trials, and so on. Moreover, it should be kept in mind that uneducated people are not stupid and that farmers bring their own specific knowledge to the table, knowledge that scientists often do not possess. In other words, the relationship between scientist and farmer should be that of equal-to-equal, not superior-to-inferior, and the farmer should be looked upon as an active and respected collaborator in the scientific process. Of course, since men and women farmers have different knowledge bases both should be involved in this process, not just male farmers.

If you want people to adopt your techniques they have to make them their own. They will do this best by working alongside you, not by being lectured about them. Remember 'if I hear it I forget it; if I see it I remember it; if I do it I use it; but if I discover it I make it my own'.

3. Taking women's, as well as men's, knowledge into consideration

Remember that in most settings women farmers exist, even if they may not be formally identified as such by either sex. It is our job to go beyond words to see what is actually practised.

Women's farming practices and knowledge tend to differ from men's, as do the crops they cultivate. When looking to work on a specific crop it is useful to find out whether it is a man's or a woman's crop (or both). In all but the first case it is important to discuss their knowledge and practices with women specifically. Also, women's crops are just as important as men's even if they are mainly subsistent food crops. They are vital for household well-being.

4. Ensuring the inclusion of women by taking special steps

In many settings, particularly in Africa and Asia but also in Latin America, when meetings of the community in general are called women may not attend, unless their presence is specifically

called for. In some places customs make it difficult for mixed-sex groups to meet together and in this case it is necessary to hold separate meetings for women, probably also using women as facilitators/organizers/speakers. In such societies it may be necessary also to use women to approach local women as it may be frowned upon for men to approach them. One also needs to realize that it may be difficult for women to speak out in front of men so that even where not mandatory it may be preferable to meet with women separately. Also, women may have less mobility and so may be unable to travel outside the village/region to attend meetings. Even when the meeting is in their village it may be difficult for them to make time, given all their many responsibilities. For instance, in many African settings women take it in turns to cook for the household, so on their cooking day they may not be able to attend meetings.

There are specific issues to be dealt with in working with women farmers, for instance in including them in field trials. One is the fact that in many settings women do not have title to land of their own but only use-rights to part of family (or their husband's) lands. Even when they have land it is likely to be smaller and of lower quality, and they may have fewer resources such as inputs. Another is that women tend to have much higher workloads than men so they have less time available and the times of day they are available are likely to be different from those when men are. But this should not disqualify them from being included. Make special efforts to include them. Using women as well as or instead of men in farmer trials and other situations gives a positive message to the community as a whole that women are valued by important outsiders and this can help raise their position within their own communities.

5. Analyzing women farmers' specificity in your environment

Gender issues include such matters as why specific tasks in certain cultural settings can only be female (or male) or why men work far fewer hours than women in almost all rural settings and what can be done to equalize things more.

Gender sensitivity includes looking at what sort of tasks men and women carry out in farming and checking that when you recommend changes in practices that you are not recommending something that will significantly increase women's already over-heavy work loads.

Consider that gender issues will vary with the local environment. In some places a crop will be a man's, in another a woman's. In some places women will never apply agrochemicals, so if they want to use these, they will be dependent on male labor. In other places women may apply their own chemicals. You will need to analyze each situation to find out which crops are for which sex and which tasks are done by each sex.

Consider that if you are intending to use machinery this may make it difficult for women, who are often excluded from the use of technology. The use of machinery for common women's tasks, such as weeding or sowing, may displace women from such activities. This may cost them the income they used to earn from them. If machines are too heavy or too expensive, or if they need the use of oxen or other large animals, this may additionally exclude women from their use.

You should also bear in mind that expecting women to carry out additional work that does not benefit them directly may simply mean your technology will not be applied. Consider whether

your technology gives extra work to women on men's fields, where they may not benefit from the results and so are likely to be reluctant to do it.

Bear in mind that paying men farmers does not necessarily mean that their wives and children, who may actually carry out the work, will receive any money. If you want women to receive payment you must give it to them directly, since husbands often do not pass money on or only pass on a portion of it.

Also, remember that increasing women's resources almost always improves family welfare, while increasing men's may do little in this respect, so improving female income is more important for family well-being than improving men's.

Consider that knowledge provided to men rarely gets passed on to women while women much more frequently pass on information to their spouses. Also, consider that male extension workers rarely contact women farmers while female extension workers tend to work well with farmers of both sexes.

In most countries male literacy rates are considerably higher than women's. However, even in places like the Caribbean, parts of Latin America and a few places in Africa, where women have somewhat higher literacy rates, they often do not have the power to take independent action.

6. Incorporating women as scientists and professionals

Care should be taken to include at least equal numbers of female scientists at all levels of the project wherever possible and to search for host-country women for collaborative efforts. Similarly women students should be encouraged to apply for scholarships.

Extension services should be supported to work out strategies to train and incorporate significant numbers of women extension agents.

Remember that being a woman does not automatically make someone gender sensitive. Women too need gender training. Similarly being a man does not necessarily make a person insensitive on gender issues. Also, gender-sensitive male scientists are vital for aiding male farmers, etc. to become gender sensitive. One of the goals in the CRSPs should be to sensitize host-country scientists and local communities to gender issues.

Conclusion

Don't forget to make all report writing and project proposals explicit in regard to the sex of those with whom you intend working/have worked.

Relevant Bibliography

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