Gender Equality in Agriculture Extension

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Introduction

Agriculture in developing countries plays an important role in poverty reduction and economic development. Many efforts to improve the agriculture sector in developing countries, where women on average make up 43 percent of the agriculture work force, have been unsuccessful in part because strategies have overlooked the role of women and the effects of gender inequities on productivity. Within the developing world, the percentage of women making up the work force is highest in Eastern Asia (50%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (50%) and lowest in Latin America (20%). It is estimated that by decreasing gender inequality, in terms of access to resources and services, women farmers (Fig. 1) could increase yields by 20 to 30 percent, increasing agricultural productivity in developing countries by 2.5 to 4 percent (FAO 2011).

Figure 1: *Woman working in her vegetable garden (Source: Brian Flanagan).*

To make gains in the agriculture sector, farmers need access to information, skills and tools. Contact between extension agents and farmers is very limited in many countries, especially among women farmers. Even when extension services are available, many are biased towards men and neglect the role of women as farmers. Agricultural workers, in the process of implementing various development projects, are often the ones attempting to meet rural farmers' extension needs. To reach all farmers, agriculture development workers must use approaches that are gender sensitive.

This article draws from the MEAS Brief # 2 **Reducing the Gender Gap in Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services: How to Find the Best Fit for Men and Women Farmers.** Many of the gender-related topics and lessons discussed in the MEAS Brief also apply to the transfer of knowledge and resources that agriculture development workers provide in their projects. This paper will discuss the case for gender equality in agriculture extension, and look at several gender-related barriers and how they can be overcome.

Case for gender equality in agriculture extension

The case for gender equality in extension services can be made both from the 'business' and 'development' points of view. The 'business' viewpoint focuses on improved efficiency and results whereas the 'development' perspective focuses on the need to eliminate inequality.

The business case for increased gender equality says that gender equality will:

- Facilitate a larger impact on agriculture skills and productivity. Applying gender equality in agriculture projects ensures that the proper technologies and knowledge reach the woman or man who performs specific agricultural tasks in a household.
- Ensure a sustainable flow of quality products. Women working in the agricultural sector ought to see the economic benefits of their labor. Incentives for women to participate in the value chain will help ensure the supply of quality goods to the market.
- Lead to new business opportunities. Extension programs should encourage women to be involved in market value chains as both suppliers of key inputs and developers of new products. This will insure women continue to participate in value chains as those chains become formalized. Otherwise women may feel hesitant to take part in value chains controlled by men.

The development case for increased gender equality says that gender equality will:

- Lead to adopting improved agricultural practices and inputs. Such adoption strengthens food security and poverty reduction when the whole family (men and women) receives access, through extension, to the skills and information they require.
- Allow humans to live free from discrimination. Increased gender equality gives both men and women access to education, skills, and employment opportunities.
- Increase household nutrition through women's involvement in household food production. Studies have also shown a strong relationship between women's access to income and larger investments in children's health and education.

Whether taking the business or development approach, addressing gender inequalities in extension services produces more broad-based and sustainable outcomes.

Gender-related barriers

To develop extension programs that address gender inequality, agriculture development workers must be aware of gender-related barriers in their projects. This section addresses possible barriers in agriculture extension programs and how these obstacles can be overcome.

Identifying the farmer

In developing an extension program, the people who benefit from the services must be identified. In many extension and development programs, the beneficiaries are often either the head of household, land owners, or farm income earners. As explained below, selecting potential recipients of services by using any of these categories can reinforce gender inequality.

Head of household

The head of household is often defined as the primary famer, considered by many institutions as the man of the household. This leads to information being passed on to the man with hopes that information relevant to working women will be relayed by him.

Land ownership

The majority of land in developing countries is owned by men. This is often because of various social, legal, and customary norms. If agriculture extension programs only target land owners, then most women will not have direct access to services or new agriculture knowledge.

Farm income earners

Some services are supplied to farmers based on the destination of their crops (i.e., market or household). Often crops destined for markets are viewed as men's crops whereas those produced for the household are considered women's crops Extension efforts can reinforce these gender stereotypes if they label crops as men's or women's. In reality, there is often variability in the extent to which men, in comparison to women, control the income from crop sales. Similarly, the level of collaboration between men and women in producing food can also vary depending on the crop being grown and how it is processed and marketed. Agriculture development workers would do well to simply provide services to people who consider themselves farmers and meet the farmers' needs based on their activities and preferences. One effective way to do this is to deliver cross-sectorial programing targeted towards more than one segment of the population. For example, programs that link agricultural extension with nutrition education can be very effective in benefitting both men and women. This would encourage collaboration between men and women at the household level.

Making extension methods gender appropriate

Advising and teaching farmers requires various means of delivery. When considering different methods of instruction, agriculture development workers should consider gender-appropriate approaches and techniques to reach many types of farmers who have different needs in an array of settings.

Figure 2: *Mixed group of women and men in small group workshop discussion (Source: Brian Flanagan).*

Using farmer groups

The use of community meetings, community-based organizations, producer associations and cooperatives has long been used as a way to increase the reach of extension programs. Generally these approaches target one person per household, with the result being that participants are typically limited to land owners or people of a higher education or social status. In such groups, men often participate more than women, and resource-poor farmers may be excluded.

Therefore, when using farmer groups as a means of extension outreach, care must be taken to make participation and membership as equitable as possible. This can be done by opening registration to multiple family members or targeting women specifically. Some organizations put a quota on the number of women who attend trainings or meetings to encourage women's involvement. Development workers must also be aware that even if women participate, gender norms may inhibit them from taking an active role in the discussion in the company of men. Women are also often barred from leadership roles due to prejudices about their skills.

Both mixed- and single-sex groups can increase women's participation and improve program outcomes, depending on the context. Women participating in mixed groups can potentially widen their options by tapping into men's networks, resources, and information (Fig. 2). On the other hand, women may feel they cannot actively participate because of local norms. To help ensure that women's opinions are heard, mixed groups can be broken into smaller groups based on gender or other social variables for certain activities. Women participating in all-female groups can build confidence and be free of norms that influence how men and women interact in these settings. This allows women to work together to find solutions and develop leadership skills. Single-sex groups

may need to be used where there is a high degree of gender segregation. Agriculture development workers must be aware of the local gender dynamics and adjust communication techniques to fit the local situation.

Accommodating time and mobility

Women may have little free time as they are often responsible for many duties such as farming, housework, and community activities. Strategies of disseminating information must account for time constraints and be located at a convenient place for women to meet (Fig. 3). One way to accommodate women is to conduct a series of short training sessions nearby, thus reducing the time that they would need to be away from home. Another way to encourage attendance by women is to provide childcare.

Figure 3: *A meeting held in the community so a larger number of women can attend (Source Brian Flanagan).*

Adapting to differing levels of education and literacy

Although the literacy rate is increasing globally for women, it is often lower in rural areas in developing countries. As the gap between adult literacy in men and women is also large in many regions of the world, the methods of transferring knowledge must be appropriate for illiterate farmers. Some organizations have been successful in using innovative information and communication technologies (ICTs) to reach women farmers through cell phone and radio methods.

This can be effective in areas with appropriate infrastructure, but women's access to financial resources and ICTs should be considered when developing programs.

Human resources for agriculture development and extension

Agriculture development organizations must have necessary skills and resources to address the different needs of men and women farmers. Consequently, organizations must be able to create equal opportunities for both women and men and should employ proper staff with adequate training.

Recruiting women extension workers

Although it is not necessary to hire exclusively female extension workers to work with women farmers, it is important to identify strategies that better meet and respond to gender responsive needs (Fig. 4). Increasing the amount of female extension workers can be one of these strategies.

Figure 4: *A Female agronomist presenting at a workshop of farmers (Source: Brian Flanagan).*

The challenges of recruiting and retaining women extension workers:

- Smaller pool of women educated in the agriculture sector
- Family obligations limit ability to relocate to remote locations

- Sexual harassment or security issues in some regions
- Lack of mobility because of cultural restrictions on women

Strategies for overcoming a shortage of women extension workers:

- Recruit women farmers who are active in the community and train them appropriately
- Employ recent unmarried graduates who may view a field assignment as a career jump
- Use quotas for women's participation in agriculture development organizations
- Provide incentives, such as higher salaries

Building the capacity of staff members

Male and female extension staff should not only be educated on agriculture related topics but should be trained on gender sensitivity and local socio-cultural dynamics. Staff should be prepared to conduct gender appropriate participatory visits. This requires providing staff with the knowledge and skills to address both female and male farmers equitably.

Conclusion

Agriculture in developing countries can be a method of increasing economic growth and reducing poverty, but efforts to improve this sector often fall short because of gender inequality in extension methods and services provided. Agriculture development workers can bridge this gap by providing gender appropriate services. This can be done by properly identifying and providing services to the proper member of the household, making extension methods more gender sensitive, and employing and training staff that can address gender issues in the agriculture sector.

References

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Manfre, Cristina, Deborah Rubin, Andrea Allen, Gale Summerfield, Kathleen Colverson, and Mercy Akeredolu. 2013. *Brief #2: Reducing the Gender Gap in Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services: How to Find the Best Fit for Men and Women Farmers*. Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services.

Further Reading

MEAS Discussion Paper

Manfre, Cristina, Deborah Rubin, Andrea Allen, Gale Summerfield, Kathleen Colverson, and Mercy Akeredolu. 2013. *Discussion Paper #2: Reducing the Gender Gap in Agricultural Extension and Advisory Services*. Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services.

MEAS Technical Notes:

Rubin, Deborah and Cristina Manfre. 2012. *Technical Note on Applying Gender-Responsive Value-Chain Analysis in EAS*. Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services.

MEAS Training Modules:

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MEAS Case Studies:

Gale, Chris, Kathleen Collett, and Piera Freccero. 2013. *Delivering Extension Services through Effective and Inclusive Women's Groups: The Case of SEWA in India*. City and Guilds Centre for Skills Development, MEAS Case Study 5.

Hird-Younger, Miriam and B. Simpson. 2013. *Case Study: Women Extension Volunteers: An Extension Approach for Female Farmers*. Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services.

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