

Agricultural AND livestock PRODUCTION



Women invest a large part of their time, labour and expertise in agricultural and livestock production. Development projects often ignore this fact and sometimes expect women to find additional time to invest in income-generating activities of minor economic relevance and often with few market opportunities.

In many countries, technology development and national extension services tend to neglect the crops that women manage and grow. They also often ignore the fact that, in almost all regions, women have significant responsibilities in the care and management of livestock and the processing of livestock products. Purchasing livestock is often women's preferred use of credit, for both income and security.

A major constraint to achieving gender balance in agricultural development is the lack of women among front-line staff. Projects have sought to overcome this obstacle by hiring women extension staff (for example, in The Sudan) or by giving some extension responsibilities to women's group promoters, generally hired through non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In Ghana, community-selected women extension volunteers have proved effective as an interface between women's groups and government extension services. In other countries, such as Cambodia and Indonesia, women volunteers have been trained as auxiliaries for animal vaccination. Ensuring that government extension services officially recognize women's groups as contact groups is another way of improving extension outreach to women. Targeting village associations for extension in some West African countries has proved less effective, since women are underrepresented in these organizations.

An IFAD/FAO study on “Agricultural Implements Used by Women Farmers in Africa” funded by the Government of Japan points out that, in sub-Saharan Africa, it is men who decide what tools to buy, even though women are the main agricultural labourers. Therefore, labour-saving technology will most likely not be adopted spontaneously without the sensitization of both men and women. This highlights the need to focus on gender, rather than solely on women, in order to include men in project initiatives and promote the sustainability of these activities.



Women and small-scale irrigation. The introduction of irrigation can result in significant increases in income. At the same time, the pressure from predominantly male-dominated local elites to control the irrigation system may be overriding. Thus projects with small-scale irrigation components generally identify women as a specific target group and establish the principle that women’s membership in water users’ associations (WUAs) should be ensured. Evaluations have found, however, that the participation of women in WUAs is generally constrained by land-holding-based membership criteria and the notion that only one person per family should register. In some projects, women have contributed to the construction of the schemes, but have been marginalized once the schemes became operational.



The lack of access to productive resources – often upheld by existing laws and social norms – is one of the most serious constraints that women face. In the *Oxbow Lakes Small-Scale Fishermen Project* in Bangladesh, IFAD was able to convince the government to provide the landless with long-term access to water bodies for aquaculture activities. The project soon realized that this shift actually discriminated against women, as men had received the access to and control over the water bodies and the income generated from them. In order to remedy the situation, the project provided women with access to small ponds for fish farming.

CHALLENGE In promoting irrigation, safeguards are needed to minimize the following risks:

- women’s labour is increased without corresponding financial benefits;
- production of food crops is reduced in favour of cash crops; and
- women are displaced from the plots they control.

CHALLENGE Women’s participation in irrigation schemes needs to be enhanced. In this regard, it is important to define support measures and institutional arrangements to ensure women’s sustained access to irrigated plots.