



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Making extension and advisory services work for women

Women play a key role in agriculture and food security, making up around 48 percent of the agricultural labour force in low-income countries (FAO, 2020). Despite this, their important contribution is hardly visible and largely unrecognized. Gender equality regards human rights but gender-based constraints in the sector cause also major inefficiencies in value chains, and are a key impediment for rural development, food security, and social and environmental sustainability. Moreover, the severe and multidimensional constraints faced by women hamper their productive potential and livelihoods. Women's needs for knowledge and support often differ from the services offered, which are typically tailored to a male clientele.

Extension and advisory services (EAS) should play a key role in helping women improve their livelihoods by providing services to harness their potential, thus empowering them to escape poverty and participate in decision-making. However, EAS providers often fall short of this goal: services are usually geared towards male heads of household, and only seldom do EAS actors have the skills to effectively support women.

What does this mean in practice?

EAS systems and providers must transform their policies, organizational culture and services in order to adequately meet the needs of women, resulting in improved and more resilient livelihoods, adoption of sustainable practices and food and nutrition security.

Pre-conditions for success:

Recognition of women as legitimate EAS clients.

Understanding women's needs and the barriers they face in accessing and benefiting from EAS.

Addressing gender norms, roles and relations.

Women's involvement in all EAS aspects.

Transform EAS system from within

- Advocate for including concrete gender equality objectives in EAS strategies, sectorial policy documents, and EAS organizations' mandates. Stimulate active participation for women (both producers and EAS workers) in their formulation and implementation.
- Design and implement gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation frameworks for policies and EAS organizations. Advocate for regular collection of gender-sensitive sex-disaggregated data.
- Ensure adequate female staff presence at management and field levels. It is key due to difficulties rural women face in interaction with male advisors, and to ensure female perspective in EAS planning and delivery. To that end, encourage women to study and work in EAS, e.g. through campaigns, scholarships and internships for female students, quotas for female employment, security measures in the field, maternity and paternity leave, anti-harassment measures, removing barriers related to career, etc.
- Integrate modules on participatory approaches, technical skills related to services demanded by women, and functional skills such as gender-sensitive communication, in all training curricula for EAS providers (universities, professional and in-service training, etc.) These skills should be mandatory for the staff at all levels, including farmer leaders.
- Collaborate with non-agricultural actors who work with rural women and girls: ministries of gender, social affairs and children, nutrition, youth, UN agencies (e.g. United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], UN Women) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), etc.
- Make policy and organizational budgets gender-sensitive with adequate resources for training on related matters, specific services for rural women, care facilities, data collection on gender, etc.

Understand rural women to better service them

- Study the socio-demographic landscape: socio-cultural norms related to gender, poverty and literacy rates (by sex and age), inheritance rights and land ownership, customary and national laws, rules for memberships in producer organizations, bank account rules, etc.
- Understand the gendered division of labour in value chains and households. Women are often engaged in staple food production, micro agro-processing, while men may do marketing activities.
- Find out when, where and why women and men perform these different tasks. Do women who take care of children need to stay close to home or it is considered inappropriate/unsafe for them to ride a bicycle to go to the market?
- Assess possible barriers to technology adoption by women, such as limited decision-making role in the family, lack of time and unequal access to financial resources or greater aversion to risk.



Remember!

It is crucial to explicitly target women via policies and interventions: unless specific measures are taken, barriers they face are likely to prevent them from participating.

Working with champions, influencers and women's associations can promote the raising of awareness and help change perceptions.



Example

To recruit more female staff, the **TechnoServe's Coffee Initiative** in Ethiopia advertised extension positions in places visited by women, like markets and churches, explicitly encouraging women to apply. The project used an 8-day training to select candidates, as women were found to do less well in traditional interviews. Liberal maternity leave policies were followed and free childcare was provided throughout (Petrics *et al.*, 2015).

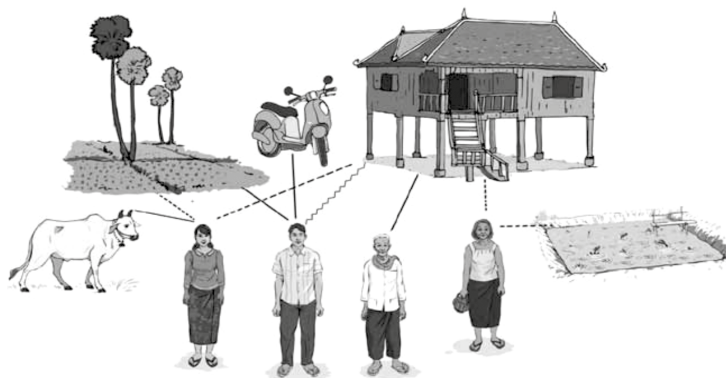


Remember!

When assessing, designing and implementing interventions look at individual rather than household level and consider gender relations and decision-making power within the household.

- Explore channels used by women to communicate: due to social norms, women may not be present at formal meetings, but informal groups like self-help groups can offer appropriate platforms to reach out to them.
- Remember that women are not a homogenous group. Needs and challenges differ between older and younger women, mothers, female household heads, entrepreneurs and contributing family workers, migrants and indigenous women, the illiterate etc. Intersectionality approach is also key as one woman can fall under many of those categories.

Asset management diagram exercise



Source: Ridolfi Ramona, Stormer Ame and Mundy Gary. 2019. *Transforming data into action – Implementing gender analyses in nutrition-sensitive agriculture interventions: An experience from Cambodia.*



Example

In Zambia, **WorldFish and local partners** conducted an 8-month gender-sensitive value chain analysis. They used an 'activity clocks' tool in which boys, girls, women and men described their tasks. This revealed seasonal variations between tasks performed by women and men, e.g. fish traded at different times, and consequent differences in types and costs of transportation, as well as the profits made by men and women respectively. The results of the analysis were presented to the participants who shared their insights regarding the causes.

Ensure accessible and tailored services

- Provide advice, training and services on tasks usually performed by women, i.e., weeding, homestead food production, backyard poultry, home-garden vegetable cultivation, agro-processing, petty trade, fetching water, etc., based on robust gender analysis.
- Advise on labour-saving technologies. Women have huge work burdens and are often responsible for time-consuming tasks. This time poverty takes a toll on their wellbeing and impedes them from engaging in income-generating activities.
- Promote on- and off-farm employment. Women's work is often unpaid/underpaid, so income is key to improving their livelihoods (and that of their children) and can increase their bargaining power within households. Such activities must be feasible, not increase their workload or require big initial investments.
- Offer women advice on land tenure, credit (formal banking or saving groups), and insurance and work with (micro)finance institutions to provide accessible and tailored solutions. Combine this with training in financial literacy, business, marketing and entrepreneurship.
- Raise awareness among policy makers, researchers, value chain actors and communities about the importance of gender equality to help change gender relations in the community and within households. Communicate around women's needs and demands to facilitate the development of tailored policies and services. This may also involve mediating potential conflicts.



Remember!

Advise women on activities they perform traditionally and start supporting them in taking on new and more profitable roles, even those usually performed by men.

Information and communication technologies can be very effective in reaching women. However, they need to be gender-sensitive as women may suffer from the digital divide.

Keep in mind the key difference between **REACHING**, **BENEFITTING** and **EMPOWERING**. All three are important, but empowerment is the key goal!



- Facilitate organizational processes and strengthen existing women's associations and cooperatives. Strengthen women's voices in mixed groups and rural institutions. Hence, EAS should also develop women's skills in negotiation, public speaking, self-confidence, leadership and functional literacy.
- Adopt gender-sensitive delivery modalities. Consult women on the timing and venue of activities, avoiding poorly chosen times or distant places. Where possible, provide care facilities or organize training on their farms. Participatory and household approaches are very effective (e.g. farmer field schools). Use visual means and local languages (theatre, video, drawings, voice messages) to reach out to women with lower literacy and portray them in agricultural roles, not only in caregiving ones. Remove barriers to women's participation, such as land ownership or high fees, etc.
- Organize follow-up visits to monitor the adoption of proposed practices and work to remove potential barriers.
- Value and document women's knowledge: in many societies, they are guardians of traditional knowledge and biodiversity. This makes them not only EAS clients, but also key resources that EAS should work with to promote sustainable practices.



Example

Yachachiq, farmer-to farmer advisors from the Peruvian Haku Wiñay Programme, come from the local communities, know their participants and speak the local language. Participatory and hands-on trainings usually require no literacy as texts are read aloud. Home visits (e.g., for cooking and family garden training) and the advisors' availability for follow-up with participants make them very effective in working with women.

Useful resources

Blum, M.L., Cofini, F., Sulaiman, R.V. 2020. *Agricultural extension in transition worldwide: Policies and strategies for reform*. Rome, FAO. (also available at <https://doi.org/10.4060/ca8199en>)

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FAO. 2020. *FAO Policy on Gender Equality 2020–2030*. Rome, FAO. (also available at <https://www.fao.org/3/cb1583en/cb1583en.pdf>)

IRRI and CRISP. 2021. *Training Module on Designing and Delivering Gender Responsive Extension and Advisory Services (EAS)*. Los Banos, Philippines: International Rice Research Institute; and Hyderabad, India: Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy. (also available at https://www.crispindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Training-Module-on-Designing-and-Delivering-Gender-Responsive_ESA_15-June-21.pdf)

Petricks, H., Barale, K., Kaaria, S.K. & David, S. 2018. *The Gender and Rural Advisory Services Assessment Tool*. Rome, FAO. 92 pp. (also available at <http://www.fao.org/policy-support/tools-and-publications/resources-details/en/c/1207160>)

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Poulson, E. 2016. *Gender Mainstreaming in Agricultural Value Chains: Promising Experiences and the Role of Rural Advisory Services*. GFRAS: Lausanne, Switzerland. (also available at <https://www.g-fras.org/en/knowledge/documents/category/17-gender.html>)

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