Findings reports on ongoing operational, economic and sector work carried out by the World Bank and its member governments in the Africa Region. It is published periodically by the Africa Technical Department on behalf of the Region.

**Integrating Gender into Extension Services: Rural Women in the Sahel**

Selected study findings on rural women's economic activities, with implications, lessons learnt and recommendations for extension services, were presented in *Findings* No. 46, August 1995. To reiterate, the sector study, *Rural Women in the Sahel and Their Access to Agricultural Extension - Overview of Five Country Studies*, covers Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal and The Gambia. This present issue focuses on lessons learnt about incorporating gender issues in agricultural extension services.

**Stages in integrating gender issues in extension services**

The process in the five countries studied appears to follow a defined path:

1. *Extension is male oriented* and officials do not question whether this reflects the farming reality.
2. *Gender awareness increases* among policy makers and managers.
3. *Actions are taken to increase the numbers of women in contact with extension services*.
4. *Actions are taken to improve the quality of extension* (subjects covered, appropriateness of messages).
5. *The impact is evaluated*.
6. *Other support services are improved*.

Most *Mauritanian* officials do not consider women as farmers despite women heading 35% of households in the main farming area. Officials in *Mali and Senegal* are more aware of gender issues but do not automatically consider them when planning extension services (although Mali
has increased women's participation). Gender awareness is very high in Burkina Faso among extension staff at all levels and special units exist in all regional offices. The Gambia has made the numeric breakthrough: over half of participants in extension activities are women and the ministry is responsive to the needs of men and women.

**Women's participation in extension activities**

In Burkina Faso, Mali, and Senegal, 15%-20% of participants in extension activities are women. In Mauritania, the estimate is 10%-15%. In The Gambia, the dramatic increase in the percentage of women contact farmers from 5% in 1989 to the present 60%-70% is a direct result of the World Bank's multi-sectoral Women in Development (WID) project.

Vegetable production and women's income-generating or diversification activities are the main focus of extension to rural women in all five countries. Few women receive extension on field crops despite their production supplementing men's food crop production, particularly during the hungry season, and contributing to household income. The Gambia makes a special effort to encourage women's participation in small ruminant and poultry extension. Women's participation in the functional literacy components of the Agricultural Service Projects, only 25% in Mali, for example, is too low to reduce the gender gap in literacy of rural adults. On average, in the rural areas of the 5 countries studied, there are 2 literate men for every woman. Thus, while women's participation in extension activities is increasing, the situation does not yet reflect their importance and roles in agricultural production and the rural economy.

**Recommendations**

1. **Targets for women's participation in extension on the main crops and livestock should be proportionate to women as producers of the individual crop or livestock being discussed. Women should exceed 50% of the participants in functional literacy.**
2. **Collect, analyze and report sex-disaggregated data whenever possible**

Agricultural extension messages in the Sahel are routine and global and themes concentrate on production technologies although, as with vegetables, marketing is the main problem. Extension services do not address many priority needs of rural women - time, inputs, credit, management skills, and marketing.

**Recommendations to improve the quality of extension and other agricultural services for rural women**

1. **Base extension activities and messages on diagnosed gender differences in activities and resources.**
2. **Develop a menu of extension modules from which individual groups can chose. Prepare a manual of technical leaflets covering the wide range of women's activities.**
3. **Use extension agents (or Gender Coordinators) to facilitate women's access to agricultural support services available from other government ministries, NGOs, projects, etc.**
4. **Train officials of rural women's groups in financial, production and human resource management of group activities, and tie functional literacy training to women's interests and activities.**
5. \textit{Increase access to inputs by encouraging village boutiques run by women to stock inputs and tools.}

\textbf{More female staff needed}

Each country has ethnic groups which discourage contact between male agents and rural women. These restrictions are least evident in \textit{The Gambia}. Very few women hold technical positions in the agricultural ministries. About 5\% of field staff are female in \textit{Mali, Mauritania and Senegal}. Women comprise 11\% of the crop department in \textit{Burkina Faso}, 14\% in the non-ministry agencies affiliated with the Projet National de Vulgarisation Agricole (PNVA) in \textit{Senegal} and 33\% in the livestock department in \textit{The Gambia}. Extremely few women are employed as Subject Matter Specialists. The number of coordinatrices for women's activities has recently increased. \textit{Burkina Faso} has female graduates responsible for promoting women's activities in all 12 regional offices (CRPAs) of the agricultural ministry.

Few women apply for extension posts because they lack the technical training. Cultural norms make them reluctant to be posted away from parents or husbands. And, except for \textit{Burkina Faso}, some are reluctant to ride mobylettes. About 15\% of students are women in agricultural courses in all five countries.

\textit{Implications and recommendations}

1. \textit{Because, in the immediate future, most agents will be men, they must be trained to work with women as well as men. They need technical training in women's activities, in culturally acceptable ways to initiate extension contacts with women, and in organizing the special dynamics of women's groups.}

2. \textit{A statut feminin could give women flexible employment without increasing the number of established posts. For example, women could share a number of positions over the long term. Within defined limits, each woman could take a break in her employment and, if a "job-sharing" vacancy were available, could return without loss of seniority when circumstances allowed.}

3. \textit{The number and status of female staff should be increased by, for example:}
   - selecting experienced female staff for in-service training and upgrading,
   - training in agriculture and integrating in extension rural female agents in other ministries,
   - not restricting recruitment to the age group 25-45 years.

4. \textit{Female enrollment in agricultural training colleges should be encouraged by, for example, providing targeted scholarships or remedial teaching before the course.}

5. \textit{Auxiliary extension agents could be selected by their groups and given some training.}

\textbf{The Sector Study as a Tool for Change}

Substantial progress in actions to equalize gender staffing and gender participation in extension activities has occurred in the past two years. In some countries this is a continuation of an effort that had already started. In others, it represents a new initiative. The sector study provided the impetus for:

- developing a dialogue on the subject which raised awareness in the countries under study;
• developing close cooperation between Headquarters and staff posted in the concerned countries dealing with on-going projects, which enabled this initiative to be mainstreamed into on-going and new Agricultural Service Projects; and
• promoting cross country exchange of experiences and spreading the initiative to other countries.

Several reasons explain the positive impact of the study

• The Sector Study has been persuasive rather than prescriptive.
• The process allowed for a long time frame within on-going activities.
• The Task Managers helped to mainstream gender into most Bank activities connected with the projects (for example, supervision missions, workshops, meetings, dialogues).
• New and on-going projects provided the operational means of obtaining these improvements.
• The use of IDA-funded projects enabled gender actions to have national coverage.

Several strategies have improved gender equity

The Gambia's free-standing, multi-sectoral Women in Development Project (WIDP) greatly increased women's participation in extension. WIDP financial support enabled the agricultural ministry's crop, livestock, horticulture, communications, and input units to increase their focus on women farmers or activities in the women's domain. Horticulture and small livestock were particular targets. The agricultural component is now mainstreamed and the new Agricultural Services Project continues this special effort.

WID coordinators and women's units: National coordinators for promotion feminine are in place in Burkina Faso, Mali and The Gambia, and are planned for Mauritania and Senegal. Burkina Faso has 12 regional women's units comprising 2-3 staff each. The national coordinator strategy has been very successful in The Gambia and Nigeria, another country in the region. In all countries, the coordinators and women's units have focused attention on an area long neglected - rural women who farm, keep livestock and carry out other productive activities.

Training and redeployment of rural agents: Senegal has begun to assess the training needs of rural monitrices who are employed by other ministries and agencies. This replicates a strategy used in Nigeria where Home Economists with some agricultural training and much rural experience were given extra agricultural training and redeployed firstly as Women in Agriculture agents and within 2 years as agricultural agents.

Changing extension client criteria: Mali increased women's participation in extension activities by 50% in 2 years by (a) increasing the proportion of mixed and female groups used for extension; and (b) changing group membership from heads of farming enterprises or businesses to active farmers. The Gambia increased focus on activities that were traditionally in the women's domain, and gave agents target numbers for women clients and "WID" villages.

Lessons learned

• Government and ministry officials must be convinced of the need to address gender issues before actions are attempted at field level
• Services must be integrated, monitored and have built-in safeguards
• The extension and research services can increase their gender balance
• Project conditionalities must be used with care
• Targeting women can remove common biases
• The numbers of female agents can be increased with a minimal increase in fiscal expenditure
• Fast and substantial improvements can be made when the Bank commits significant human and financial resources.
• The most effective coordinators in charge of the women's initiative have the personality and the academic and field experience to be regarded as equals by male colleagues. In addition, they had the authority to use the funds. The institutional location of the person was less important.

This summary analysis was prepared by Daphne Spurling with helpful comments from Elizabeth Morris-Hughes, formerly the WID Advisor, AFTHR. The original 5-country study was conducted by Daphne Spurling, consultant, under the task managership of Katrine Saito, Senior Economist, AF5AE. For more information on the study, please contact Katrine Saito, AF5AE, Africa Region, World Bank, 1818 H Street NW, Washington D.C., 20433. Tel: (202) 473-5009, Fax: (202) 473-5146.