Gender and Rural Development

Background

At least 70% of the world’s very poor people live in rural areas in developing countries (IFAD 2011). Their livelihoods usually depend either directly or indirectly on agriculture, with women providing, on average, more than 40% of the agricultural labor force. This female labor ration ranges from approximately 20% in Latin America to up to 50% in Eastern Asia and Sub-Sahara Africa (FAO 2011).

According to traditional patterns of work distribution within households, in most developing countries women are primarily responsible to meet the basic needs of their families. Women mainly produce food for household consumption and local markets, whereas men more often work in agricultural wage labor and cash crop production. Generally, women are responsible for food selection and preparation, and for the care and feeding of the children, and therefore play a key role in defining the coping strategies of poor households to ensure food security and to reduce risk. Women normally spend a higher share of their income than men on providing food, health and education to the family. Additionally, they expend a lot of time and hard work in procuring water and domestic fuel. For instance, in Lesotho women spend more than twice as much time as men and boys in fetching water and gathering firewood.

Alongside the above described responsibility for reproductive tasks, women are also engaged in productive tasks such as agricultural work, raising cattle, seed management, planting, as well as the processing and marketing of agricultural products. In livestock farming, women feed the animals, clean the stalls and compost manure. When raising poultry, sheep, goats or rabbits, they are responsible for breeding and tending to the animals’ health. It is women who cultivate the kitchen gardens, and who sustain the family when harvests are poor. The activities performed by women are often unpaid. War, disease, HIV/AIDS and the migration of male family members to urban areas or foreign countries are forcing more and more women to take on additional roles that were originally performed by men, with many assuming sole responsibility for agricultural production. Given the importance and variety of their tasks, women are important bearers of knowledge related to the sustainable use of natural resources, including strategies for adapting to climate change and conserving agrobiodiversity.

However, in spite of their important and diverse contributions, women in agriculture and rural areas have less access than men to productive resources. Gender inequality is present in many assets, inputs and services: e.g. access to or control over land, financial services, productive resources, and extension or marketing services. For example, men represent 85% of agricultural landholders in Sub-Sahara Africa. In Ghana, Madagascar and Nigeria men own more than twice the units of livestock compared to women. Similar gaps exist in access to fertilizer, mechanical equipment, new technologies, extension services and credit (UNDP 2012). Several studies have shown that gender inequality related to food security is exacerbated during crises: Women tend to become the “shock absorbers” of household food security, e.g. skipping meals, to make more food available for other household members. Moreover, women are often underrepresented in rural organizations and institutions, and are generally poorly informed regarding their rights. This prevents them from having an equal say in decision-making processes, and reduces their ability to participate in collective activities, e.g. as members of agricultural cooperatives or water user associations.
Due to the above factors, among others, female farmers produce less than male farmers. This situation imposes costs on the agriculture sector, the broader economy and society, as well as on women themselves. Gender inequalities result in less food being grown, less income being earned, and higher levels of poverty and food insecurity.

Politicians have taken note of these facts and figures. Gender equality is clearly recognized as a human right on an international level. Over the past several years, UN member states have entered into a number of commitments. The Rome Declaration on Food Security, resulting from the FAO World Food Summit in 1996, affirms the obligation to promote the equal rights and duties of men and women regarding food security. The Millennium Development Goals underline the fact that, without gender equality, it will be impossible to reduce by half the number of people who suffer from hunger by 2015. With its Development Policy Action Plan on Gender 2009 - 2012, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) has committed to strengthening the economic empowerment of women and, in particular, to highlighting the need for gender-specific answers to the negative impact of climate change on agriculture.

Steps to Action and Best Practices

For agricultural growth to reach its potential, gender disparities must be addressed and effectively reduced. FAO (2011) estimates that closing the gender gap in agriculture would generate significant gains for the agricultural sector: If women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20–30%. This, in turn, could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by up to 4%, potentially reducing the number of hungry people by 100-150 million.

Promoting gender equality has been a fundamental principle of German development policy for many years. When carrying out rural development measures on behalf of German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH ensures that impacts on both men and women are investigated as an integral part of results monitoring and evaluations, that the findings are included in relevant reports and, most importantly, used to adjust current practices. The following general measures and steps to action have proven to have a particularly positive impact on gender equality in agriculture and rural development. These measures are explored in more detail in a series of fact sheets on relevant themes, such as rural extension services, access to land, food & nutrition security, value chains, animal production, management of natural resources and fisheries & aquaculture.

Capacity Development

Due to their frequently lower standard of education, women are generally less likely than men to know and understand their statutory rights. On behalf of BMZ, GIZ is therefore actively setting up education and training programs for women in order to ensure that women have the capacities to effectively use agricultural land and means of production. GIZ also supports women to be systematically included into formal education programs on agriculture and rural development (for example, as agricultural extension workers), in order to raise their participation in decision-making bodies. Last but not least, GIZ is setting up and expanding rural women’s organizations to help optimize production and distribution (for example, through the joint procurement of new machines or joint marketing of products).

Policy dialogue and advice

Policy makers and legal draftsmen who intend to improve gender balance must take into consideration the crucial role of women in agricultural and entrepreneurial production and in the reduction of poverty. On behalf of BMZ, GIZ therefore supports developing countries in their efforts to improve the political and institutional frameworks regarding both formal and informal agricultural sector in order for men and women to have an equal share in agricultural development.
Support participation of women in decision-making processes

Giving women an equal say in decision-making processes in rural development institutions improves their access to resources, factors of production such as land and capital, and to markets. On behalf of BMZ, GIZ therefore offers support for safeguarding and institutionalizing gender balanced representation in all administrative and decision-making bodies involved in agriculture and rural development.

Create transparency and raise awareness

Openness and transparency regarding gender disparities in agriculture and rural development are needed to enhance the effectiveness of participation by women. GIZ achieves this by raising awareness among the population and targeting specific stakeholders, such as village chiefs. The information channels employed usually go beyond the written media, and include visual presentations and the use of radio. For example, GIZ supports translations of relevant laws and policies into local languages, as well as public announcements.

Areas of support and impact for equal participation in rural development

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of support</th>
<th>Institutions of rural development</th>
<th>Professional/ basic/ self-help groups</th>
<th>Farm households</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active participation in changes in business and rural development</td>
<td>Equal say in decision-making processes</td>
<td>Strengthening/Expansion of gender-specific responsibilities, knowledge and skills</td>
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<tr>
<td>Increased individual income and/or operating income and enhanced status</td>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>Adoption of new roles</td>
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<td>Access to resources and production factors</td>
<td>Design of policy and strategy</td>
<td>(Access to) organisation(s)</td>
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<td>Access to markets</td>
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Improve available data disaggregated by gender

Only a few countries systematically integrate gender-sensitive information on agriculture and rural development into their national or regional statistics. Therefore, GIZ offers support to carry out gender-sensitive studies and analysis, and to enhance the partner capacity to monitor and evaluate gender-differentiated effects of rural development policies, programs or projects.

Ensure an equitable access to natural resources and means of production

Women need to be able to use and/or own land and other productive resources in order to secure livelihoods and food security of their families. GIZ therefore undertakes important efforts to improve women’s access to financial, technological and extension services, as well as to markets. An example is increasing land registration in the name of women (cf. fact sheet “Gender and Access to Land”).

Introduce time saving technologies

The greater economic engagement and responsibility resulting from new technologies can contribute to strengthening women’s independence and control over output. GIZ therefore supports women in using appropriate technologies, thus reducing the time they spend for routine burdens that are common in rural areas (such as gathering firewood or water), and allowing them to engage in more productive tasks. In Benin, for example, more than 30,000 women have already been trained to use gathering, stocking and processing techniques that improve both the quality and quantity of their shea butter harvest, thus improving their income levels by 26%. In a number of countries, the introduction of firewood-saving stoves has not only contributed to protect the remaining forest reserves, but also to spare numerous women hard work and time. In Benin alone, 200,000 households have already profited from this.

Stumbling Steps and Lessons Learnt

- Capacity development is key

Improving women’s education, i.e. their knowledge of legal matters and their general education can substantially contribute to raising women’s access to natural resources and other means of production.
An adequate policy and legal framework is necessary. It is important to include the resource rights of women into the legislative framework. Effective mechanisms of control of power include regulatory guarantees for equal treatment of men and women, a non-discriminatory procedural law, as well as appropriate judicial and non-judicial authorities for appeal. These mechanisms can give the necessary legal security to both men and women, as well as strengthen peaceful processes of conflict arbitration. When integrating traditional and modern law, the gender-discriminating tendencies of autochthonous law must be addressed and balanced taking into consideration the respective social security which traditional laws also offer to women and other disadvantaged groups.

Technology alone does not make a change. Not all new technologies save time or empower rural women. In fact, some technologies add to women’s burdens by making tasks more demanding (e.g., extra weeding required when fertilizer is used, or the need to process more output). The mere introduction of a new technology alone is not able to simultaneously boost agricultural yields and reduce ingrained gender biases, since relationships between women and men are dynamic and complex. Men often move in and take over when a new technology results in a more profitable crop or when a new processing machine increases income. Policies thus need a gender perspective to ensure that technologies are developed and applied in ways that prevent an automatic takeover of the technology by men.

Questions to be answered in gender studies

1. To what extent do women own or have access to land, capital, equipment, and other factors of agricultural production?
2. How do policies, programs, and sociocultural norms affect the degree of women’s participation in agriculture and rural development?
3. What is the number of female-headed households in rural areas in a specific region or country?
4. What are good examples of women’s empowerment in the study area? What attempts to achieve gender equality were failures (e.g., because they were taken over by men or had adverse effects on women)?

References

- IFAD 2011: Rural poverty report.