

Findings



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Rural Women and Agricultural Extension in the Sahel

Women play a pivotal role in agriculture in the Sahel. In Burkina Faso and Mali, for example, an estimated 93% and 78% respectively of active women work in agriculture. High levels of rural poverty coupled with a fragile agro-ecological environment make the contribution of women's productive activities to the household and community a crucial element in the survival of the rural population. As patterns of production change and men migrate in search of work, the labor input of women is increasing. Yet only about one participant in five in extension activities in the region is a woman. In all the Sahelian countries, the Agricultural Service Projects funded by the International Development Association (IDA) focused initially on establishing national programs based on Training and Visit (T&V) management principles. With the second generation of these projects coming on line, increased knowledge and systematic documentation of the current and changing roles of women in agricultural production were necessary to improve the targeting of project activities.

For this purpose, a sector study (*Rural Women in the Sahel and their Access to Agricultural Extension - Overview of Five Country Studies*) was carried out in Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Senegal and The Gambia, which were selected as representative of the Sahel. Wide variations in the attention these countries' agricultural ministries paid to gender issues and in project initiatives to integrate women in agricultural development provided an opportunity for much cross-country learning. The free-standing, multi-sectoral Women in Development (WID) project in The Gambia, unusual in World Bank lending operations, added extra interest. Individual country desk studies supplemented visits to the countries, discussions with

government, female farmers and NGOs, data collection, and workshops at which Action Plans were developed. Topics investigated were :

- women's participation in farming and other rural income-generating activities;
- their contact with extension services;
- the women's perception of the appropriateness of the extension services for their needs;
- the gender of extension agents;
- women's need for other agricultural services; and
- institutional issues.

Selected study findings on rural women's economic activities, together with implications, lessons learnt and recommendations for extension services, are discussed in this article.

Underestimated as de facto Heads of Households

The household structure of the Sahelian countries is male dominated. Culturally and numerically, men head rural households. Few women are formally identified as household heads because the wives of migrants remain under the authority of the head of the extended family and widows marry their husband's brother. Women are estimated to head less than 5% of rural households in Burkina Faso, The_Gambia and Mali, 10% in Senegal but over 20% in Mauritania. However, more detailed studies show that male-headed households may not have an adult man present: they are de facto female-headed. For example, although 85% of 365 households studied in the Senegal River Valley were described as being "male-headed", 47% of all households were without an adult male head who was present. In addition to the 15% of households that were described as female-headed, there were 8% with male heads under 8 years, 4% with male heads 8 to 14 years, and 26% which had male "heads" who were absent.

Implications and recommendations:

- *Ministry of Agriculture officials generally do not consider female-headed households as important, are unaware of the significant percentages of de facto female-headed households, and so ignore them.*
- *De facto female heads are deprived of resources and revenues that are earmarked for heads of households.*

Therefore:

- *Targeting of extension and other services should depend on the relative importance of the various social groups in agricultural production and on their current access to extension, resources and benefits. De facto female-headed households in particular should not be neglected.*

Increasing work load without extra resources or compensation

Long working days are the norm for women in the Sahel. Women work up to a total of 16 hours per day in the growing season of which about half is spent on agricultural work. Time -allocation

studies from Burkina Faso and Mali show women working 1 to 3 hours a day more than men. In rural areas, the lack of basic services -- reliable water supplies, health centers, stores, woodlots, transport, mills -- adds considerably to the time women must also spend on household chores. Shortage of time constrains women's attendance at activities to benefit them, the time and attention they can pay to productive activities, and visits to health facilities. Women's obligations to work on husband's and family plots and to care for children limit their capacity to prioritize their time.

- Due to *environmental degradation*, women must spend more time collecting wood and water, and producing food crops to supplement production from family fields. For example, the average round trip to collect wood in Hodh el Chargui, in Mauritania, is 15km once every 10 days by cart or 3 times a week by headload.
- *Sedentarization* changes gender roles and tasks in pastoral societies. Traditionally, men are responsible for herding and for major decisions related to herding practices, whereas women were responsible for collecting fodder, caring for small ruminants and sick animals, and for processing and marketing milk and milk products, hides, skins and wool. However, as pastoral societies become sedentarized, women become responsible for crop production (while the men tend to remain herders) and the demand increases for wood for building and cooking. Moreover, increased isolation from the herd and the move from milk products controlled by women to meat products controlled by men diminishes women's authority.
- *Male migration* can be substantial. Surveys in Burkina Faso and Senegal found that up to 40% and 75%, respectively, of the men from the villages surveyed had migrated off the farm. Remittances have hastened integration of the semi-subsistence and cash economies, but women are in many ways worse off. The women left in the village are unable to use their husbands' draft animals which are normally left under the control of another man, and do not have land rights. They, therefore, spend dramatically more time farming family and compound land to the detriment of their own agricultural and other activities. They do not control the outputs from this communal land, and most decisions are made by the male head of the extended family under whose authority they remain.
- *Intensification of farming*. The extra labor demands of cotton (as shown in the OED impact evaluation of cotton projects in Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire and Togo) and irrigated rice (as shown in studies in the Senegal Valley), for example, fall disproportionately on women.

Implications and recommendations:

- *Governments and donors need to think through the gender- differentiated implications of proposed projects: the gender division of the current and proposed tasks; the effects of any increase in labor requirements on the various sections of the household; the control of outputs and access to incentives.*
- *Women have less time than men to attend meetings. Moreover, because set days each week are dedicated to specific activities, most women are only able to attend extension meetings or other activities on a certain day that can only be changed by agreement of village elders.*

Therefore:

- *Extension activities must be:*

a. geared to the weekday, the time and the place specified as suitable by the women; and

b. must be of sufficient interest and value to encourage women to continue attending.

- *A priority for extension services should be facilitating women's access to labor-saving technologies.*

The Diversity of Women's Activities

Women's activities can be contrasted with men's activities and with the activities of other women. Although a degree of gender-specificity is the norm, in some areas men and women grow similar crops and do similar tasks. Gender differences are greatest in The Gambia where women grow 95% of swamp rice but only 6% of coarse grains. When only women are considered, their rural activities are found to be extremely diverse among and within ethnic groups, and even within villages and agro-ecological farming systems. In addition to helping with the farming activities of their husbands, households and family, women farm and carry out other productive activities as individuals and in groups. Most have personal plots and livestock. Individual women and women's groups in a single village may differ markedly in the crops they grow, the livestock they keep, in the tasks they perform on family fields, and in the income-generating activities they carry out. This diversity reflects differences in resources, skills, knowledge and opportunities, as well as the wishes of the community (including the men) or of the group.

Women manage smaller areas of land than do the family or their husbands. However, their labor input to the household economy equals that of men and their diversification activities add value to agricultural production and generate income. The importance of women's activities for the social and economic well-being of rural households justifies the use of publicly funded agricultural services to help women with activities and complementary services that are outside pure agricultural extension.

Recommendations:

Since the extension needs of men and women differ, women need direct extension on :

a. the crops and livestock they grow or have responsibility for; b. the specific activities that they carry out or want to learn; and

c. the skilled tasks they perform.

- *Extension and agricultural support services must identify, work with, and learn from their female clients.*
- *Extension activities and messages must match the varied activities of rural women.*
- *Women need a wider range of information than do men.*

- *Agricultural extension services cannot supply the wide range of information and training that women require and therefore collaboration with other agencies is essential.*

Many of Women's Diversification Activities are Risky and Financially Marginal

There are several reasons why women's activities tend to be risky.

- *The demand for the products of their activities is weak on the local markets due to*
 - poor marketing infrastructure and information, and
 - rural poverty.

Vegetable marketing is a particular problem throughout the region because of the dry season glut of a narrow range of types. Oversupply on the local rural market is exacerbated by a lack of transport to market in urban areas or technical knowledge to conserve the produce for later sale or consumption.

- *Women's low levels of functional literacy, numeracy and related management skills limit both their ability to manage their economic activities and their status in the household and community.*
- *Smallholders, in general, have difficulty in obtaining credit for the purchase of tools, equipment, raw materials and inputs. But women have more difficulty than men in obtaining credit for reasons of collateral, the linking of credit to cash commodities, and social / educational constraints.*
- *Low labor productivity arises from, among other things, difficulties in obtaining the water and fuel necessary for many activities, and from the lack of appropriate and affordable tools, equipment and technologies to save labor and conserve produce for later sale or consumption.*

Implications and recommendations:

Rural women urgently need training in functional literacy and business skills.

a. Gender-disaggregated targets for participation in the functional literacy components of the Sahelian Agricultural Service Projects should be set and monitored.

b. The Femmes et Formation en Gestion Appliqué (FEFGA) pilot program, which was designed by the Economic Development Institute (EDI) to train semi- and illiterate women in Senegal and Burkina Faso, should be expanded.

- *Vegetable production by women has been so encouraged that supply in rural areas exceeds demand in most countries. Donors and governments should only advocate enterprises or technologies that market and economic research indicate are profitable.*
- *Market promotion of the products of rural women's activities should be supported.*
- *The collection (or development), testing and dissemination of tools and equipment to increase labor productivity, and of technologies particularly on agro-processing and storage, are a priority need.*

Given the obviously critical role that women play in agricultural production, identifying the issues and addressing them in practical ways will be crucial for overall development in countries that are predominantly agricultural.

Rural Women in the Sahel and Their Access to Agricultural Extension : Overview of Five Country Studies. 1994. Report No. 13532 AFR. AF5AE. Washington, D.C.: World Bank. This summary analysis was prepared by Daphne Spurling with comments from Elizabeth Morris-Hughes, WID Advisor, AFTHR. The original five-country study was conducted by Daphne Spurling under the task managership of Katrine Saito, Senior Economist, AF5AE. For more information on the study and the individual country studies, 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.
