



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

# THE GENDER AND RURAL ADVISORY SERVICES ASSESSMENT TOOL (GRAST)



INDIA

Rural women participating in the  
GRAST implementation

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Women are a key asset in agricultural and rural development, and contribute to food security in their families and in society. However, despite their important role in agriculture, women farmers face many gender-specific barriers that limit their agricultural productivity.

While women's roles in agriculture vary by region, many of the constraints they face are similar worldwide. These include less access to productive resources, services, and institutions (including rural advisory services) than men, unequal divisions of household labour, and discrimination by legal and customary institutions. These constraints, and the resulting gender gap, keep women farmers from reaching their potential.

Increased access to productive resources, technologies, and knowledge is essential for improving women's economic opportunities. If women had the same access to these resources as men, their agricultural yields would increase substantially (FAO, 2011). This could improve household incomes, food security and nutrition, and stimulate local and national economic growth.

## The role of rural advisory services in closing the gender gap

Rural advisory services (RAS) can help close the gender gap in agriculture by making information, new technologies, skills, and knowledge more relevant and accessible to women farmers. Gaining new skills and confidence is key for improving women's decision-making power within both the household and the community, which can affect overall family well-being in terms of nutrition, education and health.

Women face specific challenges in accessing and benefitting from RAS: often, there is a lack of recognition that women farmers are legitimate RAS clients, and therefore services are not tailored to address their needs and priorities. Women's time and mobility constraints mean that they may not be able to attend RAS activities that are far away

from home or held at times when they have other family responsibilities.

Despite progress in adult women's literacy, women still have lower average literacy rates than men, and this in turn limits their active participation in trainings that use written material. Language barriers can also prevent women from accessing and benefitting from RAS because in many countries, women in rural areas are less likely than men to speak the national language, which is the language in which most RAS activities are delivered. Participation in rural organizations is crucial for accessing information as well as rural advisory and other rural services; however, women are often under-represented in these organizations

and therefore may be excluded from the services they provide. In addition to structural barriers, RAS providers (be they public, private or not-for-profit) too often lack the knowledge, capacities, resources and enabling environment needed to target women effectively.

Because women and men often grow different crops, have different production priorities, and face different production and marketing constraints, rural advisory services must be tailored to women's needs in order to be useful for them. This requires change in the enabling environment, the policies and organizational culture of rural advisory services institutions, and the technical capacities, knowledge and attitudes of RAS agents.

## The Gender and Rural Advisory Services Assessment Tool (GRAST)

FAO developed the Gender and Rural Advisory Services Assessment Tool (GRAST) with the objective of improving the gender responsiveness of rural advisory services.

The tool takes into consideration the interactions between the enabling policy environment; the policies, institutional mechanisms and organizational culture of the service providers; staff members' capacities and attitudes; and the experience of users of the services.

The main objective of the GRAST is to help identify areas of rural advisory services provision that are working well and

those that need improvement from a gender perspective. This allows providers to identify concrete actions to make rural advisory services more responsive to the needs of women and men farmers, as well as good practices that they should consider for scaling up.

FAO uses the information generated by the GRAST to inform its technical support and policy advice and to develop capacity development programmes and guidance materials to support the design and delivery of gender-sensitive rural advisory services.



PERU - Voices from the field

"Applying the GRAST can be considered an intervention itself as it brings gender issues to the table and creates an opportunity to prompt gender mainstreaming in rural advisory services at all levels." (Research team)

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RWANDA

Rusororo village, Members of the Indashyikirwa group have a formal meeting.  
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## How the GRAST works

The GRAST helps assess the gender sensitivity of rural advisory services through seven key questions (Box 1), examined at three levels of analysis: the enabling environment, the organizational level and the individual level.

The **enabling environment** refers to the national level policy, legal, social and economic conditions that allow or limit the capacities of rural advisory service institutions to provide gender-sensitive services. An enabling environment creates the necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for gender-sensitive rural advisory services.

At this level, the GRAST assesses the extent to which the national agriculture and extension policies and legal frameworks support gender equality and women's empowerment. A good example is the inclusion of gender equality and women's empowerment objectives in agriculture policy.

The **organizational level** refers to procedures and institutional frameworks that enable an organization to deliver gender-sensitive services. It also includes the organizational culture with regards to promoting gender equality. The presence of gender-sensitive processes, practices and policies can help shape the organizational culture and influence employees' perceptions of gender roles.

At this level, the analysis focuses on organizational policies, staff training materials, monitoring and evaluation documents, and human resources documents. Good practices for gender-sensitive organizational culture include the presence of a clear and well-articulated organizational commitment to gender equality that is understood by all staff members and measures to promote the recruitment and retention of female advisers.

The **individual level** refers to RAS managers' and field advisers' technical capacities, attitudes and knowledge related to gender. It is important for staff members to

understand the needs and priorities of rural women, be able to carry out gender analysis, gender-sensitive needs assessment, and to design and deliver gender-sensitive activities. At this level, the GRAST aims to: 1) understand the challenges that advisers face in providing services to rural women; 2) identify innovative practices that staff members have found to be effective in reaching or working with rural women; and 3) assess the extent to which managers are implementing gender-sensitive human resource policies and promoting a gender-sensitive organizational culture.

In addition, at the individual level, the GRAST assesses the experience of RAS clients (women and men farmers) with the provision of rural advisory services to reveal how policies and programmes are implemented in practice, the impact they have on women farmers' livelihoods, and which approaches have been most effective at reaching rural women. Interviews with clients also help validate the information collected from the provider organization and staff.

### BOX 1 - Seven questions addressed by the GRAST:

- Are rural women included as legitimate clients in rural advisory services programmes?
- How are the time and mobility constraints of rural women addressed?
- How are the literacy and education constraints of rural women addressed?
- Does the programme facilitate rural women's ability to represent their interests and voice their demands?
- Are rural advisory services programmes designed and delivered in a way that allows rural women to effectively participate and benefit?
- Does the organizational culture enable women to become and effectively function as RAS agents and managers?
- Are there institutional mechanisms in place to ensure the effective implementation of gender-sensitive RAS and hold staff accountable?

# The GRAST in practice

In 2016, FAO implemented the GRAST in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India and Peru through a series of case studies on gender-sensitive agricultural advisory services programmes. The case studies showed how the GRAST works in practice, and identified innovative good practices used by the providers. In Ethiopia, Peru, and India, FAO and its partners led the case studies to examine the selected programmes, while in Bangladesh, four RAS organizations used the GRAST for programme self-assessment.

The GRAST helped to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the selected RAS programmes, which resulted in useful discussions on courses of action to scale up good practices as well as ways to address areas that needed improvement.

**Box 2** highlights examples of good practices identified by the case studies. With regards to weaknesses, the case studies identified lack of dedicated budget for gender-specific project activities and failure to document and share good practices as some of the major areas for improvement common to several programmes.

## BOX 2 - Examples of good practices documented during GRAST implementation:

### Enabling environment:

- National agricultural extension policy includes rural women among the targeted population;
- Agricultural policy that considers objectives of the national gender equality plan and includes gender indicators at outcome and output level.

### Organizational level:

- Organizational commitment to empowering rural women and reducing gender inequalities clearly stated in policies and strategies;
- Organization provides extensive and regular staff training to develop staff capacity in gender-sensitive service delivery;
- Organization supports cooperatives in changing their charters so that all adults in the household can register rather than just the household head.

### Individual level:

- Strong sensitivity on the part of managers and field staff to gender issues, and the personal commitment and knowledge required to address them;
- Communication with women farmers in the local language;
- Employment of female farmer-to-farmer advisers to reach female clients who are not comfortable working with male advisers.
- Promotion of small-scale rural businesses that enhance women's mobility and economic autonomy.



VIET NAM

A women measuring and counting rice grains  
©FAO/Hoang Dinh Nam

The case studies were conducted in partnership with Mekelle University, the Centre for Research on Innovation and Science Policy (CRISP), the Latin American Center for Rural Development (RIMISP), the Institute for Peruvian Studies (IEP), and the USAID funded programme on Integrating Gender and Nutrition within Agricultural Extension Services (INGENAES).

Results show that the GRAST can be successfully applied in diverse contexts, regions and programmes (governmental, international non-governmental and national non-governmental organizations). The GRAST can work both for external programme evaluations and for internal organizational self-assessments by service providers. This information can foster self-reflection processes at the organizational level, which may ultimately lead to changes in organizational culture and contribute to improved rural advisory services.

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In its work to end hunger, malnutrition and poverty, FAO has identified five key priorities, each channelled through a Strategic Programme. This initiative is being implemented in the context of:



The FAO Strategic Programme to  
REDUCE RURAL POVERTY

[www.fao.org/about/what-we-do/so3](http://www.fao.org/about/what-we-do/so3)