

Part I

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

CLOSING THE GENDER GAP FOR DEVELOPMENT



Part I





1. The gender gap in agriculture

Agriculture is underperforming in many developing countries for a number of reasons. Among these is the fact that women lack the resources and opportunities they need to make the most productive use of their time. Women are farmers, workers and entrepreneurs, but almost everywhere they face more severe constraints than men in accessing productive resources, markets and services. This “gender gap” hinders their productivity and reduces their contributions to the agriculture sector and to the achievement of broader economic and social development goals. Closing the gender gap in agriculture would produce significant gains for society by increasing agricultural productivity, reducing poverty and hunger and promoting economic growth.

Governments, donors and development practitioners now recognize that agriculture is central to economic growth and food security – particularly in countries where a significant share of the population depends on the sector – but their commitment to gender equality in agriculture is less robust. Gender issues are now mentioned in most national and regional agricultural and food-security policy plans, but they are usually relegated to separate chapters on women rather than treated as an integral part of policy and programming. Many agricultural policy and project documents still fail to consider basic questions about the differences in the resources available to men and women, their roles and the constraints they face – and how these differences might be relevant to the proposed intervention.

As a result, it is often assumed that interventions in areas such as technology, infrastructure and market access have the same impacts on men and women, when in fact they may not.

At the same time, building a gender perspective into agricultural policies and projects has been made to seem more difficult and complex than it need be. Clarification of what is meant by gender is a good place to start (Box 1).

The last sentence in Box 1 also gives room for hope: gender roles *can* change. It is the goal of this report that it will contribute to improving understanding so that appropriate policies can help foster gender equality, even as agriculture itself is changing. The agriculture sector is becoming more technologically sophisticated, commercially oriented and globally integrated; at the same time, migration patterns and climate variability are changing the rural landscape across the developing world. These forces pose challenges and present opportunities for all agricultural producers, but women face additional legal and social barriers that limit their ability to adapt to and benefit from change. Governments and donors have made major commitments aimed at revitalizing agriculture in developing regions, but their efforts in agriculture will yield better results more quickly if they maximize the productive potential of women by promoting gender equality.

Women, like men, can be considered “productive resources”, but they are also citizens who have an equal claim with men

BOX 1 Sex versus gender

The concepts of “sex” and “gender” can be confusing, not least because even the experts sometimes use them inconsistently. Sex refers to the innate biological categories of male or female. Gender refers to the social roles and identities associated with what it means to be a man or a woman. Gender roles are shaped by ideological, religious, ethnic, economic and cultural factors and are a key determinant of the distribution of responsibilities and resources between

men and women (Moser, 1989). Being socially determined, however, this distribution can be changed through conscious social action, including public policy. Every society is marked by gender differences, but these vary widely by culture and can change dramatically over time. Sex is biology. Gender is sociology. Sex is fixed. Gender roles change.

Source: Quisumbing, 1996.

on the protections, opportunities and services provided by their governments and the international community. Gender equality is a Millennium Development Goal (MDG) in its own right, and it is directly related to the achievement of the MDG targets on reducing extreme poverty and hunger. Clear synergies exist between the gender-equality and hunger-reduction goals. Agricultural policy-makers and development practitioners have an obligation to ensure that women are able to participate fully in, and benefit from, the process of agricultural development. At the same time, promoting gender equality in agriculture can help reduce extreme poverty and hunger. Equality for women would be good for agricultural development, and agricultural development should also be good for women.

The roles and status of women in agriculture and rural areas vary widely by region, age, ethnicity and social class and are changing rapidly in some parts of the world. Policy-makers, donors and development practitioners need information and analysis that reflect the diversity of the contributions women make and the specific challenges they are confronted with in order to make gender-aware decisions about the sector.

Despite the diversity in the roles and status of women in agriculture, the evidence and analysis presented in this report confirm that women face a surprisingly consistent gender gap in access to productive assets, inputs and services. A large body of

empirical evidence from many different countries shows that female farmers are just as efficient as their male counterparts, but they have less land and use fewer inputs, so they produce less. The potential gains that could be achieved by closing the gender gap in input use are estimated in this report in terms of agricultural yields, agricultural production, food security and broader aspects of economic and social welfare.

Because many of the constraints faced by women are socially determined, they can change. What is more, external pressures often serve as a catalyst for women to take on new roles and responsibilities that can improve their productivity and raise their status within households and communities. For example, the growth of modern supply chains for high-value agricultural products is creating significant opportunities – and challenges – for women in on-farm and off-farm employment. Other forces for social and economic change can also translate into opportunities for women.

Gender-aware policy support and well-designed development projects can help close the gender gap. Given existing inequities, it is not enough that policies be gender-neutral; overcoming the constraints faced by women requires much more. Reforms aimed at eliminating discrimination and promoting equal access to productive resources can help ensure that women – and men – are equally prepared to cope with the challenges and to take advantage of the opportunities arising from the changes

shaping the rural economy. Closing the gender gap in agriculture will benefit women, the agriculture and rural sectors, and society as a whole. The gains will vary widely according to local circumstances, but they are likely to be greater where women are more involved in agriculture and face the most severe constraints.

While it seems obvious that closing the gender gap would be beneficial, evidence to substantiate this potential has been lacking. This edition of *The State of Food and Agriculture* has several goals: to bring the best available empirical evidence to bear on the contributions women make and the constraints they face in agricultural and rural enterprises in different regions of the world; to demonstrate how the gender gap limits agricultural productivity, economic development and human well-being; to evaluate critically interventions aimed at reducing the gender gap and to recommend practical steps that national governments and the international community can take to promote agricultural development by empowering women.

Structure of the report and key messages

Chapter 2 provides a survey of the roles and status of women in agriculture and rural areas in different parts of the world. It brings the best, most comprehensive available evidence to bear on a number of controversial questions that are both conceptually and empirically challenging. It focuses on women's contributions as farmers and agricultural workers and examines their status in terms of poverty, hunger and nutrition, and rural demographics. It also looks at the ways in which the transformation of agriculture and the emergence of high-value marketing chains are creating challenges and opportunities for women.

Chapter 3 documents the constraints facing women in agriculture across a range of assets: land, livestock, farm labour, education, extension services, financial services and technology.

Chapter 4 surveys the economic evidence on the productivity of male and female

farmers and estimates the gains that could be achieved by closing the gender gap in agricultural input use. Potential gains in agricultural yields, agricultural production, food security and broader aspects of economic and social welfare are assessed.

Chapter 5 advances specific policies and programmes that can help close the gender gap in agriculture and rural employment. The focus is on interventions that alleviate constraints on agricultural productivity and rural development.

Chapter 6 provides broader recommendations for closing the gender gap for development.

Key messages of the report

- Women make essential contributions to agriculture in developing countries, but their roles differ significantly by region and are changing rapidly in some areas. Women comprise, on average, 43 percent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, ranging from 20 percent in Latin America to 50 percent in Eastern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Their contribution to agricultural work varies even more widely depending on the specific crop and activity.
- Women in agriculture and rural areas have one thing in common across regions: they have less access than men to productive resources and opportunities. The gender gap is found for many assets, inputs and services – land, livestock, labour, education, extension and financial services, and technology – and it imposes costs on the agriculture sector, the broader economy and society as well as on women themselves.
- Closing the gender gap in agriculture would generate significant gains for the agriculture sector and for society. If women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20–30 percent. This could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4 percent, which could in turn reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12–17 percent.

The potential gains would vary by region depending on how many women are currently engaged in agriculture, how much production or land they control, and how wide a gender gap they face.

- Policy interventions can help close the gender gap in agriculture and rural labour markets. Priority areas for reform include:
 - eliminating discrimination against women in access to agricultural

resources, education, extension and financial services, and labour markets;

- investing in labour-saving and productivity-enhancing technologies and infrastructure to free women's time for more productive activities; and
- facilitating the participation of women in flexible, efficient and fair rural labour markets.