

6th GFRAS Annual Meeting
Global Good Practices in Rural Advisory Services
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Gender in RAS Practice: Challenges and Ways forward

Summary of the Parallel Workshop¹

To start the workshop, three presentations were given. The first one was intended to guide through the work shop but already the first image, depicting equality vs. equity, stimulated a very lively discussion and we did not actually go through the majority of pursuant slides. The two presentations from Tajikistan were much appreciated and showed some practical challenges and how to overcome them.

There was generally a good understanding of gender, what it means, why we need to integrate it into RAS practice, and lots of practical examples of doing so were given. But the frustrating realisation remains that although we know why, and lots of the how, most RAS service providers are not good at doing it. Service and project design need to be based on thorough analysis; we need to go beyond asking who (in terms of gender) does what when and where – and yet many organisations are not even doing that.

Early on, we identified the continued need for work at the highest, policy level. There still is much need for gender sensitization among policy makers/legislators. Hajnalka spoke about the three projects she is involved in Tajikistan, Turkey and Guatemala. The key steps are:

- Facilitate policy formulation for gender-equitable RAS provision
- Capacity development of RAS staff in gender-equitable RAS design and provision.
- Facilitate organizational change to create a conducive environment.

→ We need a GGP on the political process of promoting gender equity

The design and implementation of RAS needs to be based on a thorough analysis of gendered practices and needs. Engaging couples, household- and community- based approaches. Create “spaces” for open and honest dialogue.

- Ernst shared compelling examples from extensionists helping couples communicate better with each other (working with several couples in a group), essentially helping wife and husband stand in the shoes of the other, and on the basis of improved communication being able to reinvigorate or start their farming business.

¹ Compiled by Andrea Bohn and Nargiza Ludgate

- Develop seasonal calendars with men writing them from what they think the women are doing and the women what the men are doing and then comparing notes, which usually leads to surprises on both sides and lively dialogues.
- "Cultural" extension training in communities where men dominate in training opportunities. Couples were brought together to discuss why women's participation was low and then finding ways to increase it. They did an analysis of what different tasks men and women have. Encouraged couples to negotiate how men could take up some of women's responsibilities so that women would be able to also participate in training.
- Stimulate discussion on gender issues within homogenous groups (e.g., all male youth, all female youth), and have them nominate a speaker who then brings those perspectives to a heterogeneous dialogue.

Where we are seeing change in gender roles and moving toward more equity: more so in urban than in rural areas; in the realm of education (policies supporting girls and young women; interest in the part of girls to do well in school and at university); and when men are finding employment away from home.

We do need to engage more female extension workers. In many countries enrolment of women in colleges of agriculture is up.

It is really important to engage men, bring them on board, and find roles for men even in women-oriented programs. Under certain circumstances it may be necessary to focus on women exclusively. And to organise activities close to women farmer's homes (If men want to join and learn as well, allow this if group agrees). Get support from community leaders when trying to reach women specifically. A magic expression: Build trust, build trust, and build trust!

Extension must go beyond providing technical, production information. Strong demand from women in entrepreneurial (business, financial literacy), leadership, and vocational training also outside of agriculture. There is also a strong interest in income earning opportunities and home economics.

Support social capital formation for and among women.

Extension can do much to empower women, to help them identify and speak up about their needs but a system must be in place to create enabling environment to meet those needs.