



Integrating Gender and Nutrition within Agricultural Extension Services

Tip Sheets on Gender-responsive EAS

Working with Farmer Groups to Provide Extension & Advisory Services

Purpose

To help extension workers understand how to best work within Farmer Groups to provide extension and advisory services also to women.



A farmer speaks up at a cooperative meeting in Liberia.

Good Practice Examples

A number of strategies have been used to make producer associations and CBO's more equitable in their membership.

- In **India**, Joint Forest Management Groups set rules that permit both spouses to register as members or allow all village adults to become members of these groups.
- In **Kenya**, the Eastern Produce Kenya tea company conducts trainings and field days specifically for women to disseminate information to them.
- In **Tanzania**, the Karagwe District Cooperative Union sets quotas for women's participation in capacity building workshops.

Why is this important?

With limited resources and time, extension and advisory service (EAS) providers need to be prepared to make choices on how to benefit a maximum number of farmers. Often, EAS are channeled through group or community meetings, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and Farmer Based Organizations (FBOs). They engage farmers directly, but research shows that such groups are not always equitable and can exclude women and resource-poor farmers due to reasons such as restricted membership criteria for admission into such groups, age, education, and civil-status. Even when women are able to participate in such trainings, existing gender norms may prevent them from voicing their opinions and needs in the presence of men.

Action Steps

1. Do preparatory work before meeting with farmer groups

Facilitate women's participation in your community-based or group meeting by:

- Making sure that criteria for participation do not restrict women or resource poor farmers from receiving EAS. For example, if it is not necessary to own land, do not make land ownership a criterion.
- Setting quotas for women's participation in trainings.

2. Understand social norms in the places you work and work within them.

If social norms in the communities you work limit public interaction between men and women or hinder women's ability to freely speak in the presence of men, mixed farmer groups may not be the best vehicle for women to voice their needs. Instead consider:

- Organizing single-sex group meetings;
- Working within existing socially sanctioned women's groups such as self-help groups, church groups, rotating savings and credit associations. These groups can serve as vehicles for capturing and delivering information.



Farmers cluster around compost to discuss benefits of quality soil

If social norms prevent a woman from interacting with a man from outside the community, consider:

- Working through community leaders to introduce men extension agents to the community and gain acceptance;
- Working with women extension agents who can interact more freely with women farmers.

Note, sometimes, other social variables like as caste, class and tribe may play a role in determining participation in farmer groups, even within same-sex groups. It is important therefore to understand how gender and other social variables play a role in accessing EAS and plan accordingly.

For additional guidance to ensure more women participate in your meetings, refer to the INGENAES tip sheet on “Accounting for Differences in Men’s and Women’s Time and Mobility Constraints.”

Mixed-sex groups or single-sex groups?

Research shows that women’s participation in mixed-sex groups is associated with better decision making and improved resource management. Women in mixed-sex groups are able to overcome their own resource limitations by tapping into men’s networks, resources and information. However, such groups can also limit women’s voice and leadership. Single-sex groups can work well where social norms severely constrain women’s ability to participate effectively in the presence of men. These groups provide opportunities for women to build confidence and leadership skills. However, there is also the risk that single-sex groups reinforce stereotypes about women (i.e., “women are interested only in crops for household consumption”) or reinforce inequalities in access to resources between men and women. Understanding the local context is important to choosing an approach is best-suited for delivering EAS.

References and Resources

Manfre, C., Rubin, D., Allen, A., Summerfield, G., Colverson, K., & Akeredolu, M. (2013). [Reducing the gender gap in agricultural extension and advisory services: How to find the best fit for men and women farmers.](#) MEAS Discussion Paper 2. www.meas-extension.org/meas-offers/best-practice

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