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## Mainstreaming gender in agricultural research key to development

Oct 23,2016



Workshop on "Gender mainstreaming for inclusive research and developmental outcomes", held in Cairo on October 9, 2016

"When I invoke 'a farmer', what is the first image that comes to your mind?" asked Bezalet Dessalegn, gender expert, and monitoring and evaluation specialist at ICARDA to an assembly of Jordanian and Egyptian agricultural researchers and development experts.

"He is a man, a poor man working on his field," one person said. "He owns his land," said another. "He is responsible about production" added a third expert.

"This is exactly my point," stressed Dessalegn. "The last thing that comes to mind when picturing a farmer, is that she can be a woman," she said.

The day-long workshop on "Gender mainstreaming for inclusive research and developmental outcomes: Concepts, approaches and lessons learned" was held on October 9 in Cairo, Egypt. Jointly organized by ICARDA, [FAO](http://www.fao.org/) and [CGIAR Research Program on Water Land and Ecosystems](#) (WLE), it aimed at sensitizing agricultural researchers and developmental experts on the importance of being gender-inclusive in their work, which is a key driver for wide and sustainable adoption of proven technologies.

Gender-inclusiveness should be integrated in all research topics, be it crops, water, soil analysis, food security, irrigation, harvesting, or livestock. "Women make up for 47% of all farmers worldwide," she said, but that is often forgotten by researchers themselves, who mostly think about the way a new machinery, technology or cultivar will be handled and manipulated by a man. "If we don't include gender in our research, our approach is discriminatory from the onset," Dessalegn explains, stressing that the goal of research is livelihood improvement, which cannot be achieved outside of who the target beneficiary of the study will be, and that includes women, children and the elderly as well as men.

### **Illustrating the Gender Gap**

Dr. Malika Martini, Regional Gender Officer in Agriculture and Rural Development at FAO, indicated that both men and women are heavily involved in agriculture-related activities within the Near East region, but that specific roles are assigned to men and women. This gender-based task allocation follows societal rules and norms and can vary by country.

'Gender analysis' investigates the roles men and women play in intra- and inter-household dynamics within a given farming system, and should be applied to decisions about agricultural research and development activities. Such information is crucial to understand in working towards closing the "gender gap" – the effect that gender-based constraints have on limiting women's access to agricultural inputs and improved technologies and thereby, constraining their overall productivity and potentially, household food security.

### **Access vs. Control, Equality vs. Equity**

In Egypt, the prerequisite to becoming a member of an agricultural cooperative is to own one's land. While the law does not discriminate between men and women's membership in cooperatives, the reality is that not many women own land and even if they do, their active participation is not socially acceptable. This gender-based constraint in turn affects their ability to access agricultural inputs that are often cheaper and of a better quality as compared to what's available in the market.

"In many countries, women who don't own land cannot readily have access to credit partly because land serves as a collateral and partly, related to social norms established by the society," explained Martini to illustrate the gap between access and control, and gender-based discrimination.

Researchers and development practitioners were encouraged to make conscious efforts to promote gender equity in their work through ensuring that both men and women have equal opportunities – which often requires additional effort to bring women to the same level as men.

### **How to Integrate Gender into Research for Development**

Basing research on sex-disaggregated data is one way researchers can ensure that gender is factored into their study. At each step of the research, men and women should act as informants, collaborators, and evaluators about current practices and experimental technologies.

Being gender-inclusive in agricultural research is one of the key ingredients to a successful research and a precondition for out-scaling. In Jordan for example, where research largely focuses on finding solutions to the country's extreme water scarcity, an ICARDA-led pilot

study on the use of small-scale greywater treatment units has highlighted the specific role played by men women in water management, at the household and farm levels. Similarly, gender-sensitive research on the management, use, and perception of treated wastewater in Egypt identifies differences between men and women, enriching the quality and breadth of information that can be used to develop different scenarios for safe and efficient use of treated wastewater for agriculture.

In Egypt, the **[mechanized raised bed technology](http://www.fao.org/neareast/news/view/es/c/410067/)** improved by ICARDA and national research institutes to reduce water usage and fertilizers' input is being used in the governorate of Sharqeya, where it is particularly suited to the area's small land plots. Delivered by the extension services to the cooperatives, the machine carves an optimal bed width into the soil, and by doing so reduces labour, water and fertilizer use.

"How easily can women access mechanized raised bed machines from cooperatives, even when they head the household?" asked Shinan Kassam, social scientist at ICARDA.

Dr. Gehan Elmenoufi, a researcher at **[Egypt's Agricultural Research Center](http://www.arc.sci.eg/Default.aspx?TabId=0&lang=en)** who looked into gender sensitivity and responsiveness to the machines, met one female farmer in Sharqeya governorate driving a tractor. "It was not seen as socially acceptable," she recalled.

During a focus group discussion Kassam had with women, he asked them what they saw as the biggest advantage of the machine. Two said: "We don't have to deal with the youth anymore." By youth, they were referring to the seasonal workers typically in charge of the initial sowing and land preparation, who are perceived as unreliable.

Another positive outcome of this technology for women is that they no longer have to cook for the laborers and can reallocate this time to other activities, added Elmenoufi.

### **Gender as a Tool for Out-Scaling**

According to Dessalegn, gender-inclusive research is certainly one of the factors that influence adoption of agricultural technologies, but is not in and of itself a sufficient condition. Gender should also be considered throughout the technology dissemination process, to ensure that both men and women have access to the technology and the means to adopt and use it effectively.

"In order to foster real change, researchers need to identify from the very beginning the various actors that will need to come along to bring about effective adoption, and involve them at different levels. These could include agricultural extensions, local NGOs and Community Based Organizations, other research institutions, and the private sector" said Dessalegn, citing the example of the crucial role played by the private sector in Lebanon in disseminating ICARDA's Integrated Pest Management technologies.

Embedding the gender dimension throughout the study is a key criterion to enable large-scale adoption of a technology, needed to effectively impact development from the research.

"Providing support to both men and women in agriculture has a multiplier effect on the rest of the household," stressed Martini. "The more we understand the gender dynamics within the

household and outside of it, the better our interventions will be,” she concluded.

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