

Gender in Agricultural Biodiversity Conservation



Development responses will be more equal, efficient and sustainable when gender is mainstreamed in agricultural biodiversity conservation strategies.

Benefits of Gender Mainstreaming Equality. Many United Nations (UN) systemwide mandates, and commitments of UN Member States exist to achieve gender equality and removing gender based discrimination. This has been recognized as a necessary means to reach the Millennium Development Goals of

Gender refers to the social roles and relations between women and men which are socially constructed, and can change and vary over time and according to geographic location and social context.

Gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action. It is integrating women's and men's concerns and experiences in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and social spheres so that both will participate and benefit equally.



reducing to half the number of poor and hungry by the year 2015. Chapter 15 of Agenda 21 and the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) recognize that different user groups within rural societies have differential constraints and opportunities in the conservation and use of plant genetic resources.

Efficiency. Societies that discriminate on the basis of gender pay a significant price - in terms of increased poverty, slower economic growth, weaker governance and lower quality of life. For example, a World Bank review found that 74% of 54 completed agricultural projects with gender-related action were rated satisfactory for overall outcome, compared with 65% for the 81 projects that did not include gender-related action.

Sustainability. It has been noted that women are intimately linked to the environment because of concern for their communities and for future generations, and some argue that women stand at the core of the sustainability paradigm. In order to design sustainable development policies and projects it is crucial that the different roles and responsibilities of women and men are understood for sustainable implementation of activities.

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Some key areas where gender makes a difference in the conservation of agricultural biodiversity are discussed below.

In the Kurichiyas community in Kerala, India, men make decisions about growing certain paddy varieties due to religious concepts (of purity and pollution) that prevent women from participating in the selection and storage of paddy seeds. Men are normally responsible for monocropping systems and women for more diversified systems such as home gardens. Such diverse systems are referred to as community "living genebanks" that are used for *in situ* conservation of a wide range of plant genetic resources.



Role in Seed Selection

The gender factor in seed selection varies. In some areas, men are fully responsible for crop selection, while in other areas, this task is entirely assumed by women. In other cases, shared responsibility exists.



Access to Resources

Because of their shared responsibilities, women are often responsible for subsistence (low value) crops and men for cash (high value) crops. If a “woman’s crop” is added value to, it may become a “man’s crop”.

When French beans became more lucrative in Kenya, men usurped either the land allocated for or the income derived from production. When the Acacia timber value increased in parts of West Africa, men started to plant Acacia trees in women's or shared gardens and cropland.

Knowledge Systems and Access to Networks

Women and men participate differently in formal and informal community-based organizations, and use different networks for exchange of seeds for agricultural biodiversity. In Nepal, for example, traditional varieties are brought into an area by the bride upon marriage. Women exchange mainly with women and men exchange mainly with men.

As a result of formal schooling and migration, indigenous knowledge among men declined in Kenya while women retained a high and widely shared level of knowledge and even acquired men's knowledge as roles and duties changed. However, the knowledge of the older generations often is no longer passed on to the younger generations.

Method

The descriptors -or preferred traits- of local agricultural biodiversity of women and men farmers provide a productive, innovative and systematic understanding and monitoring of gender factors in agricultural biodiversity



conservation. Descriptors are dynamic and may change depending on the terms of trade, cultural transformations, or overall variations in opportunities and constraints as perceived by the farmer. The quantitative and qualitative details will provide more knowledge of the men and women and the division of their labor. In addition, the descriptors will reveal the women's and men's perceived utility of the variety and its distribution.

Even if men may have the decision-making authority in most farming systems, the fact is that women may have more intimate and detailed knowledge about crops and varieties which indicate superior experience. Agro-morphological and socio-economic characteristics can be scored together with farmers. Qualitatively, the analysis can be broadened to include the descriptions used or dropped over time when describing a given variety. The level of knowledge about the characteristics of a variety is not only correlated to the experience in handling it (knowledge and division of responsibilities), but the type of descriptors chosen will also identify the perceived benefits.

Women have been found to consider many interrelated and detailed criteria including taste, color, size, texture, cooking time, crop yield, ease of processing and access, grain formation and the resistance to pests and insects. In contrast, a male farmer often looks for a more limited range of purposes related to his sphere of responsibility, such as high yield and a good market price.



Socio-Economic and Gender-Sensitive [SEGS] indicators

SEGS data required:

- The type and number of descriptors used for a given natural resource by women as compared to the baseline.
- The type and number of descriptors used for a given natural resource by men as compared to the baseline.

SEGS indicators:

- The ratio between the number of descriptors used by women for a given natural resource, as compared to the number of descriptors used by men for a given natural resource, as compared to the baseline.



Just as landraces have evolved over time and been selected on the basis of the preferred traits in the farmers' fields, *in situ* conservation will only succeed if women and men farmers are involved in conservation activities. Their involvement will be possible only if they benefit from the process. However, it is not easy to involve all stakeholders especially as women may have constraints which restrict their participation. One way to deal with this is to design strategies to overcome these constraints. Preparatory-conferences prior to a community workshop, provision of child-care facilities at training sessions, or the holding of trainings close to women's homes are efforts worth considering to encourage participation of all stakeholders.

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