

Gender Equity in Extension Services: Making Training Inclusive

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Gender equity in extension services is critical to ensuring that both women and men farmers share the same benefits from agricultural innovation and training. Women, although they make important contributions to agriculture, face challenges like lack of access to resources, little or no representation in decision-making, cultural limitations, and training programs that are not designed for their needs. Extension strategies that are inclusive in nature gender-sensitive training plans, hiring female extension agents, participatory program development, and utilizing ICT tools can address these issues. There is evidence from a number of case studies that gender-responsive extension results in higher farm productivity, household food security, and women's empowerment, which contribute directly to sustainable development objectives. Policy support, institutional mechanisms, and monitoring systems need to be strengthened for gender equity to be embedded in extension services. Including training makes it not just more equitable but also more effective and sustainable for overall agricultural development.

Introduction

Extension services for agriculture are crucial in disseminating scientific information and innovations to agricultural communities. However, in most areas, such services do not adequately meet the needs of women farmers, who make up almost half of the farmers. Sustained gender gaps in resource access, decision-making, and training limit women's ability to contribute meaningfully to agricultural development and food security. Attaining gender equality in extension services involves providing equal opportunities for men and women while recognizing their unique roles, challenges, and needs. Developing inclusive and gender-sensitive training equips women, improves their decision-making power, and enhances household livelihoods. These methods end up enhancing productivity, enhancing food security, and increasing resilience, making agriculture more equitable and sustainable.

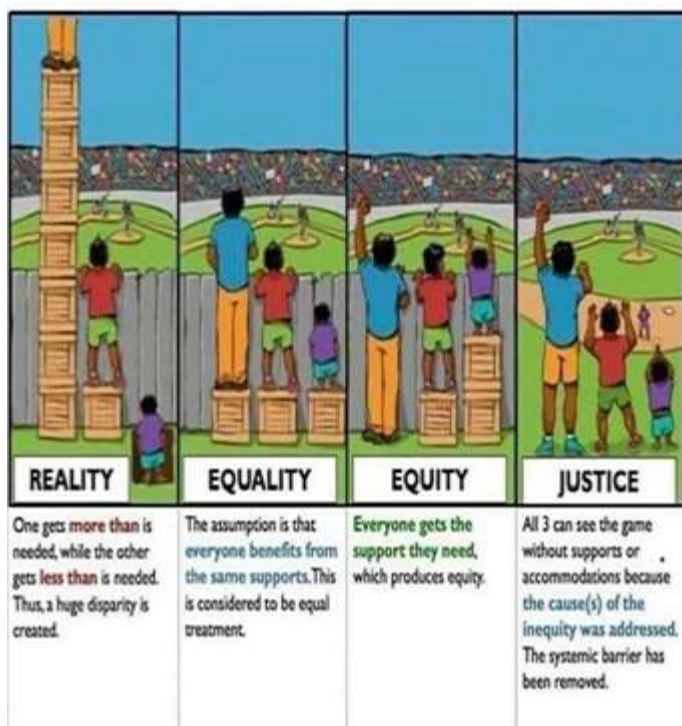
2. Gender Roles in Agriculture

Women are integral to agriculture, engaging in varying roles throughout crop production, livestock management, post-harvest processing, and home

food management. From seed choice and planting to weeding, harvesting, storage, and preparing foods, women are involved. Besides, women are at the forefront in rearing livestock, milk production, poultry farming, and kitchen gardens that feed families. Most of women's work in agriculture is invisible, unpaid, and undervalued both within and outside households.

Extension services tend to neglect women and regard men as main farmers and decision-takers. This restricted recognition hinders women from achieving access to vital knowledge, training, and innovations that can increase their productivity and earnings. For instance, in South Asian and African settings, men tend to control cash crop planning and market access, while women are largely responsible for food crops and home gardens. However, without focused extension support, women's capacity for yield improvement, adopting new technologies, or enhancing food security is heavily impeded. Identifying and responding to these gender roles is essential to constructing inclusive and effective extension services.





Source: dcduvalvet

3. Barriers to Gender Equity in Extension Services

While women contribute significantly to agriculture, they are confronted with several obstacles that constrain their access to extension services. Among the strongest of these is cultural and social norms. Women's mobility in many rural communities is highly controlled, and farmer groups or cooperatives are dominated by men, thus denying women a voice in decision-making.

The other challenge is the non-representation in extension systems. The percentage of female extension workers remains very low, and most women farmers are not at ease to interact with male trainers based on cultural sensitivities. The gap lowers women's exposure to crucial agricultural knowledge and innovations.

Time and work constraints are also hindrances. Women bear the double burden of domestic chores, child care, and farm work, with no time to spare for trainings or demonstrations. In addition, restricted access to resources such as land ownership, credit,

inputs, and technology often under men's control, also diminishes their ability to embrace new practices.

Lastly, training design problems also limit participation. Programs are usually arranged at inopportune hours, distant from villages, or presented in modes inappropriate for women learners. Until these obstacles are resolved, women will continue to be excluded from agricultural extension services.



Source: humanrightscareers

4. Approaches to Making Training Inclusive

Achieving gender equity in extension services calls for embracing approaches making training more accessible, inclusive, and relevant to female farmers.

Gender-sensitive training programmes are the initial step. Training timetables need to be tailored to accommodate women's daily duties, usually best scheduled in the afternoons or near their villages. Local venues, including centres and schools, minimize travel obstacles, while the availability of childcare facilities during sessions ensures women attend without abandoning family responsibilities.

Boosting the hiring of women extension workers is also crucial. Women trainers have the capacity to bridge cultural divides, facilitate participation, and act as models. Educating female employees in topics like nutrition, food processing, and small livestock management guarantees that women farmers get a response that caters to their needs.



Participatory methods strengthen inclusiveness through proactive engagement of women in need identification, program planning, and outcome evaluation. Farmer Field Schools (FFS) and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) can be used as platforms to facilitate balanced participation, sharing of information, and peer learning.

The application of ICT and online platforms widens women's reach for extension services. Advisory services via mobile phones, WhatsApp forums, and community radio stations can provide information to women in real time. Voice messages, visual messages, and local languages make the information more accessible, particularly to women with poor literacy.

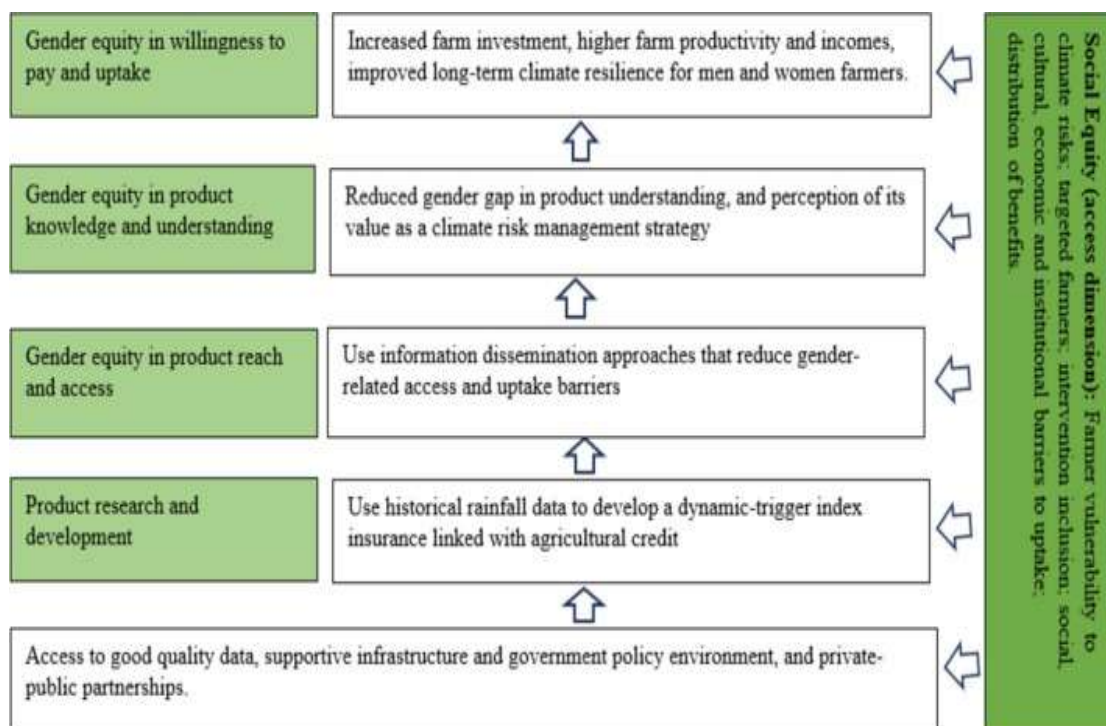
Leadership training and capacity building enable women to transition from participation to leadership. Training women in market access, financial literacy, record-keeping, and technical skills enhances their confidence and decision-making abilities. Role models for others are created through promoting women leaders in farmer groups and cooperatives.

5. Case Studies and Best Practices

A number of successful experiences globally demonstrate how gender-inclusive extension approaches can empower women and enhance agriculture outcomes.

In India, the Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana (MKSP) has been an effective model of women-focused extension. The scheme emphasizes training

rural women farmers, forming them into groups, and connecting them to markets and credit organizations. Through facilitating women's collective action, MKSP has increased their access to resources, enhanced farm productivity, and improved their bargaining power in local markets.



Source: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science>

In Kenya, implementation of Farmer Field Schools (FFS) with a conscious attempt at involving equal proportions of men and women has been found to be life-changing. These schools not only imparted technical skills but also facilitated group meetings where women were able to actively contribute to decision-making. This caused the confidence of women in crop management practices to increase, and they became more involved in family agricultural decisions.

In Bangladesh, the deployment of female extension agents has had a considerable impact on women's involvement in training programs on livestock and poultry. Female farmers were more at ease talking to women trainers, which enhanced the adoption of new technologies leading to improved livestock health and household incomes.



6. Advantages of Gender-Inclusive Extension

Encouraging gender equity among extension services has several advantages above and beyond individual farmers and has direct benefits for households, communities, and national development efforts.

Perhaps the most obvious result is increased productivity. When women farmers have equal access to training, new technologies, and inputs, they are more capable of adopting better practices, resulting in more yields and effective use of resources. It has been shown by studies that reducing the gender gap in agriculture can greatly improve farm output overall.

Household food security is a second significant advantage. Women have a tendency to emphasize food crops, home gardens, and nutritional content. With improved knowledge and resources, families gain more varied diets, better availability of food, and healthier children and families.

Gender-inclusive extension also results in social empowerment. Involvement of women in training and decision-making increases their confidence, enhances leadership positions, and enhances their power to influence household and community-level crop choices. This empowerment results in increased equity in rural society.

Finally, inclusive extension has a direct role in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger). By promoting equal women's participation in agriculture, extension services are supporting wider objectives of poverty alleviation, nutrition security, and sustainable development.

7. Implementation Challenges

Even with progress, a number of challenges constrain effective implementation of gender-equitable extension services. Rooted gender stereotypes in rural societies tend to limit women's mobility, voice, and access to training programs. Inadequate funding

for gender-specific initiatives further compromises efforts toward designing and maintaining inclusive programs. Finally, there is a lack of adequate monitoring and evaluation of women's engagement in extension activities, which makes it challenging to measure actual impact. Another key gap is the absence of gender-disaggregated data, which hinders evidence-based planning and targeted interventions. Unless these obstacles are tackled, gender equality in extension remains more of a policy idea than an attainable reality.

8. Recommendations

In order to make agricultural extension services more gender-equitable, there needs to be a set of concrete recommendations implemented. First, gender analysis needs to be mainstreamed in all extension projects. This will enable determination of the particular needs, challenges, and opportunities for women farmers, ensuring programs are devised with the purpose of effectively addressing them.

- Second, the availability of women-friendly technologies like lightweight farm tools, seed kits, and small-scale processing equipment can facilitate women's work reduction and increase productivity. Equally crucial is making these technologies available and affordable.
- Third, introducing quota systems can ensure women's participation in training sessions, farmer groups, and decision-making forums. These interventions will stimulate equal participation and foster inclusivity.
- Fourth, having solid partnerships with NGOs, self-help groups (SHGs), and women's cooperatives can improve outreach, offer additional support systems, and facilitate scaling up successful practices. These partners tend to have stronger community connections and trust among women farmers.



- Finally, gender awareness and sensitivity training for extension staff is essential. This will make the extension workers aware of gender dynamics, steer clear of biases, and implement practices that proactively benefit women farmers. All these measures in combination will enhance inclusivity and enhance the efficacy of extension services.

9. Conclusion

Gender equality in extension services is not merely a question of justice but a key to sustainable rural development. Inclusive training, taking into consideration and addressing the needs of women, guarantees that all segments of society benefit from agricultural innovation. By addressing extension services as gender-responsive, we can boost productivity, enhance household well-being, and speed up progress towards global food and nutrition security.

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