



Cultivating

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Strategies for Gender-Responsive Agriculture Programming

TaGAF
Tanzania Gender
and Agriculture Forum



Two Women Farmers of Mbeya¹



Robinah with her 'husband's coffee', that she has helped to grow, harvest and process.

Robinah's experience is typical of many women in Mbeya, Tanzania: She commits a substantial amount of time and labor toward her household's coffee production, but her effort goes unrecognized—even by Robinah, herself—and she does not benefit financially from the contribution she makes. Robinah is very aware that time spent on coffee is time taken away from farming other crops, such as maize, that yield both food and income she can control.

Coffee is a cash crop—an economic lifeline for families around Mbeya—and, as such, is considered to be a “man's crop.” The male head

of household commonly controls coffee production and the income earned through coffee sales. Under these circumstances, Robinah's skeptical reaction to a new coffee agronomy program is understandable: *Coffee is my husband's crop. I only do the weeding and harvesting, so why should I learn about improving coffee production? That won't benefit me.*

For **Amina**, another woman farmer in the Mbeya area, rice cultivation generates both income and food. As a widow, she manages all aspects of agricultural production within her household, from deciding which crops to grow to determining how income from crop sales is used. Amina notes that in other households, men largely control rice production, although women may have small plots to cultivate rice for sale. She welcomes the opportunity for women in her community to learn more about soil fertility: *Once I finish harvesting my rice, the fields will lie fallow until next year, as the soil quality is poor. I would like to know about how I can plant beans to improve the quality of my soil and also gain some food for my household. This would be helpful for other women too.*



“While a wife can ask her husband for rice as food, she cannot ask for money. Having her own plot is very important, so that she can sell the rice and make a little money.”

¹ Participant names have been changed to protect their privacy.



Robinah and Amina are just two examples of women who are heavily engaged in agriculture and would benefit from opportunities that address their specific needs and aspirations. But in millions of households around the world, agriculture is not simply an economic activity, but rather a social enterprise that is influenced by familial roles, inter-personal relationships and gender norms. These complex dynamics often drive if and how individual household members—especially women—contribute to and benefit from agricultural-related activity, including their participation in programs designed to enhance smallholder productivity. For such programs, the challenge lies in going beyond technical agricultural issues to address the underlying gender-related norms, priorities and constraints that may prevent women farmers from reaching their full potential.

Two programs, TechnoServe's Coffee Initiative and Faida Mali's Soil Health Project, are working with farmers in Mbeya with a specific focus on reaching women like Robinah and Amina. ***How have they identified gender issues that limit women's participation? How do program staff and activities then respond to gender-related constraints? What deliberate steps are they taking to ensure that women can engage with—and ultimately, benefit from—their projects?*** This technical brief highlights some of the promising approaches—and a few ideas still to be rolled out—that Faida Mali and TechnoServe are using to address gender in their programs.

Project Summaries

Both Faida Mali and TechnoServe are working in the Mbeya region of Tanzania, an area that is important for producing several staples, including maize and rice, as well as cash crops like coffee and cocoa. Most households are engaged in agriculture, both for home consumption and for sale at local/regional markets. Both organizations focus on transferring critical farming information and skills. Recognizing the vital contribution that women farmers make, both have made it a priority to ensure that women participate in and benefit from these projects.

Integrated Soil Fertility Management Project

FAIDA MALI

Soil quality is a critical concern for smallholder farmers in the southern highlands of Tanzania. Faida Mali's new ISFM (integrated soil fertility management) project seeks to increase farmer knowledge and application of better ISFM practices, thereby improving the overall agricultural productivity, income and food security of farming households.

Funded through AGRA's Soil Health Program (which is partly funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) and in partnership with the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Cooperatives (MAFC) and Farm Radio International, Faida Mali's ISFM project is promoting improved soil health through intercropping with legumes. Reaching women with ISFM information and skill-building is a priority, especially given that most legumes are generally categorized as a "woman's crop." Faida Mali has, therefore, focused on using existing information channels with the potential to reach large numbers of women—community radio and agriculture extension workers—and has applied approaches that facilitate women's understanding and application of better ISFM practices.

For more on Faida Mali, see: <http://www.faidamarketlink.or.tz/>

Coffee Initiative

TECHNOSERVE

Given the vital importance of coffee to households in the southern highlands of Tanzania, TechnoServe has been implementing its Coffee Initiative with funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. One major component of this project provides community-based agronomy training that leads coffee farmers through an 11-module training program on coffee production.

TechnoServe has taken steps to incorporate a gender-sensitive perspective in this project primarily by making a deliberate effort to ensure that women can access and participate in the agronomy training, apply new knowledge and skills to coffee production, and, ultimately, benefit from the improved coffee quality and yields produced by the household. Given that coffee is generally perceived to be a "man's crop," TechnoServe has adjusted its agronomy model to address some of the gender-related norms and attitudes that typically constrain women from participating in coffee production.

For more on TechnoServe, see <http://www.TechnoServe.org/>



While both projects focus on community-based approaches to build farmer knowledge and capacity around good agricultural practices, each applies a different model to reach this goal. Faida Mali works through existing structures or channels, such as agriculture extension networks and community radio, while TechnoServe creates a community-based system to deliver and monitor coffee agronomy. Each program model offers different opportunities and challenges, and together, they provide a range of promising approaches to engage women farmers in Mbeya.

Promising Approaches

Both projects are striving to increase women's access to and application of key agricultural knowledge and skills, thereby improving overall crop production, with the intention that this, in turn, will lead to greater income or food supply for the household. The following section details some of the promising practices that Faida Mali and TechnoServe are using (or have identified) to strengthen the gender-responsiveness of their work.

Set a Gender Goal. Projects should establish clear, measurable gender goals or objectives that are integrated across teams and activities. Gender goals may include aims or targets for women's and men's participation in the project, application of knowledge or uptake of new practices, and/or benefits from the project.

A critical first step in gender integration is to identify and articulate specific gender objectives, ideally based on information and/or experience drawn from the communities and agriculture issues that the project intends to address. Agriculture projects can have a range of beneficiaries, such as smallholder farmers or cooperatives. However, terms like "household" or "farm" or "farmers' groups" mask gender-related factors that can influence how successful a project may be in achieving its overall goal. For example, a project may aim to help farmers improve their rice yields and connect to new markets; without fully understanding gendered roles and power dynamics with rice farming, the project may not be targeting the right people (see box below). Developing gender objectives that respond to or even seek to change such factors is an essential component of gender integration.

LOOKING INSIDE THE HOUSEHOLD

The term "household" encompasses a complex network of people—children, co-wives, extended family, etc.—who each contribute to agriculture production and influence what others members can or cannot do. While most could benefit from being part of a project, the challenge is to look beyond the standard "male head of household" or "his wife" to identify the best individuals to engage so that all, ultimately, can benefit. The following questions may help determine the most appropriate roles for each household member (or combination of persons) in a given project:

- Who is the main decision maker regarding overall agricultural production?
- Who is the main decision maker regarding production of this specific crop?
- Who contributes most of the labor and effort involved in cultivating this crop?
- Who controls the marketing, sales and income derived from this crop?
- Who is best positioned to share information within the household?
- Who influences the roles that different household members play (or could play) regarding this crop?



Both TechnoServe and Faida Mali have made an effort to understand the roles and contributions of women regarding target crops (coffee and legumes) and have set goals for women's participation accordingly. Much of TechnoServe's gender-responsiveness flows from having set a straightforward gender objective to achieve 30 percent women's participation in the agronomy program, not only in terms of farmers trained, but also regarding the staff who deliver the program. This benchmark is based on previous experience in Tanzania, and staff and partners are oriented on their individual and collective responsibilities toward achieving this goal.

While Faida Mali is still in the early phases of its project, the priority placed on reaching women—especially given the direct relevance of ISFM via legumes for women farmers—is similarly understood and articulated by its partners on the ground. A good example is the radio component, which builds off Farm Radio International's formative research to develop gender-responsive objectives regarding women's access to and application of ISFM information. As the project rolls out, there is an opportunity for creating measurable gender benchmarks around participation, listenership, and ISFM practices, as well as tracking supporting activities needed to encourage women's participation in the project.

To ensure that gender objectives are met, project teams need to have the right information, skills and tools to implement activities. Gender capacity goes beyond having an understanding of basic concepts and terms. For most projects, field staff need to be able to diagnose gender-related issues and, often, facilitate a process of changing specific gender norms that may limit women's participation in training or other project-related activity.

Both TechnoServe and Faida Mali have explored different ways to build gender capacity, combining different teaching/communications methodologies to build staff skills in how best to work with men and women farmers. Some of the staff capacity building elements put forward by the two projects in Mbeya include:

- a. **Stimulate discussions on the specific gender issues evident in project communities and how these may affect women's participation.** This includes sharing success stories and lessons learned, as well as brainstorming on alternative solutions.
- b. **Practice techniques designed to draw out women's participation (see next point).**
- c. **Role play discussions that may emerge with individual farmers and couples to negotiate women's participation.**
- d. **Take advantage of more "seasoned" field staff to share experiences and techniques.** For example, extension workers in Faida Mali's ISFM project proposed pairing more experienced extension workers who understand the gender dynamics in their communities well with newer staff just starting their community rotations, balancing men and women whenever possible.



Communicate Gender-Related Intentions from Day 1. Projects should integrate supportive messaging around gender goals/objectives from the very outset of the project, across all teams, communities and activities.

Given that beneficiaries typically self-select or choose to participate in a project, there is value in informing prospective participants about gender-related expectations - for example, intentions that women farmers should be invited to join, or that men and women will be trained together. Being up-front about gender expectations allows farmers a chance to opt out if they find such an approach unappealing and also may encourage hesitant women to participate. As TechnoServe notes, “Mindsets are established fairly quickly,” so it is important to mainstream gender goals early and sensitize community members accordingly.²

Both TechnoServe and Faida Mali have an extensive community entry process, from early conversations with villages to gauge interest and gather input, to surveys and interviews that determine baselines. Much of this occurs before the project even begins. Being deliberate and consistent about gender intentions with local stakeholders, communities and potential beneficiaries before and throughout project implementation is important at two levels: not only does this help to ensure that staff and partners internalize the gender goal and share the responsibility for consistent “gender sensitization,” but it also begins to build a common understanding with communities and farmers. By the time the first training or radio listening session is conducted, gender messaging should be well underway.

Faida Mali and TechnoServe identified a few start-up activities they felt were effective in conveying their intentions to the project community with respect to gender inclusion:

- 1. Identify Local Gender Champions:** Share gender goals with community leaders and members during early conversations about the project. Not only will this help establish gender-related expectations, but it will also identify some of the local norms or contextual factors that may create barriers to women’s participation or their ability to realize project benefits. Some individuals may also emerge as “gender champions” who can help secure local buy-in for gender goals, persuade hesitant women and men to join, and tackle problems that may arise as the project unfolds.
- 2. Use Diverse Social Networks and Groups:** While most communities have existing channels to communicate information, important messages might be left out or distorted along the way and some individuals may still not be reached. Think creatively about how best to share information about the project and convey gender goals directly and consistently with as many community members as possible. Religious or school-related groups, “merry-go-rounds” (or savings groups) and burial associations may be good ways to reach women.
- 3. Go Farm to Farm:** While group meetings are helpful in sharing basic messages, it may take more personalized interactions to ensure that men and women are comfortable with gender goals and agree to support women’s engagement—not just as a theoretical concept, but specifically regarding the women in their own families and households. Home visits conducted by project staff and gender champions present opportunities to talk with husbands, wives, and other members of the household(s), form a better understanding of the individuals and dynamics involved, respond to questions and concerns, and encourage participation as appropriate. It may take more than one visit, especially if attendance drops or problems emerge.

² TechnoServe 2012. “Increasing the Participation of Women Farmers” (draft internal document). Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.



4. Include Women in Baseline Activity: It is vital that baseline data from relevant men and women are collected to measure progress against planned gender goals, objectives and indicators. In addition, by including women as part of the baseline process, a project tangibly demonstrates its gender intentions. Both TechnoServe and Faida Mali noted that the repeated focus on including women's perspectives and input throughout their community entry and baseline efforts helped to set the tone for the project ahead.

Be a Role Model for Women's Participation and Equality. Gender messaging is not simply conveyed through verbal and written communications, but also in how the project and its staff engage with the communities and each other.

It is important that a project reflect its gender-related activities and messages. For example, talking about increased women's participation may seem confusing if all project staff engaging with the community are men. This is not to say that equal gender representation is always the answer, but thinking through how a project "models" the gender outcomes it wants to achieve is an important step to consider. Field experience from Faida Mali and TechnoServe suggests a few ways that projects can be positive gender examples for their communities.



Zakia, an MAFC extension worker in the Mbeya region for the past 30 years, knows the communities well. Here, she's introducing the ISFM project to a community farm group.

1. Have Men and Women Co-Lead Initial Community Conversations: First encounters can make lasting impressions. By having men and women work together to lead community discussions from the outset, the project is already modeling important gender ideals, such as equal participation and mutual respect. TechnoServe ensures that one male and one female staff conduct community introductions together, pairing staff from different communities as needed to demonstrate that women have an important and equal role to play in coffee production. Teams need not always be

composed of project staff alone; Faida Mali's project manager (a man) works closely with women extension workers during the community entry process, which reinforces the importance of collaboration and collegiality between men and women.

2. Set Goals for Women's Representation in Key Positions: Organizations should pay deliberate attention to the gender balance with staff or field teams. While it may not be necessary at all levels or for all positions, there may be some staff roles that would benefit from having a better gender balance between men and women. For example, having women as farmer trainers (FTs) not only serves as a powerful example to women farmers, it also demonstrates that women can be "experts" at traditionally male-dominated tasks in coffee growing, such as applying pesticides or pruning. Given its goal to involve more women in coffee agronomy, TechnoServe set 30 percent as a benchmark for women's representation in key field positions, especially for FTs responsible for engaging directly with female and male farmers. Given previous experience which revealed some challenges in identifying and retaining women FTs, TechnoServe revised the FT position and recruitment process without compromising project objectives or effectiveness.



Some steps that TechnoServe has taken to identify and support women FTs include:

- a. Ensure that job notices are easily accessible by women.** TechnoServe posts job notices in locations frequented by women (e.g., churches or community centers, market areas, shops, etc.) and shares through channels that specifically reach women (e.g., women's groups, school associations, agricultural cooperatives, etc.).
- b. Adapt recruitment process to include a training period and more diverse approaches to assess candidates.** Some individuals benefit from having more time and a variety of assessment methodologies to master technical material and farmer training skills. This may be especially true for women with less formal education or who are constrained by gender norms that limit women's speaking or leadership capacity. TechnoServe has found that by modifying recruitment to include a two-step process (a total of eight days including classwork and practicums, with a one- to two-day break in-between), all candidates have more opportunity to gain confidence and demonstrate capacity.
- c. Take the time to assess home situations.** It may not always be easy for an interested female applicant to complete TechnoServe's recruitment process, especially as it involves being away from home to attend residential trainings. TechnoServe conducts home visits as needed to reassure parents or husbands about the project, the FT position and the interview process.
- d. Provide resident childcare support for children under two years of age.** Women candidates may have other responsibilities that limit their ability to fully engage in the application process. For example, some may be breastfeeding and, therefore, cannot be away from their child for more than a few hours at a time. TechnoServe has invested in providing on-site childcare during the recruitment trainings, which has enabled more women to participate more freely and successfully. This same idea may be important at the community level as well, if concerns over childcare prevent women farmers from regularly attending sessions or activities.
- e. Provide continuous supervision and support, especially for female field staff.** TechnoServe's team noted the importance of having constant contact with field teams to build relationships, give encouragement and problem solve. By ensuring this support, women staff may feel more comfortable reporting problems they face with farmers or community leaders, or personal issues (e.g., safety concerns, domestic conflicts) that may be interfering with their ability to do their job.



Community Role Models - Baraka FM's popular radio personalities, Mpoki and Charles, jointly lead its ISFM programming.

Faida Mali has similarly made an effort to role model key gender messages in the ISFM project. As the project is largely implemented through existing institutions/structures already on the ground, Faida Mali cannot always control the composition of project teams. The community radio component, led by Faida Mali's partner, Farm Radio International (FRI), is one major area where the project has the flexibility to deliberately role model women's engagement and positive gender relations. For example, partner radio stations identify one female and one male radio personality to lead the programming on ISFM. In addition to sharing information on ISFM practices, these radio personalities are trained by the project to respond to listener questions and facilitate live discussions with agricultural experts. They also conduct field interviews with farmers to gather feedback on both the program and on their progress in applying ISFM in their own fields. Special attention is paid to gender issues and to ensuring that women farmers are well-represented in all programming. By having a popular female radio personality play such a prominent role, the project reinforces the idea that ISFM is important and relevant for women in Mbeya.



Incorporate Women's (and Men's) Perspectives into Project Design.

For projects that want to reach women, it is important to ensure that women's ideas, opinions and preferences are incorporated into the design of the activities, materials and messages.

Gender-related issues can influence what programming approaches will work best for women in terms of where, when and how activities are structured, and there may be key differences between male and female perspectives that should be taken into consideration. For example, women often have specific home duties (e.g., caring for children, preparing food, etc.) that take priority at certain times of the day. Women and men may also have primary responsibility for different crops or different priorities regarding agricultural production for food versus for income. Having to travel long distances to attend meetings or safety concerns may limit when and how women can engage with a project. Gender issues may also affect how and from whom women prefer to receive information and learn skills. Limited formal education may mean that some women (and men) feel more comfortable learning in groups or through more applied or “hands-on” approaches. Men and women may or may not feel comfortable being in meetings or trainings together. Some women may prefer interacting with a female staff member and may be more willing to ask questions of or seek clarifications from her (see box below).

Both projects make a deliberate effort to collect formative information from both women and men, largely via focus group discussions with potential beneficiaries or farmers groups and interviews with community leaders. This information is then used to shape upcoming activities. For example, Farm Radio International collects information about women's radio preferences—which stations they listen to, what types of programming topics and styles they enjoy, what times they are able to listen to the radio, etc.—before selecting community radio partners and developing program content. FRI also involves community members, including representatives from all beneficiary groups, in developing the actual content of radio campaigns. Multi-day sessions bring radio teams, community leaders and farmers together to brainstorm on the information that needs to be conveyed and the different formats that can be used to strengthen comprehension and application of new knowledge. FRI makes a deliberate effort to ensure that the voices of women, men and young people are captured and incorporated throughout their participatory campaigns. (For more on FRI, see: <http://www.farmradio.org/>)

DOES GENDER MATTER FOR STAFFING?

A common issue for many projects is whether having male vs. female field staff - such as the person delivering the information/skills to farmers – is an important aspect of being gender-responsive. There is no one answer to this question, as dynamics between staff and beneficiaries can vary and be contradictory:

- Women may feel more open with a female trainer and be more willing to ask/answer questions and admit knowledge gaps.
- Men may prefer their wives to have a female trainer, as they then know their wives are not interacting with other men.
- Some men may not feel comfortable learning from a woman and may not trust the technical information she provides.

Projects should talk with beneficiaries to understand any preferences and concerns and then respond in a way that is as gender equitable as possible.



Use Communications and Training Approaches that Facilitate Women's Engagement. *Just as gender can influence whether women can even engage in agricultural projects, it can also affect if/how women are able to learn and apply the new skills and information they receive.*

Cultural and gender norms and educational experience can influence how comfortable participants feel with a project's training approach. Projects need to make sure that information and skills are transmitted in ways that facilitate women's ability to learn and apply agricultural practices.

- 1. Use Specific Techniques to Draw Out Women's Input:** Gender norms can influence whether men and women want to be in meetings/trainings together and especially how women may behave if men are present. While projects should respect local norms, field staff have several simple techniques they use to make sure that women are able to engage in activities as much as possible:
 - a. Call on women by name.** Cultural norms may inhibit some women from speaking openly in front of men, especially their husbands and other male relatives. While women may not be willing to volunteer information or respond to a question, they often can and will respond if directly called upon by name.
 - b. Select some activities for men and women to do together.** Even if men and women sit separately during training, some activities may be acceptable for men and women to do together, such as building a compost heap. There may also be opportunities to explore difficult subjects within a facilitated workshop setting, like role-playing how decisions are made about buying agricultural inputs.
 - c. Follow-up at home.** TechnoServe FTs conduct home visits to see how well farmers have absorbed trainings and are applying knowledge to their coffee trees. FTs vary their approaches, sometimes talking with a husband and wife together, other times speaking to individuals to gauge progress.

ALICE, TECHNOSERVE FARMER TRAINER



Going That Extra Mile

I think I have more women participants, because they've never seen a woman trainer before and they're eager to be part of my trainings.

Some of the techniques that Alice uses to engage women include:

- Conducting home visits prior to trainings to remind women to come, and encouraging husbands to support their wives;
- Following up with women who missed a training to make sure they are still on track to attend future trainings and/or help address any problems;
- Negotiating with husbands so that they allow wives to speak first during farm visits, giving them a chance to share information and ask questions;
- Observing/checking in with both women and men farmers on their ability to apply skills in all aspects of coffee growing, regardless of traditional gendered roles; and
- Leading additional trainings on her own time with women who are not in the Farmer Groups but want to know more about coffee production.



2. Combine Mass Communications with Personalized Learning: Faida Mali's radio component has the advantage of scale (reaching large numbers of farmers) while also supporting learning through more interpersonal training approaches. While men often have greater access to information, FRI has found that women in Mbeya listen to the radio at certain times of the day, often while taking care of other chores. But for many women (and men), hearing information over the radio may not be sufficient to fully absorb key messages, so FRI has developed additional activities that support learning.

a. Listening Groups: Women and men may benefit from having multiple ways of hearing and learning information. FRI forms or adapts groups whose members can listen to the program together and support one another in understanding and applying new skills. Groups also provide an important channel for feeding back farmer stories and questions to radio programmers. In addition, groups serve as a point of contact for extension workers who can provide additional input and directly address questions via demonstration plots or through farm visits.

b. Programming on Demand: Knowing that some women may not be able to listen when a program is live, FRI works with community members to identify respected and knowledgeable women who can be "radio agents." These women are then trained to record programs using a wind-up MP3 player, which can be replayed on demand for individuals and/or in groups at their convenience. This approach also allows women to hear programs as many times as needed to fully comprehend the information being conveyed.



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