

ASIA PROGRAM

**GENDER-MAINSTREAMING AND
AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA:
CAN IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?**

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JANUARY 2020



Women’s empowerment is a global trend. However, I have noticed that when dealing with women’s empowerment in development programs, and more precisely agricultural development, its definition remains either blurry or limited. For it being either the main goal of a project or an intermediate goal – meaning the first step to reaching a more general goal – women’s empowerment can imply various implementation tools, activities, quantitative indicators. No matter the shape or form it takes, gender inclusion in the agricultural development field is not only essential but also urgent. In the following pages, I will explore the necessity to include gender in the conception and implementation of agricultural development programs in Asian societies.

GENERAL CONTEXT

Agriculture in Asia

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 75% of the poor in East Asia and the Pacific and 83% of the poor in South Asia live in rural areas¹. Farmers have four times more chances to be poor than anyone else working in another sector. Considering the majority of the food in Asia is produced by small farmers, the food security of the region largely depends on their production. Reducing their vulnerability to economic fluctuations and climatic shocks is therefore essential to the survival and development of the region.

Though the FAO refers to family farming as the mostly spread type of food production system in Asia, the definition of it remains vague and unclear. In a 2013 report, the FAO defines it as ‘*a mode of agricultural, forestry, fisheries, livestock and aquaculture production which is managed and operated by a family and predominantly reliant on family labour, including both women and men. The family and the farm are linked, co-evolve and combine economic, environmental, social and cultural functions.*’²

Family farming is often reduced to a food production system, when it is also an institutional organization of society – with farmers’ cooperatives and groups to manage food production and irrigation systems on a local scale for example - and a cultural norm – family farming has strong values centered around living in harmony with nature, which introduced durable production systems very early on in China for instance.

¹ FAO, *Asia and the Pacific Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2018 – Accelerating progress towards the SDGs*, 2018.

² FAO. *Outcome Report of the Regional Dialogue on Family Farming: Sustainable Rural Development and Food Security*, 21–22 November 2013. Bangkok.

Food insecurity in Asia

According to the FAO, more than 486 million people were undernourished in Asia in the year 2017³. The state of food insecurity in Asia has stagnated since 2015, and though efforts to fight malnutrition have intensified, it cannot make up for the rapid population growth and increased poverty in the region. Today, half of the malnourished children in the world live in Asia: they suffer from both undernutrition and obesity, and these two diseases can affect the same child during the course of his or her life. This phenomenon is quite recent and is mostly witnessed in developing countries where rapid urbanization can both lead to difficult access to food, drinkable water and sanitation and access to cheap food, either very salted, sweet and/or fat. Extreme poverty is one of the major drivers for food insecurity in the region. It mainly affects rural families, working in the agricultural sector, and with low access to education.

Focus on women farmers

In East and South East Asia, women represent 40 to 50% of farmers, 30% in South Asia⁴. Men's migration out of the household, towards job opportunities in urban areas or even foreign countries, have become more and more common in rural areas since the 1980's. In 1993, Caroline Moser estimated the number of female-headed households to be one-third of the world's households, and this distribution is rising up to one half in developing countries⁵. According to Kelkar Govind (2007), *'the poorer the area, the higher women's contribution [...] as subsistence farmers'*⁶. This growing feminization of agriculture remains paired with remaining vulnerability factors for women farmers.

Indeed, women in Asia suffer from numerous gender inequalities related to their access to resources – natural, physical, financial, social and human. Only 10% of women in the region are landholders, and the surface of their land is in average twice smaller than lands owned by men⁷. Their lack of access can be related to traditional regulations – access to land for example - but also to their limited mobility – access to water can require a couple hours walk. Traditions and religion make up for lots of inequalities in terms of recognition and social capital for many women, often rejected from institutions because of their gender. Women's low access to land in Asia is paired with low decision-making and autonomy, as they sometimes need the authorization of their husband to open a bank account, spend the household income etc.

³ FAO, *Asia and the Pacific Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition 2018 – Accelerating progress towards the SDGs*, 2018.

⁴ FAO. *REGIONAL GENDER STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN 2017–2019 for Asia and the Pacific*. Bangkok. 2017.

⁵ MOSER, Caroline. *Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice and Training*. Ed. Routledge. New York. 1993.

⁶ GOVIND, Kelkar. *The feminization of agriculture in Asia: Implications for women's agency and productivity*. ASPAC Food & Fertilizer Technology Center, 2007.

⁷ FAO. *REGIONAL GENDER STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN 2017–2019 for Asia and the Pacific*. Bangkok. 2017.

GENDER IN QUESTION

What is gender and how can it be mainstreamed?

According to Naila Kabeer, '*gender relations, like all social relations, are multi-stranded: they embody ideas, values and identities; they allocate labour between different tasks, activities and domains; they determine the distribution of resources; and they assign authority, agency and decision-making power*'⁸. Gender differences are socially constructed relations between men and women. They differ from sex differences, which are biological and innate. Every society, at different times, attributes different roles to men and women. Therefore, the definition of these roles differs in time and space⁹. Gender inequalities can affect all spheres of society, which is why development programs need to take them into consideration.

In order to fully take into consideration gender inequality in the design and implementation of a development program, food security experts focus their analysis on the household. The household is where the nutritious health and general well-being of the family is at stake¹⁰. In the past, experts used an individual approach that was not representative enough of the actual food security challenges at stake in a given society. Today, most NGOs are using 'household methodologies' as women's empowerment can't be reached without actual change at the household level. The household is highly defined by the husband and the wife, who are the leaders of this unit. Beforehand, in order to design a project that will fit the household's needs, a Food Security expert will look into the gender distribution in five pillar stakeholders:

- The access and control over resources: quite often, women are the users of resources owned by the household, whether they are natural, financial, physical etc. However, it is usually the husband who has control over it. It is often a struggle in rural Asian areas for a woman to own land for example.
- Workloads: when you look at the task distribution in the household, the schedule of the wife is generally much more diversified, as she bears more responsibilities and her activities are more transversal. On the contrary, a husband's day is often mainly focused on the work of the land or a seasonal job, which allows him to develop and reinforce his enterprise if he owns one.
- Access and control over benefits: though the wife could be the one bringing the household income home, she is not always the one spending it, or vice-versa. A

⁸ KABEER, Naila. *Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Goals: Promoting women's capabilities and participation*. Institute of Development Studies, Sussex. December, 2003. P.193.

⁹ QUISUMBING, Maria Agnes R. et MCCLAFFERTY, Bonnie Folger. *Food security in practice: Using gender research in development*. Intl Food Policy Res Inst, 2006.

¹⁰ Interview with Victor KIAYA, Food Security and Livelihood Advisor, Pool ASIA, Action against Hunger, July 9th, 2019.

Food Security expert will always look at who brings the money in the household, and who actually spends it out of the household.

- **Decision-making:** a Food Security expert will focus on the level of leadership of each member of the household, as they make decision in their own unit but also separately in producers group or community meetings for instance.
- **Well-being:** this section will often be the work of a mental health and gender-based violence advisor who will focus on the health of the family, the presence or not of domestic violence in the household, but also the mobility of each member.

These five pillars are highlighted in the picture below¹¹:



The household pillar stakeholders

Source: IFAD

¹¹ HARTL, Maria. Poverty targeting, gender equality and empowerment. IFAD. June 2017.

Defining gender-mainstreaming

Progressively, gender-sensitive practices were included in every step of the way, all along the project cycle management. That is what most aid workers call ‘*gender mainstreaming*’. Including a gender approach to the design and implementation of development programs is essential for the acceptance and efficiency of a project. A development project has to take into consideration a large number of differences that characterizes a given society: the tasks performed by both men, women, boys and girls, and the moment of the day they perform these tasks, the existing community’s structures that one could work with – groups, associations etc. A previous query is therefore indispensable to effectively implement a gender-inclusive program.

IMPACTS OF CULTURE, RELIGION AND GEOGRAPHY

Religion, ethnicity and gender role distribution

According to the *purdah* law, women should only take part in livestock and home garden-based vegetable production. The *purdah* is a Muslim norm preaching the physical separation of men and women¹². This leads to encouraging women to take up domestic roles and remain in the household as men take up a productive role and sustain the families’ needs. This tends to shield women from economic activities, including agriculture. However, in most Asian Muslim countries, women progressively take on income-generating activities, despite the *purdah* law that restrains them to secluded areas.

Bangladesh is an agriculture-oriented society, as almost 65% of the population lives in rural areas according to the World Bank. In Bangladesh, gender role distribution is highly influenced by strict religious norms, that is the *purdah* law. Religious traditions in Bangladesh are not monolithic on their perspective on gender: in various times, spaces and contexts, religious arguments have been used to both justify male domination over women or contest it. For instance, Hindu leaders Rammohan Roy, founder of the Brama samaj, and his successor Keshad Chandra both fought for the abolition of a number of Hindu gender norms¹³: the *sati* – tradition according to which a widow should burn herself to death at her husband’s funeral pyre – the *purdah*, polygamy, child marriage and allow new practices such as women’s right to inheritance or widow’s right to remarry. However, women rarely had voices in these debates and these previous decisions were made without concerting them.

¹² ADAMS, Nathaniel. ‘Religion and Women’s empowerment in Bangladesh’. Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs. December 2015, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/5da6/79657cee0ba4391d45a0f1ff168f7176c3f5.pdf>

¹³ Ibid.

In most Asian Muslim countries, women progressively take on income-generating activities, despite the purdah law that restrains them to secluded areas. Various factors impulse this change: the work migration of men towards city centers, the necessity to diversify the household income in order to survive, the increasing challenges of farming jobs that require adaptation to climate change. All these factors encourage women to look for other sources of income, let's say the marketing of their farming products. In Asia, women are the ones that sell and exchange on markets for the most majority: the feminization of agriculture can be seen at various stages of production, from farming activities to marketing. However, women's access to land remains the same, leaving them dependent on the owner, often the husband.

Giving women the opportunity to work outside of their home means giving them the opportunity to own their own income. Access to income is a central asset for women. Indian women refer to money as *Garam Taka*, meaning weighty money: money has weight, because it has the power to give women more control and leadership.

For instance, in Baluchistan – one of the poorest provinces of Pakistan – women are considered as the backbone of their household: their contribution is essential to keep the family from destitution. As a result, women from poorer households tend to play a great role in livestock production¹⁴. According to Shafiq (2007) '*cultural constraints such as purdah are less evident in pastoral communities where women have relatively greater freedom and mobility*'¹⁵.

Two main populations live in Baluchistan: the Baloch and the Pashtun. While a majority of Pakistanis answer to the purdah, the Baloch practice Hanafi Sunni Islam, known as the most liberal Muslim movement. Baloch women have relatively greater freedom than Pashtun and, as mentioned above, do not necessarily practice the purdah. Pashtun minorities, on the contrary, tend to have more traditional practices, where Pashtun women's mobility and agency can be reduced due to religious beliefs. However, studies show that in predominantly Baloch areas, such as in Gwadar district, Pashtun women reach similar levels of independence as Baloch.

In this case, as two major ethnicities cohabit in the same environment, it seems habits and traditions tend to change and resemble each other over the time, out of a mimicking mechanism from the ethnic group in minority. Even though cultural traditions are a high factor for gender role distribution and women participation in some labour domains, these cultural traditions are nowadays highly challenged and prone to change. The knowledge and perception of what could be done differently plays an important role in a community's ability to change. It seems that economic assets, when paired with access to information – through community, internet, mobility etc. – can be decisive factors for a woman's empowerment.

¹⁴ SHAFIQ Muhammad, 'Analysis of the Role of Women in Livestock Production in Balochistan', JOURNAL OF AGRICULTURE & SOCIAL SCIENCES, December 14th 2007, Pakistan.

¹⁵ SHAFIQ Muhammad. Ibid.

Access to land can have multi-faceted impacts

As men and women, individuals do not have the same access to these resources according to the social and cultural environment they live in. These differences can be due to traditions¹⁶, institutional regulations, religion, ethnicity etc. But the end point is that in a given community access to resources will necessarily affect women's participation in development programs' activities. For instance, in most Asian countries, many women farmers, though the main users of forests and land, do not own property. If a household owns property, it is often in the husband's name, leaving single women and widows in high risks of poverty along with their children. This influences women's decision-making in the household, especially over expenditures and financial decisions. But it can also influence the will of a woman to take on initiatives, especially new and experimental ones.

In the context of the Sharia law, women and girls suffer from discriminations when it comes to land inheritance. It is indeed common saying that the son is the first heir of the family and inherits double what a daughter inherits. The rules are however more intricate than that. It is true that '*a share for a male equal to that of two females*' but only in the case of children inheriting from deceased parents. When for instance parents inherit from a deceased child, the shares are equally divided between male and female.

Bangladeshi women refer to property and assets as goods directly linked to their *samman*, their dignity and their prestige¹⁷. A woman owner is a woman who has a voice, in her household and in her community. According to a group discussion with the rural women in Bangladesh a *sammani mohila* – a woman with dignity – is defined as '*a woman who has land, education and knowledge; health is also important. We do not agree with the traditional idea of purdahnashin as being respected. Purdah is like a prison; one who stays at home and whose resources are under the control of husband or son, is like a prisoner. One who is working outside home, who has his/her own money and independent earnings, is educated and is free to go anywhere. She is the sammani mohila.*'¹⁸. In this case, land is clearly perceived as a key asset to a woman's economic independence and, by way, her social empowerment and her dignity.

In contrast, Laos is an agricultural society in which the majority of the population is Lao Thai, which is a matrilineal community where women tend to be land and house owners. Indeed, in the Lao Thai community, the last daughter is usually the one to inherit the house and land property of her parents¹⁹. Some limits to this empowering system are that ownership does not necessarily translate into decision-making inside the household

¹⁶ GOVIND, Kelkar. DEV, Nathan. ROWNOK, Jahan. *Redefining Women's 'Samman': Microcredit and Gender Relations in Rural Bangladesh*. Economic and Political Weekly. 2004.

¹⁷ GOVIND, Kelkar. *The feminization of agriculture in Asia: Implications for women's agency and productivity*. ASPAC Food & Fertilizer Technology Center, 2007.

¹⁸ GOVIND, Kelkar. DEV, Nathan. ROWNOK, Jahan. *Ibid*.

¹⁹ Schenl-Sandbergen, Loas. 'The Lao Matri-System, Empowerment and Globalisation'. *The Journal of Lao Studies*, Volume 3, Issue 1. November, 12th 2018.

anymore. Schenk-Sandbergen (2018) took the example of a woman who wanted to sell part of her land as she needed money, but could not do so as her husband refused. Though women should bear the decision-making responsibilities in the household, they are also the bearers of the household's harmony and therefore cannot be the source of marital disharmony. There is this common idea that women are superior in the matrisystem. In the case of Laos, this does not translate in the gender role distribution. Laotian men and women's roles are complementary: women are in charge of natural resources management and do all the household work; men are hunters and fishermen and their economic participation is significant in the household.

Geography in question: from isolation to degradation

A study by Saravanakumar and Varakumi (2019)²⁰ compared the level of empowerment between rural and urban women in the state of Tamil Nadu, India. They noticed a significant difference in the average level of education between rural and urban women as 27% of rural women and 14% of urban women are illiterate. 67% of rural women are homemakers compared to 43% in urban areas: the level of women employment in urban areas is significantly higher. Only 33% of women contribute to family income in rural areas against 47% in urban areas. In this context, 44% of urban women reported having a say in financial decision-making in their household vs. 29% in rural areas. The study also underlines that marital violence decreases when the woman is working, as the bargaining power of the entire household raises.

These numbers highlight a discrepancy in terms of empowerment between rural and urban women: urban women have more say in the decision-making of the household, because they are more likely to find a paid job. Indeed, the study shows that the more road access rural areas get, the higher the employment rate for rural women. One factor that seems determinant remains a woman's ability to bargain power through her economic role in the community and the household: the more productive the woman, the more power society is willing to give her. Rural women in Asia are distant from actual economic opportunities (jobs, markets) but also distant from cultural change, highly enhanced by the diffusion of information and the gathering of women in groups. All of these assets being found way more easily in urban areas. It is not just about the financial and physical opportunities of living in town: it is also about the social and cultural opportunity of being in an environment that is more prone to change.

Another aspect of geography that can act as a vulnerability multiplier on women is environmental degradation. According to Krishnamurphy (2015) *'Climate change can act*

²⁰ P. Saravanakumar, J. Elizabeth Varakumari, 'A comparative study on women empowerment in urban and rural setting in Tamil Nadu', International Journal of Community Medicine and Public Health, January 31st, 2019.

as a hunger risk multiplier'²¹. It will affect mostly the poor and the most food insecure. Women smallholders are even more vulnerable since their capabilities are restricted either by law or tradition and often keeps them from owning or using natural resources. Given their primary role in the household's nutrition and health, women farmers' vulnerability to climate change can be highly detrimental to the entire household, especially children, and the community they live in.

For instance, in Nagaland State, India, 33% of classified forests were degraded in 1996-97. The main forest users being women – they collect wild vegetables, non-timber forest products and wood for fuel to meet the needs of their households – the degradation of forest therefore mainly affects women. Their workload and drudgery increased, forcing them to spend more hours working, and to increase the distance made each day. As the role of women in the farming systems is even more present today, while they have to face legal, cultural and environmental challenges, the food security of their household is more vulnerable.

GENDER INCLUSION: DO'S AND DONT'S

Gender mainstreaming: creating enabling environments

Making a project accessible to women by adapting training times and childcare provisions cannot be enough: employing women to provide care and training to the women beneficiaries also shows it encourages sustainable changes. Many NGOs tend to employ much more men to these jobs because education level and experience in leadership requirements. According to Cheryl Doss (2012), *'by changing trainer selection processes and providing female trainers with the support systems needed to balance the job with childcare, organizations can cultivate successful and loyal trainers while sending a message to their target communities about the importance of female leadership.'*²²

Using the right tools is one thing, implementing a program correctly is another: an important aspect that came back from my interview with Victor KIAYA – Food Security and Livelihood expert at Action against Hunger France – (2019)²³ was the necessity to work with existing structures: farmers' groups, local associations and businesses, governments, community structures. Farmers' groups can be both single sex and mixed. According to Cheryl Doss (2012) they *'can serve as structures for extension delivery, input distribution, and savings and credit programs. Working within a collective system has the*

²¹ KRISHNAMURTHY, Krishna. LEWIS, Kristy. KENT, Chris. AGGARWAL, Pramod. *Climate impacts on food security and livelihoods in Asia – a review of existing knowledge*. WFP. Bangladesh. 2015.

²² DOSS, Cheryl. BOCKIUS-SUWYN, Zoe. D'SOUZA, Shereen. *Women's Economic Empowerment in Agriculture: Supporting Women Farmers*. November 15th, 2012.

²³ Interview with Victor KIAYA, Food Security and Livelihood Advisor, Pool ASIA, Action against Hunger, July 9th, 2019.

*potential to be especially effective for women, providing them with a support system and opening up markets that they cannot reach as individuals.'*²⁴

Measuring gender inclusion

In Asia, it is estimated that women do 85% of the work on family farms but earn only 20% of the family's income. Though they represent 50% of farming workers, their access to land, crops, education, technology and finance are limited. However, it is commonly spread in the literature that if women had the same access as men they could grow their food productivity up to 30%²⁵ (FAO, 2011). Resources mean access to land and tenure security, to financial means – loans, credit, savings – but also water, fuel, cooperative membership, technologies, markets, formal employment and leadership²⁶.

One of the limits of this analysis is to reduce gender approach to an economic and political topic. Development actors should not invest in gender-inclusive programs because of the potential economic and political benefits, but simply because development programs should always be gender-friendly, no matter what. When you look at a development program's evaluation, all indicators are understandably quantitative. However, limiting evaluation to these single quantitative indicators might not grasp the full gender impact of a project. In the introduction, I mentioned that empowerment could not be reduced to the power of a woman to achieve quantifiable individual actions (that is, the *power to*). Empowerment also refers to the *power over*, the *power within* and the *power with*. Yet, none of these can actually be measured through most global quantitative indicators.

Numerous development programs work towards facilitating and developing women's home-grown garden business – from growing vegetables to selling produce at local markets. O'Hara and Clements mention that '[such programs] *checked a box for most indicators of agency: decision-making, mobility, and control over income. However, women engaged in this activity also had to carry their produce on their back to the market and home again, sometimes walking for an entire day – a job that no man would have consented to do. [...] The income earned by vegetable sales allowed women not to have to ask their husband for petty cash to buy basic household items and relieved them from mental stress. However, this income was seen as insufficient to significantly change their bargaining power. In other words, this form of agency appears to reinforce women's subordination and traditional gender roles.*'²⁷

Let's summarize our approach: gender-inclusion impact cannot only be measured through gender-disaggregated data because it mainly refers to a woman's *power to*,

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ FAO, *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11: Women in Agriculture – Closing the gap for development*. Rome, 2011.

²⁶ DOSS, Cheryl, BOCKIUS-SUWYN, Zoe, D'SOUZA, Shereen, *Women's Economic Empowerment in Agriculture: Supporting Women Farmers*, INCLUDE, 2012

²⁷ O'HARA, Corey. CLEMENT, Floriane. Power as agency: a critical reflection on the measurement of women's empowerment in the development sector. World Development. 2018.

meaning her power of agency. That means gender-disaggregated data cannot be the only tool to demonstrate the efficiency of a gender-inclusive approach. Though a quantitative approach will always be incomplete, most of the time, quantitative studies based on women's empowerment allow researchers to delve deeper into the social architecture of a given society and identify the formal and informal institutional rules that contribute to the gender gaps in it. A quantitative study is a tool for research but cannot be a result in itself²⁸.

Impact of a gender approach

Gender studies underline two main ideas: that a gender-inclusive approach will help a program reach more easily its goals, and that putting gender equality as the end goal in itself can have tremendous beneficial effects. For instance, studies show that countries with more gender equality in the employment and education sectors correlates to lower child mortality, more transparent businesses and faster economic growth. Also, a mother's access to resources such as income, technology or paid work improves her children's welfare way more than a father's access to the same resources. Overall, it is understood that investing in women will not only benefit them but also benefit their children and the entire family long term. They can truly be the catalysts of a development program²⁹.

According to Govind Kelkar (2007), social and cultural gender norms change when women acquire control on land, property and assets. Her research even shows that if women and girls have unmediated access and control of productive resources – not through the household and especially head of the household – then their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS drops. As she states it, '*women's control over assets or land results into effectively breaking the vicious circle of poverty patriarchy-illiteracy-ill health, including HIV infection.*'³⁰

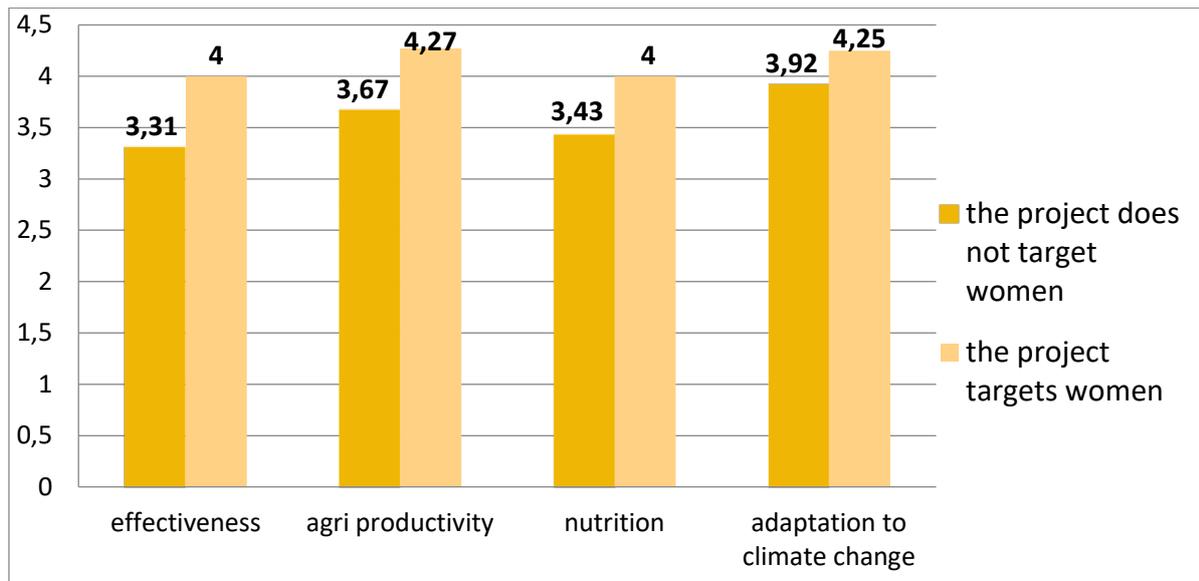
Curious about the factors of gender-inclusion and efficiency in a development program, I decided to work on the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)'s programs. Since they implement a large number of programs everywhere in Asia – especially in South East and South Asia, I had access to a lot of gender disaggregated data on the topic. While some of their programs decided to target women as their main direct beneficiaries, others did not. I could therefore compare the effectiveness of a program – its ability, five and ten years later, to reach its goals – to its will to directly target women or not.

²⁸ AKTER, Sonia, RUTSAERT, Pieter, LUIS, Joyce, *et al.* Women's empowerment and gender equity in agriculture: A different perspective from Southeast Asia. *Food Policy*, 2017, vol. 69, p. 270-279.

²⁹ GILL, Kirrin. BROOKS, Kim. PAYAL, Patel. McDOUGALL, Janna. KES, Aslihan. *Bridging the gender divide. How technology can advance women economically.* International Center for Research on Women. 2010.

³⁰ GOVIND, Kelkar. *The feminization of agriculture in Asia: Implications for women's agency and productivity.* ASPAC Food & Fertilizer Technology Center, 2007.

IFAD’s development programs are evaluated among a large number of criteria, one of them being the ‘overall effectiveness’ of a program- it’s ability to reach its set goals. The overall effectiveness of a program is then based on 4 major criteria: ‘development and effectiveness’, ‘agricultural productivity’, ‘nutrition’ and ‘adaptation to climate change’. Each of these sections are graded from 1 to 5. I decided to study the evaluation reports of on 26 IFAD programs, and differentiated programs that targeted women as direct beneficiaries, and programs that did not. The results are highlighted in the graph below:



Graph A: IFAD’s development programs – efficiency vs. woman targeting

Source: IFAD.

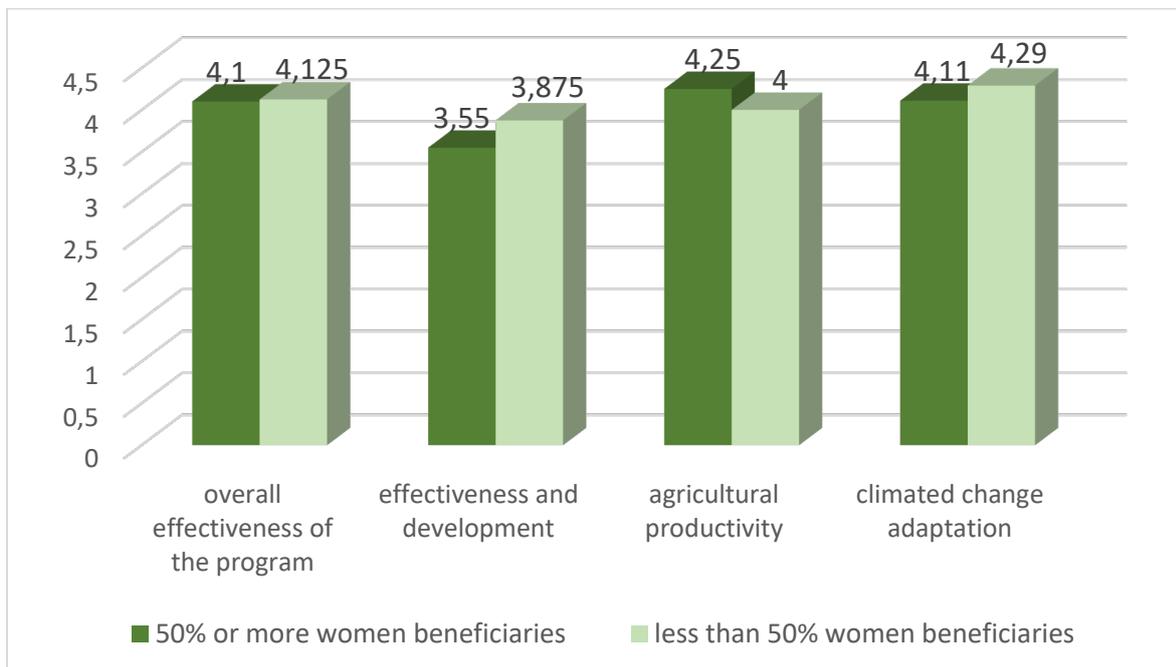
Results show that the overall effectiveness of a program is on average better when women are targeted as direct beneficiaries. The differentials between projects that target women and projects that don’t more or less equal to 0.6 for the effectiveness, nutrition and agricultural productivity sections. With no surprise, the section based on climate-change adaptation presents the lowest differential: women are less likely to take part in climate-change adaptation when their access and control of resources – mainly land – is extremely limited.

According to Cheryl DOSS (2012), ‘It is most effective to target women as a member of the household and the community. The most successful projects targeted men as well as women, with a focus on women’s partners and male community leaders. Such an approach avoids isolating women or angering men, building a better social environment for women’s success specifically and community success more generally.’³¹ Working with women means being able to see them not only as farmers but also as buyers, sellers, community leaders, wives,

³¹ DOSS, Cheryl. BOCKIUS-SUWYN, Zoe. D’SOUZA, Shereen. *Women’s Economic Empowerment in Agriculture: Supporting Women Farmers*. November 15th, 2012.

mothers, processors and innovators. ‘Projects that targeted women in more than one of their roles proved the most effective.’³²

Now, I wondered if a program was more likely to reach its goals if women represented more or at least 50% of the direct beneficiaries. Having access to the exact numbers of women and men participants for each activity of the 26 development programs. I wanted to focus on the same grades and sections I analyzed previously, but the lack of information concerning the ‘nutrition’ section forced me to erase that section of my analyses. I therefore took in numbers for the following sections: effectiveness and development, agricultural productivity, climate change adaptation and the average grade ‘overall effectiveness of a program’. Below are the results of this analysis.



Graph B: IFAD's development programs – efficiency vs. women participation

Source: IFAD

The results do not seem to show that a program's impact is actually better when women represent more than 50% of the direct beneficiaries: targeting women through a gender-inclusive analysis and approach does not necessarily mean projects should aim for more than 50% direct beneficiaries to be women, through a women-only approach for instance. Women targeting is therefore to be differentiated from women participation: the first is a comprehensive approach aiming at the possibility of inclusion, the second is a set number to reach numeral equality. The knowledge we can take from this data comparison is that putting women at the center of an analysis doesn't always mean women will be the key actors of the implementation of the project. The active beneficiary should always be chosen according to cultural and local desires.

³² Ibid.

SCENARIOS - WHICH POSSIBLE FUTURES FOR WOMEN FARMERS IN ASIA TODAY?

Implicating the right people in development processes is essential: who has enough power to change this situation? Involving local leaders and authorities is today indispensable if aid actors wish to bridge the gender gap in the long run and therefore implement sustainable solutions. For that reason, in the following pages, the question of the implication of governments will be highlighted through the creation of four different scenarios.

In this section, we may explore the possible evolutions of women farmers in Asia depending on the implications of two critical uncertainties:

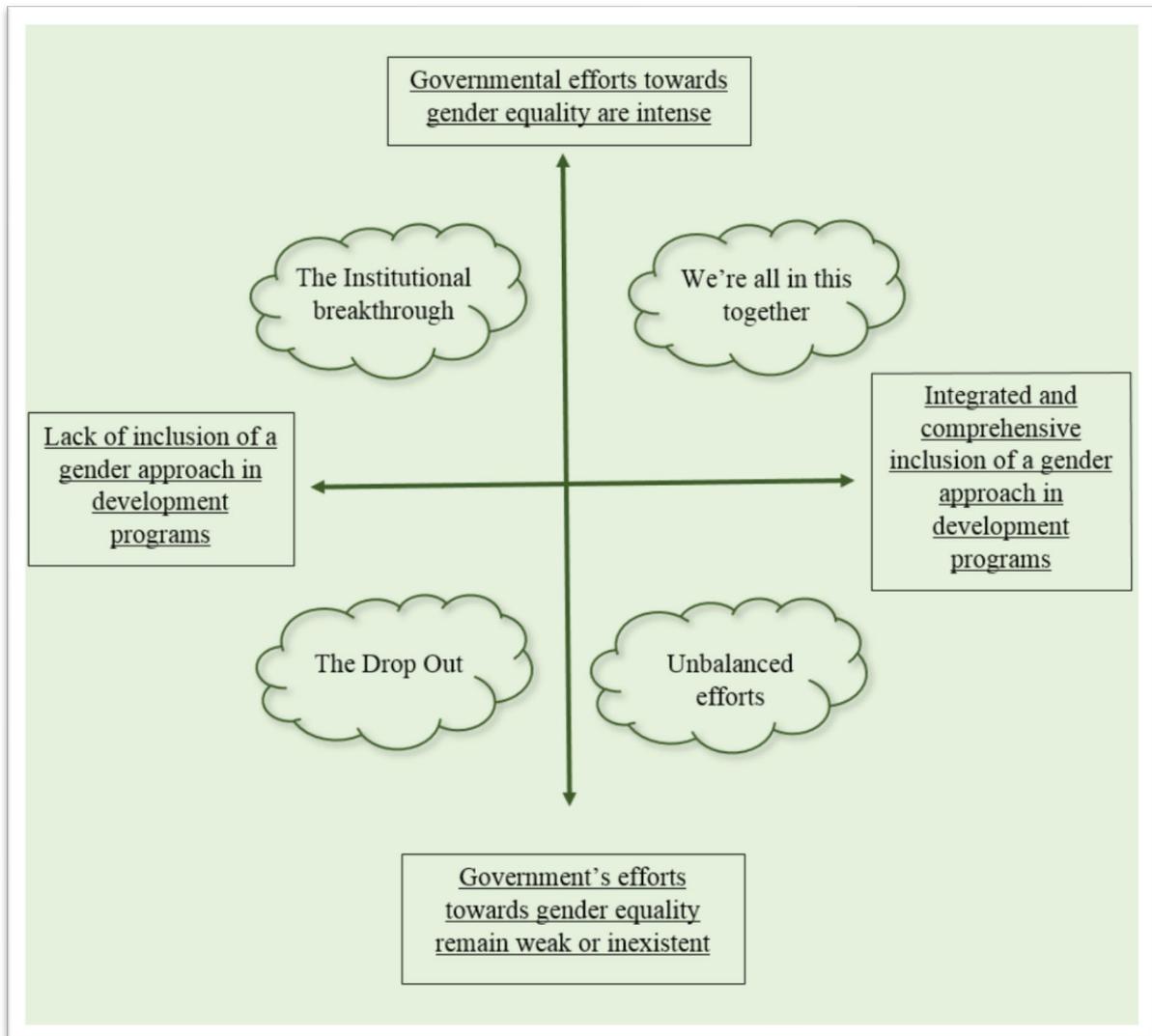
- a government's efforts towards gender equality: to this day in Asia, men and women do not have the same access to resources and markets, which is indispensable to reach stable food security, reduction of inequalities, and protection of the environment in the region. A legal framework could greatly participate to bridging these inequalities.
- the degree of inclusion of the gender approach in development programs: considering that women farmers in Asia are steps behind men when it comes to developing durable productions – due to their lack of basic rights in the first place – agricultural development programs could give them the opportunity to bridge that gap.

These two critical uncertainties can evolve into either very positive or very negative implications, creating four factors:

- Governmental efforts towards gender equality are intense
- Governmental efforts towards gender equality are weak or inexistent
- Gender approach is comprehensively included in development programs
- Development programs strongly lack the inclusion of a gender approach

The point of these scenario will be to analyse the interaction between those factors and identify four possible futures, that would be more or less plausible. This methodology is presented in the picture below:

Scenario Matrix: Impact of gender approach and governmental efforts on gender equality



I will not mention which of these scenarios is most likely to happen, mainly because the geographic area that I study – Asia – is so vast that there is no unique likely scenario. Considering the wide social, economic and institutional differences mentioned in this paper, I can affirm that there is not one agricultural Asia, and so the possible futures of this geographic area are that much more numerous.

The drop out:

In this scenario, aid actors' gender approach is considered rather optional than compulsory. Institutional actors remain absent from the discussion. An approach that wouldn't take into consideration gender differences is bound to reinforce gender rules and practices in a given community, to the extent where gender discriminations are reproduced over the years. The established social order is not challenged by the community, not even by women.

As gender roles reproduce, the feminization of agriculture does not stop and leads to a widening of social and economic inequalities for rural women: with the overwhelming outmigration of men, and the growing number of female-headed households, the necessity of a gender approach becomes critical. We can expect the youth to challenge the established social order, but without the support of institutional and aid actors, their voices will remain unheard.

Considering women will be more and more at the center of agricultural production, and that their access to strategic assets remains extremely limited, the consequences could have global and multi-scaled impacts. Indeed, sustainable management of natural resources requires the involvement and meaningful participation of all stakeholders. Women are more and more at the center of agricultural production and use but their limited ownership opportunities paired with the growing privatization of natural resources – that were previously managed collectively, which gave women the opportunity of some sort of control – leaves bad omens for the future.

Without any stakeholders leading on serious gender policies, the degradation of lands is to be expected even more. Climate change adaptation cannot be made without the implication and empowerment of women along the process. For that reason, we believe that the lack of consideration towards gender differences will correlate with the growing dangers of climate change and will worsen tremendously its impacts on populations – on women and therefore on the entire household, and children first.

The institutional breakthrough:

In this scenario, though aid actors remain inefficient in the implementation of a gender approach, institutional actors do take on the question of gender equality seriously.

The hope in this case is to see governments influence every stakeholder in question: feminization of agriculture is a large-scale phenomenon and requires the involvement of everyone - entrepreneurs, local actors (groups and authorities), aid actors, small and large farmers etc. Institutional actors, at all levels – local, regional and national – have the power to make the gender approach spearhead. An example could be Kenya's recent policy that mandated 30% of female participation in farmer groups. The implementation of this law helped raise the rate of female participation to the point where many aid actors re-evaluated their gender policy for the better, when witnessing the results.

In this scenario, other stakeholders can only be influenced for the better and the goal set for gender equity is just one step ahead. However, this commitment, considering the fragility of aid actors' gender approach, can also be detrimental to the actual efficiency of project implementation. According to Doss (2012), *'government inclusion can also hinder project implementation. The bureaucracy of payments and budgets can hinder government-sponsored participatory research. Governments can also have unrealistic expectations of*

*projects, feeding expectations that interventions will stretch beyond the defined target area or audience.'*³³

Another limitation could be that without the strong involvement of aid actors with similar goals, governments will encounter difficulties reaching communities at the local level. Indeed, a great asset of working with NGOs is their capacity to be in direct contact with the beneficiaries and therefore to guarantee a form of access for beneficiaries. This could lead to community rejection of the project, failure and even contestation of the social order established.

We're all in this together:

In this scenario, both aid actors and governments are highly involved on the topic of women farmers.

The commitment of all aid actors, both NGO's and national institutions, will both require concessions and coordination. However, the consequences of such collaboration could have tremendous effects in meeting women's needs at different levels: practical, social, emotional, physical. One obstacle that most aid actors face while trying to implement social change is the institutional lacks that allow the reproduction of inequalities and discriminations. Indeed, governments can truly shape the institutional landscape of a development program and their actions are equally important and complementary. Plus, *'involving government agencies in project implementation can ensure project sustainability after project completion.'*³⁴ Indeed, while aid actors cannot always be around, governments are the stakeholders of the continuity of a project and its sustainability on the long run.

A government-NGO collaboration at every step of a project—from design to implementation to scale-up to closing—could be an opportunity to move towards an approach that would not just aim for social change on the long run but also strategically plan social change through concrete actions: the passing of new laws, the development with large-scale media interactions, public communications, etc. In this scenario, government actors take measures in favour of law enforcement for gender equality at all levels. A clear focus is made on the local level to favour societal change on the long run.

As a result, the impacts of this collaboration are more than beneficial. Gender inequalities in the agricultural world correlate with food insecurity, poverty, the speed at which climate degradation is accelerating, other social and caste inequalities: as the topic is multifaceted, the impacts will therefore be multi-scale and multidimensional.

³³ DOSS, Cheryl. BOCKIUS-SUWYN, Zoe. D'SOUZA, Shereen. *Women's Economic Empowerment in Agriculture: Supporting Women Farmers*. November 15th, 2012.

³⁴ DOSS, Cheryl. BOCKIUS-SUWYN, Zoe. D'SOUZA, Shereen. *Ibid*.

Unbalanced change:

In this scenario, aid actors work without the support of the government. Despite aid actors' commitment towards social change through gender mainstreaming, the credibility and sustainability of their action is challenged by their lack of institutional backup. I referred to the different levels of power one woman can reach: her power to, her power over, her power within and her power with. Without an institutional support, a project will struggle mainstreaming change.

Some will say this scenario might be the most probable since gender approach remains quite occasion for governments to include in their agricultural policies. That is, in many cases, not even a possible future and rather a very accurate present.

With that being said, in this scenario, aid actors receiving very few support from local authorities, they highly depend on silent partners who are their sole funding sources. I mentioned it in my paper: the very first international actors to preach for gender disaggregated data were silent partners. They are key actors in gender mainstreaming; however their demands are often considered as detached from field realities. That will become an administrative burden for local NGOs who desperately need financial support but cannot spend that much time on administrative burdens.

Most aid actors progressively veer towards integrated approaches, as they are considered more efficient when it comes to involving women. That means that a project will not only be multifaceted, but also that one part of the project will have multiple goals. The particularity of this approach is indeed the multiplication of affects through a smaller number of activities. Women beneficiaries are often more interested by these approaches, since they have more to gain out of it: they include all kinds of trainings (on nutrition education, literacy, financial education) and they base their action on the same network to deliver multiple inputs through a single intervention, therefore making them more efficient.

CONCLUSION

In agricultural Asia, women's roles are often much more diverse than the ones of men: they are responsible for the household's health and therefore the children's, but sometimes also the parents' and in laws'. They have a role of caretaker, livestock keepers, homegrown farmers, crop planters and marketing managers. Their unpaid household responsibilities often require them to stay near home and therefore prevents them from expanding their activities to far-reaching markets. They often cannot go for formal jobs that demand set working hours, and that is without saying that men are usually getting higher wages than women in many formal employment contexts.

As seen in this paper, women in agricultural Asia suffer from multiple vulnerabilities that correlate and aggravate each other. The lack of formal gender equality in this sector,

paired with strong traditional beliefs, put women in this difficult position where they have to break the rules in order to survive – and possibly thrive. However, going through this process of breaking the rules puts them at risk for community alienation, marital violence, lack of trust from other economic actors etc. Their vulnerability is therefore triple: they are politically, economically and socially vulnerable. If aid and development actors – both private and public – want to make a change, their action needs to equally target these three different spheres: change will not be possible if, for instance, the social aspect of women’s capabilities is not seriously taken into consideration.

Gender-inclusive approaches remain to this day too weak: most aid actors progressively veer towards gender-friendly practices but their approach is often based on quantitative results and sometimes lack qualitative feedback. The pressure put on aid actors by silent partners, as well as governments, tend to slow down strategies of change. Efforts need to be made by every stakeholder towards the creation of new tools and practices that foster sustainable empowerment.

Gender is a topic that has been brushed away for too long. The number of undernourished in the world has been growing for the past three years, reaching the saddening number of 820 million people concerned in 2018 (FAO, 2019)³⁵. The impacts of climate change are skyrocketing and directly affect small farmers, especially with extreme weathers, the rise of sea levels and the progressive disappearing and degradation of lands.

It would be wrong to reduce a gender-inclusive approach to putting women at the center: a gender approach puts the community and the household at the center. It views a society as a group of people – men, women, boys and girls – that grow and influence each other daily. If no effort is made by all stakeholders – policy makers, local authorities, agribusiness actors etc. – jointly with aid actors, the consequences will not only affect all – women and men – but they will also be multi-scaled and multidimensional. That means the economic, political and environmental spheres will be impacted, as much on local, regional and global levels. ■

³⁵ FAO. *The State of Food Insecurity in the World*. 2019.

ASIA FOCUS #123

GENDER-MAINSTREAMING AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA: CAN IT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

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JANUARY 2020

ASIA FOCUS

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