

Seeing through the gender lens: Capturing gender-sensitive stories in agricultural research and development

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Photo credit: Michael Dakwa.

Gender is not a given. Men and women's roles, opportunities, and relationships are socially constructed and vary across different societies. Language and images may perpetuate restrictive gender norms or co-create avenues for more equitable relationships. Africa RISING is committed to reporting the "whole story" about its communities, research, and cooperation with various partners. It wants to present the dissimilar livelihoods and needs, the diverse voices and positions of the social groups it is working with. Generalizing the situation of one group to represent others would mean that only one side of the story is told at the expense of others, which are equally valid. For example, when writing a success story about the impact of an improved agricultural technology offered to a household, getting the "whole story" means including perspectives from several members of the household who have different, unique but important interactions with the technology.

Gender-sensitive story writing: who, what, why, and how

Gender-sensitive story writing is part of a broader gender-sensitive reporting approach that encourages reflection: What is the diversity of farmers and livestock keepers? Were their gender, ethnicity, age, and other social criteria considered? Are partners portrayed following ethical standards such as non-stereotyping? As the BBC Producer Guidelines outline: "When portraying social groups, stereotypes should be avoided. But we must also beware the danger of depicting a society that does not exist. (...) Where prejudice and disadvantage exist we need to report and reflect them (...). But we should do nothing to perpetuate them" (p.89).

Who	All partners involved in writing about the project. Gender is everybody's business.
What	To be sensitive to gender inequalities and portray men, women, and children in a balanced, fair, and differentiated manner.
Why	Gender-sensitive story writing is a professional and ethical aspiration. It can improve development efforts and contribute to more gender-balanced and inclusive societies.
How	Achieved through <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender-aware selection of sources, stories, and visual material • Elimination of stereotypes pertaining to gender, age, and other social variables • Use of fair language

(Adapted from Ramsak)

Guidelines for gender-sensitive story writing

Be gender-aware in the selection of sources, stories, and visual material

Questions for reflection:

- Have you sufficiently explored and presented both men's and women's opinions and experiences? For instance, how does an agricultural practice affect men and women in particular ways?
- Have you paid attention to other social variables such as age, ethnicity, or class, keeping in mind that women or men do not form homogenous groups?
- When quoting your respondents, have you added relevant information on the social backdrop against which they make their remarks?
- Have you chosen photos or other visual material that include both men and women (where applicable)? If you select a photo showing one gender only (for instance only men participating in a technical training), have you added a caption or sentence in the text that picks up the gender theme?
- Have you thought of the gender-specific obstacles a man or a woman had to overcome in order to become successful?
- Have you kept in mind that gender is not about women only? Although portraits of female champions may contribute to making women's efforts and achievements more visible, they should be supplemented by reports on gender relations, that is on how men and women negotiate important social

issues such as labor, access to resources, representation in leadership, and others.

- Wherever possible, can you achieve a gender balance of experts consulted and quoted?

Eliminate stereotyping – bring in a fresh perspective

Questions for reflection:

- Have you avoided portraying men and women in a manner that perpetuates stereotypes? Stereotypes would be for instance that “men need to handle agricultural machinery” or “women are ‘naturally’ responsible for child nutrition”.
- Have you named prejudices and inequalities without justifying or presenting them as a “natural given”?
- Have you considered women's and men's diversity and their potential participation in all aspects of life (leadership, entrepreneurship etc.,)?

Use language that is fair

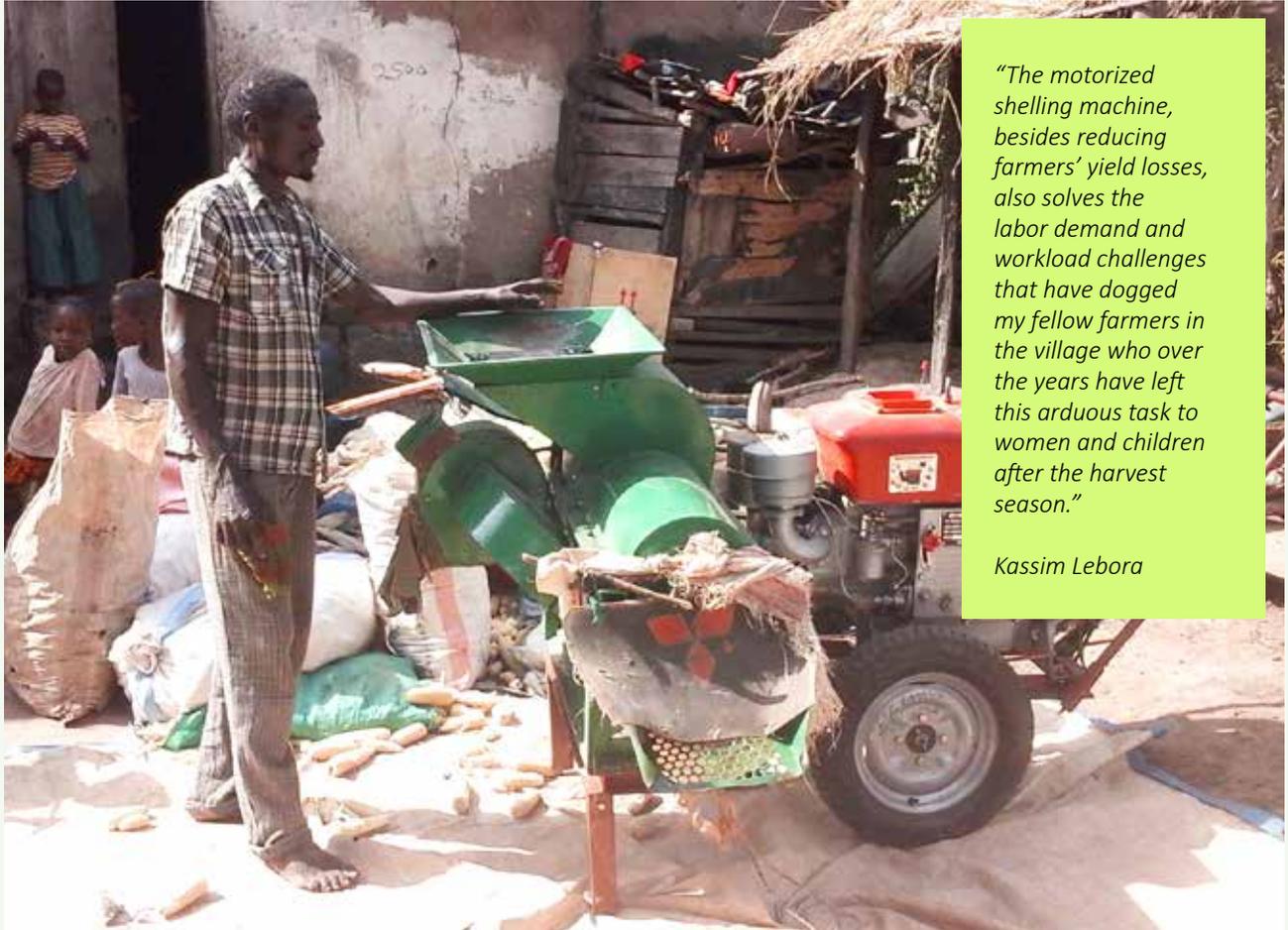
Questions for reflection:

- Have you crosschecked your language for terms which reinforce that certain activities are done by one gender only (for instance a leader is a “chairman” or the use of “he”, “him” or “his” in a general manner)?
- Writing about a woman, have you tested if you would use the same terms (adjectives, nouns, verbs) if it were a man?
- When citing a respondent's discriminatory or stereotyping language, have you appropriately marked it (quotation marks or other indicators of personal opinion) in order not to promote such a position?

Analyzing stories for gender inclusion

The two Africa RISING success stories below reflect different levels of gender sensitivity. In the brief analysis that follows each story, we explore tendencies to ignore or carve out inequalities and how the stories could be improved.

Story 1. From a training on postharvest loss management to a booming maize shelling business



“The motorized shelling machine, besides reducing farmers’ yield losses, also solves the labor demand and workload challenges that have dogged my fellow farmers in the village who over the years have left this arduous task to women and children after the harvest season.”

Kassim Lebora

Kassim Lebora cleans his maize sheller machine in Dihinda Village in Mvomero District, Tanzania. Photo credit: Frednand Japhet/IITA.

Farmers in Dihinda Village in Mvomero District, Tanzania are a happy lot. Thanks to trainings by the Africa RISING-NAFAKA project, they have been able to cut their postharvest losses and can now store their grain harvests for long periods without fearing attacks by insect pests. But even in the midst of such a happy lot, the story of one farmer—Kassim Lebora—stands out.

Eleven months ago, Kassim was among a group of 25 farmers trained by the Africa RISING-NAFAKA project partners from the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) about the technologies for improved postharvest management of grains and legumes to reduce losses. “That particular training in November 2015, exposed me for the first time to various postharvest technologies and served to open up my eyes to the

numerous opportunities therein. It became clear to me that the challenges we had been facing all along in my community particularly with harvesting, shelling, and storage of grains were solvable issues with ready technologies to overcome them!” quips Kassim.

At the training, one of the technologies participants were introduced to and trained on was the motorized maize shelling machine. “After I saw and learned about the motorized maize sheller, it suddenly dawned on me that this machine in itself represented a clear business opportunity for me. There and then, I decided to buy one and start up a shelling business in the village,” Kassim explains. “I had been saving up money to be able to buy a tractor someday, but all the plans for a tractor were quickly replaced by the desire to own the maize shelling machine,” he adds.

He notes that the motorized shelling machine, besides reducing farmers' yield losses, also solves the labor demand and workload challenges that have dogged his fellow farmers in the village who over the years have left this arduous task to women and children after the harvest season. Kassim turned the postharvest challenge into a business and the rest, as they say, is history. In one month during the previous after-harvest season (August 2016), Kassim says he earned TShs 790,000 (US\$350) from the maize shelling business. He charges each farmer TShs 2000 (less than 1 dollar) for a bag of shelled maize.

Fellow farmers are appreciative of Kassim's business venture because they recognize the value it brings to the community. "Kassim's maize sheller machine takes our village to the next level, it reduces the workload for many farmers, and since he belongs to our farming group, we are very happy for his development," explains Melkior Mhagama, one of the several farmers benefiting from Kassim's new business venture. Kassim plans to save up his income and eventually buy another shelling machine that will expand the shelling services to neighboring villages. Having experienced firsthand how innovations introduced through a project like Africa RISING-NAFAKA have changed his life, Kassim's advice to his fellow farmers is for them to embrace the opportunities created by new technologies to improve their living standards.

Postharvest food loss is a challenge that contributes to food insecurity and reduces the income of millions of smallholder farmers. A recent study conducted in the semi-arid areas of northern and central Tanzania showed that farmers lose nearly half of their farm produce during harvesting and shelling of their cereals and legumes.

Over the last two years, the Africa RISING-NAFAKA project has been implementing participatory efforts to boost adoption of viable postharvest solutions by farmers in five regions of Tanzania: Dodoma, Iringa, Manyara, Mbeya, and Morogoro. The approach adopted by the project is to raise awareness by showcasing the value of the technological solutions firsthand to the farmers and communities. Through the initiative, farmers have so far been exposed to the various postharvest technologies including: Grainpro Super Grain Bag (SGB), the maize shelling machine, and the collapsible drier case. It is anticipated that these technologies will contribute to making farmers more food secure, ensure food safety, and also enable farmers to market grains well beyond the immediate postharvest timeframe.

Analysis of Story 1

This story focuses on Kassim's success and leaves a number of important questions open:

- Do women in Dihinda village also use the maize shelling technology?
- How many men and women participated in the Africa RISING training? If there were unequal proportions, why?
- Manual postharvest processes are often assigned to women and children, as the text says. Mechanization seems to change the allocation of labor. This could have been an interesting entry point for further questions about who does what and whose labor burden has increased or decreased in the wake of mechanization.
- Kassim operates his machine in his home compound with family labor. What are the changes that Kassim's wife and children have seen in terms of labor and income? What business activities have to be done by the different household members? How is the business income shared?
- If one or several household members buy a shelling machine, who owns the machine and controls its operation?

Story 2. Improved agricultural technologies tipping the scales of gender equity in a rural Tanzanian community



“Whenever improved agricultural technologies are introduced to rural smallholder farming communities, quite often the focus is primarily on whether farmers get better yields or not. This however is not the only criteria for evaluating the ‘success’ of improved technologies in a community.”

Halima Katumbu

Halima standing in her 2-acre rice paddy field. After following the good agronomic practices she was trained on by Africa RISING-NAFAKA project staff, she harvested nearly 2000 kg of unmilled rice, a feat she, together with her husband, had never achieved for the past 10 years in which they had been rice farmers. Photo credit: Gloriana Ndibalema/IITA.

When Halima Mohamed Katumbu, a mother of four in Mkula irrigation scheme, Kilombero District, first heard of a new group in her community that was training farmers on improved rice production techniques, her first instinct was to share this “interesting” information with her husband, Hassan Luheche. They had been rice farmers for the past 10 years and despite their immense efforts to get the best yields from their 2-acre paddy, the most they ever harvested was 1440 kg of unmilled rice. By their estimates, this yield was much lower than they should have been getting. Furthermore, it also meant that the family was not able to earn much after milling the rice and selling it.

“My husband and I used to prepare the rice paddy together during planting. However, since we haven’t had any good harvests in the recent past, he’s lost interest in growing rice thereby leaving the task almost entirely to me. I wanted to join the group, but I did not get support from him. He did not see any value he could derive from joining a farmer group. But later, after a long struggle to convince him, he accepted that I could join the group,” narrates Halima.

After joining the group along with other farmers, Halima was trained on improved rice production techniques (good agricultural practices) and was also introduced to improved rice varieties which she immediately adopted and planted in her

paddy. The impact of adopting the new rice varieties and good agronomic practices was visible quite early on in the growing season, prompting a change of opinion about the group from her husband.

“After seeing some progress, my husband became interested and even joined me for the trainings offered by the group. So far we’ve been introduced to new rice varieties like TXD 306 and Komboka which I promptly started growing in my paddy. We have also been trained on improved practices that ensure we get the most yields from our paddies like correct application of fertilizer, the best planting methods, rice paddy management practices, and postharvest management of rice harvests,” says Halima.

For adopting these changes, Halima and her husband harvested nearly 2000 kg of unmilled rice in the previous year. She anticipates a much better harvest in the coming seasons now that she has the necessary skills and knows the best rice varieties to grow. “I anticipate that very soon, with the plans we are making together with my husband, a significant portion of the rice we harvest will not just be for home consumption, but rather for sale to earn extra income,” says Halima.

“But for me,” Halima adds, “one of the more ‘silent’ achievements we’ve made is the fact that our husbands are now getting more involved in rice production and sharing the tasks and resources with us. We share responsibilities at the farm and because of the positive results brought about by adopting these improved agricultural technologies and practices they are starting to become more equitable too in sharing the little extra income generated from rice sales. My fellow women have also been telling me that their husbands have generally become less frustrated and therefore aggression in the families has gone down.”

Improving women’s equitable access to improved agricultural technology has the potential to spur their economic advancement and stimulate broader economic growth. Whenever improved agricultural technologies are introduced to rural smallholder farming communities, quite often the focus is primarily on whether farmers get better yields or not. This, however, is not the only criteria for evaluating the “success” of improved technologies in a community.

Halima is just one of the 223 smallholder farmers working with Dakawa Agricultural Research Institute (ARI Dakawa) through the Africa RISING-NAFAKA project in Kilombero District, Tanzania to improve rice production by rural smallholder farming communities. The project is focused on the maize, rice, and vegetable value chains and is introducing and promoting improved varieties, promoting new and improved seed, disseminating best-bet agronomic management packages, and introducing and promoting postharvest management technologies.

Analysis of Story 2

This story is not just about Halima (as a woman), but also about her relationship with Hassan, her husband (gender relations). It demonstrates how the new agricultural practices affect both and lead to increased sharing of labor and resources. At the same time, it does not turn a blind eye to inequalities, such as the fact that Halima has to ask for Hassan’s permission to take part in the training. An interesting point would have been to explore the gender composition of the training group in general and if it changed during the course of the project. A joint photo of Halima and Hassan could have underlined the success story’s message. A question for reflection (not criticism): In the first paragraph Halima is introduced as a “mother of four”. When do we relate to men’s and women’s parental roles and with what intention?

Challenging gender stereotypes through photographs

Photos capture moments that written words alone cannot sufficiently to represent. However, photographs can knowingly or unknowingly reinforce or challenge stereotypes about gender. Below is a selection of pictures accompanied by a short analysis to illustrate how photographs convey gender messages.



Photographs of mechanization often depict men operating machines. Yet, the technologies are supposed to be suitable for use by both men and women. If possible, photographs should be taken of different beneficiaries handling the machines (or any other improved technology). If the technology is actually employed by one group only, the gender theme should be addressed in the text.

Bedilu Desta, one of the service providers familiarizing himself with the two wheel tractor provided by CIMMYT/Africa RISING. Photo credit: Frédéric Baudron/CIMMYT.



Gender-sensitive reporting explores the impact of technologies on people of all ages. The perspectives of children, youth, parents, and the elderly may differ. Therefore, in addition to including diverse voices in your story, capture images of different members of the society in interaction with the technology.

Children working on the farm in Lemo, Jawe, Bergrara-Ethiopia. Photo credit: Branislav Cika/Africa RISING.



Photographs should not further stereotypes of gender roles, but rather challenge them as much as possible. Processing, for instance, is often regarded as a female domain, yet men and women may cooperate in this activity, as this picture shows.

A female farmer in Tibali community, northern Ghana takes her turn in the process of mixing up supplementary livestock feed for small ruminants. Photo credit: Jonathan Odhong/IITA

References and further reading

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The Africa Research In Sustainable Intensification for the Next Generation (Africa RISING) program comprises three research-for-development projects supported by the United States Agency for International Development as part of the U.S. government's Feed the Future initiative.

Through action research and development partnerships, Africa RISING will create opportunities for smallholder farm households to move out of hunger and poverty through sustainably intensified farming systems that improve food, nutrition, and

income security, particularly for women and children, and conserve or enhance the natural resource base.

The three regional projects are led by the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (in West Africa and East and Southern Africa) and the International Livestock Research Institute (in the Ethiopian Highlands). The International Food Policy Research Institute leads the program's monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment.

<http://africa-rising.net/>

