

Info Note

Achieving Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Smallholder Adaptation

Lessons from IFAD's Adaptation in Smallholder Agriculture Programme

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Key messages

In order to achieve outcomes for gender equality and women's empowerment in smallholder adaptation projects, project designers and implementers should:

- Consider **differential needs and priorities of women**, so that project activities are designed to address the context in which women live and to support the activities they engage in.
- Consider **differential vulnerability** of women to climate change.
- Understand that **participation does not necessarily translate into impact**. Interventions need to consider norms, roles and relations and how these can evolve to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in programs; and consult with women in the development and implementation of project activities.
- **Invest in staff capacity** to implement gender action plans and mainstream gender in program activities.
- **Build the capacity of local institutions** to support commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Consider different needs and priorities of women and men

Projects should identify the constraints faced by women and men in accessing resources (information, inputs, finance, etc.), in utilizing these resources, and in how project activities can shift gender dynamics within the household and community. Assessing gender differences and social dynamics is critical to the design of a gender-sensitive adaptation project. All of the International Fund for Agricultural Development's (IFAD) Adaptation in

This Info Note complements the [IFAD How To Do Note on "Design of gender transformative smallholder agriculture adaptation programmes"](#), which provides guidance on integrating gender transformative approaches into agriculture and adaptation program design.



Figure 1. Cover of "Design of gender transformative smallholder agriculture adaptation programmes"

Smallholder Agriculture Programme (ASAP) projects included in the review are aware of the different practical needs of women and men. Most are designed to be accessible to women in terms of their existing gender roles and prevailing norms and relations that shape how women benefit from project activities. However, more needs to be done to understand how these activities affect household decision-making and whether opportunities to utilize farm level technology, for example, equally benefit women and men. ASAP projects have the potential to be transformative in relation to shifting norms around workload and benefit sharing (e.g. women and men doing gender non-conforming work). However, if these interventions do not foster equitable decision-making within the household, the gains in farm-level labor savings could be offset by increased workload at home.

The staff of the [Adaptation to Climate Change](#) (AMD) project in Vietnam have reported multiple benefits from time-saving. Investments in irrigation technologies that have enabled women, who were spending half a day irrigating their fields, to complete the task in 15 minutes. Women report that the use of bio-organic fertilizer helps them save time and reduces the labor burden experienced during crop harvests.

The [Pro-Poor Value Chain Development Project in the Maputo and Limpopo Corridors \(PROSUL\)](#) took the approach one step further by integrating the Gender Action Learning Systems (GALS) and household methodologies (HH)¹ that provide women and men with the tools and facilitated spaces to discuss their contributions, the benefits accrued, and how these are shared within households and groups (e.g. cooperatives). This approach builds on the experience of other projects supported by IFAD that have used GALS/HH methodologies to change relations and address discriminatory social norms.

Consider different vulnerabilities to climate change

Gender dynamics shape women's and men's different vulnerabilities to climate change impacts and their different capacities to adapt to those impacts. Identifying what adaptation practices really mean in different contexts is a challenge across the board in agriculture investments that seek to be climate-resilient. Doing this in ways that grapple with gender dynamics and variables such as age, location, and socio-economic group is critical. Some ASAP projects have integrated elements of a gender-sensitive analysis of climate change impacts into project design and implementation. This level of analysis helps project staff adapt project activities to address the differences in how men and women experience climate impacts. Even when the climate change-gender nexus is not explicit, the use of potentially transformative approaches like GALS can strengthen the adaptive capacities of households and communities. Engaging women and men in analysis and dialogue can surface unequal gender relations that limit the adaptive capacities of women, men, boys and girls to climate (and other) shocks and stressors.

The [Climate Adaptation and Livelihood Protection Sub-Project \(CALIP\)](#) is focused on improving the livelihoods and reducing the vulnerability of poor households in flood-prone Haor regions in Bangladesh. Because of the recurrent nature of floods and the differential impacts of these shocks on the coping strategies of women and girls,

¹ The Gender Action Learning System (GALS) comprises a series of tools that enable household members to negotiate their needs and interests and find innovative, gender-equitable solutions in livelihoods planning and value chain development.

the project has integrated gender analysis into both program design and implementation. In-depth analysis of the distinct impacts of climate shocks on women, the elderly and youth was undertaken in 2013. The report highlighted the differential impacts that flooding has on women's sense of security and on their livelihoods. A separate gender analysis articulated the challenges that women face in society and in the household, which enabled the project to address these challenges through gender-specific climate change activities.

Participation does not equal impact

ASAP-supported projects require the development of targets for women's participation, an important first step towards promoting gender-aware programming. However, greater participation alone is not adequate in the process of working toward greater gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE). Gender inequalities can be exacerbated by greater participation of women in project activities if projects do not simultaneously work with men and duty bearers to work together to improve their situation. Moreover, women's participation in project activities alone cannot change gender norms, roles and relations. Projects need to intentionally address GEWE. This requires facilitated dialogue to engage men, leaders and key institutions (e.g. providers of services for producers, systems of land and labour allocation, etc.) in the process of working towards GEWE.

Since GALS training began in the [Post-Harvest Support Project \(PASP\)](#) in Rwanda, 160 GALS champions (women and men) have been trained. In turn, they have trained others so PASP has reached 200 women and 200 men. In focus group discussions, men and women cooperative members showed great excitement in participating in GALS through their cooperatives and/or mentoring other households. They spoke of the benefits they experience, including improved relations with their spouse, pooling money for shared benefits within the household, and making joint decisions about household expenses. GALS also helps women and men understand that gender is about more than women. One male participant said that GALS helped "*changed the mind-set of women and men.*" A female participant reinforced this concept by asserting that "*training on gender helped us see the complementarity of women and men.*"

Invest in staff capacity

IFAD's Gender Marker System² advocates for specific and systematically applied practices such as conducting gender and power analysis to inform project design and

² The Gender Marker System is used by IFAD to score project design, implementation and completion against a continuum from gender-blind to gender-neutral to gender-aware to partial gender-mainstreaming to gender-mainstreaming to gender-transformative programming.

implementation, or ensuring that project staff have capacities for gender-mainstreaming. Gender analyses and gender action plans that are put in place during inception need to be mainstreamed well into the project's cycle. This takes the attention of a dedicated gender focal point on staff whose job it is to ensure that gender-mainstreaming is a high priority throughout the inception, start-up phase, and implementation of the project. Projects need to have early action and investments to ensure that GEWE is being mainstreamed from the outset. But even with a specific focal point, the implementation of gender transformative approaches and/or the provision of resources to do so, may be limited or slow if it is viewed as the responsibility of just the gender focal point.

Among the ASAP projects included in the review, those that are most promising in terms of being gender transformative are those that have a full-time gender focal point who is responsible for promoting a gender action plan/strategy and is trained on gender-transformative methodologies such as GALS. Translating design into implementation depends on committed management, staff and partners who are informed by the premise that gender mainstreaming is everyone's responsibility.

The [Pro-Poor Value Chain Development Project in the Maputo and Limpopo Corridors \(PROSUL\)](#) has invested in a full-time gender advisor. Because there was a dedicated focal point for mainstreaming gender, PROSUL undertook gender training with project staff and service providers on various topics, such as 'Gender and Microfinance in the Cassava Component'. Staff also received training on GALS. The GALS methodology has been incorporated to promote gender equality and gender transformative approaches in project activities. The budgeted commitment of the project to integrate gender into activities is evident even in how the project works with partners. PROSUL aims not only for women's equal participation but for equity and empowerment. The project takes a proactive approach to its commitments to promoting GEWE. These include requirements of lead service providers in value chain components to demonstrate during the tender process how gender will be addressed in their work, and support to the Ministry of Agriculture to develop a gender strategy for the agrarian sector.

Build capacity of local institutions

ASAP projects are designed and managed through key government ministries and departments, and are strongly integrated with government strategies and policies in agriculture and climate change. Thus, the institutional drivers and enabling environment for gender-mainstreaming in these projects must consider each country's policies and strategies, and how project activities will be shaped by the political and social

systems and development landscape of the country. While the stated commitment to mainstream gender has increasingly become standard in the organizational policies of agencies working in small-scale agriculture and rural livelihoods in the past decade, there is a potential danger of assuming that agencies are ready to mainstream gender in projects on their own. Sustained attention should be given to promoting the skills, capacities, and incentives to mainstream gender in programs. Supporting local commitments to fostering gender equity and women's empowerment in communities can in turn influence the political will of, and the overall investment in gender-mainstreaming by, government ministries and departments.

The Agriculture Services Programme for Innovation, Resilience and Extension (ASPIRE) in Cambodia integrates the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests and Fisheries' (MAFF) gender-specific policies and process throughout the program. The most notable of these is the delivery of gender mainstreaming training to extension service providers at multiple levels, ensuring the program is implemented in line with the MAFF gender-mainstreaming strategy and linked to the MAFF gender working group. The institutional environment for ASPIRE to mainstream gender is strong, given the stated commitment of implementers and the MAFF's countrywide policies and processes for GEWE. However, there were inadequate financial and human resources for gender mainstreaming. There was no budget for gender focal points or for extending gender training to the district level and to community extension workers. Training, reflection and on-going capacity building opportunities are a critical step in supporting all stakeholders to be more gender-aware and confident in working on commitments to GEWE. It is critical to ensure that programs have the necessary financial and human capital to commit to moving forward gender-focused activities.

Conclusion

The ASAP gender assessment and learning review provides insights into how ASAP-supported programs ensure that gender equality and women's empowerment is mainstreamed in climate change and small-scale agriculture programs. A gender action plan that articulates how climate change affects women and men differently, and one that is resourced, continues to be an important way of ensuring that GEWE is taken forward in programs. Building on this, the GALS approach is an effective way to contribute to the kinds of social and economic changes that progress towards gender equality requires. Finally, increased and consistent investment in gender focal points as well as a commitment to building staff and local partner capacity is crucial to ensuring gender-mainstreaming in program activities.

Further reading

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Research led by:

The core of the development of the methodology, the field-work, and the writing of the ASAP report was led by Catherine Hill and Greg Scarborough, consultants working with the CARE technical team comprising Emily Hillenbrand and Kelsey Jones-Casey. This team has been supported by Ilaria Firmian, IFAD, Sophia Huyer, CCAFS, and Dorcas Robinson, CARE. Review has been provided by this steering group, with valuable review contributions from Vidhya Sriram, Karl Deering and Aarjan Dixit from CARE. The finalization of the report and the recommendations has been undertaken by Dorcas Robinson, with the support of Vidhya Sriram.

This brief summarizes findings from the "[Adaptation in Smallholder Agriculture Programme \(ASAP\) gender assessment and learning review](#)" undertaken by consultants Catherine Hill and Greg Scarborough and technical staff from CARE. This gender assessment and learning review focused on eight projects co-funded by ASAP in **Bangladesh, Cambodia, Ghana, Mali, Mozambique, Rwanda, Uganda, and Vietnam**. The assessment and learning review provides lessons learned after three years of ASAP operation. The purpose of this study was to understand how the translation from design to implementation is happening in practice, and to generate insights and lessons from some of the ASAP-supported projects on the different barriers, opportunities, and experiences regarding gender-mainstreaming and women's empowerment.

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