



Closing the Gender Gap in Agricultural Development

IFPRI's work has helped to integrate gender into agricultural programs and policies, as well as the wider development agenda.

It is hard to imagine the field of international development, including agriculture, without a gender lens through which to understand progress and constraints. However, until the early 1990s, gender was largely ignored in agricultural development programs and even in agricultural economics research.

Although women make up about 43 percent of the agricultural workforce in developing countries, their contribution to agricultural development is limited by a gender gap that affects their access to asset ownership, credit, technology, education, and services such as agricultural extension. For the last three decades, IFPRI has been working to provide greater insight into the role of gender in agriculture in order to inform policies that encourage inclusive economic development and empowerment.

The Early Days of Gender Work

A series of IFPRI studies on agricultural commercialization and nutrition undertaken in the 1980s found that commercialization often reduced women's control of income, because men tended to take control of crops that were more profitable. In addition, even if commercialization increased household incomes, nutrition and health outcomes did not necessarily improve. Despite this understanding, patterns of decisionmaking within the household did not become a focus of IFPRI's research until the early 1990s. A three-day workshop in February 1992, co-organized by IFPRI and the World Bank, convened researchers from a variety of disciplines who

were working on gender and intrahousehold issues using qualitative and quantitative methods. The workshop's findings provided the basis for the book *Intrahousehold Resource Allocation in Developing Countries: Models, Methods, and Policy*, which presented a broad survey of theories and evidence on resource allocation within the household, offered new empirical evidence on household decisionmaking, and clarified why understanding who within a household controls resources and makes decisions is an important consideration for effective policy development—as well as for the design of future research projects.

The book also prompted a more systematic collection of data from men and women within households, which made it possible to take a closer look at intrahousehold control of income, assets, and decisionmaking. The expansion of work around issues such as household decisionmaking and allocation of resources cleared the way for the theoretical development and availability of data that ultimately formed the foundation of IFPRI's gender research programming.

Gender Work on the Ground

In early 1995, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) funded a US\$3 million IFPRI research program on strengthening development policy through intrahousehold and gender analysis that examined how attention to gender might improve development policies. It focused on Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Guatemala, and South Africa and included companion studies in eight other countries. What was most notable about the program was the special attention paid to the development of comparable studies in these four countries, ensuring that data were collected to test similar hypotheses in each country, and thus enabling comparative analysis. A questionnaire was distributed to more than 5,500 individuals to determine how much the allocation of intrahousehold resources affected the outcome of development policies, with a specific focus on the role of gender in intrahousehold resource allocation.

In 2003, *Household Decisions, Gender, and Development* was published. The book examined how men's and women's control of resources affects household decisionmaking in developing countries. It also showed that increasing the amount of resources controlled by women was associated

with better education, health, and nutrition outcomes, particularly for children. To explain how to put this gender-related research to use in both policy and practice, IFPRI developed a practitioners' guide, *Using Gender Research in Development: Food Security in Practice*. Field-tested in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, the guide was used by technical workers, policymakers, aid agencies, and developing country governments to identify relevant gender issues in each stage of the project cycle, from needs assessment to project design, implementation, and evaluation. Workshops targeting policymakers and practitioners were held in Washington, DC, and beyond.

IFPRI's work on agriculture, health, and nutrition in Bangladesh has its roots in those initial intrahousehold projects. Ten years after the survey conducted as part of the intrahousehold and gender project in 1996, IFPRI carried out the Chronic Poverty and Long Term Impact Study in Bangladesh project, which tracked the long-term impacts of programs that had previously been evaluated. The goal was to gain insight into the economic, social, and political dynamics of chronic poverty throughout the country, as well as the types of interventions best suited to address it. Programs that targeted women, and that tried to address gender norms, had better results for nutrition than those that did not target women.

In social protection work, IFPRI's intrahousehold work influenced the design of Mexico's Programa de Educación, Salud y Alimentación (PROGRESA), later renamed Oportunidades, and now called Prospera. The PROGRESA program was one of the first conditional cash transfer programs to target women instead of just targeting households, based on the evidence that women's control over income is, indeed, important to poverty reduction and generates positive impacts for children. The Mexican program was influential in the design of cash transfer programs not only in Latin America but also worldwide.

The Burden of Proof for Gender

Despite IFPRI's growing reputation for gender research, it was still something carried out by a relatively small group of researchers within IFPRI. A major turning point in the systematic integration of gender into IFPRI's work came

about in 2004 with the introduction of the Institute's *Gender Task Force* which was led by a small group of researchers and included a senior representative from each of the Institute's divisions. The task force had two mandates: to mainstream or integrate gender across all IFPRI research and to identify a new high-profile area of gender research, similar to its intrahousehold work. A seminal article, published in 1995, "*Unitary versus Collective Models of the Household: Is it Time to Shift the Burden of Proof?*" provided the impetus for IFPRI's new focus. The article's central argument was that there was enough evidence about household decisionmaking to know that the process is not unilateral and homogenous—differences among household members exist. And so, instead of requiring proof of the relevance of gender, the burden was now on researchers to prove that gender was *not* relevant to each study.

The Gender Task Force's effort to incorporate gender into programmatic work at IFPRI was quite successful. Prior to the initiative, approximately 50 percent of research programs included attention to gender in some aspect. Two years after the "burden of proof" rule was established, all but one program included substantive gender work.

The Importance of Assets

On the heels of IFPRI's revolutionary intrahousehold research program, the Institute deepened its attention to research on gender and assets (tangible assets, such as land and water, as well as less tangible ones, including human, social, and even political capital). Closing the gap between men's and women's ownership and control of assets is not only important for women's empowerment and welfare, but is also a necessary step for achieving global development goals. The research was cross-cutting, as existing activities in all divisions were related to the work. Evidence on the importance of assets laid the groundwork for the *Gender, Agriculture, and Assets Project (GAAP)*, led by IFPRI and the International Livestock Research Institute. The first phase of GAAP ran from 2010–2014, and was supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. It not only looked at how differences in men's and women's use, control, and ownership of assets affected their take-up of new agricultural technologies, but also looked at the impact of agricultural development projects on the gender gap in asset accumulation.

Land tenure and property rights are also important in the context of gender equality, food security, natural resource management, and economic development. IFPRI led one of the *first email conferences* on gender and property rights in 1997. More than 170 people in 27 countries participated to discuss the impact of different types of property regimes on the status and well-being of women throughout the world. The *Collective Action and Property Rights program (CAPRI)*, led by IFPRI, has continued giving attention to gender issues as they shape access to water, forests, and other natural resources.

Gender differences also play a major role in how men and women cope with risk. From March 2011 through September 2014, the IFPRI-led Research Program on Policies, Institutions, and Markets carried out the *Enhancing Women's Assets to Manage Risk under Climate Change: Potential for Group-Based Approaches* project. Taking a closer look at the linkages among gender, assets, climate change, and collective action, researchers were able to show how climate change affects men and women differently and how development projects that incorporate group-based approaches can be successful in improving resilience to climate change.

Measuring Women's Empowerment in Agriculture

As IFPRI's reputation and body of work on gender grew, so did demand for its expertise. As a result of mounting evidence that women's empowerment is an important determinant of development success, in 2011 USAID approached IFPRI and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative to develop the *Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI)*. The WEAI serves to measure the inclusion of women in agriculture as part of the US government's Feed the Future (FTF) Initiative. USAID is using the WEAI in all 19 FTF countries, and it has been broadly adopted by researchers and development practitioners in surveys, or as a means of monitoring and evaluating their programs, or both.

The WEAI has received widespread support from developing country governments and donors alike.

Former US Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton recognized it as an example of a tool created to integrate gender equality into the agricultural sector, and former USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah explained that the WEAI can serve as a means to help women farmers in poor countries produce more crops and gain greater influence over the agricultural economies of their countries. At the 2012 session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, Bangladesh State Minister of Women and Children Affairs Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury said the Index will be useful in defining the obstacles rural women face in their work as farmers and caretakers.

The Continuing Relevance of Gender

IFPRI's gender work has played an important role in demonstrating the credibility of rigorous gender research that integrates qualitative and quantitative methods, notably demonstrating the value of intrahousehold surveys that interview women *and* men and showing how the surveys can be done in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

IFPRI's gender-related research has helped to provide a more nuanced understanding of topics ranging from agricultural productivity to climate change and resiliency, contributing to the design of better-targeted programs and policies. Gender will continue to play a key role in IFPRI's research agenda as the Institute looks towards its 41st year and beyond.

Resources

For IFPRI's gender-related research, see <http://www.ifpri.org/topic/gender>.

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