

An Analysis of Gender Gap in Access to Extension Services

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ABSTRACT

Women produce between 60 -80 percent of food in most developing countries and are responsible for half of the world's food production with fewer resources, less access to technology and the added responsibility of child and family but they receive little or no support from mainstream agricultural extension services. This paper reports information on gender differentials in access to extension services in the state of Assam. Using a cross-sectional study design, data was collected from a random sample of 1100 farm families. In majority (53.20 %) of the households, men owned land compared to 31.5 per cent and 15.3 per cent that was either jointly owned or by women. Both rural women and men included as respondents in the present study possessed knowledge of different extension personnel, Access to extension information was dominated by 47.5 per cent of the men while only 32.5 per cent of the women had access. Reasons given for non participation was that the shortage of time for both rural women and men (58.23 %), sometimes it was because organising without prior notice (48.11 %) and also venue and time not suitable to participate. However, there is a gender bias on the part of the institutions providing extension services. Findings show that despite the women's important role in agricultural production, disparities exist in the receiving extension services and training programmes in the province. Factors shaping the gender gap were found to be due to notions about who is a farmer and narrow definition of women's roles in agriculture, targeting rural women as extension clients and targeting male extension agents. It is strongly recommended to train men extension agents in culturally acceptable methods of delivering extension services to women along with alternate extension methodologies such as ICTs.

Key word: Extension agents, extension services, gender, ICT, knowledge, problems.

INTRODUCTION

Classically in extension, a household is conceptualized as a programme unit. A household consists of individuals working in similar ways towards a common goal under the leadership of a male head. However, in reality the household is a much more complex and dynamic social entity. While it is useful to draw attention to the fact that there is division of labour along gender lines and it has profound implications for the organization of agriculture, men's and women's responsibilities and privileges vary along socio-cultural and socioeconomic lines specific to a particular time and place. The key role played by women in agriculture in the past was generally not acknowledged in government data and decision-making. This situation has changed over the last two or three decades, and much has been achieved in giving recognition to the importance of women in the agricultural sector. Gender mainstreaming is the current global approach in advancing gender equality and equity.

The advantage of a gender mainstreaming approach is that it allows for the advancement of gender equality and equity regardless of whether it is women or men who are disadvantaged and whose position needs to be addressed. In some regions and sectors, for example, women may be in a more advantageous position than men and gender analysis can reveal this. However, given the fact that historically it is women, who have tended to be disadvantaged, and that a number of inequalities remain, projects and programmes may need to target women specifically in order to bring about gender equality.

Much has been written about the past failures of government extension services in reaching women farmers and the cultural bias which has in many countries prevented women from active participation in group training, extension meetings and most importantly, access to inputs such as fertiliser and credit. These services have been predominantly staffed by men and they have tended to direct their services to male farmers or heads of

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households, excluding female-headed households and women members of male-headed households. However, any consideration of gender in relation to these points must be considered in the context of the changes which are taking place.

The approach for Agricultural Extension for XIth Five Year Plan was formulated based on the recommended of the sub-groups, National Commission for Farmers (NCF) and observation of planning commission and accordingly the basic approach to agricultural extension focus on extension reach to small/marginal/ women farmers and dry land areas. Keeping this in view and to bring the women at par with men by making the women friendly technologies available to them, improving their knowledge and skill in technologies through extension services was studied with the following objectives was under taken, to find out the knowledge of respondents about different extension personnel and to measure the access to extension services and gender differences in extent of participation in extension programme.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in the state of Assam, covering all the six agro climatic zones of the state namely Upper Brahmaputra valley zone, central Brahmaputra valley zone, lower Brahmaputra valley zone, central zone, north bank plain zone and hills zone. Using a cross-sectional study design, eleven hundred families were proportionately selected from different landholding categories. One active male member and one active female member was the unit of data collection from each of 1100 households. Information was collected with the help of a structured interview schedule. The interview schedule was pretested and modified and data was collected by personal interview method. The data has been compiled and analyzed in quantitative measures using simple statistical tools.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Age, occupation and education was included under profile of the respondents and the data is presented in Table 1. As education plays a major role not only for individual's opportunities in society, but also for the productive capacity and wellbeing of a household was considered to be an important variable in this study.

The data reflected that compared to the rural women the percentage of educational level of rural men was higher at all level. Highest percentage of rural men studied upto high school level, followed by middle school

and post metric diploma. While educational level of rural women in the entire category was very much poor this may be due to ignorance of importance of female education or may be traditional beliefs in some parts of the state, which was reflected education and occupational level of rural women.

These data are consistent with evidence reported by the World Bank (2007b), according to which, by 2005, 83 out of 106 developing countries had met Millennium Development Goal 3 regarding gender parity in access to education. Future prospects for reducing and eliminating the educational gender gap, as measured in terms of educational attainment, appear promising, as highlighted by the gender gap in rural middle school education attendance in the project. In terms of middle school attendance, most of the states covered now display gender parity (defined as the difference between male and female). Out of 1100 sample households selected for the study more than 70.00% rural men had complete access to and control over the productive resources whereas only 7.52 % women had complete access. Majority of the rural men (75.17%) had complete control over land labour and capital, whereas most of the rural women had partial access to and control over these resources. Gender differences with regard to access to and control over resources become more prominent as the land holding and socio-economic status increases. Across assets and inputs women are disadvantaged.

Table 1: Profile of the respondents

		n= 1100	
Variables	Profile category	Rural women(%)	Rural men(%)
Age	Young (18-30 years)	28.38	11.99
	Lower middle (31-45) years	57.09	54.9
	Upper middle (45 years and above)	14.02	32.77
Occupation of respondent	Labour	4.56	17.91
	Service	2.20	15.71
	Enterprise	1.35	9.8
	Farming	15.71	55.24
	Home Making	75.68	1.01
Education	Illiterate	8.45	5.57
	Lettered	14.19	5.07
	Primary School	19.76	12.5
	Middle School	17.06	24.49
	High School	28.21	31.93
	Post Metric Diploma	10.64	15.71
	Graduate And Above	1.18	4.39

The degree of institutional and economic development determines the scope and types of agricultural extension services and the ways in which these services are provided and financed (Anderson 2007). Data on extension impacts are often difficult to find, and comparing figures can be complicated due to the variety of ways in which data is gathered and because extension seldom stands alone. Both rural women and men included as respondents in the present study possessed knowledge of different extension personnel but gender differences was reflected in the awareness about different extension personnel and the data is presented in Table 2. VLEW and 96.83 per cent did not know about the bank personnel, 94.57 per cent block personnel and 92.53 per cent about University personnel.

The data can be supported with the world Bank report 2011. However, data also show that coverage is not always uniform, and that positions are not always filled, limiting the support farmers are able to receive. According to the position paper 2012 on Fact sheet on extension services, in India, of the 143,863 positions in the Department of Agriculture, only 91,288 posts are filled. Combined with the large number of farm households in the country, this small number of positions means that on average extension services only reach 6.8 per cent of farmers. Woman farmers' access to extension services remains limited, and the coverage of resource poor farmers needs expansion and improvement

The gender difference in level of awareness was highest with to VLEW and followed by extension officer while it was just opposite for personnel from NGO and Block. This was due to the fact that personnel form in the Govt Sector targets "men" as their clientele and also the number of extension worker personnel's not alarmingly low, one person had cover a large geographical area while the Both male and female members had frequent contact with VLEW compared to other Extension personnel.

The findings are in the same line with the data reported by GFRAS (2012) where it says that Almost all extension services lack something crucial – female participation is very low. Women, on average, comprise 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries and account for an estimated two-thirds of the world's 600 million poor livestock keepers. Yet only 15 per cent of the world's extension agents are women, and only 5 per cent of women farmers benefit from extension services. This, in combination with a continuing gap in access to resources, inputs, and technologies, negatively affects women farmers' ability to create sustainable livelihoods from their farms

**Table 2: Knowledge of Extension personnel by gender
n= 1100**

Extension Personnel	Rural women (%)	Rural men (%)	Gender Differences
Vlew	81.22	85.58	4.36
Extension Officers	22.62	26.80	4.18
University Personal	4.47	7.02	2.55
NGO personnel	16.29	12.75	-3.54
Bank Personnel	3.17	3.33	0.16
Block Personnel	5.43	4.44	-0.99

The degree of institutional and economic development determines the scope and types of agricultural extension services and the ways in which these services are provided and financed (Anderson 2007). As regard to preference of extension methods 61.54% of the rural women preferred tour programme as one of the training method which was followed by on farm trial, multimedia, awareness programme, campaign, field day etc. In case of rural men they preferred mostly training using multimedia followed by on farm trial, field day, awareness programme and tour and 38.39 per cent of the male members preferred demonstration. Lecture as a method of training was not proffered by a large majority of women (72.70%).

**Table 3: Area of participation in training by Gender
n= 1100**

Training Area	Rural women (%)	Rural men (%)	Gender Gap
Crop cultivation	33.7	82.2	-48.5
Fisheries	12.0	11.2	0.8
Homestead	2.2	0.5	1.7
Horticulture	28.3	24.9	3.4
Income generating	22.8	3.0	19.8
Livestock	39.1	16.2	22.9
Social/educational programmes	5.4	2.0	3.4
Waste management	0.0	2.0	-2

High majority (82.2%) of rural men attended farm related training programmes while 33.7 per cent of rural women included in farm related training in spite of contributing the labour input in farming is alarmingly low indicating that the role of women in farming is still invisible. taking this as a major theme of NGOs working for women one in the growing for women are in the increasing day by day in our country. Moreover women SHG benefits and services from the Block personnel and besides officials which may be due their ongoing developmental schemes. Instead the rural women were targeted for training in income generating activities which was larger than the men.

The access to well-defined extension services is more important for economies in which agriculture is a major or declining source of economic growth (agriculture-based and transforming economies) but less important in

economies in which agriculture is a minor source of economic growth (urbanized economies).

Now a days a number .of NGO, GO are involved in extension services in spite of 30.43 per cent of the rural women did not avail extension services provided by different organizations and institutions due to involvement of men in the services. As expressed by the respondent the vanue and the time of conducting training programme was reported to be inconvenient to participant . more than half of the respondents as even now the mobilizing to the women members are limited and their role as “mother” and “wife” is can not be ignored. Thus our finding indicates that while organizing any extension programme the time and venue must be well planned .so that participation women members can be included leading to the gender differences and increasing the status of women of Shortage of time was also a factor for some of the women. Sometimes biasness of the Extension personnel made the women farmers unsatisfied as a result they cannot avail extension services. Which was reported by some of the men too for availing Extension services.

**Table 4: Reason for not availing Extension services
n= 1100**

Reason	Rural women (%)	Rural men (%)
Biased contact by extension worker	40.23	40.83
Not convenient to attend at the venue	6.84	55.56
Not needed	10.34	10.35
Not relevant	18.98	41.77
Organised without prior notice	27.87	39.35
Personnel involved are men	73.91	26.09
Shortage of time	49.29	24.41

CONCLUSION

Traditional gender divisions of labour often consign women farmers to subsistence production for her household's own consumption. Policies and interventions that accept this as a given and assume that commercial production is the province of men will miss many opportunities to tap into the tremendous productive potential of women. Rural women have the potential to lift their households and communities out of poverty. But they are hampered by persistent gender inequities that limit their access to decent work, which they need as a vehicle for economic empowerment, social advancement and political participation. Without that knowledge it is impossible to analyse these fundamental issues or propose appropriate responses. The access to well-defined extension services is more important for

economies in which agriculture is a major or declining source of economic growth (agriculture-based and transforming economies) but less important in economies in which agriculture is a minor source of economic growth (urbanized economies). Hence the gender discrimination in delivery of extension services is to be taken care .

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the present project following policy recommendations are proposed, strengthening women's land and water rights and investing in girls' schooling, taking gender roles into account when designing and implementing projects, adopting program design or service delivery to meet client needs, creating Gender-responsive climate, promoting divisible technologies or smaller input packages that are more affordable, as well as opportunities for groups to achieve economies of scale, the potential of ICTs to capture and respond to women farmers document the experience of private sector Extension Advisory Services in reaching women farmers.

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