

# Gender Issues in Ag Extension Programming in sub-Saharan Africa



Food security is critical to achieving sustainable growth, poverty reduction, and political and economic stability, especially in regions of the world undergoing rapid population growth, such as sub-Saharan Africa, where the population is projected to double by 2050 (UN, 2020). In 2018, the total population of sub-Saharan Africa amounted to approximately 1.08 billion inhabitants; by 2060, the population could be as large as 2.7 billion people (UN, 2020).

**Poultry plays a vital role in the food security and economy of the region** because of the increasing demand for animal protein, with consumers demanding more indigenous chickens (USAID, 2010). Local chickens are one of the most adaptable species of domestic birds, so large numbers of rural households are directly involved in their production under free range/scavenging systems (Nakkazi et al., 2014).

Smallholder households provide up to 80 percent of the food supply in sub-Saharan Africa through farming and livestock production, of which chickens are a key part. Although smallholder households often have fewer resources than more prosperous farmers, they play a major role in food security in developing countries (Dixon et al., 2004).

These **smallholder households often keep chickens** even if they don't produce crops or own larger livestock. In sub-Saharan Africa, indigenous chickens are owned and managed mainly by women and children (Ahlers et al., 2009). However, these individuals may not have access to and control over income from the local chicken value chain because of gender issues and the fact that men tend to **take over women-owned enterprises once they become profitable** (KIT, Agri-ProFocus and IIRR, 2012).

## Gender Issues

Agriculture can be an important engine for growth and poverty reduction. However, the sector is underperforming in many countries in part because women, who are often a critical resource in agriculture and the rural economy, face constraints that reduce their productivity (FAO, 2011a). For instance, the persistent gender gap in farming activities constitutes a major obstacle to agricultural growth and development in sub-Saharan Africa (Agholor, 2019). Despite concerted efforts to mainstream gender into agricultural Extension services, women are still restricted from learning opportunities provided by these services (Ragasa, 2014).

An FAO survey in 1989, which covered 97 countries, indicated that **only about 5 percent** of available local Extension resources were accessible and directly targeted toward women (FAO, 1993). Closing the gender gap could release the untapped productive potential of women in agriculture (Agholor, 2019). If women had similar access to the means of production as their male counterparts, they could maximize yields on their farming enterprises by 20–30 percent and subsequently multiply output by an average of 3 percent (FAO, 2011b).

Unfortunately, however, **gender inequalities in many developing countries keep women at lower levels of the poultry value chain**. These inequalities exist in Extension poultry programming just as in many other areas. However, improved poultry Extension programming could offer opportunities to address gender inequalities associated with village chicken production and increase production efficiency, which could improve family stability and reduce poverty.

In Africa, gender participation in both farm and nonfarm activities varies depending on the country and culture (Ndiritu et al., 2014). This variation has had implications for agricultural development, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where farm productivity is still low compared to other countries in the world (FAO, 2011). Gender plays a key role in stimulating smallholder farming growth, especially in rural areas of developing countries where manual labor dominates production (FAO, 2014). Gender is also considered vital in determining constraints and opportunities for technological innovations and adoption in East Africa (Mapiye et al., 2008).

It is critical that Extension programming address gender issues because **gender inequalities contribute to global hunger and food insecurity** (Njuki et al., 2016), and because, for the most part, Extension programming that does not have an explicit focus on women and gender often does not recognize the important role that women have in agriculture (Anandajayasekaram et al., 2008). While women in agriculture have been extensively studied since the 1980s, Extension programs in developing countries are often **insensitive to gender and fail to consider specific needs and desires of women farmers** (Jafrey and Sulaiman, 2013a). This neglect contributes to women's continued income and food insecurity (Kabeer, 2012). **Women are an integral part of agriculture and the agricultural workforce** in developing countries, sometimes supplying the bulk of the labor while systemically being overlooked by Extension services (UNICEF, 2000; Jafrey & Sulaiman, 2013a).

In general, agricultural Extension services in developing countries deal mainly with prosperous farmers concerned with crop and ruminant production systems. Therefore, the current knowledge base of how poultry production is integrated in the farming system is quite lacking (Bagnol, 2009).

Extension staff in developing countries are often male and lack adequate skills on gender integration in their day-to-day activities. Extension workers also have limited knowledge on **poultry husbandry** and are not aware that women have different perspectives about raising chickens than their male counterparts. In addition, **village leaders, who make most of the decisions concerning the community, are almost exclusively men**. Consequently, the activities, solutions, messages, and communication materials are often inappropriate to women farmers' needs (Bagnol, 2009).

There is evidence that, globally, when women are the targets of Extension programming, the benefits are typically felt by both women and their children (Anandajayasekeram et al., 2008). If Extension services are to be useful to women, programming must consider the unique social, cultural, and economic contexts of women, and their program implementation must be adjusted accordingly (Diaz and Najjar, 2017). An **overhaul of most Extension services** in developing countries is necessary, in order to become more sensitive to issues of gender (Jafrey & Sulaiman, 2013b). Bagnol (2009) reported that **women are often less exposed to Extension messages** even when the messages are related to activities that the women oversee. For example, when study groups were separated into men and women, the women's group had never heard of Newcastle disease vaccine, while the men's group had. It cannot be assumed that, because men receive Extension training, the information trickles down to women.

## Farmer Field Schools

**Extension services are critical for addressing rural poverty** since they involve farmers in agricultural knowledge systems (Davis et al, 2012). As such, Extension has a unique opportunity to use Farmer Field School (FFS) programs as a participatory method of learning, technology adaptation, and dissemination, where farmers conduct research, solve problems, and suggest solutions (Davis et al., 2012). With properly qualified Extension personnel, FFS programs can be an important practice to ensure Extension services are relevant to women. FFS programs increase productivity and incomes significantly more for women than men (Davis et al., 2012).

Farmer Field School is a Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) approach, started in Asia in the late 1980s, based on people-centered learning that is now being implemented in over 90 countries around the world. FFS activities are anchored in **non-formal adult education** approaches, making FFS programs ideal for Extension programming efforts. FFS programs enable learning through direct experience, integrating scientific insights into local knowledge systems. However, a critical element of quality FFS programs is the **training of facilitators** who direct the FFS process. Facilitators often are Extension workers,

farmer organization staff, and farmers themselves. Some FFS programs focus on training local farmers as facilitators, which may lead to higher levels of success as farmers are motivated to return home with useful skills and knowledge to share with their home village.

Because Extension services in developing countries are often designed with men in mind, Farnworth and Colverson (2015) proposed a "gender transformative Extension and advisory facilitation system," based on **creating knowledge with farmers rather than disseminating knowledge to them**, with the ultimate goal of reaching gender equality. As such, combining existing innovative approaches to gender and agricultural Extension, such as working with existing social structures in order to transform them and including men in the process to develop collaborative relations, can help create effective approaches to a gender-transformative Extension and advisory facilitation system (Farnworth and Colverson, 2015).

## Different Extension Approaches

Many developing countries around the world rely on small-scale agriculture, even though it has not met its full potential in many locations. One reason is that there are limits on finite resources such as land and water. Another is a **lack of smallholder training programs by Extension services** (particularly where women are concerned) or, perhaps more importantly (especially in the case of chicken production), training that is inappropriate for the audience (i.e., programming delivered to men when women are raising the chickens).

Extension services in many developed countries have shifted dramatically in recent decades from a top-down approach to a more shared approach that focuses on entrepreneurship instead of simply transferring technology (Pretty, 2002). However, some believe the top-down approach still prevails in sub-Saharan Africa (Mudege et al., 2015; Spaling et al., 2011). Still others suggest that Extension services worldwide should focus on increasing farmer knowledge and observation skills so that farmers come to recognize some agricultural practices as unsustainable and others as beneficial (Anandajayasekeram et al., 2008).

Extension services in developing countries often have FFS programs under their umbrella, and this would seem a natural fit. However, to evaluate the role and function of FFS programs in Extension programming, it is important to understand how agricultural Extension has changed over the decades. For decades, most countries in the developing world relied on the **concepts of diffusion of information and transfer of technology from scientists to farmers** using the Extension worker as essentially a **one-way mode of communication** (FAO, 2016).

However, in the wake of a number of large-impact studies, this is largely considered a failed system (Anderson et al., 2006). There is now a general recognition that **sustainability of agricultural improvement is not simply in the transfer of technologies**, but rather in the social process of active farmer-managed innovation and dissemination of ideas where farmers manage and

coordinate the processes themselves (Leeuwis & van den Ban, 2004).

FFS programs may offer special significance in the areas of village chicken production and gender inequality because they offer an opportunity to bridge the gender gap and improve production efficiency through social groups and farmer-to-farmer interaction. FFS programs, through their focus on **empowering farmers through field-based experiential learning processes**, create conditions for new trends and opportunities in Extension programming and innovative systems to be put into practice (FAO, 2016). If managed properly, new trends in Extension programming can address gender issues in agricultural Extension programming across much of sub-Saharan Africa.

## Summary

Achieving food security is critical to many developing countries around the world. Poultry production plays a vital role in food security in sub-Saharan African economies because of the increasing demand for animal protein in the region. Unfortunately, serious gender inequality issues keep many women at the lower levels of the poultry value chain. However, **improved Extension programming can address gender inequalities associated with village chicken production**. It will not be an easy task. There is a critical shortage of Extension workers throughout much of the sub-Saharan African region that must be addressed. For real change to occur, countries must be willing to commit time, money, resources, and, perhaps most importantly, qualified personnel, to address the issues.

Extension personnel, particularly in developing countries, must be carefully selected. They need strong communication skills to translate scientific information and best management practices in a way that is understandable at the farmer level. They need to be able to quickly understand the best way to deal with each unique individual (man or woman). Last but not least, they should value everyone (man or woman) equally and desire to help them find a better way to do things and increase their agricultural productivity.

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**Publication 3501** (POD-08-20)

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Extension Service of Mississippi State University, cooperating with U.S. Department of Agriculture. Published in furtherance of Acts of Congress, May 8 and June 30, 1914. GARY B. JACKSON, Director