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GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

Bridging the Gap between Research and Action

Agnes R. Quisumbing and Bonnie McClafferty

Practitioners may ask why they should address gender issues in development. Aside from the obvious answer—that gender equality is a basic human right and in that sense is integral to development—many disparities in development outcomes stem from gender differences. While practitioners are often knowledgeable about general development or technical issues, many lack the understanding and resources necessary to effectively integrate gender issues into specific projects and public policy. Further, many practitioners are not convinced of the importance of gender issues, or they may find it difficult to navigate approaches in the context of development.



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FOOD SECURITY IN PRACTICE

Using Gender Research in Development

by Agnes R. Quisumbing and Bonnie McClafferty



Gender considerations can affect the allocation, targeting, and control of resources; hence, an understanding of how resources are allocated within households can profoundly affect policies associated with the design and implementation of development projects. For specific projects, on the other hand, incorporating research findings can increase their effectiveness.

Recent research undertaken by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) provides both empirical evidence of the effects of gender and intrahousehold issues on development intervention outcomes, and specific guidance on how to incorporate research findings effectively into development projects and policy instruments. The challenge is to bridge the gap between research and action. It is vitally important—regardless of whether gender issues are taken into account—that programs and policy instruments be backed by rigorous research. A recently published guide for practitioners, *Food Security in Practice: Using Gender Research in Development* by Agnes R. Quisumbing and Bonnie McClafferty, embodies the efforts of IFPRI researchers to maximize the relevance and accessibility of their findings to their audiences.

FINDINGS

FROM IFPRI'S GENDER RESEARCH PROGRAM

Households do not act as one when making decisions

In an overwhelming majority of cases from a wide range of developing countries, the conventional wisdom that men's and women's resources have the same effects on household decisionmaking is rejected. Results indicate that household members have different preferences and do not pool their resources.

Share of resources depends on bargaining power within the household

The inequality in resource distribution between men and women has both economic and social consequences. The collective model predicts that “bargaining power” determines the share of resources allocated to an individual within a household. Regardless of the measure chosen, the distribution of power and resources within the household almost always favors men.

Increasing resources controlled by women has beneficial effects on agriculture, health, and nutrition

In agriculture, if resources are inefficiently allocated within the household, their redistribution, in favor of women,

increases yields or leaves them unchanged. Improvements in women's status and increases in the resources controlled by women are associated with increased allocations toward education and improving child health and nutrition. Further, investment in women—particularly in education—is key to poverty reduction and income improvement.

Local norms and statutory laws both determine women's rights

Despite legal reform, what often determines women's property rights in practice is how laws are interpreted and implemented at the local level. The relative importance of norms and statutes varies across countries and is also influenced by women's social class, education, and urban or rural location. In many cases, particularly in rural areas, customs may be more important than statutes.

Increasing women's resources helps achieve successful development outcomes

Innovative measures to increase women's resources include credit programs targeted to women, programs designed to increase girls' educational attainment, community day-care programs, and income transfers targeted to women. These programs have had positive effects on women's earning and decisionmaking ability and in some cases have conveyed benefits to their children, such as reducing the incidence of illness and the probability of stunting, and increasing attendance at school. In the case of PROGRESA, Mexico's conditional cash transfer program, for example, the educational attainment of the children of participating mothers was extended by 0.7 years per child on average, and secondary school attendance by girls was increased.

INCORPORATING

GENDER RESEARCH USING PROJECT AND POLICY CYCLES

A primary goal of IFPRI's gender research is to show how the findings can inform the design and implementation of development projects and policy. For the purposes of exposition, a development project is determined to have four primary phases: (1) needs assessment and problem identification, (2) project design and appraisal, (3) project implementation and monitoring, and (4) evaluation.

Similarly, the process of policymaking also has phases: (1) agenda setting, (2) policy formulation, (3) adoption, (4) implementation, and (5) assessment.

Addressing gender in needs assessment and problem definition

In many cases, the only information on resource allocation is likely to come from qualitative studies, such as interviews with key informants, focus groups, and participant observation. Views of men and women in the community must be solicited separately, especially in cultures where women do not feel free to speak out in the presence of men. Other factors must also be considered that may mediate the effect of gender, such as age, civil status, ethnic makeup, indigenous mixes, and urban versus rural locations.

When designing development projects in countries where poverty rates are higher for women, the nature and causes of poverty in female-headed households and for women in general must be taken into account. It is important to know about the formal and informal organizations to which men and women belong, the criteria for membership, and the actual and perceived barriers to participation. Project planners need to be aware of the supportive roles women play in organizations, even when they are not formal members; the informal channels they use to make their needs known; the extent to which men's and women's needs are perceived as legitimate; and whether channels exist through which these needs can be made known to local authorities or governing bodies. It is important to discern whether mixed or single-sex groups will be more effective. Often it is not legal ownership of a resource but its control that is important, which necessitates an understanding of the relationship between resource control and bargaining power. Project planners must be aware of formal and informal institutions, such as inheritance, marriage, and other institutions that affect gender status, since this will affect the relative status of male and female project participants.

Addressing gender in project design and appraisal

Gender considerations will affect such aspects as the relative priority given to needs and solutions, the choice among different approaches to a particular problem, the need for and nature of the targeting mechanism used, the gender balance of project staff, and the involvement of different stakeholders as participants. Increasing women's control of resources is crucial to attaining many desired project outcomes, such as increased education and improved health of children. However, women's participation in projects may have unintended consequences, such as on time use. When designing human capital interventions, it is important to discover the constraints to increasing school attendance, retention rates, regularity of health visits, and so on. These constraints may be financial, social, or cultural—and they may vary by gender. If the constraints are financial, conditional transfer programs may be viable. If cultural factors are important, information, communication, and education (ICE) activities should be incorporated into the program. If human capital outcomes are worse for women, design features can increase incentives selectively for girls. Helping women fulfill domestic responsibilities such as child care may be important to increasing their participation in the labor force.

Addressing gender in project implementation, monitoring, and evaluation

Measuring the performance of development projects is essential to increasing their effectiveness. Targeting mechanisms, levels of staff training, the gender composition of staff, and even the extent to which service providers understand project objectives may have an important effect on the project's success in reaching its beneficiaries and, thus, the project's overall performance. Monitoring provides policy-relevant knowledge that assists in project implementation. It is also important that unintended project consequences be brought to light. Evaluation enables project implementers to draw lessons for future experience, ultimately increasing impact. Project beneficiaries may have strong preferences for the gender of providers, a factor that should be taken into account when determining staffing plans. Quota-based targeting may have unintended effects if field workers—who may be evaluated based on the quota—attempt to meet it without paying attention to intrahousehold dynamics. Targeting based on one objective (gender equity) may at times run counter to other program objectives (say, increased yields or profits) if women do not have equal access to productive resources and if the project does not include specific provisions to equalize women's access to resources.

Increasingly, quantitative studies are being complemented by qualitative studies, which provide project planners with direct views from different stakeholders. Whether quantitative studies can do before/after comparisons, however, critically depends on the existence of baseline data. Therefore, it is important for evaluators to be involved in project design, so that evaluation can be built into project implementation and the collection of monitoring indicators at the local level. Implementers should pay attention to feedback from male and female stakeholders in designing project modifications; the use of participatory methods can help to ensure their continued involvement.

Implications of gender research for policymakers

Policymakers are a rather amorphous group, such that informing policy is more of an art than a science. Thus, gender and intrahousehold research findings should be viewed as a lens through which the policy agenda is set. This involves asking pertinent questions, scrutinizing policy options, determining levels of risk, and monitoring policy outcomes. Policymakers should not assume that the impacts of policies will be the same for all household members. Development policies in countries where poverty rates are higher for women must take into account the nature and causes of poverty among female-headed households and among women in general.

Policymakers should examine the extent to which statutory laws regarding property rights discriminate against women. At the same time, they should be aware that legal reforms may be nullified by customary practice. Even countries with highly equitable legal systems may

have local customs that discriminate against women. When forecasting policy impact, titling or other land legislation should be examined for its effect on women's land rights. However, attempts to increase women's incomes or agricultural productivity by equalizing land rights will only succeed if other constraints facing women, such as limited access to credit, labor shortages, and lack of seed and other inputs, are also addressed. Policymakers need to examine trade-offs between acceptability and long-term development objectives when implementing policies whose success may be conditioned on social and cultural constraints that may vary by gender. As for projects, when constraints are financial, conditional transfer programs may be viable; when cultural factors are at issue, ICE activities should be incorporated; and when human capital outcomes are worse for women, design features should target girls.

Policymakers should invest in an information system that collects sex-disaggregated data to enable them to ascertain the gender-specific impact of policies, track progress, and ensure consistency with other national development objectives. The choice of evaluation method depends on the developmental objectives, the scale of the policy implementation, and resources and data available for evaluation. Policymakers should pay attention to feedback from male and female stakeholders when proposing changes to existing policies and interventions. In some cases, no modification is good modification because policies may be achieving the desired outcomes if they have been sensitive to the gender implications of resource use within households.

This brief is based on the 2006 volume, *Food Security in Practice: Using Gender Research in Development*, by Agnes R. Quisumbing and Bonnie McClafferty. Related IFPRI publications include A. R. Quisumbing, ed., *Household Decisions, Gender, and Development: A Synthesis of Recent Research* (Washington, D.C.: IFPRI, 2003); L. C. Smith, U. Ramakrishnan, A. Ndiaye, L. Haddad, and R. Martorell, *The Importance of Women's Status for Child Nutrition in Developing Countries*, Research Report No. 131 (Washington, D.C.: IFPRI, 2003); E. Skoufias, *PROGRESA and Its Impacts on the Welfare of Rural Households in Mexico*, Research Report No. 139 (Washington, D.C.: IFPRI, 2005); and M. T. Ruel and A. R. Quisumbing, with K. Hallman and B. de la Brière, *The Guatemala Community Day Care Program: An Example of Effective Urban Programming*, Research Report No. 144 (Washington, D.C.: IFPRI, 2006).

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