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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OF

GENDER ISSUES IN FARMING SYSTEMS RESEARCH:

A SURVEY OF CURRENT PROJECTS

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GENDER ISSUES IN FARMING SYSTEMS RESEARCH AND EXTENSION:
A SURVEY OF CURRENT PROJECTS¹

by

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Introduction

This report presents an analysis of the mechanisms that have led to either successes or failures in integrating gender analysis and issues into a selected group of agricultural research and extension projects that are using the Farming Systems Research and Extension (FSR/E) approach. The study took advantage of the explicit attention given to gender in the

1988 Annual FSR/E Symposium held at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. Based on this analysis, the report presents a set of findings and recommendations for more effective integration of gender issues into agricultural development.

The Significance of WID and Gender Issues to Farming Systems Research and Extension

Farming Systems Research and Extension, or FSR/E, is an approach used in agricultural research and development to generate appropriate technology. The approach potentially offers an excellent mechanism for identifying and addressing the agricultural problems of farmers, both male and female.

While there are excellent examples of social science research on agriculture prior to FSR/E, the FSR/E approach changed the relationship between social science and agriculture in the following important ways:

- FSR/E encouraged expansion of social science involvement from a narrow group of agricultural economists to a broader range of social science disciplines, including anthropology and sociology;
- FSR/E enabled social scientists to work as members of interdisciplinary teams in the actual development of technology;
- The development of institutional structures to contain FSR/E in research or extension institutions at last provided a secure home base for the social sciences in agriculture (Bingen and Poats 1988).

Initially, FSR/E practitioners used the household as the central unit to analyze management and decision making by farmers. While the focus on the household was part of a long-needed recognition of the rationality of low-resource farmers, it obscured differences among individuals within the household. Borrowing household models proposed by economists, practitioners assumed that "the farm household" functioned as a single unit of production and consumption. It was further assumed that consensus among household members existed on the allocation of resources and benefits, and that all household members' interests and problems were identical (Cloud 1988).

In recent years, these beliefs and assumptions about farm households have radically shifted, in part because of the growing body of empirical research on women in development (WID). WID researchers focused on women's importance as household producers and providers in addition to their domestic roles. Women emerged as active producers whose potential contributions were often overlooked or undermined by development projects (Poats et al. 1988). By recognizing differences between men's and women's roles in production, the assumed homogeneity of the farm household was

replaced by the concept of "intra-household dynamics." It is now widely recognized that intra-household relationships are as diverse and dynamic as the relationships between households. Individuals within a household may share some interests, have separate interests, and at times have opposing interests (Feldstein et al. 1987, Cloud 1988).

Technology that will help one farmer in a household may actually hurt other farmers within the same household. The recognition that these diverse and complex relationships among members of households must be considered in the design, testing, and evaluation

of new technology has stimulated exciting and innovative methodological developments in FSR/E.

The growing WID field has provided new tools to allow researchers and development workers to identify relevant information on who performs which activities, who makes which decisions about the allocation and control of resources, what are the incentives and disincentives that influence which women and men are included (or not included) in development activities, and who benefits from proposed interventions (Feldstein et al. 1987, Overholt et al. 1985).

Uncertainty About Gender, Gender Analysis, and Gender Issues

Uncertainty exists about the use of the term gender, the process of gender analysis, and what the incorporation of gender issues into a project implies. Practitioners often confuse the use of gender as a socioeconomic variable to analyze the farming system and disaggregate data, with the equity issue of including women, both as project personnel and as target groups for development projects. While analysis of this socioeconomic variable – gender analysis – may indicate a need to include women as target groups or hire women on project teams, doing gender analysis and incorporating the results into project design and implementation has far broader consequences. The addition of women to teams or target groups may not be sufficient if the intervention is inappropriate to women's responsibilities within the farming system or if their access and control over resources is not understood. Effective gender analysis expands our understanding of the farming system in its entirety to include an awareness of how all the activities of all members of the farm household are interrelated and impacted by development-

induced change. Specific recommendations based on gender analysis will vary from farming system to farming system and broad generalizations such as "hire more women" or "target women farmers" cannot be automatically transferred from project to project.

Gender is a socioeconomic variable that can be used to analyze the farming system and disaggregate data. Gender analysis applied to agricultural research and extension asks the key questions – who does what; who has access and control of resources needed for production, who will benefit from proposed interventions; who should be included in the process of technology improvement.

Gender analysis is the most effective tool to open up the farm household and to begin to understand the behavior of its members. Disaggregation of information must be done to understand the choices open to the farm household. Disaggregation is not limited to gender – sometimes it may have to go further to include age, class, caste, race, ethnicity – but the most effective category to start with is gender.

Gender analysis should not be something done strictly as part of the initial diagnosis or socioeconomic assessment. Used in this limited way, the findings of the gender analysis – gender issues – are not effectively translated into recommendations to modify other aspects of the project, such as on-farm trials, evaluation, and dissemination. Too often, gender analysis has been perceived as being the sole responsibility of the social scientist on the team, or the female team members, rather than the entire team. It is important that team members see the relevance of gender issues to their own responsibilities.

Obstacles to gender analysis lie largely within project teams and less in resistance from farmers. Effective inclusion of gender issues into development projects requires overcoming cultural attitudes emanating from at least four different "cultural" sources: the culture of the professional discipline, the culture of the development project/agency, the native culture(s) of the project team members, and the culture(s) of the target group(s). All too often in development work, the culture(s) of development project teams go unexamined, and the culture(s) of target groups are treated only as obstacles to be overcome to successfully transfer technology. In many cases, gender analysis is a new tool being introduced to the

development team at the same time the team is attempting to introduce new technology to a target group. There are several reasons why the introduction of gender analysis may provoke resistance from team members:

- It places team members in the role of "ignorant" recipients, rather than "expert" donors;
- It challenges team members' perceptions about their roles within project teams and their research methodologies.
- It questions basic constructs that team members have about gender and appropriate roles.

Despite uncertainty about gender analysis and resistance to its implementation, gender analysis is an effective and useful tool to projects that do it – interventions are more appropriate and more accurately targeted, research is more efficient, and transfer of technology is easier and better received by target groups. Gender analysis thus makes project personnel's jobs easier and projects more effective.

Findings and Recommendations

1. Gender analysis is an important tool for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of projects.
2. Gender analysis should be an on-going process whose findings are continually being applied to all stages of development projects.
3. Gender analysis should be the responsibility of all project team members although for practical considerations, a single team member should be in charge of gender analysis activities. While there was a correlation between having women and/or social scientists on the teams and whether or not gender analysis was conducted, their presence did not guarantee attention to gender issues. Additionally, there were some teams with no women or social scientists who did conduct gender analysis and include gender issues. The key was *training*.
4. Training on gender analysis and gender issues works and should be incorporated into more projects. It is the single most important factor responsible for inclusion of gender issues into project activities. Training should address the importance of gender analysis, sources of resistance to the inclusion of gender issues into development projects, methods of doing gender analysis and methods of converting gender analysis findings into project-specific recommendations or modifications. Training should consist not only of formal programs but also informal efforts that continue throughout the project.
5. Formal training in gender issues should be implemented before projects begin and be directed at the entire project team and host country counterparts, if possible. Training focus often has been only on participant training in degree programs or on short courses delivered by external experts. This focus must shift if gender analysis is to become truly a part of the established development process.
6. Informal training in gender issues should continue throughout the duration of projects and should involve all members of the project team. This informal training should be directed at adapting gender analysis findings to the needs of all project members and all project stages. An effective type of informal training is group data analysis and discussion meetings in which the entire team brainstorms strategies based on shared gender analysis results.
7. Donor agencies, international agricultural research centers, and national agricultural research universities and institutions should have staff available to backstop efforts by projects to integrate gender issues and to troubleshoot on gender and WID problems. They could maintain a database of successful training approaches, field methodologies for gender analysis, and strategies for the implementation of gender analysis findings to projects. This would advance our methodological knowledge and keep both trainers and projects from having to "reinvent the gender issues wheel."
8. Techniques for gender analysis could be improved by practitioners making a greater effort to share their experiences. Increased attention must be paid not only to methods for doing gender analysis but to strategies for applying gender issue findings to all stages of projects.

References

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¹The full report, *Gender Issues in Farming Systems Research & Extension: A Survey of Current Projects*, is divided into five sections with appendices. Section 1 introduces the overall goals and objectives of the study, provides the background on why the study was initiated, and defines the audience for the results. Section 2 addresses the question "Why consider gender issues in FSR/E?" and describes the history and current status of women in development (WID), gender issues, and FSR/E. Section 3 describes the research methodology used in developing and distributing the questionnaire, analyzing the results, and interpreting the findings. Section 4 presents the survey findings and the analysis and interpretation of the results. These are then summarized as conclusions in Section 5 and a series of recommendations are presented for project managers, researchers, and development workers. A bibliography and several appendices with the survey questionnaire and description of the survey sample complete the report. Requests for copies of the full report should be directed to:

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