

NSAC International Beyond Borders

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What does gender have to do with it?

"The participation of women in agriculture in Ethiopia has been described as one of 'contested identity' – indicated on a literal level by the semantics employed at the government and community levels that frequently equate the word farmer with man." Frank, E. (1999)

In Africa women are responsible for approximately 70% of the staple food production and they also play a significant role in the cultivation and harvesting of cash crops (World Bank, 1986). Despite women's deep involvement in agriculture they are rarely considered as farmers by policy makers or their own communities. In addition to food production and income generation, women are also traditionally tasked with the domestic and reproductive duties within Ethiopian households. These multiple workloads mean that rural women tend to work on average 13-17 hours each day; in many cases more than twice the daily input than that of men.

Despite heavy workloads and responsibility, women rarely receive a portion of the household income from their spouses or communities, and have unequal access and rights to land. Women working in agriculture have also been shown to have less access to advanced technology for their farm work, with females often tilling the land by hand while men use oxen. They generally collect firewood and water by

hand, without assistance from farm animals. This can take hours away from their other activities.



Ethiopian women ploughing and planting crops.

In terms of policy, Ethiopia is taking steps to promote gender equality. A key component of their current 5-year Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) as well as the previous 5-year plan (PASDEP) is to assist women through active and empowered participation in all development programs. Ethiopia is actively working towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals related to gender and have taken measures to adopt gender responsive goals and targets to reduce the workload of women so as to enable them to participate in political and socio-economic decision-making. The government has also introduced extension services for female-linked agricultural activities, encouraged women-headed households to participate in programs and facilitated in the provision of credit and resources to rural women. However, despite the appearance of policy support, data indicates that these national and regional-level guidelines and provisions have not been adequately translated into local change.

A study on agricultural universities in Ethiopia found that women were under-

represented at all levels, both as students and as staff members (Bekele, 2006). Recruitment strategies to attract female students - where they exist- have had limited success and the drop-out rates during the first year are high. When the vast majority of agricultural researchers and university teachers are male, the vast majority of agricultural students are male, combined with the general sense that the farmers are all male, it is difficult to conceive that these universities could successfully engender their curriculum and improve agricultural production through the effective engagement of rural women.

Initiating Change

Gender mainstreaming as a way forward for JUCAVM

Jimma University College of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine (JUCAVM) is located in Southwest Ethiopia and is a current partner of NSAC and McGill University. Together they are implementing a six year project titled "Post Harvest Management to Improve Livelihoods (PHMIL)" funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

The project will support JUCAVM to become a leader in post-harvest management and technologies to improve the quality, value and availability of local agricultural products. It will do this through training in post-harvest management and value-added agriculture techniques; new degree programs; improving library and laboratory facilities; and establishing a network of universities, industries, government and community groups with expertise and interest in the development of improved post-harvest systems. Post-harvest technologies will be developed through

graduate student and faculty research and shared with farmers via demonstration sites and a community-based education program.

One of the cross-cutting themes of the PHMIL project is gender and a specific strategy has been put in place to address issues of inequality at JUCAVM. The components include:

- Recruitment and retention of female students at B.Sc. and M.Sc. levels to attain 50% female and 50% male in these programs, along with capacity building of female faculty and staff;
- Mainstreaming of gender issues within the new B.Sc. and M.Sc. programs;
- Enhanced awareness and rigour of gender issues in applied research programs and projects;
- Ensuring attention to the gendering of HIV/AIDS within the framework; and
- Specific attention to capacity building of Development Agents (DAs) to work in a participatory way with women farmers in relation to technologies.



Don't Turn Your Back on HIV/AIDS - JUCAVM staff use photovoice to create local messages about HIV/AIDS

Jimma University, as evidenced in the Jimma University Draft Policy (February 2008), has a commitment to recruiting and retaining female staff and students. At the time of the development of the draft policy only 4% of staff and 22% of students at JUCAVM were female. A 50% target for female students in the Post-Harvest management Bsc. and MSc. Programmes, combined with JUCAVM's commitment to hire the top female graduates, and the planned strategies to reduce female drop outs, are all positive steps forward.

To date the PHMIL project has implemented three customized short term trainings focused on gender at JUCAVM, the latest being in January of this year. In addition, short term trainees from JUCAVM, who have come to Canada, have also had the opportunity to take gender specific training. One of the main topics of the workshops focuses on gender and HIV/AIDS mainstreaming in higher education.

Mainstreaming is considered one effective way of addressing gender inequality because it looks more comprehensively at the relationships between men and women in their access to and control over resources, decision making, and benefits and rewards within a particular system. That system may be an organization, a government or an entire society (CIDA, 2000).



Gender trainees conduct a gender analysis of traditional tea production methods in Ethiopia

JUCAVM has come a long way in terms of promoting gender equality on campus and in its teaching, and the new Post Harvest Management Department is leading by example. It now has 25% females in the Bsc. program and 53% in the MSc. Program. Currently, two of the seven faculty members of the Department are female and services are being put in place to ensure that female students and staff have the support they need to succeed.

For more information on gender, agriculture and university curriculum in Ethiopia see the new article written by Mitchell, C., Belew, D.m Debela, A., Muleta, D. & Fikreyesus, S. (2010). "The farmer and her husband": Engendering the curriculum in a Faculty of Agriculture in an Ethiopian university. *Agenda*. 86: 66-77

Testimonies from JUCAVM students and Faculty

Gender trainees (anonymous):

"As a result of the training I will now try and incorporate gender issues in my research activities and seek to increase the opportunities available to females in agriculture."

"I am thinking to include gender as an issue in my research with regards to post harvest management activities in our country."

"I will now make gender mainstreaming an integral part of my course plan and class implementation."

One female in the first cohort accepted into the PHM BSc. Program – Ardo Ali:

"In Ethiopia mostly males alone participate in the agricultural field while females participate in the general household activities. But nowadays women in this field are expressing our knowledge and skills to others. We are competing equally with men in the agricultural field."

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