



Women farmers in Tajikistan (Neil Palmer/IWMI)

Gender responsive research for better inclusion and equity

The CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE) operates under the assumption that giving women equal access and opportunity to participate in agricultural development will be essential to enacting sustainable agricultural intensification and improving natural resource management. To do this, WLE works with both men and women, and looks at issues of reducing gender-discriminatory norms and practices. In addition, WLE works to understand and respond to the different needs, demands of, and challenges faced by women and men in managing water, land and ecosystems.

WLE does this by looking at the way access to natural resources is gendered, by studying how men and women influence decision-making processes,

and by understanding how investment and *reinvestment* of capital affects men and women.

“This has been a really important year for gender work in WLE,” said Dr. Noline de Haan, lead of WLE’s Gender, Poverty and Institutions research theme. “Many of the flagship products, such as the Resource Recovery and Reuse business models or the Managing Resource Variability Four Basin Gender Profile maps are explicit in how they address gender issues and can ultimately serve to help us understand how to empower women. We are undergoing a paradigm shift in which people are realizing that doing research that focuses on gendered relationships is important, not just because it is more inclusive, but because it yields more complete and better results

and leads to outcomes that have more staying power.”

Tools for assessing gender impacts

In the Greater Mekong region, WLE has been building on the work of the Challenge Program on Water and Food (CPWF) to make sure the priorities of women and men are included in hydropower development. Oxfam Australia’s project under CPWF, titled ‘Gender Justice in Hydropower – Balancing the Scales,’ promoted the use of gendered impact assessments in hydropower schemes. This project has contributed to the establishment of the Oxfam led ‘Mekong Inclusion Project,’ which will continue to promote the importance of considering gender equity in developing sustainable hydropower.

“Historically, the hydropower sector has been very male dominated, and no one was even really talking about how this was a problem,” said Dr. Kim Geheb, coordinator of the Greater Mekong regional program. “Oxfam’s work under CPWF set the standards for gender inclusivity and attention in the hydropower planning process, resulting in a practical tool that can be used by hydropower developers to improve their practices. It’s wonderful that this work is continuing, and we are pleased to be a part of it.”

Under the Land and Water Productivity research theme, WLE also developed a tool for the irrigation sector which allows government agencies managing irrigation schemes to better assess gender performance on projects. This tool was created in response to a demand from agencies in Africa experiencing challenges in implementing practical measures to improve gender equity and outcomes in irrigation development. The tool helps identify ways to increase gender-responsive actions and recommendations for irrigation systems, which are historically male-dominated.

The gendered dynamics of decision-making

In Ethiopia, the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) led a hands-on [gender mainstreaming training](#) in Gondar that was hugely successful at motivating behavior change amongst participating researchers. The training had researchers conduct three focus group discussions in a community with which they were already familiar: one group with all male farmers, one group with all female farmers, and finally one group with both male and female farmers. Asking these three groups the same questions resulted in completely different answers, and brought to the fore many issues faced by the community of which the researchers were previously unaware.

The participants found that when men and women are separated into separate discussion groups, women are more vocal and likely to express their opinions. With a better understanding of issues faced by the community, researchers can design more appropriate and targeted projects. For example, ICARDA identified that the biggest burden faced by women is collecting firewood, and deforestation is a major issue in the region. As a result, the project is now conducting an experiment of trading free fuel-saving cook stoves in exchange for the labor involved in maintaining soil and water conservation structures.

Influencing policy processes

At the global level, research is leaving a mark on policy discussions. In 2014, a WLE project called “Gender-equitable Wealth Creation through Optimized Value Chains in Tanzania and South Africa” was integrally involved in a global conference on gender and water policy in South Africa. This conference was the first step in implementing the African Ministers’ Council on Water’s policy and strategy for mainstreaming gender in the water sector in Africa. As a result of the conference, an entirely new and unique partnership was forged between seven (deputy) ministers of water, high-level policy makers and 430 African and global scientists, government officials and development actors.

Taking advantage of this momentum, scientists have continued to promote women's access to water and water management solutions at global events during 2015.

Focal Regions

This past year saw the inception and rollout of WLE's focal region research program, which included a strong emphasis on gender right from the beginning of the proposal writing process. Writeshops were held in the Greater Mekong, Ganges, Volta, and Nile Basin and East Africa in order to ensure that gender issues were included in regional problem statements and project designs. Since gender is culturally specific, designing the

work within the context of each region improves the prospect of change at the national and basin scale.

Although the focal region projects only started their work at the end of 2014, exciting things are happening already. In the Ganges, a project called "Poverty Squares and Gender Circles" is investigating the drivers behind consistent poverty in the region, and looking at how to break the cycle through investment in gender projects. Another project in the Volta, "Giving Latecomers a Head Start," is examining how women can benefit from agricultural water technologies. Each project will help produce a stronger portfolio of options for improving access to and management of water, land and ecosystems for women and men.



Woman at the Can Tho floating market, Viet Nam (Ian Taylor/CPWF Mekong)

The CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE) combines the resources of 11 CGIAR centers, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and numerous national, regional and international partners to provide an integrated approach to natural resource management research. WLE promotes a new approach to sustainable intensification in which a healthy functioning ecosystem is seen as a prerequisite to agricultural development, resilience of food systems and human well-being. This program is led by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI), a member of the CGIAR Consortium, and is supported by CGIAR, a global research partnership for a food-secure future. wle.cgiar.org

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