



Learning from the Renewable Natural Resources Research Strategy

Gender: some insights

Although few projects within the 11-year Renewable Natural Resources Research Strategy (RNRRS, 1995–2006) tackled gender issues directly, many researchers attempted to use their experiences to improve the quality and range of information available about gender. The resulting lessons, although not particularly novel, provide useful insights for future research on natural resources and poverty.

Key messages

- Men and women have different perceptions of what is important in terms of livelihood decisions. They also tend to use different sources to inform their decision making.
- Gender disaggregated data is valuable, but only if time is spent on analysing and drawing conclusions from it.
- More attention needs to be given to collecting data on how decisions are taken in the household and how income is shared.
- Failing to include men in 'women only' projects can be destructive in the long term.
- The goal of empowerment (of women in particular) is rarely justified or thought through: what do we mean by empowerment and what are the consequences of empowering women for the community?
- Empowerment (of women) has to be conducted in parallel with gender awareness raising.
- Women are often mentioned as a beneficiary of a project but without any clear indication of how they will benefit.
- 'Community' is often used as a homogenous term and it masks the differences between men and women. Women often carry the burden of implementing community initiatives, but benefit less than men due to restrictions on their time.
- Gender-neutral terms (farmer, fisher) are still much in use and mask (for the wider public) the achievements made by the RNRRS in terms of including gender issues in projects.

Introduction

The role of women in natural resource-based livelihoods in the developing world has long been acknowledged but has rarely been valued on an equal basis to that of men. In fisheries, women have traditionally occupied the pre- and post-harvest sector, concentrating on financing the fleet and processing and marketing the catch. In farming communities, women are more likely to be involved in the husbandry of small ruminants (e.g. goats), poultry and milking cows. Women tend to be the

custodians of seeds and are traditionally in charge of growing staple food crops.

Despite the illusion of gender equity within natural resource-based economic sectors, much of the work performed by women and the 'social space' they occupy has historically remained invisible to researchers and policy makers.

This Brief presents an overview of how the DFID-funded Renewable Natural Resources Research Strategy (RNRRS) has addressed gender in the field of natural resources management. It

explores the impact – direct and indirect – of gender on key areas and distils lessons for future research and policy.

Background

The criteria used to review the coverage of gender issues in the RNRRS projects were based on the aims of the Millennium Development Goals, DFID's wider development goals, issues raised in the DFID working papers on gender equality and women's empowerment, and the key issues arising from individual project summaries.

To understand the (albeit indirect) gender impacts of the RNRRS projects, it is useful to examine them through a framework that encompasses the many areas potentially impacted upon by gender. This includes health, education, access to markets and household security, as well as access, control and management of resources.

Gender and health

Since there is an intimate connection between food, diet and health, many projects within the RNRRS had an impact upon household nutrition and thus health. Although most projects assumed that improving harvests and/or incomes should improve household nutrition and income, only a few projects made the link explicit.

The Crop Post Harvest Programme (CPHP) project Decentralisation of Food Grain Storage and Distribution in India (R7828) improved food security because it enabled women to sell surplus grain and use their income to buy additional food.

Various other projects promoted locally important but neglected food crops (R7100, R7187, R7524, R7569 and R7885). In these projects, researchers developed technology to improve the production and cultivation of nutritionally valuable food crops, such as chickpeas and beans (known as 'meat of the poor'), fruit, chickens and fish.

The Post Harvest Fisheries Research Programme (PHFRP) project Changing Fish Utilisation and its Impact on Poverty (R7799) looked at how changing market patterns were affecting the supply of fish (an important source of protein) in southern India. The researchers found that the

Box 1. Gender in brief: concepts and approach

Gender has featured in development debate for some 20 years, yet there is still confusion in some quarters about what it means. Gender describes the perceptions, norms and roles that separate men from women, as opposed to sex (male/female), which is based on biology. Broadly speaking, gender embodies the roles, duties and obligations of men and women that have been reinforced through the centuries by institutions (e.g. the household, the market, the community and the state).

'Gender and Development' adopts an approach to development aimed at both men and women, and tackles the socially constructed relationship between male and female and the question of power. This followed an approach referred to as 'Women in Development', which targeted women only in an attempt to better their position. Much attention in recent years has focused upon the mainstreaming of gender within development policy and programmes.

demand for fish from wealthier households was inflating prices, forcing the poor to change their buying patterns.

Most references to health concerned children, nursing mothers and the elderly. The CPHP project Improving Food Safety for Informally Vended Foods in Southern Africa (R8272) was unique in its reference to the health of men in urban Zimbabwe and Zambia. Here, the provision of safe food was noted to have a positive impact on the large population of HIV/AIDS infected men who tend to rely upon street vended food during the day. However, no projects mentioned how food is allocated within the household and which family members would benefit from better harvests (in many cultures male children receive more and/or better food than their female siblings).

Gender and education

Access to education in many parts of the developing world is unequal. Girls tend to receive fewer years of

schooling than boys and women have fewer opportunities than men to acquire new skills. Education as such was not mentioned specifically in any of the projects reviewed, although several noted that increasing incomes from better harvests enabled children to attend school (R7795, R8271). The Crop Protection Programme (CPP) project Promoting the Adoption of Integrated Crop Management in Chickpea by Poor Farmers in Nepal (R7885) recorded up to 80% increase in expenditure on education following improved harvests.

Although capacity building in the RNRRS is dealt with elsewhere (see Almond and Kisauzi, 2005), it is useful to look briefly at gender and capacity building. Most projects provided some capacity building or training. Training within projects addressed the need for specific skills (e.g. hygiene, grain storage design and marketing techniques) and community-type skills (e.g. leadership and community cohesion). Training in gender awareness was very rare. Some projects noted the gender split of participants while others did not, raising some uncertainty about equitable access to skills development.

Overall however, gender differences in access to education have been addressed, with many projects helping women to access information and further their skills. In many cases, the projects drew new attention to women's economic activities, about which little information was available. Researchers also came to realise that women tend to learn and impart information through very different channels to men. Women use family and friend networks, while men use the radio, print media and networks built up around eating/drinking venues.

Gender and household security

Improving food security and household income does not necessarily end poverty, and there may be a poverty gap between men and women. Flintan (2003) notes that many development projects fail to recognise the link between food/financial security and development projects, particularly those that focus on the environment. Women are often disproportionately disadvantaged by policy decisions regarding natural resources.

While many projects undoubtedly impacted on household security by improving harvests, few

appeared to be aware of the gender implications of the process. The Fisheries Management Science Programme (FMSP) project Understanding Fisheries Associated Livelihoods and the Constraints to their Development (R8196) showed that many households in Kenya and Tanzania depended on fisheries for their livelihoods (although this dependence was never quantified in terms of money). Another project focused on fish distribution from coastal communities in Bangladesh (R7969) and highlighted a lack of household security among women fish traders. Project R7799 (see above) raised the problem of reversal of gender roles (e.g. as men move in to co-opt successful income generation ventures). However, no mention was made of how improved household income was shared and whether women and men had equal control.

Gender and access to markets

Improved access to markets plays a significant role in improving incomes. Men often have better market access and mechanisms because they are able to travel without permission and to acquire credit more easily than women. Men often own the household assets and can tap into the networks that govern how markets are operated. However, the spread of gender roles in the market place varied widely across the projects reviewed. In Nepal, the LPP project Increasing the Contribution that Goats Make to the Livelihoods of Resource Poor Livestock Keepers (R7632) noted that decisions about marketing in Nepal were taken equally by men and women whereas in Zimbabwe, women had no say in the marketing of their own livestock (R8108). In addition, men had been known to sabotage successful poultry initiatives run by women.

Projects were able to move the debate on women's access to markets forward. Firstly, they gave women more information on markets and marketing products. This was particularly evident in project R7885, in which female traders were awarded national prizes for their achievements. In another project that aimed to improve the livelihoods of small-scale sweetpotato farmers in Uganda (R8273), women were encouraged to diversify their products to achieve a wider market. In R7969, researchers collected information on the function of fish markets for poor women who sell there.

Gender and natural resources management

The projects reviewed rarely mentioned explicitly how access to management mechanisms was governed by gender. Women's lack of voice in policy and decision making (at all levels of governance) is well known. While women and men often put in equal amounts of labour into economic activities based on natural resources, it was not often clear whether they had equal influence on how natural resources are managed. Future research needs to encourage a more equitable distribution of decision-making power.

A common theme in many projects was that of drawing women into the management process by equipping them with skills (e.g. literacy, information and leadership) and providing them with opportunities. The Natural Resources Systems Programme (NRSP) project Strengthening Social Capital for Improving Policies and Decision-making in Natural Resource Management (R7856) had an implicit objective of encouraging more women to take part in management processes. This was achieved by establishing forums and committees in which women participated and by providing all members of the community with leadership skills training. Merely placing women on boards where they could influence policy and management processes is no guarantee that their voices will be heard. Indeed, project R8108 found that although women were encouraged to attend project meetings, men often prevented them from attending. Likewise, men often treated women's meetings about non-traditionally female topics (e.g. resource management) with suspicion.

There is little doubt that many projects provided the foundations for allowing a more equal distribution of management responsibilities across genders (even if this were not their intent). Various projects, including An Agroforestry Manual for Illiterate Women (R6072), R7524 and R8273 all provided women with knowledge that had previously been denied them (either through illiteracy or lack of available information). Project R7524 in particular noted that men could view increased female participation as a threat.

Where resources were clearly identifiable as being privately owned (e.g. fruit trees in R7187), management of the resource depends on how

Box 2. Gender and the sustainable livelihoods approach

A livelihoods approach to development has been the focus of DFID research for a number of years and many DFID-funded projects make some reference to the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) in their work. Because the SLA incorporates the whole community and a wide span of economic activities, it provides ample scope for addressing issues related to gender. It helps to bridge scientific and social science disciplines. However, livelihoods research within the RNRRS could have gone further to consider gender as a key factor in how natural resources are managed.

individual households organise their income-generating activities. If resources are owned in common, the distribution of management powers is less clear. Women were in charge of the management of grain storage facilities in R7828 and shared equal responsibility for goats in R7632. Ultimately, in many resource sectors, men still hold the balance of power in the decision-making process irrespective of the input by women.

Ownership of assets and gender

Ownership of assets is closely related to household security and the ability to influence management decisions. Being able to secure and maintain ownership of assets (financial or physical) is an important factor in establishing some degree of financial security and exercising influence over resource management. Ownership is often dictated by legal frameworks that place it in the hands of the (usually male) head of the household. Since many of the RNRRS projects focused on improving assets (e.g. crops, livestock and skills), it is vital to understand how these are distributed and secured by different members of the household. Many projects failed to mention ownership of assets and how ownership patterns might affect project outcomes. However, there were some exceptions. Project R7856 noted that women's inability to command control over assets was a key constraint to development.

For example, female-headed households were disadvantaged by controlled grazing laws because they lacked land and labour. A similar point was raised by project R7799, in which women were unable to adapt to change in the fisheries sector because they lacked assets, which prevented them from accessing credit.

Lessons and conclusions

Probably the most prominent lesson is that men and women have different perceptions of what is important in terms of their livelihood decisions. For example, which crops and varieties to grow, which animal health care provider to use or which conditions to treat. The information on which they base their decisions is also derived from different sources. Advances in the understanding of how social capital works has demonstrated that men and women tap into different networks of information and influence. While this information is not necessarily new, it is critical to the promotion of outputs of DFID RNRRS research and should be incorporated into communication strategies early on.

A considerable amount of gender-disaggregated data has been collected, but many projects failed to use the data fully in their reports. In addition, there is a danger that the information will be lost unless a central database is kept. Gender-disaggregated data of household activity is only valuable if it is analysed and conclusions drawn from it. A critical, although missing, element is how decision making is shared in the household and how income is held between men and women.

A number of projects focused on women, while others cited women as the main beneficiaries. While there is nothing intrinsically wrong with projects that place women at the centre, serious consideration has to be given to how these projects will impact upon gender roles. Boosting the role of women will have no effect on gender relations unless men are also co-opted into the project. Gender impact analysis conducted at the project proposal stage should help highlight where the project may have a detrimental effect on gender roles.

Projects that intend to empower women need to consider exactly what they mean by empowerment and how empowerment will be realised. Empowerment of women without reference to men will only be short-lived. The ideal solution

is that gender-awareness is conducted alongside empowerment so narrowing the gap between men's and women's understanding of their roles. What is clearly needed for all programmes is a set of clear, easily implemented guidelines on how to incorporate gender into a project.

Thought needs to be given to the use of blanket terms such as 'community'. This should not be regarded as a homogenous term, in the same way as 'household' is regarded.

Gender-neutral terms (farmer, fisher) are still much in use and mask (for the wider public) RNRRS achievements in terms of the inclusion of women and gender issues in projects.

In conclusion, natural resources research funded by DFID still has a considerable distance to go before it can claim to have mainstreamed gender. However, significant advances have been made over the last 11 years and much of this is surely attributable to the sustainable livelihoods approach, which facilitated the incorporation of social science disciplines into what were largely technical/scientific projects. However, despite efforts made at the project level and inputs made at the programme level, it is important to recognise that the ethos guiding project structure and funding distribution is often dictated by policy decisions that are outside the control of the research strategy.

Additional resources

- Almond, F. and Kisauzi, D.J. (2005) Synthesis study on capacity development. <http://www.research4development.info/pdf/thematicSummaries/>
- Flintan, F. (2003). Engendering Eden: Gender, women and integrated conservation and development projects. International Institute for Environment and Development: London, UK.
- Oyewumi, O. (2002). Conceptualizing gender: The eurocentric foundations of feminist concepts and the challenge of African epistemologies. *Jenda: A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies* 12 (1): www.jendajournal.com
- Waterhouse, R. and Neville, S. (2005). Evaluation of DFID development assistance: Gender equality and women's empowerment. Phase II thematic evaluation: Voice and accountability. DFID Working Paper 7. Department for International Development: London, UK.

RNRRS projects

- R6072 Agroforestry Manual for Illiterate Women
- R7100 Improved Management of Small-scale Tropical Cage Culture Systems in Asia
- R7187 Promotion of Indigenous Fruit Trees through Improved Processing and Marketing in Asia
- R7524 The Use of Oil-seed Cake from Small-scale Processing Operations for Inclusion in Rations for Peri-urban Poultry and Small Ruminant Production
- R7569 Participatory Promotion of Disease Resistant and Farmer Acceptable *Phaseolus* Beans in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania: Options at village level
- R7632 Increasing the Contribution that Goats Make to the Livelihoods of Resource-poor Livestock Keepers in the Himalayan Forest Region
- R7795 Winners and Losers in Commercialisation of Non-timber Forest Products
- R7799 Changing Fish Utilisation and its Impact on Poverty in India
- R7828 Decentralisation of Food Grain Storage and Distribution: Development of Institutional and Technical Options at Village-level
- R7856 Strengthening Social Capital for Improving Policies and Decision-making in NRM
- R7885 Promoting the Adoption of Integrated Crop Management in Chickpea by Poor Farmers in Nepal
- R7969 Fish Distribution from Coastal Communities in Bangladesh – Market and Credit Access Issues
- R8108 Strengthening the Contribution of Women to Household Livelihood through Improved

Livestock Production Interventions and Strategies in the Teso Farming System

- R8196 Understanding Fisheries-associated Livelihoods and the Constraints to their Development in Kenya and Tanzania
 - R8271 Promoting Improved Food Safety Management for Small-scale Farmers and their Commercial Exporters who are involved in Horticultural Exports
 - R8272 Improving Food Safety for Informally Vended Foods in Southern Africa
 - R8273 Improving the Livelihoods of Small-scale Sweetpotato Farmers in Central Uganda
- For further information see www.research4development.info/projectsandprogrammes.asp

About this Brief

This Brief is an edited summary, prepared by Susanne Turrall, of a paper written by Dr Elizabeth Bennett (2005): *Gender and the DFID RNRRS: A Synthesis*. www.research4development.info/thematicSummaries/Gender_synthesis_study_P1.pdf

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About the Renewable Natural Resources Research Strategy (1995–2006)

The objective of DFID's Renewable Natural Resources Research Strategy (RNRRS) was to generate new knowledge and to promote its uptake and application such that the livelihoods of poor people are improved through better management of renewable natural resources. Through its ten research programmes it addressed the knowledge needs of poor people whose livelihoods are dependent on natural resources production systems in semi-arid areas, high potential areas, hillsides, tropical moist forests, and at the forest/agriculture interface, the land/water interface and the peri-urban interface. The breadth of the strategy programme reflected the wide variety of environments in which poor people live in poorer countries and the multiple routes by which research can reduce poverty.

For more information about the source papers and other RNRRS thematic summaries, visit <http://www.research4development.info/thematicSummaries.asp>

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