



AGRILINKS

BREAKING BARRIERS: INTEGRATING GENDER AND NUTRITION INTO EXTENSION SERVICES

QUESTION AND ANSWER AUDIO TRANSCRIPT

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Julie MacCartee:

Wonderful. Thank you so much, Andrea and Edye and Jeannie for those excellent insights and for chiming in to answer some of the questions in the chat box. We have received a variety of questions that have come in so far and we encourage all of you on the webinar to keep posting your questions. We have about 20 to 25 minutes to address any questions that have come in about this topic and this presentation. So Andrea, just a quick clarifying question from Amanda Davy. You showcase some activity sheets in different languages. Are there any plans for a French version?

Andrea Bohn:

Let me un-mute first. Not posted by INGENAES, but we welcome anybody who would like to translate them to French to go right ahead and do so, but we will not do it as part of this project. Although we tried, but for several reasons we ended up not working in a Francophone country, and we sort of maxed out on what we can handle this year. But organizations are very welcome to take that and translate it, and if they send it to us in a French version we will be very happy to also post it on our website and to other platforms.

Julie MacCartee:

Understood. Thank you. A question came in from Natalie May Sope, who is a gender advisor with the Global Center for Food Systems Innovation at Michigan State University, and she wrote "In still many parts of Africa, most small holder farmers are still relying on government extension workers for extension services. Building the capacity of extension workers to integrate gender and nutrition in the design and delivery of these services is a great idea. However, in practice extension workers usually have limited resources to effectively play their roles: low salaries, no or limited transportation, etc.

With our projects in Malawi we have to pay extension workers and provide them with transportation before they even agree to work with us. Are you doing anything with government institutions to improve the working conditions such as the historic extension workers thereby providing incentives for them to effectively play their role as extension workers?" Andrea, can you chime in on that one?

Andrea Bohn:

Yeah, very gladly. Believe me, this is not just the situation in Malawi. I remember many years back, well not so many years, in 2012 in December stumbling across an extension worker in Bangladesh, agricultural extension worker actually giving a lesson on complimentary foods to a group of men and women farmers in that community, and I was like, what? What's going on here? But it's a very typical situation that for the public extension workers to actually have the resources to work with their clients, they depend on a project to provide those funds.

This is the reality and they will do what they're told. They will do what they're being trained to do. They will do what they have resources for. But this means that one year they'll be working on beekeeping. The next year the big focus is going to be on complimentary feeding. Who knows what will be next year? A lot of these ministries – we could talk for hours on this and I know there's

people like Gary Alex and John Peters on this call who could equally speak to this for several hours.

Actually one of the reasons we take something like the institutional view and science framework is really important, the way things are now, public extension workers do what projects they're being hired on either directly or indirectly. Sometimes also NGOs that hire them to do the work and they wouldn't have anything to do if it wasn't for those projects. There has to be a lot better leadership on the part of the ministries and they need to negotiate with other actors in the country, stakeholders, on what it is that they can really focus on. I mentioned early on that there's real governance issues that challenge not just public agricultural extension but what is being done is very much driven also by donor priorities.

I don't know how to resolve that, but the observations you made are definitely a fact. I'm looking forward to a future where ministries of agriculture are much more vocal about what it is that they can do and can't do, and that they focus on the things that have not served well the other actors in the system, but the expectation is there that they do nutrition on top of everything else, and your question shows just how very unrealistic that may be.

Julie MacCartee:

Very interesting and helpful. Thank you, Andrea. We had a question come in from Esther Gube who just mentioned that is the introductory training that you showcased only for extension workers? What about other people that work in the area and are not necessarily extension field agents? Can we participate?

Andrea Bohn:

Oh, absolutely. This is not rocket science. This is not something that is really limited to a very narrowly defined group of people. Also one of the reasons I talked about extension early on, there's lots of organizations and individuals in this space that would never call themselves extensionists. We've got community health workers. Community health workers would really enjoy doing this training, but it of course has to have a really good facilitator implementing that training who can engage them in such a way that they come to talk about how their day-to-day work relates to the whole agriculture side of things in the communities. It's very fun to have a mix of people in this group who work for very different types of organizations, and it's always great to have real farmers in there because they will tell you as it is.

Julie MacCartee:

And as long as we're talking about these training programs, Indra Klein asked if you would elaborate on how the training programs are delivered and what type of follow-up is conducted post-training.

Andrea Bohn:

Right. So let me be very honest. Like many donor funded projects we want to have some results early on, and sometimes you start with activities I wouldn't say in the wrong sequence, but we got started with this introductory training based on requests we got from some organizations we interacted with during our kickoff trips, and that actually really gave rise to the institutional review and planning frameworks because organizations think that this is what they

want, but they don't really have a plan in place of how to implement it, how to supervise that work.

You will find that institutional planning framework really also challenges an organization to not only be clearer on what it is that it's in the business for, what's its mission and mandate, where does its resources come from, who are its clients, what are the client's needs, and then identifying what kind of staff do we need to have on board, what do our staff need to be able to do. Then you would do training to fill the gaps, but then comes the whole supervision part and operationalizing all of this. The big international NGOs are really good at this and many of them have very strong local NGOs that they work with that are able to implement this very well.

They don't just train people, they provide really good supervision and help staff be successful in working in the communities in the way that they've learned in the training. In INGENAES we have been able to do that with just a few of the organizations that have done the training. We do follow up with them, but we realize that, and I'm sure this rings true with a lot of you on this call, if you don't have an institutional commitment to really be serious about this and if you don't have managerial systems in place and operational funding in place to implement this and to learn while you're doing it to get better and better at it, you're not going very far.

So we feel that institutional capacity is actually a big, big barrier to seeing significant change. So where to start? The enabling environment needs to improve, the institutional capacity needs to improve, individual capacity needs to improve, and we're sort of caught in that conundrum, but we're very well aware of the fact that it takes more than just attending a training and then all this magic will happen. We do follow up with our trainees and we have some very interesting feedback, but what's holding people back is not knowledge, not the lack of good intentions. It's working for an organization that is really serious and well-structured to implement gender ____ and nutrition sensitive agricultural extension.

Julie MacCartee:

Wonderful. Thank you, Andrea. We're running through all of our questions. As you can see, Edye is also answering some questions directly in the chat box, so be sure to look out for her comments and answers there as well. A question came in from George Schmurzek, I think that's how you pronounce it, who asked how do you define gender equity, which appears to be your aim, in the context of the convention? Is it about making the roles that men and women take independent of their gender or more so about supporting women in their traditional roles?

Edye Kyuper:

I can try to address that and maybe you can jump in, Andrea if I miss something. I would say that it's both. I was actually just in the process of responding to Mary Dean who had a somewhat analogous question about how we provide nutrition education to men as well as women. One of our mottos in this project is engaging men and empowering women.

So given the predominance of male extension staff and their tradition of historically working primarily with men farmers, we don't want to exclude that dynamic and we see it as being really vital, that if we can encourage and motivate men extension staff to convey gender responsive messages to the men farmers that they work with, that can actually be some great modeling and a way of promoting societal changes, changing social norms that goes beyond just working with women and trying to make women's part comparable to that of men's.

But we are also hoping that in the long term there will be a more even distribution of labor, an analysis of how traditional labor distribution may not be economically in the best interest of the family and that breaking down some of these traditional barriers between men's work and women's work might not only be good for the human rights of women but also to the economic ends of the family and household.

Andrea Bohn:

Right. If I could also answer that, I like to come from this position it's about good business. you can only be successful if you really understand your clients well and if the services and products you offer meet their needs and that you have overcome the constraints that they're facing. So the starting point to answer a question like yours is really what is the organization in the business of? If it's a donor funded project it probably has some particular guidelines on this. If it's a private sector input dealer or machinery seller you might approach this differently, and let me give you an example from Bangladesh.

One of the things we didn't talk about here today is the technology assessment tool. The trainees went out to speak to several manufacturers of small farm machinery, and they were asking the kind of questions that they had learned to use in the training. There was this machinery dealer who talked about how his clients were men and he didn't really quite understand why we were talking about women, and he almost paused mid-sentence, he's like, "No wait, actually there is this woman in this community. She's very active.

She's actually very influential in terms of what machinery may be needed in this value chain. I gotta rethink this. I have to actually reach out more to women. They're actually much more important in the decision-making than I thought." So you see often it's this gender blindness or making certain assumptions as to who does what that you don't actually see an opportunity that you're missing.

This is what it's very much about, taking a fresh look at things and realizing as Edye has said that the way things are done right now, how work is divided up, how decisions are divided up, how power is distributed, down to things such as who gets what to eat, is often actually not in the interest of the individual or the community that you're working with, but they're so ingrained in how they see the world and the assumptions they make about roles that they need some help bringing that to life. It's recognizing that the changes in their own personal, the families of the community's interest is often a turning point for that.

Having lots of discussions, the other thing I was amazed about in the introductory training when we used role-play were men switched into the role of men and women switch into the role of men. Inherently they actually have a very deep understanding of what the challenges are in the relations between men and women in the community or in a household, and also that that's not the kind of situation that they actually want. So how you define your clients, what kind of service you provide for them is very much determine by what kind of organization you are, what your mission and mandate is, what your funding sources are, how you define success, and in that whole process what we work on is related to helping people see that being gender equitable will actually help them be more successful in what they set out to do in the first place.

Julie MacCartee:

Wonderful. Thank you, Andrea and Edye. A couple of different questions have come in, thinking about how modern communication has changed extension. Vic Tinsley brought up the comment that why does extension require a direct administrative link to individual small holder farmers? This seems to be based on the U.S. system 100 years ago when farmers were living on individual 160-acre homestead lots without the mass communication available today, and Indra Klein was asking about considering the use of social media, You Tube, digital technology as venues, is there anything you can just address regarding those comments about how communication changing especially even in just the last five years is affecting extension and your ability to integrate gender and nutrition?

Andrea Bohn:

I'll take a shot and this and Edye, please feel free to chime in.

Edye Kyuper:

Just to mention, I did respond in brief to some of those questions on the chat.

Andrea Bohn:

Okay. I haven't even had a chance to catch up, but I'm sorry if I communicate in such a way that you thought I'm basically talking on one-on-one interactions. The fact is, there is hundreds of thousands of farmers. There's very few extension agents even if you add all of the ones working for these different types of organizations up and if you add those that may not even call themselves extension agents, right? The transaction costs of dealing with individual farmers are extremely high and there's too few people who are being incentivized, resourced to have the mandate and ability to work with farmers, so there is a mismatch.

An important element is that we mostly work with groups. That having been said, there are some particular client groups where helping them make change towards let's just say better livelihoods, food security, nutrition security, it may warrant working more on one-on-one, and I'm especially referring to household-based approaches. Those are very costly. You have a few field agents, community workers working with individual households one-on-one almost, but it's that approach that has the highest success rate. I'd rather have an organization limit itself to a relatively small number of clients but help those clients make that leap into a situation that is much to improve than

working with a large number of individuals and hardly making any change at all.

So you have to look at the particular situation of the project or the organization to answer if maybe it is worth the effort of one-on-one. But speaking about the large farming community and how to effectively reach them, I'm a big fan of ICT. I'm a big fan especially of radio and I'm also a big fan of participatory videos that aren't just sort of screened or showed on television or disseminated via smart phones or other means like that but where there's also a real dialogue with the viewers of the video and where there is active learning that is supported between the members that are watching that video. So I'm a huge fan of that.

My concern is that people have high expectations from ICTs in terms of well now we have really cheap ways of getting all of this information out to so many people. information is necessary but not sufficient. I know the example that I gave about my breakfast has its limits, but the idea there is I know very well what I should do different, but there's other things that are holding me back from doing it, and similarly I may have information through a message I got via SMS or I may even have called a number and gone through the interactive voice recording to get an answer to my question about when should I plant my sweet potatoes.

Those things are helpful, but they're not sufficient, and I'm just a big skeptic in terms of the power of just more easy access to information actually leading to substantial behavior change. That having been said, there's really interesting innovations in ICT coming out. There's many approaches that are really quite effective and there's lots and lots of resources online where you can read up on what works and what doesn't work so well.

Julie MacCartee:

I had a little bit of trouble with my mic there. It sounds like my voice is a little bit low, but I'll speak up for the moment and make sure to get this fixed. I had a couple questions come in asking for data on effectiveness, effectiveness of what channels are most useful, effectiveness of the tools that you presented, effectiveness of programs and methodologies. There seemed to be a lot of demand for data and kind of information on what's more effective than other, comparatively effective. So just hoping you can address that at large in the context of INGENAES.

Edye Kyuper:

Sure. I can work to address that. We'll apologize that the evidence base is not as strong as we would like. At this point it's really conceptual and we are going off of experience in other sectors to feel that this is an evidence-based direction which to move. Primary in forming that evidence is experience from the NGO Freedom From Hunger, which the individual who did the lion's share of the institutional review and planning framework, Rob Davis, he formerly worked for Freedom From Hunger.

So Rob's experience with Freedom From Hunger was that there were networks of micro finance institutions that were just in the business of providing micro

finance services and Freedom From Hunger partnered with them to expand their mission, build on their mission to include health and other related programming, and they were able to collect data to show that when health programming was included, in this case nutrition and health education, the business proposition for those micro finance institutions actually also improved, that repayment was greater once people were healthier and were engaged in these participatory health education modules. So we have based the IRPF in large part on that, and that experience has also been formative in considering how this is something that adds to the economic business interest of both extension providers and farming households.

But we are not a research project as INGENAES, so the best that we can do is collect data on before and after. We can do case studies, which we're in the process of developing more of, and we can document what we're doing along the way, share our experiences working in different contexts, those ten different countries that we mentioned at different levels of engagement, and we hope that in the future there will be more discreet research activities that will really build this evidence base.

Julie MacCartee:

Wonderful. Thank you, Edye. Recognizing that we are only about ten minutes out from the end of our webinar I'd like to go ahead and pull up some polls for all of you to answer to help us kind of gauge your reactions to this webinar and also help us plan for future AgriLinks webinars. So if you wouldn't mind filling out these polls that would be very helpful to us, but we still have about eight or ten minutes left for questions. Also we invite you to share any resources that you think would be useful to the other participants on this webinar about extension and integration of gender and nutrition. Feel free to share links in the chat box anything you think would be valuable to the other participants. Looking at our list of questions, I'm kind of going through our list. There's a lot of really interesting ones that have come through, so see what we can bring up before we end today. Quickly there was a question from Alex Dunlop from DLEC who asked, can you speak to your experience with how you measure the adoption of improved nutrition practices? That's different from agriculture to be sure, but can you speak to that?

Edye Kyuper:

So is the question how we measure impact and what should we be going for in terms of measurement? I would refer to – that is the right question, right? Yes?

Julie MacCartee:

Yes, the one at the top of our presenter Q&A list.

Edye Kyuper:

Thanks. There's a growing body of indicators that are being promoted and a recent publication by FAO is a compendium of those indicators and measurement tools that describe ways in which nutrition can be impacted by agricultural projects. I think when this conversation about linking agriculture and nutrition originated, well not originated but became a little more vibrant several years ago we were looking to impact stunting rates with agricultural interventions and have later resoundingly discovered that ag has a really hard time impacting stunting in particular. So this compendium of instruments is

something I can find a link to and share, and I would suggest that is a great starting place.

Andrea Bohn:

If I may pitch in as well, Alex, to answer your question, when you look through the competency framework column at the far right that is about desired impacts, they're indicative, but it gives you a lot of things that you could measure, but what you want to measure depends again on what kind of organization are you? What are you in the business of? Does it look very different from a new horticulture program that may be – take the example Bangladesh.

The ministry of agriculture extension department is more active in the horticulture space, and one of the reasons is that they believe that this will be something that will have a positive impact on better nutrition through various pathways. So if you're managing that unit and you're implementing programs in particular areas of the country, you could turn to the competency framework and say, well, we started this horticulture program because we also wanted to contribute to more diverse diet, etc. You can build the indicators that will help you track whether you're being successful or not based on that right hand column in the competency framework.

Julie MacCartee:

Great. Thank you. A question from Indra Klein came in. "If a government provides no resources, what is a strategy for training more inclusive with greater outreach?" So what are your strategies in cases where government is simply not providing resources needed for extension?

Edye Kyuper:

I would say that one strategy that we promote in again the IRPF workshop is partnership. It's challenging. If there's no resources you probably can't even get staff into these meetings or this workshop, but we look to identify small bite-sized activities, actions that we can do, and if there isn't adequate support to make – and I don't think that any of us intend to make extension nutrition experts. I think that probably should've been said earlier in this webinar today that it's really our goal to identify how they can support nutrition and who they can turn to for the more nutrition specific activities.

So those would typically be your health sector partners and there may be other partners in education or in the NGO space or in the private sector that you can pass the baton to in order to meet all the needs of the family related to nutrition and gender equity. So working within your individual context, specific community to identify those partners and develop relationships where they're very explicit, shared areas of interest and then being able to move forward, taking action together on these areas.

Andrea Bohn:

Yeah, and Indra, your question has a lot to do with this whose job is it. I have the expectation for public extension in Malawi to contribute directly to improve nutrition outcomes, but who am I to say that? Ultimately this is something that's negotiated in the political process. The answers to that question are very much influenced by donor priorities when you're talking

about a country where the agricultural development is so strongly influenced by donor priorities and international NGOs' capabilities.

They often find themselves at the receiving end being told what to do instead of sitting in the drivers seat. I don't want to come across as too cynical, but they do what they're being given money for, what they're being incentivized to do, and they're often with an intention among different actors in government. Again I don't want to go into details with specific countries, but we have found already specifically looking to nutrition that public extension was behaving in strange ways from an outsider perspective, but when you took a deeper look you actually realized that what they're doing or not doing is decided in the hallways of certain ministries and certain donor priorities.

You also mentioned mobile technologies. Sure, but whose job is that? Whose job is it to use mobile technologies to disseminate good nutrition practices? The government of Bangladesh has endorsed over 500 apps, a significant number of which relates to nutrition. We have to ask the question, does that lead to any change? It's good to have that and if you're an organization working in a space if you can tap into nutrition apps created by let's say World Fish in Bangladesh, fantastic. That may make your work easier.

What we actually see though is that instead of building on resources and applications including applications that are already out there, organizations seem to be strangely incentivized to do their own thing with their own branding and the claim that theirs is better than anything else that's out there. Sometimes the project ends with that tool just having been developed and there's no more funding to continue it and actually see whether that works or it doesn't.

Julie MacCartee:

All right, thank you very much. In respect to everyone's time I think we're gonna go ahead and wrap up the webinar today. We received a few really interesting questions that we weren't able to get to and so we'll be sure to share those with the presenters and see what we can do, follow-up with information via AgriLinks. As a reminder if you joined the webinar today you will receive an email in about a week's time or perhaps a little bit longer than that with the recording, post-event resources, the transcript, everything that you need to know related to this webinar you will get in your email inbox and it will all be posted on AgriLinks as well.

I would like to extend a sincere thank-you to Jeannie, Andrea, and Edye for your excellent presentations today and for your work answering the participant questions. Of course a thank-you to the KDAD team to producing the webinar today and a special shout-out to Ashley Mullinax for her excellent support. Last but not least, most importantly I'd like to thank you our participants. Without you we wouldn't be holding these webinars. Your feedback, your participation is vital and we hope to continue fostering knowledge sharing around Ag development through AgriLinks. So thank you very much and we will see you at future webinars.

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