



Gender Equality in Rural Advisory Services

Towards a Common Understanding

A working document

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GFRAS working group on gender equality in rural advisory services

1. Background

During the recent years there has been a strongly increased global attention to women's equal economic opportunities, and women's role in agricultural production is becoming a centre of attention in this perspective as well as in the perspective of improving food security and nutritional status for poor families. Women's equal access to agricultural extension is one of several aspects that therefore require increased attention. In 2011, the Steering Committee for Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services (GFRAS) therefore decided to establish a thematic working group dealing with issues of gender equality in Rural Advisory Services (RAS). The GFRAS working group on gender equality in rural advisory services was established in 2012 with the purpose of supporting the GFRAS mission and functions of advocacy with regard to gender equality in rural advisory services by creating an effective global voice for commitment to increased gender equality and women's empowerment through increased access to and participation in Rural Advisory Services. The group represents researchers, educators, development partners as well as RAS practitioners and holds a broad range of very relevant expertise and experiences that provides a strong resource of knowledge and experiences in gender equality in RAS for GFRAS.

In order to support the advocacy for commitment to gender equality in rural advisory services, the first issue to address is to increase awareness and create a common understanding among RAS policy makers and RAS providers of what gender equality in RAS means conceptually and for the planning and implementation of the services. The present paper is prepared for this purpose.

The paper defines and explains the concept of gender equality in advisory services and discusses the opportunities that gender equality in RAS would potentially create for global and local food production, women's economic empowerment, household food security and nutrition as well as the challenges in achieving this. Based on the current knowledge in the working group and its environment of documented experiences, the paper summarises the existing experiences of how gender equality can be pursued in RAS and finally concludes with providing recommendations and suggestions for policy makers and RAS providers for planning and implementing RAS with equal access for men and women.

2. Defining gender equality in RAS

Gender equality is a human right by men and women, boys and girls to equal access to resources, opportunities and protection. This also means equal entitlements by men and women in civil and political life.

However, discriminatory customary and statutory laws, socio-cultural and religious norms and beliefs and gender-blind policies often prevent women from fully enjoying their rights and result in inequalities between women and men in access to and control of productive resources, services, economic opportunities and decision making.

The UN Millennium Development Goals placed gender equality as a top priority for global development. The third goal: PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER WOMEN placed particularly strong emphasis on providing equal opportunities to education and health including reproductive health.

The World Development Report (WDR) 2012 concludes that "gender equality is a core development objective in its own right. It is also smart economy as the evidence is clear that gender equality can enhance productivity, improve development outcome for the next generations and make institutions more representative".

The FAO State of Food and Agriculture 2010/2011 highlighted that women's role in agricultural production is important all over the world, but particularly so in developing countries. On average, women's labour comprises 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, ranging from about 20% in Latin America and almost 50% in Sub-Saharan Africa¹. Women participate both as wage labourers in commercial productions, with work in the family farms or their own farms². Enhancing women's equal economic opportunities bearing in mind their crucial and major role and involvement in agricultural production is therefore a crucial concern for rural development.

Another development perspective of gender equality is improving food security and nutritional status for poor families. Particularly in rural areas there are strong links between under nutrition on one side and women's education, participation in household decision making, productive capacity and knowledge about nutrition on the other side. Several cases over the years have documented that increasing gender equality is an important key to improving the nutritional status of families. Gender equality here means increased educational status of women, women's equal rights to resources and participation in decision making.³ – and as part of this, it is widely acknowledged that women's access to effective extension services that address issues of nutrition can play a strong role in improving nutritional status of families. This is both through increasing knowledge and through promoting farming systems that are oriented towards improved and sustainable food production.

Over the last few decades rapid changes in the agricultural sector in many parts of the world make small-holder production less viable and many men therefore migrate away from the rural areas and into other sectors, leaving women to take responsibility for the farms and take over men's tasks such as land preparation and cash crop production. As a consequence, women have broadened and deepened their involvement in agriculture in many developing countries. They increasingly shoulder the responsibility for household survival and respond to economic opportunities in commercial agriculture. However, as the rural-urban migration changes the roles of women in agriculture rapidly, there have been almost no changes in the patterns of landownership and women's access to agricultural services, credits, inputs and technologies and the result is therefore re-enforced problems of low productivity and difficulty in producing adequate food on the small-holder farms.

The Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook⁴ uses the framework of sustainable livelihoods to understand and describe gender issues in rural and agricultural development. Livelihoods are seen as a combined result of access to and control of assets; information and organisation; risk and vulnerability; markets and by the interaction of these factors with policies and institutions at national and local levels.

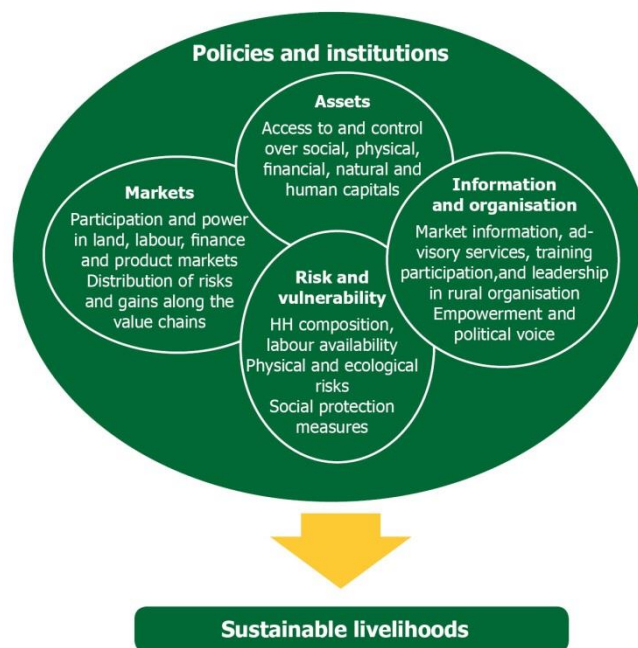
¹ FAO, 2011; Women in Agriculture, Closing the gender gap for development; The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11, Rome 2011

² Note that estimates of women's participation in agricultural work are usually difficult to get as data on women's work on family and own farms are rarely available. More intensive surveys of women's work contributions on small scale farms often find these to be much higher. In many African countries, it is thus normally stated that 80% of farm labour is provided by women and girls

³ Most recently in a series of four papers about maternal and child nutrition: Ruel, M.T. and Alderman, H.; 2013; Nutrition-sensitive interventions and programmes: how can they help to accelerate progress in improving maternal and child nutrition?; The Lancet Early Publication, 6 June 2013

⁴ The World Bank, FAO and IFAD; Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook; 2010; Washington DC; USA

Figure 1. Sustainable Livelihoods Framework⁵



With the definition of rural advisory services used by GFRAS (see Box 1), it is clear that equal access to RAS can have important bearings on all the factors contributing to the sustainable livelihoods. Gender considerations regarding the institutional set-up and policies guiding the RAS organisations and practises can therefore be a strong tool contributing to gender equality in the agricultural sector.

Box 1. What are Rural Advisory Services?⁶

Rural Advisory Services (RAS) are about strengthening capacities, empowering rural people, and promoting innovations. RAS support people to obtain skills and information, and to address challenges so as to improve their livelihoods and well-being.

Traditionally, RAS disseminate information about technologies, markets, inputs and financial services, and assist farmers to develop their farming and management skills. But RAS also broker interactions between farmers, the private sector, research, education, and government. RAS coach different actors to improve market access, deal with changing patterns of risk, and protect the environment.

RAS are also known as agricultural advisory services or extension.

Looking at the sustainable livelihoods as in figure 1 through a gender lens, shows that there are serious inequalities between men and women in all the issues - from women having less access to and control of assets, information and organisation, and markets. There are also serious issues of risks and vulnerabilities linked to gender.

Gender equality in RAS is here defined as:

⁵ Adapted from The World Bank, FAO and IFAD; 2010; Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook; Washington DC; USA

⁶ <http://www.q-fras.org/en/about-us/about-us>

Gender equality in rural advisory services are policies, institutional set-up and practises of rural advisory services that increase women’s agency⁷ and position with regard to sustainable livelihood.

This means rural advisory services that effectively address the in-equalities between men and women in access to and control of assets, technologies, information and organisation and markets, reduce the vulnerability to risks and make women’s contribution to sustainable agricultural production visible.

Many interventions in RAS have targeted women’s specific practical needs for a specific period of time and have resulted in practical benefits for women in that period. However, looking beyond these interventions, it is striking that a major issue constraining gender equality in agriculture is the lack of sustainability when it comes to up-scaling/mainstreaming the concept of gender equality beyond the specific project interventions. The present paper seeks to provide insights and advice for policy makers and extension organisations that go beyond specific gender project interventions and pursues sustainable changes in the policies, regulatory framework, organisational structures and practises that can effectively support empowerment and equal opportunities for rural women. As figure 2 illustrates, this cannot be achieved only through changes in practical needs for the rural women but requires structural changes in attitudes and power relations in the whole organisational setup that will change women’s by ability to participate in setting the agenda and making decisions for the rural advisory services that will contribute to ensure its relevance to both women and men.

Figure 2. Route to sustainable change in gender equality



3. What are the opportunities – what is there to gain?

There are currently strong gender gaps persisting in agriculture, which RAS have potential to influence. Women have great constraints in taking advantage of economic opportunities in the agricultural sector. An

⁷ Agency here refers to the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices.

Issues Paper from the DAC Network on gender equality lists the constraints⁸. As compared to men, women generally:

- Operate smaller farms
- Keep fewer livestock
- Have greater overall workload
- Have less access to innovation and productive assets and services
- Are much less likely to purchase inputs such as fertilisers, improved seeds and mechanical equipment
- Have weaker property rights and tenure security and therefore reduced incentives to invest in their land
- Are poorly represented in the leadership of rural organisations
- If women are employed, they are more likely to be in part-time, seasonal and low-paying jobs
- Receive lower wages for the same work

Despite problems of methodology in analyses of gender differences in non-land agricultural inputs, technology and services in developing countries and the need for better and more nuanced methodologies and research into gender differences to provide more robust and credible data⁹, the overall findings of research show that gender inequalities and lack of attention to gender in agricultural development contribute to lower productivity, lost income and higher levels of poverty and malnutrition.

Considering women's immense importance in agriculture on one hand and agriculture's strong importance for women's livelihoods on the other hand, it is clear that increasing gender equality in rural advisory services can make important contributions to a more fair playing field for men and women, providing women with their right full possibilities for benefitting from economic opportunities in the agricultural sector. The Agricultural Support Programme in Zambia supported by Sida was a good example of this where the direct economic benefits for women and men were well documented and showed that the equal access to advisory services made female headed households progress relatively more (78% increase of incomes) than male headed households (31% increase of incomes).

It is also clear that equal opportunities for men and women are an important precondition for increasing productivity in smallholder farming in most developing countries. This is for example illustrated well in an impact study by IFPRI of a number of Farmer Field School projects in Africa¹⁰, where it was found that women relatively benefited more from the intervention in terms of increased productivity than men.

There are at the same time great opportunities for achieving other important goals of supporting vulnerable livelihoods, poverty reduction, increasing food production and reducing malnutrition. Several studies and evaluations from Bangladesh for example show how well targeted training and advice in agriculture contributed to reduced vulnerability of poor households, reduced poverty levels and contributed to improved nutrition of families, including girls and women. One particular example is the Rural Livelihood Programme in Bangladesh that was implemented by CARE. Through a strong focus on gender equality in training and extension services, poor rural families strengthened their coping strategies and started a route out of poverty.

⁸ OECD; 2011; Women's Economic Empowerment; Issues Paper, DAC Network on Gender Equality (GENDERNET)

⁹ Peterman, A. at al.; 2012; A Review of Empirical Evidence on Gender differences in Nonland agricultural Inputs, Technology and Services in Developing Countries; IFPRI Discussion Paper 00975; May 2010; FAO, Rome, Italy

¹⁰ Davis et al.; 2010; Impact of Farmer Field Schools on Agricultural Productivity and Poverty in East Africa; IFPRI Discussion Paper 00992; Washington DC., USA

There is evidence, from interviews and project monitoring and evaluation reports that many women during this intervention increased their incomes and that household food security was improved¹¹.

Equal access to rural advisory services for women and men therefore has potential to contribute to addressing several of the constraints for women mentioned above. This should not be as a stand-alone effort, but combined with other efforts to overcome gender inequalities. Equal and well-targeted access to advisory services for women would strengthen women's knowledge, skill and innovative capacity in their farming enterprises. With the right approach, it can also facilitate and strengthen women's participation in rural organisations, including enhancing women's representation and leadership in these. Including services such as legal information and advice in the rural advisory services would furthermore have the potential to strengthen women's equal access to productive resources as it would strengthen their property rights and tenure security, which would, moreover, increase women's interest and incentives to invest in agriculture.

As inequalities in access to technology and services are reduced, it can be expected that productivity and output from women's farming activities will increase. In FAO's State of Food and Agriculture 2010 -2011 it is estimated that if women had equal access to productive resources and services, they can increase the yields on their farms by 20 to 30%, which will potentially raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2,5 to 4% and reduce the number of undernourished people in the world by 12 to 17%. As an example of the enhancement of productivity, the report presents the calculation from Malawi and Ghana that equal access to inputs and services would increase maize yields alone by 17%¹².

4. What are the challenges?

Considering the important opportunities RAS offer for the participation of rural women in food production and agricultural based economic activities and the potential this offers for fighting poverty and malnutrition, it is most unfortunate that most extension services approach mainly male farmers. Most development policies so far have automatically assumed that farmers are men and extension concepts are designed along this assumption in terms of decision making, targeting, employment of staff, service delivery models and content of the services.

A study by FAO from 1988-89 in 97 countries thus showed that only 5% of extension resources were directed at women and 15% of extension personnel were women. Over the past two decades there have been several efforts to overcoming gender biases in advisory services which have had positive outcomes in the particular pilot situations. For example, in 1997 the Ministry of Agriculture in Tanzania had increased the number of female extension officers to constitute one third of all the extension officers¹³. Recent data from the survey of a Worldwide Extension Study¹⁴ provides gender disaggregated data of public extension staff for some few countries – see the table 1 below.

¹¹ CARE Bangladesh; 2005; Rural Livelihood Programme, Capturing Lessons Learned, Final Report

¹² FAO, 2011; Women in Agriculture, Closing the gender gap for development; The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11, Rome 2011

¹³ Due, J.M; Magayane, F. and Temy, A. A; 1997; gender Again – Views of Female Agricultural Extension Officers by Smallholder Farmers in Tanzania; *World development*, Vol. 25 (5): 713 -725; Great Britain

¹⁴ <http://www.g-fras.org/en/world-wide-extension-study>

Country	Senior management staff	Subject matter specialists	Field staff
Malawi	39	31	21
Kenya	32	33	32
Zambia	13	17	14
Ghana	26	23	29
Mali	0	0	7
Mozambique	11		
Rwanda	36	23	30
Bangladesh	1	5	7
Nepal	9	7	8
Cambodia	21	26	11

Table 1 shows that there are great differences between the countries that have reported the number of female public extension staff¹⁶. Some have made strong efforts in increasing the number of female staff, while others still have very few women as staff. The lasting impacts of the efforts have not yet been documented but appear to have been limited as a result of the fact that the broader policy and institutional environment is not equitable. Most advisory services are therefore still seriously constrained in overcoming the gender biases.

A study from Uganda from 2008 on strengthening linkages between poverty and gender analysis noted the following constraints for extension reaching women¹⁷:

- Lack of access to and control of land result in women having far less interest than men in investing in expanded or intensive agricultural production and hence they are less interested in the extension messages related to such topics
- Women have limited opportunities to access extension services in situations where culture dictates restrictions in movements outside the domestic sphere
- Women's daily workload leaves no time to seek services that are only available in the public sphere
- Extension messages are not responsive to strategic agricultural activities, interest and responsibilities of female small-scale farmers

Looking at the constraints above it is clear that the challenges to address women farmers' practical needs in terms of relevant training and advisory services are strongly related to structural gender inequalities such as the three first bullets. But also related to specific structural gender biases in rural advisory services. The challenges are therefore double sided: Rural advisory services need to confront and address issues of structural inequalities in society as such along with their own gender biases within the organisations.

Challenges related to the structural gender inequalities in society:

- RAS may need to address problems of land tenure and property security for women in order for the services to be relevant and attractive to women. In several countries this will include consideration of usufruct rights of women to land and other natural resources

¹⁵ Adapted from the website above

¹⁶ It should be noted that the data is only reported for a few countries and only for public services. The situation may be different for example for NGOs providing rural advisory services

¹⁷ Danida 2008; Preparatory study of U-growth component Gender Equality for Rural Economic Growth and Poverty Reduction, Kampala, Uganda

- For RAS to reach women under circumstances where the structural discrimination of women through social norms are so strong that the lack of personal safety prevents women from moving out of their homes to attend meetings and training sessions. It is important to note that such circumstances may equally prevent women professionals to move out to rural women and serve as agricultural advisors. The services need to find ways to deal with these constraints. This may also apply in countries with social unrest or even war situations
- RAS have the challenge to deliver the services in innovative ways that address the low educational status and capacity of many rural women as well as the low decision making power in the society and families to make it possible for women to benefit from RAS
- In many cases it may also be a challenge to address the workload of rural women and also consider the reproductive roles of women in order to enable women clients to participate in meetings and trainings connected to RAS or otherwise adjust meetings as well as the delivery of services to the work schedule of rural women

Challenges related to gender biases within the organisations:

- First of all the major challenge is to increase the access of women to rural advisory services. This requires increasing gender awareness and capacity in the RAS organisations, whereby the services can embrace women's participation
- The content of the services needs to be targeted towards the needs and interests of women as well as men. This must include consideration of women's access to finance, inputs and technology in order to adapt the advice and training to knowledge that women are able to apply on their own farms

In order for women to be able to influence the policies of the organisations including ensuring that the content of the rural advisory services corresponds to their needs and interests, the RAS organisations have the challenge to increase the female representation at all levels. This implies both for women client representation in the governance system and women staff at senior management, professional and field levels

An important challenge for the RAS organisations is to increase the number and qualifications of women professionals in rural advisory services. This is important for several reasons. In many cultural contexts it is easier for women advisors to address women farmers. Moreover, women in the services will often have greater awareness on the issues that concern women farmers

- Another challenge is to obtain sufficient accurate data on women's farming activities and its outputs and outcomes as one of the side effects of the gender biases in RAS is that women's contributions in the agricultural sector to a great extent are invisible

Overall, these challenges are all interrelated and addressing them combined is a key to increasing women's voice and contribution to decision making in both organisations and in their households. The end result will be greater commitment and ownership to changing the situation of in-equality.

5. How can gender equality in RAS be achieved?

Gender equality in RAS is defined as policies, institutional set-up and practises that increase women's agency and position with regard to sustainable livelihood. Sustainable change towards gender equality in RAS therefore means confronting and addressing both challenges related to structural inequalities in society and the gender biases inside the RAS organisations. The end result of such change is ideally expected to be that both men and women can contribute, give feedback and generate new knowledge as result of RAS.

Gender equality needs to be mainstreamed into strategy and M&E system as well as mainstreamed at the field level. In one successful example of an extension intervention – the Agricultural Support Programme in Zambia, which had documented progress in terms of increased income for women and households and improved food security for the families and evidence of gender empowerment - the factors for success were identified to be:

- Effective mainstreaming of gender into both strategy and at field level
- Planning and budgeting of the services including determining the content was driven by demand at the grass-root level
- The extension services used a household approach combined with a business approach, which means that all household members were targeted and involved in the planning, training and advice follow up. The extension was centred around developing business entrepreneurship for men and women in the households¹⁸

5.1 Gender equality policies and institutional set-up

The advisory/extension systems need to be re-orientated towards greater responsiveness and accountability to women's aspirations and needs. This must be pursued through organisational policies and structures that ensure equal representation of men and women in the decision making of the organisations along with governance policies and practises that empower women in terms of decision making - for example through gender sensitisation of leaders and leadership training of women leaders.

There are two sides to this: One is to reorient the governance systems to promote rural women's ownership and control of their organisation and advisory services. The other is to reorient the organisations to embrace and increase the number of women professionals as employees at all level in the institutional setup and also the organisational functioning and culture. When this division is made, it should be noted that there are several overlapping issues because the mechanisms and driving forces around gender biases to a large extent are of the same nature, whether you are a farmer or an agricultural professional woman.

Promoting rural women's ownership and control

Strengthening rural women's participation in organisation and leadership will address several levels of challenges for women. Apart from enhancing the responsiveness of RAS to women and their needs and interest, it furthermore strengthens rural women's social and political capital in society, which is crucial for addressing the strategic needs of women that are related to inequalities in terms of power and rights.

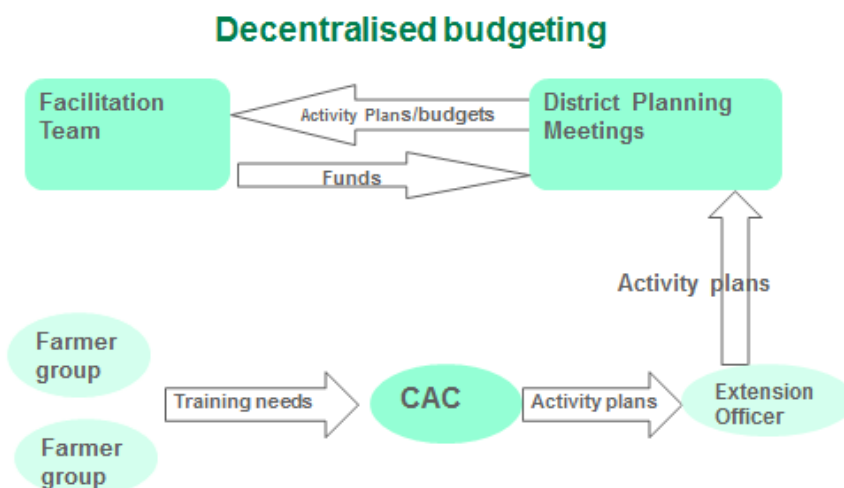
Greater responsiveness and accountability can furthermore be enhanced by reorienting the RAS systems – policies, institutional set up and practises from being supply driven to be driven by demand. This involves policies and procedures for increased participation and influence by women on the methods and content of

¹⁸ These conclusions are drawn from combining the analysis by Bishop-Sambrook and Wonani; 2008; The household approach as an effective tool for gender empowerment and the analysis particularly of the extension methodology: Chipeta, S. et al.; 2008; Extension as a tool for farming as a business, Learning from 5 years of project experience; Agricultural Support Programme, Zambia

the services. Experiences related to addressing gender biases in RAS institutions show that success first of all requires strong and affirmative gender targeting and monitoring and also that methods are applied to matching supply of services with women’s needs, as women are typically engaged in and therefore have interest in other types of agricultural activities than men. The proper matching is closely linked to representation of women in decision making in the RAS institutions. The experiences with quota enforcement of representation are mixed. In some cases it works and in others not, mostly because the quota is not fulfilled.

Orienting the services towards responding to women’s demands however also requires a decentralised and transparent planning and budgeting process, that ensures that the training and advice responding to women’s demands are in reality planned and budgeted for. As mentioned above with the ASP in Zambia, a strong contributing factor for the success was that the planning and budgeting happened at the local level and that there was a procedure for demand formulation at the farmer group level that were translated into service planning and budgeting at district level.

Figure 4. Decentralised budgeting of extension activities in ASP



There are positive experiences of building organisations of women at grass-root and higher levels. Several studies¹⁹ have indicated that programmes and services that target women in groups have greater potential to address gender relations within households and society and thereby address women’s strategic needs than do programmes targeting individuals. Depending on the cultural context, this may be through facilitation of particular women organisations or through promoting women representation in Farmer Organisations or Community Based Organisations - for example through capacity development for leadership.

Embrace and increase the number of women professionals in RAS

Most experience finds that professional women advisers are strategic for reaching women farmers with services. Therefore, gender equality in RAS also means gender equality within the RAS organisations - in the sense of having an equal representation of men and women as professional advisers.

¹⁹ E.g. Tabassum Naved, R., 2000; Intra-household impact of modern agricultural technology: A gender perspective; IFPRI FCND Discussion Paper NO. 85; Washington DC, USA

Despite progress made in some countries (see table 1) men by far outnumber women in agricultural extension. A strong effort to recruit women as advisers is therefore necessary. An e-discussion by ARD network members in 2011 identified a number of reasons for low numbers of women extension agents²⁰. The major constraints and challenges were identified to be:

- Recruitment criteria of the organisations
- Problems of mobility for women
- Perceptions of women being un-reliable
- Acceptance by society

In the discussion, ways to address these challenges were found to be:

- Reconsider the recruitment criteria of the organisation
- Provide for gender sensitive work conditions
- In particularly hostile contexts consider working with couples as extension agents
- Promote gender sensibility also with male agents
- Work through social networks

Equal recruitment of men and women will require building capacity of female staff, both through formal education efforts and through particular upgrading opportunities for female staff. There are a number of constraints related to attracting women candidates into natural sciences and agricultural extension in particular and also to maintain the women in the highly male-dominated professional environment. The education institutions (primary, secondary and tertiary) are important in addressing this. Experiences with initiatives such as the "African Women in Agricultural Research for Development (AWARD)²¹" and "African Women Leaders in Agriculture and Environment (AWLAE)" show that a combination of targeted sponsorship, crash training programmes for upgrading and intensive mentorship by other women champions in the professional field can yield extremely positive results.

Moreover, there are strong challenges related to rural advisory services being attractive (or even acceptable) as an occupation for women and efforts need to address these challenges as well. Many of the challenges relates to perceptions of gender roles in society, what women can do and particularly not do. Experience from the countries in Africa that has progressed most in this area such as Malawi and Kenya shows that some barriers can be broken by pioneers – for example women riding motorbikes in the rural areas, where after others will follow. But for this to be up-scaled, incentives for female staff in RAS organisations must be developed. This includes, for example, gender sensitive workplace design, providing a safe and gender sensitive working environment with strong policies for fighting discrimination and sexual harassments, considering the reproductive roles of women through such practises as paid maternity leave, possibilities for breastfeeding and childcare units attached to the place of work. In some cases direct financial incentives for women to work in RAS may be required. In quite difficult areas of Bangladesh, CARE have had good results in terms of recruiting and maintaining female staff for fieldwork by using financial initiatives and in some cases even employing married couples that could move together in the client communities²². In particularly hostile environment or direct violent conflict areas particular precautions need to be taken to protect the safety of the women staff as they move in the rural areas.

²⁰ Carter, J. and Weigel, N.; 2011; Targeting Women in Rural Advisory Services (RAS); ARD Network Brief No 1; SDC, Zürich, Switzerland

²¹ AWARD is a professional development program that strengthens the research and leadership skills of African women in agricultural science

²² Chipeta et al.; 2005; Rural Livelihood programme; Capturing Lessons Learned; CARE Bangladesh

There are moreover experiences from other working sectors that some organisational structures and cultures are more conducive for professional women to thrive. This should be further studied in order to create gender equality in rural advisory organisations.

5.2 Gender sensitive approaches and practises in RAS

There are documented experiences related to gender sensitive approaches and practises such as farmer field schools, participatory methodologies in working with women's groups, business training of women and use of radio and other ICTs for providing knowledge and information to women.

The experiences show that the most effective gender sensitive approaches and practises at field level are:

- Participatory or demand driven approaches
- Group based approaches
- Focus on education and capacity development
- Gender sensitive advisers
- Service practises contributing to legal support and economic empowerment
- "Household" approaches
- Use radio and other ICTs
- Effective monitoring and evaluation for learning and accountability

Participatory, demand-driven and group based approaches

Women often have different priorities and concerns regarding their agricultural activities than men and it is therefore crucial that the content of the services is relevant to both men and women. The priorities of women naturally differ in different contexts but Box 1 shows an example of how the different priorities and concerns can be expressed in a certain context – in this case by small scale women farmers in Zambia.

Box 2. Women's main concerns regarding farming²³

Diversification

Women are generally not very involved with production and marketing of maize or cotton at a commercial scale. They made strong request for services related to other crops, such as sunflower and legumes, fruits and vegetables and also to livestock production, including financial and marketing services related to these.

Value addition

Women were also forceful in their suggestions for increasing services related to value addition (processing).

Advocacy for women's land and property rights

This is a great concern for women in terms of enabling their progression into commercial agriculture. Women who had established good agricultural businesses, just to lose everything with divorce or the death of their husband.

Considering the importance of the content of the services mentioned above, in order to achieve gender quality in RAS, women's needs and aspirations must be considered in the content of the services. Rural women themselves are the best informants, negotiators and decision makers of what services would be most bene-

²³ Example from a review of services provided by a farmer organisation: Chipeta, S., Chileshe, C., Overgaard, B.; 2012; External Review of Core Support under Joint Financial Agreement to Zambia National Farmers Union; Indevlop AB; Sida, Stockholm, Sweden

ficial for them. The experiences show that this is best achieved when using participatory or demand driven approaches to the services, often combined with group based approaches such as farmer field schools (FFS)²⁴ and farmer study circles (FSC)²⁵. These concepts are characterised by being oriented to participatory and practical learning in groups that are often self-facilitated and the topics decided by the participants themselves. Several studies, reviews and evaluations²⁶ show that when FFS or the FSC have been implemented with men and women farmers, these are extremely well appreciated by women farmers in particular. The strong preference women have to these approaches is likely due to the fact that the groups make their own choice of content and topics, plan their own study schedule and the content is moulded to the women farmer's needs and involves experience sharing and experiments between the group members in their practical life.

For example, an in-depth study by IFPRI of FFS in East Africa²⁷ found the FFS methodology to be more beneficial to women than to men as women had equal access to the FFS and participation in FFS had a significant impact in terms of productivity and income for women in all the studied cases in East Africa. It was suggested that the reason for the positive impact for women was linked particularly to the experiential learning and demonstration focus as this made the learning process very practise oriented and did not require much of literacy from the participants.

Gender sensitive advisers

For advisory services to reach men and women equally there is need for all agricultural advisers – men and women - to be gender sensitive. This means that they need to be aware of both men and women's roles in agriculture and about the particular issues and constraints that apply to rural women's lives. They also need to be knowledgeable about how to reach and approach women farmers in non-discriminatory ways. In most RAS organisations there is a strong need to build the capacity of all advisers for gender awareness and sensitivity.

Focus on education and skills development

As mentioned above, there are strong gender gaps in terms of rural women's knowledge, education and capacity in developing countries. This becomes evident, when looking at the preferences rural women have for services that provide them with opportunities for learning and capacity development. Here again the FFS and FSCs often score high as excellent ways for women to develop new knowledge and skills that they can use for developing their agricultural enterprises.

Communication channels and networking preferences

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) provide excellent opportunities for learning and capacity building that needs to be explored and utilised. They can also help with capacity development of women in agriculture at all levels. Currently, there are strong gender imbalances in access to ICTs in developing countries. Women's participation falls behind men on most ICTs. However, the utilisation of ICTs is in rapid tran-

²⁴ <http://www.farmerfieldschool.info>

²⁵ Farmer Study Circles are promoted by We Effect as a concept for training of farmers and implemented by their partner organisations as a service to their members. See: Sekeleti, M.;2013; Study Circle Implementation Manual; We Effect, Regional Office for Southern Africa; Lusaka, Zambia

²⁶ E.g. Chipeta, S., Chileshe, C., Overgaard, B.; 2012; External Review of Core Support under Joint Financial Agreement to Zambia National Farmers Union; Indevelop AB and Chipeta, S.; 2013; Farmers Organisations Fighting Poverty and Injustice (FOFPI) 2010-2013; Final Evaluation Report; Knowledge Centre for Agriculture; Aarhus, Denmark

²⁷ Davis et al.; 2010; Impact of Farmer Field Schools on Agricultural Productivity and Poverty in East Africa; IFPRI Discussion Paper 00992; Washington DC., USA

sition. According to Meinzen-Dick et al. (2011)²⁸, the following trends can be found concerning use of ICT by men and women:

- Internet: This is much more used by men than women
- Television: The pattern here is not clear but varies
- Radio: Rural women's access to radio is often good although less than men's
- Mobile phones: Men have more access, but the difference is diminishing

The same paper emphasises that the experiences of training of women in the use of ICTs show that ICTs have important potential to empower women and break the digital divide between men and women, which is an important opportunity for reaching women with education and capacity development.

Contribute to legal support and economic empowerment

It is important that the rural advisory services also include practical services that address issues related to women's rights as these in some contexts become great obstacles to women's participation in RAS. Such services strive to enhance women's voice in households and society and secure property rights. They will have to be combined with other types of efforts at higher, more strategic levels. But at field level, RAS can contribute through the following examples:

- Provision of information and legal advice on land, property rights and business operations
- Facilitating negotiations of more equal gender relations in families, households, communities and work places
- Enhancing negotiation skills and negotiation strategies for empowerment

There are a few documented experiences in successfully addressing issues related to power and rights of women. For example FAO had a very successful project in Mozambique that featured the presence of paralegals on the ground. Among the many component of the project, one was specifically related to women's land rights. The paralegals empowered community representative and enabled them to advice community members on how to maintain or acquire legal rights on land after the husband's death²⁹.

A guide from Sida on the challenges regarding women's access to land provides a number of examples of entry points that have assisted in securing women's access to land. This includes supporting awareness rising and access to information for women, men and communities about existing legislation and policies. It also includes information about where to get assistance in cases where rights are violated³⁰.

A few organisations have managed to facilitate fairer gender relations in households and communities. For example, the Agri-business Initiative Trust in Uganda (aBi Trust)³¹ has a particular fund for women's economic empowerment called Gender for Growth (G4G). The G4G partner organisations offer technical, practical and to a lesser extent financial support, which through the first years of implementation has mostly focussed on changing gender relations and cooperation in household before the direct cultivation of women entrepreneurs. One of the partners is Uganda Association of Women Lawyers (FIDA Uganda)³² which advises both men and women on land rights and domestic violence, for example. According to an early assessment

²⁸ Meinzen-Dick et al.; 2011; Engendering Agricultural Research, Development and Extension; IFPRI; Washington DC, USA

²⁹ Video: <http://www.fao.org/gender/gender-home/gender-resources/gender-videos/gender-videosdet/en/c/161466/>

Report: <ftp://ftp.fao.org/sd/sda/sdar/sard/Mozambiquecase.pdf>

³⁰ Sida; Quick Guide to What and How: increasing women's access to land; Women's Economic Empowerment Series; Sida; Stockholm, Sweden

³¹ <http://www.abitrust.com/>

³² Uganda affiliate to The International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA)

of the G4G performance, the effort has so far led to increased income, production and productivity and improved gender relations within households³³. Time will show whether this can lead to sustainable changes supporting women's economic empowerment in agri-business.

Household approach

Another important approach to RAS that can enhance gender equality in access and benefits is the household approach, whereby the services are aimed at catering for the needs and priorities of all active adults and youths in the household. It also promotes practises that do not discriminate against any of the household members – women, men and youth. An outstanding experience of this practise was the Agricultural Support Programme (ASP) in Zambia, which had remarkable impact in terms of increased income and assets in the households, as well as women's empowerment in the families – here understood as increased control of income and resources and improved farming skills. According to an evaluation of Sida's portfolio of agricultural projects regarding gender results, *"the power of the Household approach lies in its ability to bundle the often disparate and competing livelihood strategies of household members together to form a shared goal, or 'vision' in ASP terminology.*

*Its motor force comes from its treatment of farmers as farm managers rather than as beneficiaries. The attitudinal changes that have been wrought with respect to the cultural norms governing 'male' and 'female' roles and responsibilities"*³⁴

In the case of ASP, the approach included separate training and interventions for women on issues that were particularly sensitive for women, such as business and entrepreneurship training. Also IFAD has taken on a household-based approach for their projects³⁵

The potential of the household approach thus relates closely to the experiences mentioned above in facilitating fairer relations in households and communities as the training and advisory processes facilitate dialogue plus joint planning and decision making by all household and community members – male and female. The approach can therefore serve as an important strategy in respect of improving gender relations in families and communities. The G4G partner organisations mentioned above have so far had good experiences with copying the household approach. It has, for example, been used in the coffee value chain in Uganda by the National Union of Coffee Agri-businesses and Farm Enterprises (NUCAFE)³⁶, where it has been important to negotiate improved gender relations in the families, whereby the coffee production is seen as a joint family business in order to engage both women and men in the efforts to improve productivity and quality of the coffee.

Good practises in monitoring and evaluation are crucial for learning and accountability

Finally, experience shows that for RAS organisations to be successful in achieving gender equality it is tremendously important to have instituted good practises in monitoring and evaluation that will assist the organisations in learning from their experiences and also to be able to document to their clients and funders the progress they make in this respect. Several efforts to reach both men and women with extension have failed simply because the aim has not been enforced in their practise because there has been no set targets

³³ Shroff, C. and Ogavu, D.; 2012; An Assessment of Potentially Sustainable Approaches to Women and Youth Economic Empowerment in "Gender for Growth Fund"; Final Report

³⁴ Farnworth, C. R.; 2010; Gender Aware Approaches in Agricultural Programmes: A study of Sida-supported Agricultural Programmes; Gender 2010:3 Sida Evaluation; Sida, Stockholm, Sweden

³⁵ <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/ruralwomen/ifad-good-practice.html>

³⁶ <http://www.nucale.org/>

and no way of tracking it, or the targeting has been over simplistic to simply aiming at women's participation in numbers without considering the many other factors in play.

How exactly to build the framework and system for monitoring and evaluating the advisory service practises depends on the context and concrete aims of the organisation. However, Table 1 provides examples of issues that might be relevant for RAS practises and possible indicators for these.

Table 1. Monitoring and evaluation progress on gender equality of RAS³⁷	
Relevant issues to monitor and evaluate	Possible indicators
Both men and women participate in or access extension services	Number of men and women participating in/ accessing/using extension services
Budgeting for services give adequate priority to both men and women	Amount of resources available for services/activities used by men and women
The services respond to and/or confront particular key constraints for women's agricultural activities	Key constraints for women such as e.g. land ownership are acknowledged and addressed in the services
The extension services address cultural restrictions and issues of workload for women to participate in and access services	Time series analysis of gendered workload Extension practises aimed at addressing eventual restrictions for women to participate
The extension messages respond to strategic needs of men and women farmers	Women farmers indicating changes in their ability to participate and to benefit from the services
There is a sufficient number of women extension agents with appropriate skills to serve female clients	Numbers of female extension staff at different levels of the organisation

6. Conclusions - recommendations to policy makers and RAS providers

In the previous sections gender equality in RAS is defined as *policies, institutional set-up and practises of rural advisory services that increase women's agency and position with regards to sustainable livelihood*. This is understood as *rural advisory services that effectively address the asymmetries between men and women in access to and control over assets, information and organisation of markets, reduce the vulnerability to risks and make women's contribution to sustainable agricultural production visible*. It is summarised how gender equality in RAS provide tremendous opportunities globally for women's economic empowerment, increased food production, improved livelihoods, household food security and improved nutrition.

The constraints and challenges are however also identified and it is clear that the persisting constraints to reaching particularly women with relevant training and advisory services are strongly related to structural gender in-equalities in society such as in-equality in land tenure and property rights, discriminating social norms, low educational status and capacity of rural women and heavy workload of rural women. These create challenges for the rural advisory services to confront and address the structural in-equalities as well as challenges to address gender biases within the RAS providers organisations and the service delivery such as building gender awareness and capacity, providing services targeting and relevant to women, securing fe-

³⁷ Adapted from GFRAS, 2010; Guide to Evaluating Extension Services, GFRAS, Lindau, Switzerland

male representation at all levels of decision making, recruiting women professional advisors and making women's contribution in agriculture visible.

The experiences regarding how the challenges can be overcome and gender equality in rural advisory services achieved are discussed in section 5. These show that the aim is complex and fundamental changes are required in order to re-orient the rural advisory systems towards greater responsiveness and accountability to women's aspirations and needs. The experiences from around the world and in different contexts also show that efforts towards gender equality need to be very context specific, as the nature of the challenges differ tremendously.

Generally gender equal RAS systems require gender equality policies and an institutional set-up that promote women's ownership and control. This involves strong gender targeting, policies and institutional set-up that ensures women's influence on the services through women's participation in decision making and policies that promotes recruitment of women professionals in the organisations and also provides an attractive and safe working environment for women. Moreover it involves approaches and practises of RAS that are gender sensitive. This requires capacity in the organisations towards gender awareness, which can direct gender sensitive practises and behaviour that are non-discriminatory to women.

The experiences moreover show that some approaches and practises at field level are more effective in reaching women than others. Particularly effective approaches and practises are described:

- Participatory, demand driven and group based approaches
- Approaches and methods that have strong focus on education and capacity development
- Practises that provide legal support and contribute to economic empowerment
- Household approaches that focus on all members in the households and facilitate fairer gender relationships

Moreover, experience shows clearly that effective monitoring and evaluation of the gender targets are crucial both for learning and accountability to both clients and policy makers.

As stated several times, sustainable change in gender equality in rural advisory services requires a combination of actions at several levels: Supportive policy actions from policy makers at national and local levels and development partners as well as actions by RAS providers themselves in terms of change in organisational policies, management and implementation. The following provides a summary of key recommendations for actions by policy makers and to RAS providers.

To policy makers (Governments and Development Partners)

- Promote policies that demand equal representation of men and women in decision making at all levels: Policy making, planning, management and field implementation of rural advisory services
- Support efforts to increase the numbers of women professionals in agricultural advisory and extension
- Institute strong targets for gender equality and also strong instruments for monitoring and evaluation of these

To RAS providers

- Mainstream gender equality in the governance structure and practise.
 - Secure equal representation of men and women at all levels of governance
 - Promote practises that empower women in decision making towards influencing the services through for example gender sensitisation of leaders and leadership training for women

- Mainstream gender equality in the organisational policies and culture. This means:
 - Promote recruitment and maintenance of women professionals at all levels of the organisation - for example through direct targeting (e.g. quota) or through implementing recruitment procedures and up-grading planning that encourage and embrace women applicants
 - Implement policies that secure a safe and attractive working environment for both women and men in the organisation, consideration of women such as practises of maternity leaves and provision of day care for small children, gender sensitive workplace design and strong policies against sexual harassment and other discriminating practises. In some contexts it may be necessary to implement particular measures to secure the safety of women advisers as they move out from the workspace to the clients
 - Strengthen women's participation in decision making through capacity building including leadership training
 - Build capacity of all members of staff for gender awareness and gender sensitive behaviour

- Mainstream gender equality in the RAS practises. This means using approaches, methods and delivery mechanisms that promote women's participation, such as:
 - Participatory, demand driven approaches that can ensure that the services and the content are relevant to women clients
 - Group based approaches are in many cases preferred by women and have potential for contributing to empowerment of women both in families and society
 - Household approaches can ensure that both men and women in the families are involved and can in many cases contribute to improved and fairer gender relations in the households
 - Methodologies that focus on education and capacity development are often attractive to women and can assist in closing gender gaps in knowledge and skills
 - Gender sensitive delivery systems that, for example, adjust the schedules to women's schedule of work and consider the heavy workload of women through for example using ICTs such as radio that can be combined with daily work at home
 - Services that address issues of power and rights of women, such as legal advice or facilitation of negotiations in family and society towards fairer gender relations
 - Effective monitoring and evaluation of the services can enhance the learning of all parties – RAS providers and clients as well of accountability towards the clients. Moreover, it will increase the visibility of women's contributions in agriculture