Supporting Women through Agriculture Projects in the Latin America and Caribbean Region

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In the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) Region, agriculture projects cover a variety of activities such as agricultural production, off-farm employment, access and management of water resources (irrigation), land titling and land management, as well as access to markets and financial services. Women represent the majority of the rural poor, and increasing the economic productivity of the rural poor is largely about enabling women to realize their socioeconomic potential more fully and improve both their own and their families' quality of life.

To this end, in 2008 the Agriculture and Rural Development Unit of the Latin America and Caribbean Region (LCSAR) received a grant of $250,000* from the Gender Action Plan (GAP) to mainstream gender into already existing projects in the region. The Gender Action Plan (GAP) was a multi-donor trust fund that ran from 2007–11. Its focus was to advance women’s economic empowerment as a means to promote shared growth and accelerate the attainment of Millennium Development Goal 3, which is to promote gender equality and empower women.

The main goals of this GAP LCSAR grant in the Latin America and Caribbean Region were as follows:

• Increase the understanding and awareness of the agricultural sector
• Increase the understanding and awareness of the gender dimension in agricultural projects
• Support efforts to advance women’s economic empowerment.

To help accomplish these goals, the GAP LCSAR grant was divided into eight subgrants of approximately $30,000 each. The aim of the first six subgrants was to support gender work in already active World Bank–financed projects in several agricultural sectors, including:

• Land access
• Market access
• Financial services access
• Water resource access.

The aim of the final two subgrants was to evaluate the impact of gender initiatives in community-driven development (CDD) projects.

This Note presents the results of these GAP-funded projects covering activities in several subsectors.

LAND ACCESS

Nicaragua — Gender Focus in the Nicaragua Land Administration Project

This grant supported the Land Administration Project (PRODEP) in Nicaragua. This project includes land demarcation of indigenous territories, collecting property information, and identifying landmarks and boundaries. It aimed to empower women by increasing their participation in land regularization decision-making on Nicaragua’s Atlantic coast. In participatory workshops, the factors affecting women’s participation in the collective land regularization and titling process were determined, and a conciliatory governance environment favoring

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women’s participation was supported. Mestizo, Afro-descendant, and indigenous communities were included in these workshops, which were later extended to the rest of the country. PRODEP’s approach, informed by the GAP-funded gender assessment, now incorporates the following:

- An inclusive social communications campaign
- Actively engaging women in the PRODEP project
- Actively engaging women in the cadastre process
- Assessing the project’s impact on women and the rural poor by including in the monitoring and results framework targets for new titles given to women individually or jointly.

Initial project results indicate that the gender strategy raised awareness of gender inequality in land access across all agencies involved.

MARKET ACCESS

Peru — Gender Differentiated Impact in the INCAGRO Project

The Peru Agricultural Research and Extension Programme (INCAGRO) was designed to reinforce the organization of activities enabling women’s access to markets. These activities included moving women from subsistence production to market-oriented production, developing market access strategies, and adapting their products to existing markets. GAP funding was used to conduct an assessment of women’s organizations and indigenous peoples’ subprojects: 77 percent of surveyed participants identified training as their most important service need, 14 percent as technical assistance visits, and 5 percent as access to farmer fairs; 72 percent ranked production and marketing as a priority issue and 24 percent identified organizational strengthening and management as priorities. The study reached the following three conclusions:

- INCAGRO’s focus on gender and indigenous people strengthened institutions at the local level (including alliance partners, service suppliers, and private-public collaborations).
- This focus further highlighted the importance of self-esteem and cultural identity.
- Sampled subprojects that collaborated with public or private entities in addition to their formal alliance partner performed better than those that had not.

The GAP funding helped the INCAGRO project to sharpen its focus on rural women and to understand how they can best be included in an otherwise open project design, based on competitive grant funds. In particular, it revealed the specific resource constraints of women, the gender-specific labor distribution, and women’s training needs. The project’s third phase will build on the study’s findings to make the project more inclusive and to define gender-specific project expectations.

Nicaragua — Building Capacity of Women in Small-Scale Cacao Farming (COCOA RAAN)

The grant’s objective was to inform and train small-scale women farmer organizations on the alternatives to agro-ecological production and opportunities in the organic foods market, and to build capacity of small-scale cacao farmers. The project is linked to a Japan Social Development Fund (JSDF) grant supporting the production of agro-forestry and environmentally friendly cacao farming as a mechanism for environmental conservation and poverty eradication, along with innovative and entrepreneurial activities, in the Autonomous Northern Region of Nicaragua (RAAN). The project identified women (particularly mestizo and indigenous women) as the main beneficiaries, although men were also beneficiaries in order to avoid fostering gender divisions.

With GAP funding, women gained access to a variety of trainings, such as the production of organic chocolate, food safety standards, the use of computer software, preparation of product labels, and the definition of indicators measuring progress. The grant contributed to women leading chocolate production, developing their own business niche, and opening a decision-making space within their cooperatives. Training-in-progress indicators helped them to increase their availability to plan and assess the state of their business.

Overall, the training worked as a vehicle for improving both women’s and households’ livelihoods. The grant also helped to better measure the impact of women’s participation on agriculture and developing enterprises. The lessons learned have helped in preparing three other JSDF projects implemented in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador.

FINANCIAL SERVICES ACCESS

Mexico — Gender Strategy for Financial Services Access in Rural Areas

The project entailed a set of practical activities to improve access to financial services in rural areas of Mexico for groups of indigenous peoples, including women. GAP funding led to developing a social strategy for financial inclusion of indigenous peoples and women, which was used to inform the design of the financial inclusion component of a new project. This strategy is now a cornerstone of the Savings and Credit Sector Consolidation and Financial Inclusion
Project’s (BANSEFI) objective to have at least 30 percent of the new savings accounts opened in favor of women. It is expected that 300,000 new savings accounts will be opened under the proposed new project as a result of this strategy.

WATER RESOURCE ACCESS
Peru — Gender Mainstreaming in the Peru Irrigation Project
This project aimed at enhancing women’s leadership in the Water User Organizations (WUOs) (Juntas de usuarios) in the Sierra region of Peru. The WUOs, responsible for the operation and maintenance of irrigation systems, still persist in restricting women’s participation in them. Workshops and training sessions were aimed at improving women’s positions as members of the WUOs, strengthening their status as agricultural producers, and extracting lessons in order to incorporate gender dimensions in the components of the new World Bank–financed Sierra Irrigation Sub-Sector Project.

Sharing the results of this gender analysis among the many WUOs led to a greater recognition of women’s role in and their contributions to the public sphere. Six government institutions committed to supporting gender capacity-building activities, while women’s water groups were created in all four water commissions sensitized to the gender pilot. These activities have demonstrated a practical way to mainstream gender considerations in irrigation projects located in areas characterized by high poverty rates and the presence of indigenous groups.

Peru — Gender Perspective in the Climate Change and Agricultural Vulnerability in Peru AAA (Mantaro Valley)
GAP funding integrated a gender perspective in designing the methodology, implementation, and evaluation of selected adaptation measures to climate change in agricultural systems. The milk-and-dairy chain of the Mantaro Valley was identified as vulnerable to climate change, mainly due to the reduction of water availability for irrigation and its effects on different parts of the milk chain. A gender specialist was hired to manage six workshops among three irrigation commissions, where 56 percent of the participants were women. The methodology used for the gender diagnosis allowed women and men to acquire better knowledge of the resources needed for the execution of their livestock activities. Women were informed about a variety of private and public institutions in the region that offer financial services and markets. Participants were also informed about the economic benefits with the added-value of their products obtained by other producers and livestock associations.

IMPACT EVALUATION STUDIES
Haiti — Impact Evaluation of the Community Driven Development Project on Women
While the Haiti Community Driven Development (CDD) project included indicators for measuring women’s participation in the project, there were no indicators for evaluating women’s economic empowerment. Funding from the GAP aimed at filling this gap. The grant supported a gender study that evaluated the overall impact on women’s empowerment in Haiti and drew lessons and recommendations for future similar interventions. It resulted in a quantitative/qualitative assessment, including a statistical analysis of gender-disaggregated data collected through the project’s monitoring system, stakeholder consultations, and subproject site visits. The assessment proposed three sets of indicators to measure empowerment of women in Haiti:

- Political (for example, do women’s voices in CDD projects result in providing the community development interventions that women prioritize?)
- Economic (for example, do women have more time to engage in economic markets?)
- Social (for example, do women have decision-making power at the household level?)

The findings and indicators from the assessment have been worked into new CDD programming design for monitoring the degree of women’s empowerment.
Brazil — Impact Evaluation of CDD Initiatives in Mainstreaming Gender in Northeast Brazil

The objective of this GAP-funded study was to cover gaps in knowledge regarding the efficiency of mainstreaming gender when measuring the impact of the Rural Poverty Reduction Project (RPRP) in the State of Rio Grande do Norte in Northeast Brazil. The study sought to understand the female burden within the household economy, women’s empowerment in household and community decision making processes, and the patterns of gender relations that traditionally prevail in poor rural society.

Although this study does not permit a definitive conclusion (due to small sample size and short time span), it is important to note the following: families who benefited from the project saw a 360 percent increase in agricultural income from the family’s property one year after the project’s implementation, while families who did not benefit from the project perceived an increase of only 130 percent in agricultural income. The study revealed that:

- Investments in community water supply reduced the time both men and women farmers spent on water collection and household activities.
- Surplus time led to an increase in family agricultural income.
- An estimated 30 percent of increased farming income originated in greater income from the off-farm work of women.
- Female participation provides social and cultural benefits (for example, mitigation of a trend of declining civic engagement within treatment communities and a positive impact on female social networks which grew in size, strength, and frequency of engagement).

The impact observations collected shortly after the project’s implementation provided input for design improvements in future project phases.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The experience with the GAP Latin America and Caribbean Region portfolio shows that there is scope for gender mainstreaming in World Bank projects and that a small amount of financing can make a huge difference. In many cases, the financing led to new insights that were either incorporated into the respective project designs or were used in the design of future projects.
- An effective communication strategy at the project’s initial stage is key in committing the government and implementing agencies to incorporate a gender perspective. One way to do this is by providing decision-makers with robust economic and analytical data on women’s contributions to the economy, as was done in the Peru irrigation project.
- Gender analysis can be a powerful tool for understanding the different factors that determine the extent to which women and men participate in decision making at different levels. For example, conducting a gender analysis at the level of the Water User Organizations in Peru and sharing its results with their members led to a greater recognition of women’s role and contributions in the public sphere in Peru.
- A qualitative/quantitative gender assessment that evaluates the overall impact of a project on women’s empowerment can help draw lessons and recommendations for similar interventions in the future. The PRODEP assessment showed that participatory evaluations with men and women at different stages can validate results and constitutes useful feedback for implementation adjustments.
- When mainstreaming gender in development projects, it is important to measure, assess, and disseminate impacts differentiated by gender. Useful indicators include women’s autonomy, the capacity to organize groups and manage subprojects, participation of rural women in community-based organizations, as well as the income generated.

CONCLUSION

The injection of GAP funds into World Bank–financed projects in the Latin America and Caribbean Region increased the knowledge concerning women in agriculture and promoted gender equality. It helped include a gender dimension in rural projects and highlighted its importance. Most importantly, it created a core of knowledge that can be used in future projects for gendered policy making, based on solid data and impact evaluation assessments. And it was done with a small amount of funding ($30,000 on average), showing that even small-seed financing can have far-reaching results. The successful GAP-funded activities presented in this AES Note demonstrate the importance of considering gender when designing and implementing projects and programs to ensure maximum effectiveness in impacting rural livelihoods.

* Note: All dollar amounts are U.S. dollars unless otherwise indicated.