

# Making a difference for women through gender-responsive project implementation







## Resilient Food Systems Cross Cutting Series | 05

### Making a difference for women through gender-responsive project implementation

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# Introduction

Gender is a cross-cutting issue within the Resilient Food Systems (RFS) Programme and gender mainstreaming was crucial to the design of the country projects. Gender mainstreaming necessitates analyses to identify and account for differences in needs, roles and responsibilities, as well as opportunities for the equal engagement of women and men. Furthermore, gender responsiveness refers to going beyond the identification of gender-based differences and a 'do no harm' approach to conscious effort to address gender and social inequalities through project activities, seeking to advance gender equality.

This involves understanding how anticipated outputs and outcomes will affect women and men differently, and in turn, how the different roles and status of women and men will affect the project activities and objectives. It also requires tailoring approaches and methods to the needs, priorities, and interests of women and men of different ages and socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

**Gender responsiveness should, at its core, facilitate the equitable achievement of project benefits for both men and women.**

In 2021, World Agroforestry published a guidance note with a framework to assist RFS country teams in identifying gender dimensions most relevant to the theme and scope of their projects. It also suggests activities, methods and approaches for addressing the gender dimensions in project implementation.

## Framework of gender dimensions



**Gender equitable participation in decision-making**



**Access to and control over resources**



**Access to financial services and markets, and control over income and benefits**



**Equitable workload**

**The guide provides three key elements for each gender dimension, as follows:**



**Expected outcomes** – highlighting the potential outcomes that the project would achieve when addressing each specific dimension;



**How is this relevant to my project?** – provides questions for project teams to assist them in understanding the socio-economic and cultural dynamics at play; and



**Suggestions for gender-responsive implementation** – provides suggestions for activities and approaches to address each specific dimension that can be integrated into project workplans.



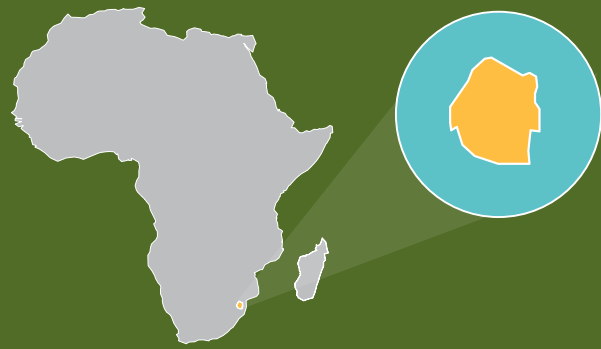
## 2021 RFS Virtual Workshop Series

On 5th October 2021, the RFS Annual Workshop series held an interactive session to put the gender-responsive framework into practice through the examples of two country projects, **Eswatini** and **Nigeria**, which have made a difference for women through gender-responsive project implementation. This learning note presents key insights from the event and summarises the constraining factors influencing women and men's participation in each project, the activities and approaches integrated in project implementation to address the identified constraints, the main challenges faced and the main outcomes for women.



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# Eswatini

## Trainings for Transformation: Engaging leaders to recognise and empower women

The Climate-Smart Agriculture for Climate-Resilient Livelihoods (CSARL) project aims to enhance food and nutrition security, as well as promote the livelihoods of smallholder farmers through diversified, climate resilient agricultural production practices and associated market linkages.

**The project is structured around three principal components:**



**Promoting integrated, multi-stakeholder development planning processes** in 37 chiefdoms;



**Scaling up sustainable land and water management practices;** and



**Strengthening capacities at the national and sub-national levels** to monitor ecosystem services and resilience and to carry out associated knowledge sharing and reporting activities.

The CSARL project is closely associated with IFAD's Smallholder Market-Led Programme (SMLP), which strengthens market linkages and promotes the scaling up of resilient and sustainable agricultural production practices and approaches.



## Constraining factors influencing women and men's participation in project activities



**What were the main constraints women faced to participate in the project?**

**The project targeted the engagement of important community structures responsible for chiefdom planning. Ensuring inclusive participation in these structures was key in responding to the needs and interests of different groups within each community.** However, it became clear that women were not participating in these structures mainly due to traditional norms that dictate that women should be in the background, both in the household and in the community. When it came to community discussions women were not expected to speak and instead passed their ideas through their husbands to voice in public spaces. Women have been considered as minors in decision-making spheres for so long that it has become embedded in their mindsets, such that they too believe it to be normal.

**Another major constraint is women's limited access and lack of control over land.** In

Eswatini, land belongs to the King and traditional chiefs allocate it to households on his behalf, but patriarchal norms dictate that the recipient of land should always be a male head of household, even though the Constitution of the country recognises women's right to acquire and inherit land. This situation effectively means that women can only access land through their husbands and if unmarried, widowed or divorced, through their sons or brothers.

To better understand the effects of these constraints on the ground, **the project carried out a baseline study using the Women Empowerment in Agriculture Index** that allowed them to identify communities with the lowest levels of empowerment and the specific areas and dimensions of concern within each community. This guided the prioritisation of communities and activities to support women's participation in the project.

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**THE PATRIARCHAL CULTURE IN ESWATINI IS EVIDENT IN MEN HOLDING THE DECISION-MAKING POWER EVEN IN URBAN AREAS. FOR EXAMPLE, UNTIL RECENTLY, A HUSBAND'S SIGNATURE WAS REQUIRED FOR A WOMAN TO GET A LOAN FROM A BANK. ”**

*Lynn Kota, National Project Director*





## Activities and approaches integrated in project implementation to address the identified constraints



### What did the project do to address the identified constraints?

**It was difficult to get women to meaningfully participate in community discussions and to take up leadership positions.** *Two strategies were key in achieving results:* sensitisation and critical awareness among both traditional authorities and communities of the role and contribution of women; and continuous engagement from the start of the project and throughout implementation on the value and importance of inclusive development.

**The project started by targeting traditional authorities (all of them men) with the message that women and youth are important actors in community development, and they have valuable ideas and suggestions.** The project team held quarterly workshops with the traditional authorities in all chiefdoms, supported with one-on-one meetings with some chiefs and their councils. This engagement process led to the design of **‘Trainings for Transformation’** to prepare and engage with communities around

the topics relevant to the project and the importance of including women and everyone in the community in project activities to be able to achieve the expected outcomes.

The ‘Trainings for Transformation’ included modules on sustainable development, group formation and dynamics, communication, conflict management, leadership in sustainable development, decision making, gender equality in development, socio-economic rights, governance and constitutional development and management of meetings. The trainings targeted the whole community but were delivered separately for chiefs and councils and for the community. The contents were adapted to each specific audience, and to the particular context of each chiefdom.

Trainings with the chiefs were focused on highlighting what was being lost by not engaging women and youth, and how they can support and accelerate development. With communities, trainings emphasised the effective use of resources and the characteristics of good leadership. The tools applied allowed for critical

reflection and the provision of solutions by participants. For example, this is how it was learnt that men often relay what their wives tell them in community discussions, and how the chiefs were confronted with the question of women as leaders, and the difference they could make.

After the trainings, the chiefs officially addressed their subjects with instructions to include women and youth in public discussions, leadership positions and in community activities. The doors were open for women’s participation and engagement in project activities.

**Unequal access to land has also been discussed with traditional authorities to support the recognition of rights enshrined in the country’s Constitution.** This was done by using simplified language or translating the text into local languages and discussing it with the chiefs, explaining that the project changes reflect the will of the King.

The CSARL project also targeted women’s increased participation in **five priority value chains namely, honey, legumes, horticulture, goats and indigenous chickens** by supporting the

development of business skills among youth and women in targeted areas. These specific value chains were selected either because women had traditionally been engaged in them or they were new activities that would not be perceived as women entering men’s domain. Cattle farming, for example, was not an option.

**However, participation was not restricted to women** and although a lot of women are participating in the chicken and goat value chains, honey production is engaging mostly youth and legume farming both men and women. The project focused its efforts in supporting aggregation and preparing farmers to respond to the quality required by the market, as well as in skills needed to handle the activity as a business.

The project has also provided trainings in permaculture techniques, conservation agriculture and seedlings production for small-scale gardens. These were offered mainly to women farmers who showed interest in vegetable production, with the goal to become self-reliant by producing enough food to eat and sell to fellow neighbours for a profit. **This had the added benefit of enhancing household nutrition with greater access to healthy, nutrient-rich foods.**







## What have been the outcomes for women?

- The project has been able to surpass its initial targets for women engagement both in community planning and in project supported income generating activities.
- More inclusive participation in chiefdom planning and community structures has facilitated access to resources that were previously restricted. Conservation of natural resources at the community level takes into account the different uses and interests of men and women, and therefore they assume different responsibilities in restoration and conservation activities according to the areas and resources they depend upon. Wetlands, for example, which were previously underutilised, are now recognised as a valuable source of resources and benefits, especially for women, and their rehabilitation has been prioritised. The inclusive participation has also had positive outcomes for the youth, who were able to raise their concerns about agriculture and their interest in activities like honey production, and subsequently the activity has become an area of focus for the chiefdom.
- Representation of women in National Resource Management Committees, Regional Management Committees, Chiefdom Development Committees and even in the chiefs' inner councils has significantly increased. The project team has also observed that women have gained confidence to speak up in community discussions and in their capacity to lead, and they are planning to evidence this change by applying the Pro-WEAI tool at project end.
- Women have access to income generating opportunities over which they have control. Project activities targeting women's engagement in vegetables, poultry and goat value chains, have supported women to be in control of the sales and receive payments directly. Women have also been supported with access to relevant market information.
- The training sessions provided a platform for female farmers to connect, exchange knowledge, experiences and resources, discuss the needs of the community and devise solutions collectively.

“**PREVIOUSLY, WOMEN ELECTED MEN TO POSITIONS OF LEADERSHIP, THINKING THEY (WOMEN) WERE INCAPABLE OF FULFILLING SUCH POSITIONS. CONTINUOUS EMPOWERMENT AND SENSITISATION WORK IS CHANGING THEIR MINDSETS. IT HAS BEEN A DIFFICULT PROCESS.**”

*Lynn Kota, National Project Director*



“**IT IS DIFFICULT TO CHANGE THE MINDSET OF A PERSON WHO HAS BEEN SOCIALISED TO ACT A CERTAIN WAY. SINCE THE AGE OF FIVE, FOR EXAMPLE, GIRLS ARE GIVEN DOLLS TO LOOK AFTER AND ARE TAUGHT TO PLAY WITH COOKING SETS. THIS ENGRAINS CERTAIN BEHAVIOURS, ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FROM A YOUNG AGE. IT IS THEREFORE DIFFICULT FOR A PROJECT THAT IS ONLY SIX YEARS IN DURATION TO CHANGE THE MINDSETS OF PEOPLE THAT HAVE BEEN ENGRAINED OVER A MUCH LONGER PERIOD OF TIME.**”

*Lynn Kota, National Project Director*

## What have been the main challenges in addressing the gender-based constraints relevant to the project?

- **Engaging women meaningfully and generating opportunities for their empowerment often means going against deeply entrenched social norms** that dictate strict gender roles and what is considered acceptable behaviour from men and women. Changing mindsets around these norms and roles requires continuous long-term engagement that can be at odds with the short-term nature of most development interventions; and
- **Land tenure issues and in general issues around land have been the most difficult to discuss and influence.**



## Key learnings

- To achieve sustained project initiatives, it is imperative to transfer skills and knowledge to communities through the engagement of community-based facilitators during the life of the project;
- It is imperative that projects receive strong political will from both traditional authorities and government from the design stage and throughout implementation, and their roles and responsibilities need to be clearly defined;
- Beneficiary contribution strengthens community ownership of projects and thus their sustainability; and
- Innovation platforms and memorandums of understanding with key stakeholders are essential to the sustainability of interventions.





# Nigeria

## Dual breadwinner households: Empowering women and sensitising men

The project 'Integrated Landscape Management to Enhance Food Security and Ecosystem Resilience in **Nigeria**' aims to foster sustainability and resilience by addressing key environmental and socio-economic drivers of food insecurity across three agro-ecological zones in Northern **Nigeria**.

The project is delivered through three interrelated components:



**Enhancing the policy** and institutional enabling environment for achieving improved food security, including the development of public-private partnerships (PPPs) for major food crop value chains (e.g. cassava, rice and sorghum);



**Scaling up sustainable land and water management and climate-smart agricultural practices**, focusing on women and youth groups in particular and targeting the improved commercialisation of eight selected commodities (groundnuts, maize, rice, sorghum, cowpea, yam, poultry and dairy), fruit trees and aquaculture; and



**Establishing an effective and functional monitoring, assessment and knowledge-sharing system** that evaluates the impact of project interventions on food production and household and ecosystem resilience, including global environmental benefits, using the Vital Signs monitoring framework.



The project specifically targets **14,000 women and 28,000 youth** to participate in increased groundnut and rice production and processing for improved income and nutrition.



“**WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT IS DIFFICULT IN TRADITIONALLY PATRIARCHAL SOCIETIES. WOMEN CAN FEEL THREATENED WHEN THEY ARE EMPOWERED.**”

*Rhoda Dia, Country Project Manager*

## Constraining factors influencing women and men’s participation in project activities



**What were the main constraints women faced to participate in the project?**

The constraints vary according to the geo-political zones. Three of the seven implementing States (Kano, Katsina and Jigawa) are in the Sudan-Sahel savannah of the northwest. **The States comprise traditional gender norms and roles which dictate that women mostly stay at home and do not participate in community or farming activities.** The livelihood component of the project, however, was set up to reach and benefit women, especially those that were not farming but were actively engaged in processing activities, such as those pertaining to rice and groundnuts.

In the Guinean and Sudanese geo-political zones, comprising three target states (Adamawa, Benue and Nasarawa), many women participate in community or farming activities with men but are constrained by a lack of access to improved seeds, inputs, land, extension services and basic information needed to improve their farming activities, especially climate-smart agricultural practices.

**An initial gender analysis study was carried out to identify the main gender gaps in value chain participation**, as well as needs, constraints and opportunities of women and men in the project target areas. The study helped in establishing a baseline to inform interventions and allowed for the tracking of project progress and impacts. Some of the main issues identified through the gender analysis included male dominance in household decision making around productive and income generating activities; also, men had better access to productive resources relevant to project activities, but women were more involved in the productive activities targeted by the project.





**Local women's groups were supported with a variety of livelihood options**, including beekeeping, dairy goat keeping, noodle making machines, rice and groundnut processing and value addition, and mushroom farming. **All the activities were suggested and requested by the women's groups, despite women not traditionally being involved in some of them.** For example, beekeeping was perceived as both labour intensive and dangerous, and women had previously been excluded from the activity due to a fear of handling bees. However, training on modern beehives and handling techniques, beehive construction along with information about honey and beeswax markets and prices, and supporting linkages to markets, opened opportunities for women to generate independent income, and to be recognised within the community.

Previously, dairy goat keeping had not been considered as a business opportunity.

Trainings on this activity also included information about the nutritional benefits of goat's milk, its advantages over cow's milk, how to identify signs of illness and access veterinary services, and information on the existing market for goats.

**An additional strategy pursued by the project was the establishment of a public private partnership (i.e., contract farming) to support sustainable agriculture.** In this context the project partnered with the Women Farmers Advancement Network (WOFAN). The partnership facilitated an agreement between the producers and millers of rice and groundnuts to create a sustainable farming relationship between producers and large-scale off-takers. The contracts are exclusive to women's groups undertaking rice farming and support them in the implementation of climate-smart agricultural practices.

“**WOMEN ALSO NEED SENSITISATION; THEY NEED CONVINCING OF THEIR ABILITIES. ONCE THE SENSITISATION AND TRAININGS ARE COMPLETE AND THEY KNOW THEY CAN DO IT, THEY TAKE PART IN DEMO PLOTS GROUPS AND NOW SOME HAVE PURCHASED OR RENTED THEIR OWN FARMLANDS AND ARE RUNNING THE ACTIVITIES THEMSELVES.**”

*Rhoda Dia, Country Project Manager*

Activities and approaches integrated in project implementation to address the identified constraints



**What did the project do to address the identified constraints?**

From inception, the project team recognised the need to make conscious efforts to include women that focused on three areas:

- 1 Robust and continuous sensitisation of the community, particularly men and community/religious leaders on the value of women's participation;
- 2 Setting aside interventions strictly for women or giving women priority to participate; and
- 3 Allowing women and men-youth farmer beneficiaries to select the livelihood interventions that the project would support based on their needs and interests, through state level consultations with cooperatives/ farmer groups.







## What have been the outcomes for women?

- The variety of activities targeting income generation for women, along with the continuous sensitisation and engagement of men and community leaders, has created opportunities for women to control their own income, allowing them to pay for things such as school fees and support their families financially;
- Women's stronger financial positions within their communities and their households has enhanced their confidence to take up farming activities alongside men (as in the case of rice production) and has allowed them to acquire land. These effects are also visible in women's increased participation in cooperative groups and in discussions during community meetings; and
- Women are respected in the household and their consent is sought by their husbands when making decisions. This respect stems from their contribution to household income.



“

**THE INTERVENTIONS WERE BENEFICIARY DRIVEN, IN THE PLANNING PHASE OF THE PROJECT, WOMEN WERE ASKED: WHAT CAN WE DO TO EMPOWER YOU? ”**

*Rhoda Dia, Country Project Manager*

## What have been the main challenges in addressing the gender-based constraints relevant to the project?

**Cultural and traditional attitudes and beliefs prevalent in the targeted region limit women's roles to the domestic sphere and discourage their participation in income generating activities.** Women also lack the confidence to engage in certain activities or to make their voices heard in community discussions. These were major challenges to the project given that it was set up to benefit women and youth specifically through commercialisation and income generation activities.

Initially the team encountered a lot of resistance. **Intensive engagement and sensitisation with men and community leaders** around the benefits of empowering women for the whole family was key to overcoming the resistance. The message given to men was that their wives need to be empowered to support them, not that the wives need to be 'independent'. The word 'independent' is very threatening to the men.

In some communities, men demanded to be included in beekeeping trainings and the project had to start engaging men in some activities. However, the team insists on the message that women are being empowered not to compete with their husbands but to support their families, and they have observed acceptance and receptivity from the communities in general.

Another important challenge that remains to be addressed is **the division of labour and achieving a more balanced workload of domestic and care work**, particularly in the context of newly introduced income generating activities that are taking up women's time and energy. The team is starting to look for strategies to tackle this during the last year of project implementation.



## Key learnings

- Recognise that addressing women's empowerment extends beyond project designed interventions. It is imperative that interventions are sustainable in the different communities and are selected and driven by the beneficiaries themselves, creating a sense of ownership;
- Understand that creating a lasting impact takes time and that stakeholder involvement and buy in is key to ownership and sustainability;
- Using community-based extension agents and lead farmers to transfer skills and knowledge to beneficiaries / communities is important for ensuring a long-term, sustainable impact; and
- Creating linkages and opportunities for private sector investment is necessary for the sustainability of interventions.

“

**IT WAS DIFFICULT, DESPITE THE INTENSIVE ENGAGEMENT AND SENSITISATION MEN STILL CAME TO OBSERVE THE WOMEN'S TRAINING SESSIONS. ”**

*Rhoda Dia, Country Project Manager*



# Summary

- The gender dimensions addressed by the **Nigerian** project were **access to markets and control over income**, while the project in **Eswatini** focused on **participation at the community level and increased access to resources**.
- **Both projects completed a gender analysis study at inception** to better understand the context i.e. gendered roles that were relevant to the Nigerian project, and women's empowerment levels in Eswatini. Through these studies it was easier to identify the relevant gender dimensions as well as entry points and levers for the projects to achieve results.
- **Continuous and intensive sensitisation about the importance and value of women's contribution and women's participation** with the whole community including traditional leaders and chiefs, and both men and women was critical to the success of the gender related efforts.
- Women's empowerment is important, but it is only one part of the equation. **It is crucial to determine who is surrounding the women and permitting them to have a say and exercise their rights** and to win their support. To achieve this, both projects engaged the gate keepers (the community leaders and men) to establish their buy in for proposed project activities.

## Key questions



**Have any of the income generating activities in which women are engaged had a negative impact on them (e.g. on their workloads), and how are the projects addressing this?**

In **Nigeria**, men have seen the benefits associated with women participating in project activities and so are more willing to assist with domestic work. In **Eswatini**, women are generating good income, and this is encouraging men to work harder to make more money to maintain their positions as breadwinners.

Women are getting new income and power through the different project interventions which can cause backlash and resistance from men, this highlights the importance of sensitisation activities in counteracting this effect. In **Eswatini**, the backlash has been positive in that the men are working harder, but it can also be negative and could be reflected in an increase in domestic violence.



**Should a wider definition of gender be considered, not just women and men?**

Gender refers to men and women and their relations, it refers to their decision-making dynamics, power, division of labour and roles and responsibilities. A broader definition of gender goes beyond looking at women and men as a homogenous category and considers

how gender intersects other axes of social differentiation such as age and ethnicity. For example, younger women are typically more disadvantaged, and migrants or certain ethnicities and castes may be socially excluded. The analysis of these interactions is called 'intersectionality'.



**How do you move beyond training women to empowering women?**

In **Nigeria**, focus was placed on beneficiary driven interventions with the presumption that if an activity was directly requested by the community, it would be sustainable. It is important to consider women's own understanding of empowerment and offer a variety of interventions asking women: What do you want to do that will empower you? For example, if you teach women how to sew but there is no market for it, or they are not interested in sewing, it will not be a successful intervention. It is also crucial that people are not just trained but are continuously supported in practising their new skills and in addressing challenges.

As with the **Nigerian** project, in **Eswatini** it was important to work with communities to understand their preferred interventions. The chiefdom development planning

allowed the participation of different community members in the identification and selection of interventions according to their preferences, priorities and needs. For example, the youth requested beekeeping as it generates income within a short timeframe, and women, who are typically responsible for household nutrition, were more interested in project activities that put food on the table. This highlights the importance of project planning to respond to the needs and aspirations of the whole community.

It is important to note that empowerment is a multidimensional concept that involves not only the individual but also the communities and institutions around them. Agricultural interventions tend to only affect a few dimensions at one level.

## References

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This brief is part of a series of knowledge products prepared by the Regional Hub project of the Resilient Food Systems programme. This brief falls under the **Cross Cutting** theme, with other knowledge products categorized under the other programme pillars Engage, Act and Track, or within a Cross-cutting tag.



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