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**Gender is not a sensitive  
issue:**  
institutionalising a gender-  
oriented participatory  
approach in Siavonga, Zambia

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*This Gatekeeper Series is produced by the International Institute for Environment and Development to highlight key topics in the field of sustainable agriculture. Each paper reviews a selected issue of contemporary importance and draws preliminary conclusions of relevance to development activities. References are provided to important sources and background material.*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Increasing the participation of farmers in agricultural extension is a goal for many organisations. However, as this paper points out, while gender is inherent in the notion of participatory development, it is not automatically addressed. Without an explicit awareness of gender, and without building the techniques for understanding and addressing the issue into the day-to-day activities of extension staff, participatory extension approaches will not necessarily improve livelihoods.

Gender is wider than the promotion of women only, focusing on the relationship between men and women, their roles, access to and control over resources, division of labour and needs. Gender relations determine household security and many aspects of rural life. Failure to take into account gender relationships leads to unsuccessful extension activities, and the marginalisation of the disadvantaged sector of society and a large part of the agricultural workforce. Thus understanding gender relationships and adjusting methods and messages to them is crucial. This paper describes how an agricultural extension department in Zambia attempted to do this.

An initial fear to overcome among extension staff was that gender is simply too sensitive to be addressed. Through village meetings extension staff gained great confidence from the response of villagers who raised gender issues without naming it as such. They saw that with the right methods, attitudes and approaches, local people welcome the chance to address the difficulties raised by gender roles. Staff developed activities such as role plays and discussion groups to help men and women discuss and suggest solutions for issues such as women's workloads which were obstructing their participation in extension activities. All work plans and extension visits were designed to take into account the differing needs and time demands of both men and women. As facilitation skills improved and methods were developed, the extension officers switched from seeing their role as purely technical advisors to facilitators of a more intense, and broader process of change.

Many changes have come about through this approach. The self-image of the staff, how they view their roles and farmers have all changed. Many are saying that they could not and would not revert to their old work styles if they were to be transferred to another district. Village extension groups have many more female members who speak up. The groups also expect less free assistance from the outside and are more willing to help themselves.

The extension department itself has also had to change. Extension staff who practise participation demand participatory management styles; support structures which follow up activities and processes initiated in the villages; and planning which takes into account their village plans. They demand a more multi-sectoral approach because farmers' needs are not divided into categories according to government departments and cannot be solved in isolation. These demands strengthen as they increasingly feel accountable for the process which they generate in villages.

# **GENDER IS NOT A SENSITIVE ISSUE: INSTITUTIONALISING A GENDER-ORIENTED PARTICIPATORY APPROACH IN SIAVONGA, ZAMBIA<sup>1</sup>**

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Christiane Frischmuth

## **Introduction**

Whilst the participation of farmers in agricultural extension is becoming a goal for an increasing number of organisations, this paper points out that without an awareness of gender, participatory approaches alone are not enough to improve livelihoods.

Gender has often been misunderstood as being about the promotion of women only. However, gender focuses on the relationship between men and women, their roles, access to and control over resources, division of labour and needs. Gender relations determine household security, well-being of the family, planning, agricultural production and many other aspects of rural life. Failure to take into account gender relationships leads to unsuccessful extension activities, and the marginalisation of the disadvantaged sector of society and a large part of the agricultural workforce. Thus understanding gender relationships and adjusting methods and messages to them is crucial for full participation by all sectors of the community. This paper explores this issue, and describes the process taken by an agricultural extension department in Zambia to institutionalise a participatory extension approach which was able to understand and take gender into account in its daily activities.

## **Background**

Siavonga District covers an area of approximately 3600km<sup>2</sup>, stretching along the Zambian-Zimbabwean border. The pattern of rainfall is unreliable, and changes annually, making rainfed agriculture a hazardous operation. Drought periods are common, forcing people to depend on social welfare, food-for-work programmes and maize deliveries by donors. The people in Siavonga District are primarily farmers and fisherfolk. The main linkage between them and the government are the extension services of various ministries, the Department of Agriculture being the most prominent. The District is divided into 15 agricultural 'camps', each with a Camp Officer responsible for providing technical advice to farmers. A Block Officer supervises four Camp Officers. A Subject Matter Specialist develops technical messages, and monitors, evaluates and assists the field staff in their daily work.

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1. Based on work done with the Siavonga District staff of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and fisheries, Zambia, especially Ms. Jester Cheelo and Ms. Lillian Hamusiya and Ms. Edna Maluma, Gossner Mission, Sinazeze. A version of this paper will soon be published in *The Myth of Community: Gender Issues in Participatory Development*. Edited by Irene Guijt and Meera Kaul Shah. Intermediate Technology Publications, London. 1988.

Most extension staff are male. The few female staff are mostly Subject Matter Specialists. An Assistant and a District Agricultural Officer manage the extension system from Siavonga, the district capital.

Village extension groups vary in size (10 to 30 people) and are open to all, men and women. Before the recent changes described in this paper, extension was conducted in a top-down manner: field staff received technical messages to pass to farmers in the village extension groups. Theoretical sessions, practical demonstrations, and individual farm visits were used to pass on scientific knowledge from research and via the Subject Matter Specialists. While the extension officers had a good relationship with the farmers, attendance at group meetings was low and messages were adopted by few farmers and with varying success. The process of knowledge transfer was one-way.

## **From knowledge transfer to joint learning**

Since 1992, the agricultural extension staff in Siavonga District have been developing a participatory extension approach (PEA). In this venture, they are supported by the German-Zambian Siavonga Agricultural Development Project (SADP). An initial impulse came in the form of a group of students from Germany. Together with the extension staff, they tested a range of PRA methods to make the existing extension approach more participatory. Extension staff got a first glimpse of how participatory methods could help create agricultural extension based on farmers' needs. Subsequently, the district extension staff received national level support to develop this into a more comprehensive participatory extension approach with GTZ<sup>2</sup> financial support and technical advisors.

In the intense process that followed, the perceptions and behaviour of all those involved changed, facilitation skills of both extension staff and villagers improved, and the understanding of extension as a whole shifted away from a process of giving technical advice. The extension staff came to see themselves as facilitators who guide villagers through a process of self-discovery, of finding solutions themselves, of providing information and linkages to other services, of identifying causes, effects and linkages of their problems and needs. Income-generating activities, self-help, village development plans, food-for-work initiatives, and stronger community spirit grew out of this process-oriented extension approach.

By using their training in facilitation skills, gender, and participatory methods in their fieldwork (Box 1), the extension staff realised that technical problems are often not the main concern, that they can learn from the farmers, and motivate the farmers for action. They lost their fear of not knowing all the answers, and instead trusting their role of asking questions so that farmers can find answers themselves. This was no small transformation for staff trained in technical knowledge and the passing on of technical messages.

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2. GTZ = Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit

### **Box 1. The role of participatory methods**

Participatory methods are used to initiate and guide the process of joint learning. They help people to visualise the analytical process of identifying causes and effects and their linkages, serve as common points of reference, and help to mobilise communities for action. As illiteracy is very high, especially amongst women, symbols, whether actual objects or drawn on the ground or on paper, help to visualise discussions and to record final plans and agreements reached. Original documents remain in the village and copies are passed to the extension office. Meetings are always held in the villages, usually in a public place.

The two key methodological points are flexible use of the methods and continual adaptation. Whatever the topic, combinations of participatory methods are used for needs identification, planning, message development, research trials in farmers' fields, monitoring and evaluation.

## **The process of participatory extension in Siavonga**

The extension cycle starts in the dry season, a good time to meet with farmers for a problem census and preference ranking to determine priority needs for the coming season. Farmers raise all their needs. When these relate to non-agricultural problems, extension staff either link the group with other sectoral specialists or assist the farmers in developing their own solutions. Agricultural activities are discussed further, maybe with another, more detailed problem census and preference ranking. However, as agricultural and non-agricultural needs are closely linked they cannot be dealt with entirely separately in practice.

The next step involves creating a seasonal calendar to plan the timing of activities, the kind of activities, the interested groups and requirements. The calendar remains with the village extension group, and can be referred to and modified when necessary during the season. The farmers use it as a monitoring tool, to see if their needs are really taken into consideration and plans adhered to. Field staff pass the village plans to senior management, which incorporate them into district-level plans and budgets.

During the season, technical messages are developed and trial plots on farmers' fields are operated jointly. Technical messages might be based on a general identified need. They develop from an analysis of the local situation, and discussion of required changes, possible benefits, and existing local solutions. For example, the need 'hunger' might be taken as the starting point to identify agricultural income-generating activities. These activities might then form the basis for the Subject Matter Specialists to develop their own messages about improved livestock husbandry, legumes, crops, etc. They will use role plays, diagramming methods, field visits and demonstrations to do this.

Monitoring is carried out jointly by field staff and farmers, either individually or as a group. During harvesting time, a participatory evaluation takes place, focusing on the field trials, the benefits derived from new messages and the extension service, and recommendations

for future research and extension. Inter-community visits are also useful to exchange ideas and experiences between the groups. Recommendations from the participatory evaluation sometimes serve to start planning the next season's work.

## **The missing link: gender**

However, despite using participatory methods and improving facilitation skills, the extension staff became aware that not everybody participated and benefited from the extension activities, and that certain fundamental needs were not being addressed. Some agricultural trials failed and messages were not adopted because women, though active farmers, did not attend the extension sessions. Husbands did not repay the loans given for seed purchases because they spent the money on other things and had discussed neither the loan nor the seed purchase with their wives. Women's groups failed to market their produce because their husbands did not allow them to travel. Children remained malnourished because men, who choose which crop to cultivate next year, did not attend the health and nutrition meetings attended by women and favoured cash crops over food crops.

Evaluation of seasonal extension messages clearly showed that men benefited more from extension than women. Men usually attended extension sessions, men were elected as office-bearers and received specialised training such as record-keeping. They also received information about loans, where to buy seeds etc. Women did most of the work in the field and at home but were either not allowed to attend the meetings or had too much work to do. Women only received valuable information in women's groups, as was the case for hands-on experience in leadership positions and training in accounting and budgeting.

A major turning point was a district-wide participatory evaluation held in September-October 1994 (GTZ SADP, 1994). Extension staff from the field, management and national levels discussed some of the problems separately with male and female group members. The outcome was simple and incisive: the practical procedures of the extension system were not conducive to allowing all groups of farmers, and especially women, to participate in extension activities. Meetings were called by extension officers rather than village head men. If male officers announced meetings, it was difficult for women to attend; in the case of female officers, village men were uninterested. The distance of the meeting place and the time of the meetings were important. However, even if catering to their wishes, women still had too little time to attend meetings. The formal registration of the members meant that only the male head of household was registered, female heads of household often not acknowledged and illiterate participants - the majority of whom were women - who could not write their names and felt insecure in the face of such an official procedure, became automatically excluded. Women felt neglected, while men felt chided when they failed to attend a meeting and were asked about their absence. Men preferred to stop coming rather than lose face.

It became clear that the notion of a 'village extension group' needed a radical overhaul. The group had to be seen as an opportunity to discuss community and individual concerns, to improve village and personal lives and to learn about new possibilities. It had to change from a fixed group where attendance is mandatory. In some cases, women clearly wanted to meet on their own with female extension staff. In other cases, they wanted to remain in a

mixed group. While some problems were general, others were group-specific. The message was clear: the extension service had to become more flexible, less formal and more in tune with local structures of authority.

The evaluation also highlighted an essential issue which had been emerging during the transformation: the extension staff accepted that their target group consists of a variety of interest groups with different needs, roles, resources, and options. These groups are linked through power relationships which are mostly unequal. Without ensuring the participation of all these groups and addressing these power relationships, message adoption and motivation to engage in a learning process would remain poor and the extension service would be less effective. Although these issues seemed to go beyond the official mandate of the extension service, these fundamental conflicts could not be avoided. The most fundamental power relationship which affected all spheres of the farmers' lives, was that of gender relationships.

## Initial changes

Following the evaluation, the entire project made a concerted effort to involve women more. For every field trip, every extension meeting, every demonstration in the field, couples were asked to attend together. Through role plays, extension staff stimulated discussion about the impact of not sharing information and not participating together in development activities. For these meetings farmers were asked to prepare role plays on different village scenarios, eg. the husband gets sick, gets drunk, dies and the wife has not attended meetings. Women's demands for more women's groups, leadership training, and more legume crops were taken up. More female store-keepers were sought for the decentralised seed and plough spare parts sale centres, to increase accessibility for women and to give women the benefit of training in store-keeping and accounting.

During problem census and preference ranking, men and women either worked in separate groups or visualised their needs and preferences with different colour symbols. In each exercise, men's and women's different interests, needs and preferences emerged clearly. The villagers themselves started to discuss whose preference was more important, why there were differences, and how to deal with the different demands for the extension service. These led to heated discussions about gender roles and needs. For example, in some villages extension officers were told that, traditionally, men decided these things and that's how it is and will be. Nevertheless, the facilitators grew confident over time in dealing with this difficult task and offering further meetings about these issues.

When drawing up a seasonal calendar to plan the extension work, men and women worked separately, or named or drew their activities in different colours. Extension staff often had to encourage women to also list their daily chores, such as firewood collecting and cooking. These calendars highlighted that although women were much busier than men, their daily activities were not considered as 'work' by the men and even by many of the women. They revealed that men were often unclear about women's activities or the correct timing of certain agricultural tasks. The location and timing of extension meetings were changed, based on analysis of the calendars, to suit the women's preferences. Finally, women wanted to include topics such as land use planning, transport for water, nutrition and leadership

training in the calendar of general extension activities, even though men felt these topics were more appropriate for women's meetings.

## Gender is not sensitive

The extension staff initiated, guided, and were themselves part of a process of self-discovery and changing perceptions and behaviour about gender. Their initial fear was that gender is simply too sensitive to be addressed. In their eyes, gender had meant traditions, taboos, an issue which is foreign to villagers and will not be understood. Gender for them meant: women, liberating women, changing traditions, setting the men up against the extension staff who initiated the 'women's revolt'. The Camp Officers who depend on a good personal relationship with the farmers feared conflicts and animosity for being too provocative. They reasoned that it really wasn't their business to talk about gender.

However, extension staff gained great confidence from the response of villagers who addressed gender issues at most meetings without naming it as such. Extension officers learned, through the responses of village men, and the analysis of cause and consequences, that gender meant both men and women and their relationship. They saw that gender affects all aspects of village life and had to be addressed to effect sustainable change. Gender became synonymous with participation, as addressing gender would empower men and women, enabling all to participate and benefit. As facilitation skills improved and methods were developed, the extension officers became more confident about the questions to ask and how to guide discussions and deal with conflicts. They switched from seeing their role as purely technical advisors to facilitators of a more intense and broader process of change.

Observing the sub-groups and conflict during group meetings, extension staff soon noted that gender relationships were not the only power relationship within the community. Old and young, rich and poor, livestock owners and farmers, etc, all presented different power hierarchies which they had to be aware of to allow broad participation. Yet awareness was not enough. The relationships had to be addressed and methods designed to compensate for power differences. For example, voting procedures had to allow everyone to express themselves freely. During sub-group work, extension staff had to join certain groups to facilitate an open exchange of opinions. To make this easier, they sometimes had to predetermine the composition of sub-groups.

## Activities to address women's subordination

Activities to deal with topics raised such as women's work overload, women not being allowed to attend the extension meetings, women not receiving information, were developed by extension staff and advisors for use in group meetings (Box 2).

Some changes which can be observed in some families are assisting each other with child care, attending meetings jointly or taking turns, husbands or fathers training some few women in previously male tasks such as brick-laying. The real changes, however, which are taking place within the family and their impact, are so intimate, and often incremental, as to

## **Box 2. Role playing to seek solutions**

The meeting is opened with a role play by the farmers about a typical day in the life of an overworked woman and her husband. In the ensuing discussion, extension staff ask men and women separately to draw what they do every day. Comparing the visualised work loads has an amazing effect on farmers. Men try to justify that traditions dictate the workload of women and discussion follows on bride price, the role of women, how husbands see their wives and women's reactions to those views. But then the group starts to analyse the effects of these workloads and to explore solutions. Sometimes, men see the benefit of contributing to the education and care of their children, to free up time for their wives, to keep them healthy (and beautiful!) and allow time for other, often supplementary income-generating activities. Some men are stunned when the work overload of their wives is visualised. Quite often, they discuss ideas about how to assist in collecting firewood and water, conserving trees, etc. The men add these new extra tasks to their activity profile, for the benefit of the whole family and community.

be beyond the extension workers to monitor, the information too private to gain access to. The challenge is to devise a system of providing long-term self monitoring data and holding regular follow-up meetings with the same participants, as well as involving the immediate community to discuss their observations. To date, these activities have not taken place in the project area.

A big problem is how to convince husbands to attend general extension activities together with their wives. The extension staff again use role plays as openers and then create a division of labour chart with the whole group. For each activity they identify who does it and who is responsible for decisions. The picture which emerges is that women and children do most of the work, even concerning livestock, which is considered a predominantly male responsibility. Discussion then follows on questions such as: "*Why do only men attend extension meetings?*" "*Should not those who do the work also learn how to do it better?*" "And what happens if they don't learn about innovations?" Decision-making and transparency of the family budget are also debated, including who has power to earn, to spend, and to decide about money.

A real eye-opener for the community and the extension staff is when, sooner or later, discussions focus around men's co-operation in health, nutrition and child-care issues. The men regularly complain that efforts to assist their wives are blocked by the women themselves. Their own wives laugh about them, even call their friends over or gossip about their husbands who 'work in the kitchen'. The women foster the image of a strong man who beats his wife to show his dominance. One of the men took his daughter to the village clinic for a check-up and was publicly laughed at by the women there. Once, the men suggested starting a men's group to support each other in initiating changes in their households and the women could not stop laughing about it. This represents a learning process for the women. It shows the women that they influence the process of change as much as their husbands. These experiences show the extension staff that gender is an issue about and for men and women alike.

One result of this gender sensitisation process has been an increase of requests by women for leadership workshops. Training in management, budgeting, household planning, good leadership and official positions were key demands. The women also wanted to generate their own income, to learn without the interference and dominance of men, to practise assertiveness and speaking freely in public meetings, and to gain self-confidence. The activities they planned were often for the benefit of the whole village. While some women's groups have dissolved, mostly due to internal and personal conflict and mistrust between members and the leadership, others undertake increasingly complex and independent projects and have more confidence in their dealings with non-village institutions and during public village meetings. The members are also respected by men as leaders in village development. Some women have even decided not to meet separately from the mixed village extension group anymore.

## Gender awareness workshops

At different stages during the learning process, groups reach the point when they either demand a separate meeting to deal with gender issues or take up the offer of the extension staff to do so. In all cases, the groups become motivated enough to deal with gender relations and see a real need to change. This point can be reached during discussion on the division of labour, or during land use planning or monitoring meetings. Sometimes this point is reached when the women become confident enough to invite their men to women's group meetings to deal with fundamental changes together.

The extension staff use these entry points to offer a gender awareness workshop. There are three workshop conditions: couples must attend together, must set aside two to three days of their time, and must provide their own lunch. The extension staff work as a mixed gender team of field staff, block officers and subject matter specialists. Men and women discuss, in single sex groups what they do, and do not, like about being a woman or a man. Relatives of the same sex, eg. a mother and daughter, are separated to allow people to speak freely. Usually, the key issues are: oppression, lack of freedom, sole responsibility for the children, no control over resources, bride price, heavy workload, being seen as the men's slave, and the burden of being responsible for the extended family. The groups select issues and depict them in role plays, which provoke many emotions. Women and men are encouraged to analyse each play in terms of the causes, consequences and solutions portrayed. Discussions are held on the causes and effects of traditional roles and how these contribute to the oppression of men and women. Although this is time consuming, it helps enormously in making people think about what they think is unchangeable.

Women's heavy workload usually provokes heated discussion as men refuse to admit it and women defend it. Seeking solutions for domestic responsibilities also meets with much resistance. The facilitators ask the group to enact the present conflict situation and then an ideal situation, for example with the husband playing with the children and gathering firewood. At first, everybody laughs but they inevitably agree that this is the best solution. The workshop ends with couples discussing how they can change their behaviour and attitude in their family and community (Box 3). Seeing couples sitting together in public, which they traditionally do not do, and discuss their relationship, is a powerful experience. As this is quite sensitive, the couples are given as much time as they need and can go

wherever they want to discuss. They are then asked to share whatever they wish about these discussions.

The workshop is evaluated either publicly or anonymously and the results are shared and discussed. Everything which is written down during the workshop is copied and translated into the local language. The report is given to field staff, their supervisors, management, and the villagers.<sup>3</sup> The participants inevitably want to meet again to continue certain discussions and to check which of the proposed changes and initiatives have been implemented. The women, in particular, value this support for the changes they are trying to effect from the community and extension staff. To date, these follow-up workshops have not yet taken place, as the time between initial and follow-up workshop was requested to be six to 12 months, depending on the season and workload. It will be important to ensure that the same participants attend the follow-up workshop, in order to generate more support at a community level for this process of transformation.

### **Box 3. Creative solutions from the men**

One aspect has been of particular interest to the facilitation teams: village men seem to have thought about gender issues and can offer more solutions more readily than women. It is far more common to hear from the men "we could help with child care, we should allow our women to travel, our girls should also go to school, we should budget together etc" than to hear women propose: "we should support our husband to change and not laugh about them, we should be more open with our feelings at home, we should support other women more during public meetings, we should ask our husbands more questions for more information". It may be that men are more used to and more courageous about expressing their ideas in public or are more used to changes due to more involvement outside the village. But this observation must be understood better. At present, extension staff are still speculating about this phenomenon and are starting to raise it with the farmers.

## **The institutionalisation of gender-oriented participation**

Several factors were significant for the institutionalisation of gender-oriented participation in the extension system in Siavonga District:

- teamwork;
- interactive method development;
- training; and
- changing terms of reference for extension staff.

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3. As there is always someone in the women's group or in the family who can read, the participants have not yet had trouble with written workshop reports.

## A supportive system for teamwork and feedback

Feedback from the field staff was actively sought by management and the extension system

responded to their needs with training, technical messages, field-level support in the field, feedback, and innovative methods. One of the main support structures established was teamwork. Rather than working alone or being joined occasionally by supervisors or Subject Matter Specialists who then took over village meetings, staff members formed teams, supporting each other, sharing roles and responsibilities, and giving each other feedback. Especially when testing new methods or in difficult village sessions, the team setting gave a sense of support. Sometimes members of other sector departments or NGOs join, which is also very effective. Generally, the field staff responsible for the village extension group does most of the facilitation to improve his/ her skills. But in tricky situations, colleagues can be counted on to help out.

## Interactive method development

The project supported extension staff in changing attitudes, behaviour, and facilitation skills with intensive backstopping in the field. Methods were first practised, safely, on themselves at meetings and training sessions. Then mixed gender teams applied methods in the villages, gave each other feedback about the facilitation itself, and discussed necessary methodological adaptations. Longer workshops were organised and conducted by teams of supervisors, field staff, and Subject Matter Specialists. During monthly block meetings, field staff, their supervisors and management discussed problems with methods, facilitation or specific conflicts.

The need for different or new methods is identified by field staff at block meetings. Then Subject Matter Specialists, together with the advisors, begin the process of developing or searching for new methods. New methods are presented to the field staff, who are also trained in their use, then tried in a village setting and adapted, either on the spot or following a feedback session.

Close co-operation with NGOs in the area, such as support with training extension officers, co-facilitating village meetings or attending each other's training, stimulates inter-organisational learning. Farmers who attend NGO training sessions become village animators and assist extension staff as village facilitators in village extension group activities. Field trips to other projects and NGOs are also very successful catalysts for change.

## Training

To change perceptions and behaviour, training must touch the personal level and build on staff's own experiences. Therefore, each training starts with the personal experiences of each staff member and includes much reflection about themselves, their work and the target group. Then past behaviour and situations are discussed, methods and skills offered and

future activities planned. Training also includes technical subjects other than agriculture, such as rural water supply, maintenance and committee management.

Management and supervision training is also crucial. The skills required for effective supervision (human resources development, conflict resolution, etc.) are rarely included in training. Instead, management is seen as administration, and often staff are promoted to supervisory positions without the commensurate training to build the skills they need to support their staff in implementing participatory approaches.

## Changed Terms of Reference for extension staff

Based on the changing demands which participatory extension generates on each staff position, job descriptions at all levels need to change to reflect this.

As part of the transformation, the role of Subject Matter Specialists who used to deal only with home economics had changed. Rather than being only responsible for women's groups and traditional women's group activities, the female staff member was trained and assumed primary responsibility for participation, facilitation and gender. At the same time, gender issues and awareness workshops became part of the mandate of all staff. The terms of reference of block supervisors and Subject Matter Specialists included giving feedback and support to the field staff on facilitation skills, method development, and conflict resolution. With provincial and national level support, extension staff expanded their role from that of a technical advisor in the field of agriculture to a more general facilitator. They now provide linkages to other sector departments and give advice to water point development committees, adult literacy groups, school agricultural programs, nature conservation clubs, land use planning activities, etc.

The resulting increase in workload presented few problems. Hardly ever did staff complain about having to attend or arrange more meetings, rather the issue of increased fuel rations for their motorbikes due to more visits to the villages and the only slowly overcome resistance to working in areas which were perceived as responsibilities of other sector departments were pre-eminent. "*Why should we do the job that should be done by the water department?*" was a common question until the staff accepted that to act in the interest of the villagers meant assisting them in establishing linkages and going beyond narrowly defined sectoral technical advice. While more meetings had to be attended and preparations for trainings which included role plays took up more time, the meetings themselves were more fun, efficient, effective and drew a large crowd of participants. The staff were increasingly sought out as advisors, increasing their standing in the village, their self-worth, sense of achievement and motivation.

Since the meetings and preparations for training were also social events, it was more the increased report writing, monitoring and administrative meetings which were perceived as work overload - and silently sabotaged. Work as such was only then perceived as too time consuming when the financial situation required extensive private activities to ensure survival, a not too seldomly encountered situation as the government coffers ran dry at regular intervals. At those times, the extension staff regulated their workload themselves and learnt to plan only those activities for which they had time to prepare and do follow up.

A thorough institutionalisation must take place if participation is to be put in practice. Extension staff who practise participation demand participatory management styles. They demand support structures which follow up activities and processes initiated in the villages, and planning which takes into consideration their village plans. They demand a more multi-sectoral approach because the farmers' needs are not divided into categories according to government departments and cannot be solved in isolation. These demands strengthen as they increasingly feel accountable for the process which they generate in villages.

## Remaining challenges

The process of institutionalising a gender-oriented participatory extension approach described here is not complete. The process has not yet taken hold in all 80 active village extension groups with which the programme works. As staff leave, new ones must be trained. Not all staff members are confident about being a facilitator nor are they all gender sensitive. It is still easier just to talk to male farmers and invite only male farmers to meetings than to go that extra step, do that extra bit of work, to ensure women's participation. Poor conditions of service affect motivation and job satisfaction.

Despite demand from farmers, female extension officers are rare. There are many reasons for this including poor living conditions in rural areas, husbands who refuse to move to the wife's assigned place of work, and women's perception that the only suitable jobs for women are teaching and nursing. Ways and means have to be found to make the agricultural service attractive to women.

Another challenge which remains is how to develop a system of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) which reflects the qualitative changes occurring within the target community. Reporting the number of visits and attendance by farmers at meetings says nothing about the increase of self-help initiatives, behavioural change, appropriateness of messages, reasons for adoption or non-adoption, decision-making processes by farmers etc. The information derived from M&E needs to be fed back to field staff and farmers so that they can participate and benefit. All too often data is collected from outside without the objectives being clear to farmers. Ideally one staff member per district should have sole responsibility for M&E, and eventually M&E should be taken over by the farmers themselves.

Some more national challenges also need to be met. For example, the National College which prepares agricultural extension staff for their duties primarily teaches technical skills, rather than participation, facilitation and an understanding of gender issues. Until these skills become part of the wider curriculum, experiences such as the Siavonga one will continue to be the exception.

## Conclusions

For now, up to this point, the work in Siavonga District offers these lessons:

- Gender is not the sensitive topic some claim it to be. With the right methods, attitudes and approaches, it is welcomed by local people and extension staff alike.
- Gender can be demystified. Gender is not a foreign, theoretical concept, can not only be addressed by women and is not only about women. If handled appropriately, gender is not a 'hot' issue that will cause problems for the facilitators. But before embarking on gender discussions, facilitators must feel comfortable about how to deal with potential conflicts.
- Gender affects all aspects of life and determines the success of extension work and development. At the same time, gender is inherent in the notion of participatory development, but not automatically addressed.
- The extension staff must challenge themselves and change their views and attitudes. They need to pursue and allow change at a personal level in order to become sensitive facilitators.
- Methods must be adapted constantly and used flexibly. Methods must promote change of attitudes and behaviour, and help see causal linkages between perceived needs, causes and consequences.
- Visual PRA methods serve to accompany discussions in the process of change. However, they are only one group of methods which must be supplemented with other. In the Siavonga context, role plays have proved to be particularly useful.
- Institutionalisation must be a participatory process itself, responding to demands for change and inputs from the actors and participants concerned and following the pace of change and development that the actors and participants in the process set and undergo.

## References

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