

# Gender Analysis: Engaging with Rural Development and Agricultural Policy Processes

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## Introduction

One of the great ironies of the last 40 years is that sub-Saharan Africa, a continent of 'female farming *par excellence*' (Boserup 1970), became populated, at least within much development discourse, by rural women represented as either 'cardboard victims or heroines' (Cornwall et al. 2004:1). How did this disjuncture come about? What have been its implications for agricultural development policy and practice? How can more nuanced understandings of gender and social relations be fruitfully brought into agricultural research and policy processes?

It is now over four decades since Ester Boserup published her landmark book *Woman's Role in Economic Development* (1970). Boserup's description of African farming systems and her analysis of women being left behind at a time of rapid economic change were supported by the writings of other feminist scholars and activists. Women were portrayed, under the influence of capitalism, as engaging in agriculture as subsistence producers who sought to achieve household food security using 'primitive techniques'. Men on the other hand were seen either as market-oriented farmers using modern farming technology, or as migrating out of rural areas in search of alternative income sources.

Analyses along these lines underpinned a series of high profile international conferences beginning in 1975 and continuing to-day, and international agreements that included the establishment in 1982 of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The flurry of activity during the UN Decade for Women starting in 1975 resulted in the establishment of national women's 'machineries' and bureaux, modifications to statistical data collection and analysis, new development planning aids and the proliferation of women-focused projects. All of these were meant to address the 'invisibility' of women's economic contributions and consequently their exclusion from development opportunities. Agricultural projects during this era of Women in Development (WID) most often framed and dealt with women as a single isolated category (i.e. outside any social context) and primarily sought to increase their production efficiency.

Mounting criticism of the WID approach through the 1980s, along with increasing demands to more directly address women's subordination (Pearson et al. 1984), led to a declared shift in development focus to gender and development (GAD), that resulted in the adoption internationally in 1995 of what was seen as a radical process of 'gender mainstreaming'. With GAD, the focus shifted (conceptually) to the empowerment of women and 'gender justice' as ways of addressing women's subordination. Here women's individual and collective agency was highlighted. What was at times referred to as 'more fundamental gender mainstreaming' was meant to force governments and all types of development agencies to take the gender and development agenda seriously.

During the WID and GAD periods a number of different 'gender frameworks' were developed and promoted for use as research, policy and planning tools. These frameworks, of which the Harvard Framework is one of the best known in agriculture and rural development, both helped frame and were partially framed by the WID and GAD discourses. The Harvard Framework includes a set of data collection tools and has been widely used for sex disaggregation and analysis of gender roles and asset access and control in African farm households. Within this framework households are portrayed as 'non-resource pooling' and non-cooperative, with individual members going about their own business as though indifferent to the lives of others. Much of this analysis has reinforced an overly rigid and conflict ridden sense of social dynamics that ignores the nuances and complexity of social relations that are recorded in other literature. Like many 'tools', a fair proportion of the shortcomings of its practical application can be laid at the door of its popularisers and users rather than its creators. Without an accompanying knowledge of and sensitivity to the lived experiences of individuals, as spouses, siblings, offspring and parents etc, the mechanistic and simplistic application of this framework might explain to some degree the persistent and highly simplistic portrayal of women as cardboard victims or heroines. These 'universalisms' ignore the social constitution of gender relations, the fact that gender relations are context-specific, and are constantly re-negotiated.

The arguments I develop in this paper are that the use of these framings in agricultural research, development, and in policy formulation has neither served the purpose of sustainable agricultural development nor positively changed the lives of rural women. In large part this is because they do not deal with women explicitly as members of society. The neglect of this relational dimension highlights the continuing mismatch between feminist scholarship that asks "how did we get into this situation?" and policy makers' and practitioners' interest in "how do we get them out of this situation?" However, with agriculture now firmly back on the development agenda, it is time to re-socialise the ways that agricultural research, policy and practice deal with women and men, and analyse them both in relation to one another and their wider context. In the remainder of this paper I develop this argument in more detail and conclude by sketching out how a social relations approach can be brought to bear in agricultural research and policy processes.

I begin the paper by re-presenting the WID-GAD policy debate and linked gender frameworks that are often referred to as analytical and conceptual tools for enabling the implementation of gender policy. I use the WID-GAD debate to demonstrate the chasm that lies between the intention of the academics who played key roles in defining the gender 'problem', and the way these intentions were subsequently re-negotiated or re-defined in policy and practice. In the case of the frameworks, I argue that they are not simply gender training tools, to be used to broaden the knowledge of gender and gender

analysis in order to facilitate mainstreaming. Rather I argue that they frame and are framed by discourses and narratives that lie at the core of much of the dissatisfaction expressed by feminists and others seeking shifts in the status and position of women. Following this, a selection of the persistent narratives on women, men, gender relations and households are used to highlight the need for change in our analytical approaches.

At this point the paper turns to agricultural research and development. It details the way in which gender has been incorporated, or not, into agricultural research and development (R&D) activities, and then continues with the argument about a social relational gender perspective. The paper ends with some indications as to how more nuanced understandings of gender and social relations can be fruitfully brought into agricultural research and policy processes.

### **WID and GAD: Fighting for (and losing?) a transformative agenda**

The WID-GAD policy debate has been a battleground within which feminists have fought to retain what is widely referred to as 'a social transformative agenda' as part of a broadly political gender project. From the brief presentation here it is possible to see the increasing complexity of the gender policy environment, in terms of the range of actors involved, their shifting allegiances, the rise and fall and rise again of arguments made by different actors, the use of fuzzy gender terminology to support given policies, and the way different elements of this complexity have been drawn into gender policies, or more precisely, policies for and about women.

Insights from gender studies, and especially research on what are frequently referred to as 'women's issues', have informed rural development policy since the 1970s. They have also been incorporated into debates around more specific policy areas such as poverty, participation, sustainable livelihoods, environmental protection, and more recently, climate change. However, it is the theme of women's continued disadvantage (subordination), and the failure of development agencies to address this adequately, that has dominated the feminist critique of gender policies over this period. Feminists and some gender advocates have, since the 1970s, fought to retain a transformative agenda, seeking change in the status and position of women in their various identities as daughters, wives, kin and community members at one level, and as political actors and senior professionals at another level.

The call for a socially progressive agenda referred to widely by gender advocates as 'gender justice' had already been made before 1970, particularly in the United States, based on research by a number of female anthropologists (Tinker 1990). Razavi and Miller (1995) mark the year 1977 as a watershed in the evolution of thinking on feminism and development, when a group of feminist thinkers formed the Subordination of Women Workshop and sought ways to conceptualize the link between gender and the economy in a less deterministic

way than had Boserup (1970). In the introduction to a report on the work of this group, the editors raised concerns about the conceptualization of women in development literature: the predominance of descriptive studies within which gender relations are presented as unchangeable and fixed; the equivocal identification and analysis of women's subordination using standard terms of patriarchy, exploitation and oppression; and the identification of women as a uniform and isolated category (Pearson et al. 1984). While reserving concepts of patriarchy and exploitation for specific forms of gender relations, they favoured the terms 'subordination' and 'the social relations of gender' to represent the common elements in the relations between women and men.

Nevertheless, early WID policies had been prompted by observations that women were being denied access to new social and economic opportunities: they were being excluded, included only on adverse terms, or denied their existing rights or claims over natural resources (Rogers 1980). It was findings from sub-Saharan Africa, and specifically from Boserup's work on female farming systems, that were used to challenge the view of women as simply needy recipients of welfare. The need for policy support for women to engage in productive roles – customary or new – was articulated within WID in terms of economic efficiency, with the costs of investing in women's productivity being justified first in terms of economic gains and second in terms of increased social equity.

Early criticisms of these arguments pointed to women's integration into the economy through their reproductive labour contributions (Pearson and Jackson 1998), and to the fact that the picture of excluded women was generated by an almost exclusive focus on 'productive' labour (the contribution of male citizens). These contestations of the framings of women's position led to discussions about the value of women's reproductive labour in enabling the productive labour of men, and helped to stimulate the shift from Women in Development to Gender and Development in the late 1980s and 1990s.

However, prior to this shift, and following the publication of Boserup's book, the second World Conference on Women held in Copenhagen in 1980 concluded that while women had become more visible, they continued to be ignored in policy documents and projects. A number of constraints on women's economic activities were identified, including their lack of property ownership and inheritance rights, and the lack of male involvement and support for change. While feminists alongside other researchers continued to analyse women's position in societies undergoing dramatic economic change, they questioned WID's productionist underpinnings when the problem had already been named and analysed as 'women's subordination'. The fact that WID-oriented activities frequently ignored women's 'triple roles' (reproduction, production and community), and may have actually increased women's labour burdens, was also recognised by many commentators. These critiques and the continued

portrayal of women as a single, isolated category resulted in a declared shift in development focus to gender and development, and the adoption at the 1995 World Conference on Women of a strategy of more fundamental gender mainstreaming.

Although special bureaux with responsibility for addressing women's issues in development had been set up before the 1995 Beijing meeting, it was at this Fourth World Conference on Women that the need for and principles of the GAD approach was first articulated. By this time frustration with the continued marginalisation of gender issues in agricultural development had mounted. In effect the call to address this marginalisation had been met through small-scale income generating activities and/or targeted provision of assets, resources and /or services, and in some cases with legislation supporting women's resource rights. Participants at the 1995 women's conference recognized the need to shift the focus from women to gender relations, and it was acknowledged that the entire structure of society, and all relations between men and women within it, could only be re-evaluated and changed through mainstreaming of the gender agenda. By reaching all organisations and all programmes, mainstreaming would help counter the 'slow progress in equalizing power in gender relations and the persistent political marginalization of women's views on the development process, especially at the level of development planning in institutions such as state bureaucracies and development organizations from multilaterals to NGOs' (Goetz 1997:2-3). Nevertheless, with the Millennium Declaration of 2000 and specifically MDG 3 (Promote Gender Equity and Empower Women) there was a sense that the commitments made in 1995 to address structural change, in order to achieve gender equity and the empowerment of women, were being taken seriously (Eyben 2008). It was also acknowledged that MDG 3 underpinned the other MDGs.

Regardless of the commitments made at international conferences since the 1990s (and later, the MDGs), it has been poverty reduction and women's vulnerability that have dominated the rural development policy arena. Here women have been and are consistently tagged as the 'poorest of the poor' and lacking the assets needed to invest in independent agricultural production. The call to improve poor women's productive capacity with the provision of assets (to reduce gender gaps revealed through the use of a Harvard-type analysis), continues to be attractive to those who are not convinced by or committed to GAD's more radical, transformative agenda. A programme focus on 'female-headed households' has been seen by many organisations as the most practical way of addressing women's poverty. From a practical point of view this strategy has the apparent advantage of avoiding the problem of dealing with power relations, or of negotiating agreements between more and less powerful groups (Geisler 1993).

Unlike the transformation of the status and position of women that would definitely require a change in the distribution of power, the poverty agenda was not fundamentally about redistribution (Buvinic 1983). This

situation did not change with the arrival of sustainable livelihood approaches in the 1990s and their focus on 'capitals': as implemented in the field the agenda for social change was often reduced to quantifying and 'strengthening' 'social' and 'human' capital (Seshia and Scoones 2003). The institutional and organisational issues that were, in fact central (literally in the presentation by Scoones [1998]) were ignored. Nor did the situation change as the participation agenda gained ground during the same period (Cooke and Kothari 2001).

Meanwhile, women's increased vulnerability in the context of resource pressure, and in new, unregulated or comparatively unregulated employment spaces in horticulture, flowers and fisheries, are pointed to to-day as evidence of women's continued subordinate status (Barrientos et al. 2003; Dolan 2004; FAO 2006).

## Gender planning tools

Since the 1980s, and in parallel with attempts to mainstream gender more widely within research and development organisations, considerable attention has been given to the development of frameworks for gender analysis and planning. Three gender frameworks are mentioned here – Moser, Empowerment and the Harvard or Gender Roles Framework (March et al. 1999) – each having a different origin and focusing on different issues. The concepts and terminology they use are common in gender documentation: equity, empowerment and participation, access and control, practical and strategic needs. Here I examine the role of these gender frameworks. I argue that they are not simply tools, to be used to facilitate policy formulation, in gender training to facilitate gender mainstreaming, to develop a data base for gender analysis, a conceptualisation of the pathway to empowerment, or for programme assessment or evaluation. Rather they both frame and are framed by discourse. This section concludes firstly with an outline of Naila Kabeer's proposal for a Social Relations Approach to gender and development planning (Kabeer 1994; March et al. 1999), and secondly with some thoughts on the links made between gender and livelihoods approaches for gender analysis in the context of planning for the future of women in agricultural development.

The central elements and tools of the **Moser Framework** are probably the most familiar. They are based on three concepts: women's triple roles, women's practical and strategic gender needs, and women's interests (Moser 1989:1993). Women's triple roles (reproduction, production and community roles) have been central to the critique of many WID-inspired development programmes where women's work burdens actually increased. This issue now forms part of the critique of social inclusion as a policy objective. Although the value of Moser's conceptualisation of women's contrasting practical and strategic needs has been fully debated, especially in terms of its value in practice, this distinction continues to be used especially in programmes targeting poor (or the poorest) women. In reality many of us could no doubt point to an intervention that appears to fit one or the other category. The concept of 'interests',

borrowed from the work of Molyneux (1985), is critical to the understanding of agency, and the ability of women and men (individually or collectively) to act in their own interests rather than simply being frozen as it were in the face of structural constraints.

The **Women's Empowerment (Longwe) Framework** prepared by Sara Hlupekile Longwe (1991) focuses on individual processes of empowerment. March et al. (1999) describe this framework as being based on the notion of five different 'levels' of equality: welfare (meeting basic needs), access (to resources and benefits), conscientisation (awareness), participation (active engagement in development processes) and control (decision-making about resources, benefits, representation etc.). Although this framework never attained the popularity of the other two, each of these indicators continues to appear in gender documentation and might be used, independently, as an indicator of positive social change, or steps along the pathway to achieving equality and empowerment. The current interest in women's economic empowerment is nowhere linked with this framework, because within neoliberal development discourses empowerment has come to be associated with individual self-improvement, and consequently economic growth and poverty reduction (Cornwall et al. 2008). In contrast, Longwe's framework is unequivocally about women, and about inequality, discrimination and subordination.

The **Harvard Framework** was developed at the Harvard Institute for International Development (HIID) in the USA in collaboration with the WID office of USAID. Published in 1985, it coincided with the third International Conference on Women held in Nairobi where improvement in the efficiency of small farms was very much on the agenda. This framework came out of the Farming Systems Research movement and was used for analysing smallholder farming families. It operates on the assumption that interventions can be planned, implemented and expected to have reasonably predictable effects so long as the correct units of analysis are used (Okali et al. 2000). As an agricultural planning tool it was used to support the mainstreaming of gender in agricultural research and development programmes. It has since become the standard for identifying gender issues within natural resource programmes.

Most fundamentally, the Harvard Framework is a guide to data collection. The question 'Who does what?' is the starting point, and the data on patterns of gender task (role) allocation, and access to and control over assets is seen to provide the key information for a gender analysis. Although the focus of data collection and its analysis is the household, the framework privileges the roles of individual household members and their individual access to and control over assets and benefit streams. Its ideological underpinnings support asset ownership as a necessary incentive for investment leading to increased productivity and efficiency. In terms of gender planning, the analysis focuses on differences between women and men in labour use, tasks and time expenditure, and access to and control over a similar set of assets. Resulting analyses invariably portray differences between

women and men as problematic, with women spending more hours than men in agriculture and having access to and 'owning' fewer assets. Gap filling interventions based on such analyses seek to achieve gender equality, and thereby provide the incentives for increased production and productivity. In some cases the framework has been used in its original form (Feldstein and Jiggins 1994), while in others it has been adapted by integrating elements from other frameworks and approaches such as rural livelihoods (Okali 2006).

Each of these frameworks, but especially the Moser Framework and its derivatives, has been used in gender training, as guides to planning, and for monitoring and assessing change. But what were the expectations around these frameworks? In large part, the purpose of both the Moser and Harvard frameworks was, at least initially, to address the critique that women's specific interests and needs had generally been ignored in development, and in the case of the Harvard framework, in technology development and promotion processes (Doss 2001; Saito et al. 1994; Stamp 1989; Ahmed 1985).

A key concern was to avoid women simply suffering 'collateral damage' from interventions not targeting them directly. By integrating domestic and unpaid work into the analysis, both the Moser and Harvard frameworks sought to address concerns about the impact that technology change or economic development more broadly has or could have on women's workloads. Role analysis served the targeting purpose well. It became central to much gender planning in agriculture, and especially to the design of technologies that match women's interests and capabilities. Subsequent experience has demonstrated that targeting can be undermined as demonstrated by Goetz and Gupta (1994) in relation to credit, and matching technologies with interests and capabilities is much more challenging than simply undertaking an analysis of roles (Sumberg and Reece 2003; Byerlee 2000). The direct reading of interests from observed roles runs the risk of entrenching existing inequalities and strengthening the association of low status, low return work with particular social categories, such as women (Locke 1999). It also excludes any sense that the women and men being observed have aspirations for change.

Other aspects of the Harvard framework and/or the way it has been used might be viewed as more problematic. In particular, the understanding that the pathway for addressing both inequality and low productivity lies in reducing differences in workloads, asset ownership and decision-making power vis-à-vis asset use. Achieving an 'equal share' in relation to resources and decision-making is interpreted as equity leading to 'empowerment'. Limitations from the point of view of gender analysis relate to the earlier critique of WID-informed development programmes: they failed to visualise any difference in the way women and men might value inclusion in processes of economic change (Locke and Okali 1999).



In the end, what is called for are understanding of interests, norms and values, gender identities, and family, conjugal and community relations that lie at the core of gender and social differences, and disadvantage. While feminists have certainly provided important insights along these lines, there is widespread agreement that understandings of these can only be revealed through detailed contextual analysis.

Kabeer's **Social Relations Approach** is underpinned by the understanding that gender relations are constituted as relations of power. It focuses on the analysis of these relations within and between organisations. As detailed in March et al. (1999) Kabeer's approach points to five organisational elements that can be linked with the persistence of gender inequalities: rules, resources, people, activities and power. For agencies that see themselves as changing or challenging power relations this framework points to a dilemma: in any society relations of disadvantage may be differentially reproduced by different actors and institutions across diverse sites including households, families, the community, the market and the state. At the same time, these relations are potentially shaped and mediated differently, across these different sites, and individuals and/or groups who can define and interpret rules, mobilise resources etc. across a range of organisations, exercise most power (Kabeer 1994).

### *Linking livelihoods and gender analyses*

Livelihoods approaches are widely viewed as a means to address the social agenda of development, and possibly, to take steps towards achieving the transformation of power relations. Although a livelihoods perspective does not automatically result in gender being addressed, or in social issues being placed at the centre of activities, the focus on assets for livelihood building that lies at the heart of this analysis sits at the forefront of much of the gender (women and agriculture – including livestock and fisheries) literature (Okali 2006). Social norms and institutional constraints on individual and group ability to make claims on resources are acknowledged in both analyses, and addressed in a similar way: by building social capital (e.g. the formation of women's groups) and enhancing human capital (capacity building for women group members) resulting in the acquisition and accumulation of assets. This theory of change is usually presented as quite unproblematic. Within livelihoods approaches little or no indication is given of which women or which men are under discussion or are being targeted, beyond 'the poor'.

As Ramisch et al. (2002) also conclude based on evidence from various natural resources programmes, since the central concern in terms of livelihoods is first and foremost income generation for the poor, emphasis is placed on demonstrating the value of a range of resources, especially land but also water, seeds, trees and other forest products, and new resource management groups, for achieving this income outcome. The problems being addressed in most programmes using livelihoods approaches are therefore those of how to achieve desired

(usually by the programme) or potential (possibly defined by research) production and productivity increases: regardless of the political and social issues that are central to the ability of different social groups to make claims. In effect, the natural resource disciplinary focus remains intact within a framework of asset accumulation (Okali 2006).

The conceptual and practical similarities between a livelihoods approach and gender analysis within agriculture is demonstrated by the merging of the two in the conceptual framework used in the Women in Agriculture Sourcebook produced jointly by the World Bank, FAO and IFAD (2009). The Sourcebook was designed to update understanding on women in agriculture, and to point to ways forward for addressing the role of women in agriculture in future rural development programmes.

## **Cardboard victim or heroines: dominant framings and narratives**

'A highly politicised model of gender relations is at the heart of this analysis of African agriculture. Rural women, usually wives, are seen as the victims of exploitative male behaviour, usually husbands. Rural men are seen as exercising gender power by passing on the increased work burdens to wives, daughters and other female family members and by selfishly commandeering the money income from marketed agricultural products (Whitehead 2000: 41).'

By the 1990s, many of the framings of and narratives around women, men, their individual and relational behaviour, and especially in the context of small farm households (as illustrated in the quote from Whitehead above) were deeply entrenched in policy and practice. As Whitehead comments, these discourses had their roots in politics rather than in sociological observation. In general they conflated gender with women, treated men and women as undifferentiated categories, and reduced the complexity of social reality into simple statements.

Key elements of these include the ideas that:

- Women undertake the majority of agricultural work in addition to domestic or reproductive work and have limited control over their own labour.
- Women are altruistic, putting their children and household food security first, engaging in food crop production for subsistence using unimproved technology.
- Women's work burdens have increased following the out-migration of men seeking other income earning opportunities, and as access to water and fuel has deteriorated with environmental change.
- Women are risk averse in their economic undertakings and constrained in taking advantage of new opportunities, including new markets in the agricultural

- sector, by their limited educational background, their poor networks and their mobility restrictions.
- Women lack secure access to land and are unable to provide the collateral that would secure access to credit for their independent agricultural activities. They are also ignored by service providers.
  - Women have limited control over the outputs from their labour and therefore lack incentives to increase their production.

Together these paint a picture of rural women working in agriculture as victims, overburdened and under-rewarded relative to men, vulnerable and poor; but equally, although less immediately evident, playing (willingly - heroically) a central role in providing food security and household well-being especially in the absence (in perhaps more ways than one) of husbands and other men (IFPRI 2002; Quisumbing et al. 2004). Essentially women and men are framed as isolated opposites, and at least in the realms of policy and practice this framing is seldom contested. Importantly this framing points to a clear intervention pathway for achieving women's economic empowerment (World Bank et al. 2009; Cornwall et al. 2004; 2006; 2008).

This picture of women labouring in the fields and even taking prime responsibility for farm management, while having little power to take decisions and no control over key resources, is painted across the agricultural sector, and is reproduced in new policy areas such as climate change. In the climate change case their vulnerability is linked directly to their asset poverty (as revealed e.g. through livelihoods analyses). This picture also relates to the way in which rural households as small-scale, family-based economic enterprises that include farming but also home-based production and processing and off-farm activities, are, for the purposes of agricultural policy and practice, characterised for much of the developing world, and is well documented in the social science literature (Moock 1986; Guyer 1986; Chiappori 1993; Hart 1997).

As reported in numerous documents, the most conventional household model is based on a stereotypical, functionally discrete, nuclear family unit, consisting of a husband, wife and offspring. Within this unit, women as wives are presented primarily as family ('unpaid') workers whose economic interests are congruent with those of their husband, and whose work is subsumed under his.

A variation of this is a model associated largely with sub-Saharan Africa that presents the conjugal relationship as weak, with husbands and wives (and other women and men both young and old) having separate activities, interests, rights, responsibilities and decision-making power, and holding separate purses (i.e. there is little if any resource pooling). These African households are modelled as sites of contestation and conflict with women (especially wives) being placed at a considerable disadvantage compared with men in relation to their economic activities (Jackson 2000). The following often-repeated statements are rooted in such an understanding of household dynamics:

- Married women are vulnerable to loss of resource access when husbands die, or upon separation or divorce.
- Husbands will reduce their household contributions as the production and/or income of their wives increase.
- Husbands take over the enterprises of women if they are commercially successful.
- Local and family norms limit women's ability to operate in the public sphere.
- Husbands and men more generally neglect their responsibilities for maintaining household welfare as they increasingly commercialise their agricultural operations, or migrate.

Such household-level (even community-level) dynamics are viewed as constraints to women's economic empowerment because they limit their ability to intensify existing production activities and/or to engage in new systems of production, and new markets, and are used to explain why the market-based strategies of the last 15 years have not produced sufficient growth in African agriculture (Whitehead 2002).

Since these dynamics point to clear problems in terms of production, household wellbeing, and women's empowerment, they have served as guides to action. For example, they have been used to call for legislation supporting individual women's resource rights, and for targeted asset and resource provision (including micro-credit) for individual women. The fact that men are likely to take over women's commercially successful livestock enterprises has also been reported by Hill (2003), and Okali (2010) details the circumstances under which men were attempting to benefit from the grade cattle that had been registered in the names of women in Tanzania.

While these might be regarded as innovative, gender-sensitive development activities, they are likely to be contested, especially where resources are valuable, and form part of wider group interests, and thus unlikely to result in expected production outcomes where individual decision-making takes these interests of others into account. The Women in Agriculture Sourcebook (WB/FAO/IFAD 2009) provides examples of valuable resources, Folbre (1994) provides understandings of the economics of family life, the identification of individuals with others, and their interlocking projects. Goetz (1997) argues that interventions like these can lead to negative reactions from men raising other problems for women, including violence. In contrast, while it is actual or potential negative outcomes that are documented, there is some evidence from elsewhere that men might actually support women in their call for more resources. Rao (2008), writing of Santal women and men in Dumka District, Jharkhand, India, observes that while in general Good Women do not Inherit Land (the title of her book), in some instances, men, especially those who are secure in their own authority, may support women's land rights. Rao also notes that customary institutions, at least in this location, even though entirely male dominated, have generally supported women's land claims.

Although it can be shown that there are conflicts of interest between household members, and members of other linked institutions, perhaps what is less evident or less commonly reported is that there are also substantial levels of cooperation, and even shared interests between wives and husbands, and between household members and wider kinship groups more broadly (Carter and Katz 1997). As Jackson (2007: 113) argues: 'it is not a good idea to... imagine that preferences and risk behaviour of male household heads can be taken to reflect that of all members within the household, [it is also not a good idea] to separate out women from the context of household relations and suggest they are reliably risk averse and oriented to subsistence and food security in a narrow sense of food production. A husband may be food security personified'.

Following Jackson, even if resistance on the part of men, either powerful men or men in general, has been recorded in some situations, we cannot simply assume that the outcome of any perceived conflict of interest is always women losing out. Outcomes such as women taking on additional workloads 'for men'; giving up any existing rights they may have to men such that they appear to lose their ability to fulfil their responsibilities; and husbands and other men not acting to protect or support the needs and interests of their wives and other women, cannot be taken for granted, but must be investigated. In each case this might involve asking a range of questions of different household, family or community members about expectations of behaviour, previous arrangements/exchanges amongst family/kin and community members for example.

What evidence there is from sub-Saharan Africa (but also from elsewhere) indicates that the demands that husbands can make of wives are not open-ended; that marriage is not simply an institution for the exploitation of women; and that 'backgrounding shared interests can underestimate the extent to which women have rational commitments to household arrangements, even though they appear to be gender inequitable' (Jackson 2007:467).

Finally, even if we agree that targeting individuals or groups is a valuable strategy, we must return to the wider social context to determine and understand actual outcomes, and to learn more about the processes involved. Apart from Kabeer's social relations approach, none of the frameworks point to the need for such investigations. For example, although development agencies might emphasise the advantages of working with women in sex-segregated groups– to create the ideal environment within which they can have voice, enhance their learning, capacities and skills, increase their social capital, draw on the benefits of collective action for achieving change– there is little information about the group processes involved, or even about group members. There is also little if any information about the link between group activities and the other institutional contexts in which the women live. The possibility that enhanced social capital might allow women to seek new ventures or support spouses in their activities, and

thereby improve their lives together, does not appear even to be contemplated. While such investigations may not automatically fit with 'development agencies' immediate interests in group formation or training provision (about the organisation and management of milk marketing for instance) it would seem to be essential to know more about both individual and broader gains from group action or decision-making in their 'linked lives' (Locke and Lloyd-Sherlock 2011).

In addressing the challenge of changing the way in which rural society is framed, we are drawn to examine the structured and formulaic process of gender analysis inherent in the gender frameworks, and especially the Harvard Framework, that have been so closely associated with the construction of a particular view of women in agriculture, and the importance of individualised assets and control over revenue streams for women. As noted, they are based on, and reinforce orthodox understandings about households as bounded units; about their farming activities; their access to assets; and income control. The resulting comparisons between men and women are understood as 'gender analysis' but provide only a static view, one that privileges women and highlights the nature of their disadvantage, by focusing on time inputs, assets especially land but also credit conditional on land access, and women's caring roles.

These comments are not made to suggest that women are not disadvantaged (in households or in other institutional settings). Rather I am arguing for an alternative approach that begins by examining for example, the character of households in specific settings, how they operate in terms of income generation and meeting responsibilities, and the implications for individual decision-making and household livelihoods of what are often interlocking projects of individual household members (and even other kinsmen) that extend over time and over a wider range of activities. Such an approach points to a different set of questions, different data, and certainly a need for data on men and gender relations (as opposed to simply sex-segregated role data). Such a shift from an analysis that isolates women and men from their social environment, and takes gender roles data as the end point of gender analysis, might also result in the design of more sustainable approaches to addressing disadvantage and thus support a strategy for achieving women's (economic) empowerment.

Although this paper concludes by arguing for more research and analysis along these lines, as noted earlier, there is an existing body of detailed analytical research from which emerge more complex and more nuanced understandings of the relations between women and men as spouses, parents, community leaders, farmers and farm labourers. Here the dynamic nature of these relations is often highlighted: the term 'nuanced' implies that lessons for intervention or policy are less obvious and straightforward than under the conventional framing.



I have argued elsewhere that if we are serious about economic empowerment we need to break the link between women on the one hand and small, poor and vulnerable producers with only limited interest in more commercial agricultural activities on the other (Okali 2010). In relation to this, and regardless of the explanations detailed above, I would argue that we need to ask the question: How does the social construction of different groups (e.g. women as vulnerable, responsible for household food security, and without agency or power) affect their opportunities to contribute to and/or benefit from mainstream agricultural policy?

## Gender in agricultural research

In reviewing the place of gender within agricultural research a focus on the practices of the research centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (the CGIAR) is instructive. This is partly because the evolution of CGIAR practices is well documented. It is also because these centres have long been linked with national agricultural research systems (widely referred to as NARS), and more recently with a whole range of actors that undertake research, and including non-government organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations, academia, members of the UN system and farmers. The intention here is to briefly sketch the ways in which formal agricultural research has responded to the call to integrate gender into their programmes.

Certainly, research organisations have not been indifferent to the calls to integrate social agendas into their work. In terms of gender, this was incorporated, at least initially, as part of farm systems research (FSR) that involved working more closely with farmers, even entering smallholder farm households; and later as part of participatory and sustainable livelihoods approaches. These responses were mirrored in agricultural extension, with farmer field schools being a recent example (Van den Berg and Jiggins 2007).

### *Farming Systems Research: Knocking on the doors of households*

Much of the core business of formal agricultural research revolves around technology development, often in the narrow sense of new or improved genetic material, but also in the form of land, crop, tree and even watershed management, and more recently policy research. However, approaches to rural development within which agricultural research sits, evolved significantly in the African post-independence period (Ellis and Biggs 2001). While the modernisation agenda first focused almost entirely on technical change and especially that viewed necessary for larger-scale, mechanised production, by the 1970s the idea that the smallholder sector could also benefit from a process of modernisation was gaining ground. The Green Revolution experience in Asia and Latin America demonstrated that under the right conditions technology could boost smallholder

productivity, and the farming systems research (FSR) movement was instrumental in setting this agenda within a broader 'systems' framework in agricultural research establishments, programmes and projects (Collinson 2000). In so doing, farming systems research opened space for a greater focus on economic, but also social issues. Regardless of one's assessment of the other impacts of farming systems research and the broadening of the research agenda within the CGIAR more generally (see Borlaug 2004) there is a strong argument that it played a key role in the integration of gender into agricultural research.

Farming systems research entered agricultural research in the late 1960s and early 1970s with the purpose, at least initially, of increasing the relevance of research to smallholder farming. It was associated with the shift to on-farm (as opposed to on-station) experimentation with farmer interaction and participation, and involved an operational sequence that began with the identification of constraints or key farm production problems. This problem diagnosis often involved farmer and household surveys, using what some subsequently critiqued as 'extractive' data collection methods. While the focus was still on the design of appropriate technology, the ex ante analysis of technology needs, and their social, economic and institutional fit came into the frame. FSR was promoted as holistic and multidisciplinary in nature, and included social but especially economic analysis. As described by Collinson (2000) it represented an important shift in agricultural research. FSR approaches gradually spread through the CGIAR centres and national research systems as funding became available; in large part, FSR research teams that included economists and in some cases sociologists or anthropologists, were set up with separate funding and worked outside mainstream research programmes.

The present day acceptance of the importance of gender as a significant analytical category within agricultural research largely reflects the intensive and wide-reaching activities that took place under the rubric of FSR with special funding from the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, USAID and the World Bank, but also other international agencies (Feldstein et al. 1994). The Harvard Framework was developed in the context of this FSR movement, and gender was also emphasised through a series of regional networks of academics, agricultural researchers, government staff and development personnel working at various levels, that explored the position of women in small farm systems. Detailed descriptions of sex disaggregated roles, asset access and control in specific farming systems in different parts of the world were published in farming systems research journals and conference proceedings. There were also anthropological household studies (e.g. see Moock 1986) and a series of Africa country studies published by the World Bank that laid out all the missing elements, including agricultural extension services, needed by women to support their work as independent producers, and to be as productive as men (Feldstein et al. 1989). The World Bank publication by Saito, Mekonnen and Spurling (1994) was based on the African country case

studies from Burkina Faso, Kenya, Nigeria and Zambia. They were part of a UNDP-funded and World Bank-executed project on Raising the Productivity of Women Farmers in Africa. Expected production gains from supporting women farmers are detailed in this document. According to Feldstein (2000), if policy and programmes incorporated the findings of this FSR-related research, women would no longer simply be the recipients of the unexpected consequences of new technology designed for men, but would be empowered as their ability to make choices about their own livelihoods increased.

By the 1990s, much emphasis was being placed on engaging women farmers directly in the research (Sperling et al. 1993), and eventually the CGIAR gender research was folded into participatory research. This broader participatory agenda not only addressed the longstanding (since Boserup) and contentious issue of women being the unintentional victims of technological changes (due to gender bias and gender blindness, but also to Western cultural hegemony), but also reflected the understanding that farmers, acknowledged by this time as having valuable knowledge, formed part of the research system (as Biggs 1990). Again, gendered role analysis was used to identify gender-specific knowledge domains.

### *The dilution of gender through participation?*

By the mid 1990s, FSR approaches were no longer in favour: they were critiqued as expensive to set up and run, and failing to produce rapid results. They were also being overrun by alternative processes of problem analysis beginning with RRA (Rapid Rural Appraisal) emphasising a more rapid and participatory process of data collection, PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) and later PLA (Participatory Learning Approaches) emphasising a more equal basis of information exchange and learning between researchers and farmers, and subsequent developments of the participatory paradigm. Concern about the need for 'client' involvement in technology design and dissemination was not limited to the experience of women, but the setting up of a separate office or bureaux responsible for addressing gender reflects the way in which gender was incorporated organisationally across development sectors. In 1997, the CGIAR announced its System-wide Program on Participatory Research for Gender Analysis and Technical Innovation (later named Participatory Research and Gender Analysis – PRGA - based at the Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) based in Cali, Colombia. This programme continued through 2009 when it was replaced briefly by a CIAT only programme (2010-2011), before closing in 2011 (CIAT 2011; Lilja and Johnson 2002). Given the strong link that PRGA made between participatory research and gender analysis, one of its key activities was to demonstrate the value of bringing women farmers into the research process. A checklist was produced for researchers to monitor their participatory processes through the research cycle, from technology development through testing and diffusion (Box 1).

## Box 1 Checklist for types of gender analysis

### Stage of innovation/ type of gender analysis

#### Design

- Was the client group differentiated by gender at the research initiation stage?
- Were different available solutions identified for men and women?
- When deciding the relative importance of solutions to be tested, were the differences between women and men's priorities analysed?

#### Testing

- Was the client group for evaluating potential innovations or technology options differentiated by gender?
- Was it determined whether women and men have different yardsticks for measuring what is an acceptable solution or not?
- Was it considered whether men and women wanted to recommend different solutions to other farmers?

#### Diffusion

- Was the client group for awareness building, and validation and dissemination of tested innovation of technology options, differentiated by gender?
- Were the differences between men's and women's preferences analyzed when deciding when, to whom, and in what way to supply new inputs needed for adoption?

(Extracted from Lilja and Ashby, 2001:12)

The questions were expected to also reveal the gender interests of the women and men involved in the programme. It is important to note that none of the questions asked how contrasting views were resolved within households or between spouses (or anyone else for that matter, including participating group members). The whole programme was built around the analysis of sex disaggregated data, and this had a strong conceptual link to the Harvard Framework.

What is now referred to as a 'demand-driven and participatory gender approach' lies at the core of the new CGIAR global research programmes (CRPs) which will not only pursue improvements in 'system productivity' but also analyse the working of markets, policy processes and knowledge communications in order to create: 'opportunities, commodities, relationships and services that ultimately change the way people do things' (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2010). Within the six overarching objectives of one of these integrated, multi-institutional programmes (Harnessing the Development Potential of Aquatic Agriculture for the Poor and Vulnerable – CRP 1.3), two refer specifically to gender:

- Reduced gender disparities in access to and control of resources and decision making through beneficial changes in gender norms and roles, and
- Improved policy and formal and informal institutional structures and processes implemented to support pro-poor, gender-equitable and sustainable development.

Participatory solutions to the disadvantaged position of women have now been on the development agenda for at least two decades, and certainly it would be almost impossible for anyone to question the need to engage local populations in micro-planning and decision-making processes. Within the CGIAR, in line with its core technology development concerns, the gender research programme has focused especially on involving women in two areas of research in sub-Saharan Africa, the improvement of plant genetic material, and natural resource management.

The East African bean research is probably the earliest and most widely quoted example of collaborative research being undertaken by scientists and women, in this case, 'specialist' bean growers (Sperling et al.1993). The reported gains from this research included more rapid production of suitable genetic material, and new bean varieties that were thought likely to spread rapidly amongst bean growers because they met the interests of women growers in this region.

The justification required by the research system for the inclusion of women in natural resources management research was a more challenging task. In the case reported by Westermann et al.(2005) reference is made to increased group maturity, and as a consequence more effective resource management. Empowerment is also mentioned as an outcome of the social and human capital formation – experience of group management and public speaking – from the group processes. Regardless of the reported gains from the inclusion of women in both programmes Renkow and Byerlee (2010) in their analysis of the CGIAR's impact conclude that while this natural resources research might result in local and national benefits, and might reveal even greater benefits in the long term, plant genetic research has had 'the most profound documented positive impacts'. No reference is made in this document to the value of any particular gender-specific benefits. These authors conclude by suggesting a reallocation of funding towards plant genetic research.

The claims made in both research programmes about women's empowerment as an outcome of group management and participatory processes are linked with social and human capital formation (as in livelihoods thinking). Where reference is made in research and development to these social processes, most do not go as far as Bebbington (1999) who writes of human capital enhancing the capacity to change the world, although many come very close. Norfolk (2004) for example writes of the empowered 'community voice' enabling access to the judicial system, and providing a platform for local people to challenge powerful actors. In the context of agriculture, from the late 1980s through the 1990s, reference is made to 'farmer first' approaches and 'farmer participation' as enabling poor, marginal farmers to articulate their demands (Chambers et al.1989). Others used livelihoods terminology: the confidence, knowledge, networks and capacity built allows technologies to have a fuller effect on lives and livelihoods (Scoones and Thompson 1994). In a later document Seshia and Scoones (2003) suggest that local ownership of plant genetic

resources may contribute to the formation of social capital.

The claims are based almost exclusively on reports by the women involved, and are not really about gender relations. However, in terms of improving the status and position of women where these are low, this is contingent on the position and status of people both within and outside the groups, and thus there is a question of the social legitimacy of the reported changes. For this, we need to know more about what is going on in the lives of group members, beginning with their day-to-day domestic settings, and then institutional sites beyond this: how do individual men and women, as household members, value or support the changes, and so on?

FAO in a policy report on small-scale fisheries communities in the Republic of Bénin, Burkina Faso, Congo, Gabon and in The Gambia (FAO 2006), points to various factors blocking women's effective participation in new institutional arrangements. The African women that were the subject of this particular research activity reported that men may perceive that their participation in and increased access to know-how and information will make them less submissive, more independent and therefore better placed to challenge them. As a consequence they reported that although they may participate in meetings, they hesitate to take on leadership positions, follow up on decisions and new information, and practice their newly acquired skills.

In addition to claims being based on self-reporting by the women themselves, the reports are implicitly about married women being given more independence (by or from their husbands), or participating more in community meetings (Norfolk, 2004), or even enjoying more security over land for farming or housing. These are assumed to be positive changes but it is often not made clear whether their meaning and value for all those directly involved have been examined. There is little sense of men's specific needs, responsibilities and interests, and certainly indications are rarely given of the implications for gender relations of women being able to act independently, or of what acting independently means for the women concerned, or even of which women and men are involved.

In terms of the understanding of how gender works, neither participation (as social inclusion), nor 'representation' (as membership of decision-making bodies) are straightforward processes. The issues are well documented and it is not the purpose here to review them in detail here. Suffice it to say that there are issues about social norms and values that determine who can speak in public gatherings; how what people express as what they need and want is shaped; and where and under what circumstances decisions are actually taken (Mosse 1995). There are also issues of who is making the claims, of equity and empowerment (Cornwall 2003), and around the multiple meanings of all these terms, and of gender itself (Eyben and Napier-Moore 2009; Cornwall 2003). Again, even when positive change is reported, little or no attempt is made to disaggregate group members or

determine who is speaking at public gatherings. Rather, all women are presumed to be lacking in control (decision-making) over resources and benefits, and disempowered overall, and the position of all women is presumed to have improved.

The value of participatory research, and especially of engaging women in research, has been argued especially on grounds of efficiency and decreased costs of producing, for example, genetic material that responds to local situations – a practical rather than an ideological argument that also enabled the research system to respond to political imperatives. The fact that the genetic material also appealed to women's interests, and possibly therefore contributed to their empowerment, enabled the PRGA to speak to feminists' demands for a more transformative agenda.

In contrast, the less obvious and longer term outcomes of the natural resource management research have presented problems for those needing to demonstrate to funders the added value of including women, and in this respect we might sympathise with Borlaug (2004) who argued that the CGIAR should concentrate on its comparative advantage – crop genetic improvement. Such arguments illustrate the institutional imperatives that Rasavi (1997) suggests will inevitably limit the extent to which different organisations can meet the feminist goals of gender mainstreaming. In the case of the CGIAR centres, an opportunity to increase the gender learning from their more traditional research portfolio may appear within the CRPs with their wider social development focus and increased space for research for development partners.

## Way forward – social relational approaches

Our aim was to develop better analytical and conceptual tools for the development of a theory of social relations which would encompass not only the so-called economic relations of society but what have also been called the relations of everyday life (Young et al 1981:viii).

The experiences of feminists and gender advocates seeking to influence development policy and practice demonstrated the need to problematize gender relations, rather than to simply focus on possible practical ways of changing the lives of women. Calls for a social relations approach, the rejection of the idea that women are socially isolated and that women and men are homogeneous social categories were central to GAD but also rehearsed before GAD was officially adopted. Other elements of the critique outlined above are also long-standing including the fact that relations between women and men are not immutable and fixed; that gender relations cannot be read off from either other social relations or from gender relations in other societies (Pearson et al. 1984; Jackson and Pearson 1998).

All this remains relevant to-day, even in the light of the widespread adoption of change in social relations as a key goal by development organisations and donors (Pearson and Jackson 1998), and the fact that many women may have benefited from WID-type interventions. The continuing relevance of this critique demonstrates the chasm that lies between feminist analysis that was critical in defining the gender 'problem', and the way this was (and continues to be) re-negotiated or re-defined in WID and even GAD-inspired policy and practice. WID programmes may have satisfied many, but the narrative of women as weak, vulnerable and isolated rather than as economic agents facing gender constraints as producers, investors or consumers remains the dominant narrative in development practice. As Spring (2000) remarks, all standard WID arguments about women's invisibility in agriculture seem to apply even more so to women's invisibility in commercial agricultural production.

In this paper I have argued that the challenge is to step outside of conventional understandings of the problem and to engage rather with the complex realities of social relations. This may well involve starting with sex disaggregated data but must clearly identify which women and which men we are talking about, and in what circumstances i.e. a kind of 'scaling down' in order to learn more about processes of change.

A modified Harvard Framework that worked at this level of detail might be useful, but we need to be clear about the purpose of this framework, as a guide to data needs, and then about the understanding of gender relations, household functioning etc. that will be used to interpret these data. In spite of any practical value these data might have, for targeting interventions for example, they provide a picture of roles, resources and benefit allocations at a particular point in time, and with no additional information provide little insight into household livelihood strategies, where these may or may not conflict with individual strategies or interests, what roles individual actors might be invested in, which roles are negotiable (or not), or which are being contested, and expectations of change

Rather than proposing another framework, a useful starting point is to agree on a number of 'operating principles' that incorporate a social relations– gender in particular but also other social relations– approach into agriculture and rural development policy (Box 2). These principles include key gender understandings: gender relations are dynamic; women and men are heterogeneous social groupings with multiple identities (as spouses, siblings, co-workers and so on). They also take account of the fact that women and men as household members have both separate and joint interests while remaining engaged in what is essentially a cooperative enterprise. Further, the operating principles acknowledge the fact that social relations of different kinds – gender, class, age, marital status – often act together in the production and reproduction of disadvantage, and 'gender issues' may not be women's most important concern. It follows that gender needs to be considered along with other



## Box 2. Operating principles for a social relations approach to incorporating gender into agricultural research and development policy

### Vigorously resist notions that:

- The rural population is a collection of isolated, atomised individuals with only individual interests
- Farmers, producers and others are neutral actors with no gender, age, class or other identities
- All rural areas are the same (share the same history and social identity, and are experiencing similar rates of change etc.)

### Question dominant narratives about:

- Women and men in agriculture, gender relations and household decision-making.

### Remember that:

- Gender disadvantage is about social structure
- Gender relations are dynamic: men and women seek to maintain or re-negotiate these to meet their own interests
- Men and women have multiple identities
- Changes in gender relations are intrinsically ambiguous and cannot be simply read off from sex differentiated data

### Avoid:

- Simply cataloguing differences and seeking gap-filling solutions
- Repeating standard representations of women and men, youth or other groups

### Clarify:

- The context in which any specific study is undertaken
- Which women and which men are the subject of study
- Gender and wider social relations in various institutional contexts

social divisions and categories, especially age and class.

Overall, the principles imply that the messiness of social reality must be acknowledged and addressed. As Kabeer suggests, the institutions of households, communities, markets and the state are not delinked from one another as the official picture suggests (Kabeer 1994: 308), and relations within them are not simply determined by economic considerations. The operating principles also point to a need to ground social analysis in 'local' reality, and avoid compressing differences and diversity, including rates and pathways of change, into

a single convenient reality for which there are established policy responses. Bridget O'Laughlin provides a revealing example in her analysis of female headed households in Southern Africa using the case of Botswana (O'Laughlin 1998). She argues against taking existing households as the frame of reference for arriving at policy, and rather emphasises the need to see these households in the context of the long term structural unemployment of the region. She questions the narrow focus of policy since the 1980s on poverty and poor women-headed households, and the policy question being asked in order to know who to target: 'Will assistance channelled to rural women-headed households reach the destitute, all the destitute, and only the destitute?' (p.2). Finally, O'Laughlin argues that this policy response takes poverty as a given to be alleviated and argues that this is not sufficient. Rather her alternative question for policy is: 'What should be done when capital no longer needs the labour that is pulled from rural households over generations' (p.1).

In terms of defining the context specificity of research, much of the gender and agricultural development literature focuses on women's work on men's fields with only passing reference to women's own fields. We are reminded by Whitehead (1994) of the various categories of 'contemporary' (15 years ago) women's economic activities (Box 3). While it may be true that women spend much of their time on 'men's fields', given the current interest in promoting more intensive production on small farms it would seem to be important that women's own fields and agricultural activities are in the frame. In this case, in the context of commercialisation policies for example, we should be taking women's ability to take risks for granted, and ask which women, where and under what circumstances (access to information, capital, labour etc.) are already involved in commercial production, and in what ways?

How might a social relations approach that includes accepting the diversity of institutions and patterns of change enrich understanding and create new leverage for policy intervention? In relation to debates over land policy and changing tenure systems, Yngstrom (2002) based on research in Tanzania, examines evolutionary landholding models that assume landholding systems are evolving into individualised systems of ownership with greater market integration. She argues that this road to modernity will gradually weaken or even extinguish women's rights, but that this is not inevitable. She concludes that since marriage is the most important channel of access to land, and the means to work it, the law needs to recognise the mutual responsibilities that women and men have to each other, in landholding and production, and this would serve as a powerful tool for women to exercise their land claims.

In relation to the design and delivery of agricultural extension that use households as their frame of reference, these would seem to be particularly challenging in contexts where domestic arrangements are not only diverse, and in constant flux, but also where residence, consumption and production units do not automatically

**Box 3 Typical categories of rural women's contemporary economic activity**

<b>Female Farmers</b>	<b>Independent Farming</b>	<b>Labour for others</b>
In <b>smallholder</b> production (i.e. producing for self-consumption and for sale)	On own account as 'smallholders' wives On own account as female heads of households	Unremunerated 'family labour' Labour remunerated in kind or cash for husbands and neighbours
In <b>commercial</b> production (i.e. producing for sale)	Own account farmers, as wives Own account farmers, as female heads of households Unremunerated 'family labour'	Managers for absent husbands Casual or permanent wage labour

(from Whitehead, 1994:41)

reflect day-to-day responsibilities for a small bounded group, or the actual organisation of production. Matrilineal groups are referenced by Guyer (1986) as possibly representing an extreme form of these arrangements, and their complexity amongst the matrilineal Akan in Ghana has been detailed by a number of researchers (Berry 2009; Okali 1983; Hill 1963). The disappearance of these matrilineal arrangements, because they are 'irregular' or 'unnatural', has been predicted for decades by academics and others (see Okali 1983). Within agricultural extension organisations these same domestic and production arrangements are considered problematic for efficient service delivery.

The operational principles refer to both men and women. 'Bringing men in' is however highly contested amongst gender specialists and advocates, and specifically among those interested in 'women in agriculture'. Nevertheless, women rarely operate as autonomous individuals in their communities, in their daily lives and even in projects designed for them. In

reality it is entirely possible for men to be allies who support women's demands for additional resources.

In addition, as noted earlier in this paper, there are reported problems arising from the negative labelling of men, which fixes them in oppositional sexed categories, hostile to 'women only' projects. There are also suggestions that the conventional view of men as having hegemonic power is being challenged by events such as migration, changing marriage laws, and commoditisation (Jackson 2000). These are steadily eroding the power of senior men that is based on the labour of both junior males and females in a number of African societies. Authors such as Cleaver, Chant, Sweetman, Cornwall and many others appear to agree: changes in the economy, in social structures and in household composition in a number of societies are resulting in 'crises of masculinity'.

The talk is of 'men in crisis', 'troubled masculinities' and 'men at risk', particularly in Latin America but also in South and Southern Africa. Young men, who have low income levels, even when they migrate for work, are singled out as especially vulnerable to insecurity and marginalisation. Evidence offered to support the idea of a male crisis includes: low educational attainment of boys; the loss of men's role as breadwinner and provider to the family; increased entry of women into the labour force; a higher share of female-headed households; and increased incidence of anti-social behaviour and violence among men. Changes such as these are important to both men and women, and have implications for the way they (and we) envisage the future of agriculture, and their role in it. They also reinforce the fact that orthodox views of gender relations must be challenged. Men's activities in key areas such as food production and purchase for household consumption, activities or interests that have been conventionally associated with women and policies for women, but also their reported interest in the commercialisation of farm operations, along with the allocation of income from these operation need to be reassessed. In terms of food security and crop production for home consumption, the image presented by Ann Whitehead of both women and men engaging with food and cash crops, independently and/or jointly, should be the analytical starting point.

## Conclusions

This paper sets out a case for changing the way in which gender is incorporated into agricultural policy, practice and research. It argues for using a social relations perspective in problem analysis, and in the analysis of what have become the standard sex disaggregated data sets on roles, access to and control over resources and benefits. In arguing for a social relations approach to the integration of gender into agricultural research and policy processes, I am not suggesting that gender disadvantages do not exist, or that many women are no longer objects of subordination. Rather, the point is that over three decades the focus on the differences between women and men in their agricultural time use, their assets and their access to benefit streams has not resulted in the expected changes in women's position in society or improved our knowledge of change processes.

A set of operational principles has been proposed as the starting point for a social relations approach. With an acknowledgment of the diversity and changing nature of social relations, and the importance of contextual analysis, a social relational approach based on these principles provides the means to challenge the narratives about women, marriage and small farm households that underpin the way gender presently features in agricultural research, policy and practice. This approach reinforces the need to shift attention away from households and marital relations to other institutional sites where limited research has been undertaken to date, but where much of the discussion of change in the agricultural sector is situated. With agriculture back on the development agenda, and signs that new thinking about innovations, communications and extension and advisory services is being taken seriously, there is now an important window of opportunity.

The next step is to use these operating principles to demonstrate both retrospectively and by looking at new proposed projects, programmes and initiatives within agricultural research and development, how compared with for example the Harvard Framework, they provide a different and more nuanced basis on which to understand social, economic and technical change, and analyse policy alternatives.

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