

## Gender mainstreaming in agriculture:

### The untold story of Ntafungirwa United Mixed Development Association (NTUMIDA)

It is six o'clock in the morning, and as the big brown feathered cock in William Katwalume's home crows, his 5 children are already up and about preparing to go to school. Their father is on hand to help them find their uniforms, shoes and by serving breakfast in order for them to get to school, 2 kilometers away, in time. And they love it, because not many fathers in the village are doing this. Meanwhile, out in the chilly morning cold, his wife, a teacher at Buwaiswa Primary School, is busy mixing poultry feed for the 200 indigenous chickens the family rears as one of the income generating projects on the farm. After this she will quickly sweep the courtyard and then cut fodder for the 4 Boer goats before preparing herself for the long motorbike ride to Buwaiswa school.

Shortly after his wife and children have left, Katwalume, a 65-year-old retired Primary School Headmaster, busies himself on the family farm before the children and wife return in the evening to help out with the remaining tasks on the 2 acre farm. Ever since he retired six years ago, this has been the routine in Katwalume's home, in Ntafungirwa village, Buwaiswa Parish Mayuge district, 119 Kilometres East of Kampala City. This level of unity and teamwork in the family has mesmerized many members of the village community. But for the residents of the village who are members of Ntafungirwa United Mixed Development Association (NTUMIDA) it is a scenario that does not surprise them.

Katwalume is the Secretary of the 50 member strong association comprising of mainly poor smallholder farmers.

The male and female farmers came together to collectively search for market opportunities for their produce and practice sustainable agriculture for improved agricultural production.

For members of this group, men helping women with house chores and on farms or the whole family unit working together is a practice they have been trained to adopt, thanks to Africa 2000 Network-Uganda, a member of Participatory Ecological Land Use Management(PELUM) Association.

Through its gender policy, A2N-Uganda is helping NTUMIDA to mobilize and empower male and female

partner farmers to participate effectively in activities aimed at promoting sustainable development. The organization uses training and sensitization sessions to educate women and men about their rights, provide health information to improve the quality of their families and provide knowledge and skills to enable male and female farmers in their communities manage their environment sustainably.

According to the Treasurer of NTUMIDA, Rose Kigongo, this is done to ensure that men and women work together as a family unit. The trainings enhance men's understanding of the need to

involve women in decision making regarding what agricultural enterprises to invest in and how to use the income accruing from selling the produce.

*"This avoids women from doing all the work but not benefiting from the proceeds. It also increases the effective participation of men in agricultural and household activities which reduces the work load for women,"* expresses Mrs. Kigongo

This method was adopted after studies showed that women who were the main producers of crops had little or no power on the sale of the harvested produce and utilization of the income from the produce sold. As is the case with African tradition, agricultural activities in the village are largely a preserve of women. Examples of women's work include planting, weeding and harvesting coupled with other domestic chores such as fetching water, collecting firewood and cooking.

Men are more involved in the 'hard jobs' or 'men's work' such as house construction, slaughter of animals and milking cows and marketing of agricultural products.



**Mr. Katwalume feeds the Boer goats. His wife cleaned the goat pen early in the morning before leaving for work**



**Mr. Katwalume working in the family poultry farm. His wife and children usually join him later in the day to feed the chicken**



**Members of NTUMIDA help out on a soya farm belonging to one of their members**

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*"While women attended to domestic chores, we men here only ensured that there was a house for the family. We spent most of our time socializing and participated less in agricultural activities and in domestic work. But now this seems to have changed as we have discovered the advantages of helping our wives"* revealed David Magumba, a member of the association who admitted to helping his wife to harvest food and firewood from the garden. *"I used to despise such activities but after undergoing the training in gender issues I surprised my wife and neighbours when I accompanied her to the field to collect firewood,"* he continued.

### **Gender training and extension services**

As a leading advocate of gender mainstreaming in agricultural activities Africa 2000 Network Uganda has a policy to first conduct gender sensitizations to project beneficiaries before any interventions are embarked upon. This has been the case with NTUMIDA where, with the guidance of a gender training manual and national gender policy, gender training was conducted to ensure that men and women work together as a family unit.

*"There are a number of cases where women do all or most of the work on the farms but do not benefit from the proceeds. Sensitization on gender issues increases the effective participation of men in agricultural and household activities which reduces the work load for women. Although women are the producers of crops, they have little or no control over the sale of the harvested produce and later on utilization of the income from the produce sold"*, said Ms Margaret Kabuye, a Community Development Worker in charge of the area.

Uganda's new constitution promulgated in 1995 is an important tool used to equip the association members with knowledge about gender issues. Members of NTUMIDA were sensitized to appreciate aspects of the constitution that prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender and emphasize the importance of equal opportunities for both men and women. During refresher trainings, emphasis has been laid on persuading men to increase their participation in farming and household activities in order to reduce the workload for women to enable them live healthier lifestyles.

Ms Joy Tegunyagwa, a member of NTUMIDA said gender training has enabled men to start involving women in decision making regarding what agricultural enterprises to invest in and how the income accruing from sales of agricultural produce can benefit the family as a whole.

*"The trainings enhance men's understanding of the need to involve their wives in deciding which agricultural enterprises to get involved in. This is crucial because some men avoid seeking their wives opinions on agricultural and other issues pertaining to the family's welfare because they are the head of the family and control the household resources,"* said Ms Tegunyagwa.

Field extension staff have put in place incentives to reward farmers who come out boldly to promote equal participation of men, women and children in domestic and labour

intensive agricultural responsibilities with a view of reducing the hitherto labour burden on women and children. During extension training sessions, men and women who come with their spouses are recognized and given a newsletter, *U g a n d a*

*Environnews*, which promotes gender friendly extension services. This measure was found to stimulate participation of the rural farmers and subsequently promoted sharing of agricultural responsibilities by both men and women.



**Farmers undergoing training in gender and sustainable agriculture**

In instances where agricultural demonstrations are to be carried out, training sites, sessions and locally available materials that are gender friendly are used to ensure that both men and women benefit from the training. To ensure gender equity the trainings are also designed in such a way that 2 people, one man and one woman, are selected. To enable active participation and clear message delivery, the men and women participants reverse roles during role plays and share responsibility as well. According to Ms Kabuye, this is aimed at ensuring that the women's potential is brought into the limelight in such fora where they were usually sidelined or kept a low profile due to cultural reasons.

*"For instance before such trainings were held, refuse collection for making compost was solely the responsibility of women and children. However, all this changed during one of the sustainable agriculture trainings on a demonstration farm. We asked the men to work with their wives to make compost. Both the men and women were excited to work together as they were able to share ideas and also accomplished the activity quickly,"* revealed Ms Kabuye.

Using female extension agents has also played an important role in promoting women emancipation and empowerment initiatives in Ntukungirwa village. Given the case of NTUMIDA, women said they felt more at ease being trained by their fellow women whom they considered peers and able to understand their unique problems.

### **Impact**

Cultural and customary restrictions over women ownership or utilization of land and property have greatly impacted on rural poor women's efforts to improve their livelihoods but for Ms Sarah Namukose, another of NTUMIDA's active members the sky was the limit in her quest to come out of the vicious poverty cycle. The 43 year old farmer was given leeway by her husband to grow 5000 pineapples and 640 banana trees on land that had been underutilized for years. For her, it was a dream come true. After attending a series

of trainings on marketing, gender and nutrition, she approached her husband and requested to use the land for commercial agriculture. With each pineapple and a bunch of bananas sold at USD\$ 2 and USD\$ 4 respectively, Namukose said she can now afford some of the basic needs and nutritious meals for the family.

*"My husband has greatly supported me in this project whose earnings have helped turn our lives around for the better. We weed the garden and change turns when going to sell the produce," she narrates. We both plan together and share information regarding the family enterprises together," she narrates.*



**Ms Sarah Namukose weeding the pineapple garden intercropped with soya beans and bananas**

For Christine Biryeri, listening to local news, information on farming and current affairs on her portable radio as she works in the field is something she has become accustomed to since she came to learn about 'the power of being informed.'

*"Initially I used to wonder why women and farmers in general were being encouraged during trainings to be informed by listening to radio and reading. But as a woman, I have come to learn the importance of having knowledge on issues regarding our rights," said Ms Biryeri.*



**Ms Namukose prunes a banana plant, a staple food crop south and east of the country and highly sought by traders**

There is a positive trend towards joint decision making by spouses over the sale of agricultural produce and utilization of income. This has had incremental benefits for family livelihoods since such families tend to have improved household food availability, improved hygiene and greater cohesion of the family members.

The local village authorities too have appreciated the gender mainstreaming initiatives which, according to the

i Local (Village) Council Chairperson, Albert Ikoba have enhanced the local government's effectiveness and responsiveness in dealing with the concerns of its community residents. He added that the initiative has also fostered greater appreciation of the role and contribution of both women and men in realizing the development aspirations of the community.

### Constraints

Despite these achievements, there are still some hurdles to overcome. The absence of organized markets and transport infrastructure is one major constraint to women's advancement in agricultural production. For the majority of agricultural produce, the main means of transport is by carrying produce on the head or on a bicycle to far away roadside markets. Some women travel a distance of 3kms to access markets. Those who cannot travel sell the produce at farm gate. In addition, marketing of agricultural produce continues to be dominated by men due to cultural norms. As a result, women who play a big role in the agricultural production process are denied both opportunities for exposure to the sector and effective access and control over income from the produce.

Ms Kigongo revealed that challenges for women in the village begin in childhood. Most young girls in poor families, she said, may be brought up to believe that they are only suited for the roles of housewives and mothers. Gender lines are drawn early, and exclusions for women continue throughout adulthood. These constant messages lead to a false belief that women do not have other roles to play in the development of households and the community at large.

Women's productivity is further hampered by inadequate access to credit and general lack of skills and appropriate technology due to the high level of illiteracy, poverty and inadequate flow of access to information. To address these problems, active farmers in the village community were identified by Africa 2000 Network-Uganda and trained in lobbying, advocacy and entrepreneurship skills which they later imparted onto their colleagues. Each member of the association was implored to contribute US \$5 towards opening up a savings account with a large rural development bank which has a branch in the district. So far, US \$250 has been saved. To address the knowledge and information needs, members have continued to undergo sensitization seminars on collective marketing, gender, nutrition, hygiene, and basic skills development in sustainable agriculture practices and environmental conservation.

Women in poor households face particularly serious time constraints due to livelihood activities and childcare responsibilities. Women also complained that they continue to struggle to survive on meager earnings from sale of produce, but these earnings are further eroded by men's indulgences in social hazards, especially uncontrolled drinking, a common cause of wastage of income.

## Lessons learnt

Following the gender trainings, members said husbands and wives work together hence increasing on the output from their gardens. There is more awareness about gender issues than it was before.

*What we have in our family belongs to all of us. We work so hard together guided by a set out chievement plan. We all participate in the production and sale of produce. Either of us takes produce to town for sale on a bicycle or commuter taxi. We plan to buy a small truck to transport our produce,"* said Mr. Ali Kasango.



**Two women farmers ponder the next move as they look at a harvested maize garden**

Addressing gender equality as a cross-cutting goal requires that women's views, interests and needs to shape the development agenda as much as men's and that the development agenda supports progress towards more equal relations between women and men. It should also be emphasized that gender equality is an issue that concerns both women and men and achieving it will involve working with men to bring about changes in attitudes, behaviour, roles and responsibilities.

Without specific attention to gender issues, programs and projects are likely to reinforce inequalities between women and men and may even increase resource imbalances. While individual projects cannot hope to redress these inequalities in the short term, at a minimum, interventions should do no harm, and ideally they should catalyze a change process for ending gender discrimination and securing women's access to key resources.



**Members attending a development planning meeting**

Extension messages, whether delivered by male or female extension agents, should be given in the simplest terms possible. This is so in cases where women have lower literacy or schooling rates.

Furthermore, working with groups is a major mechanism through which women can increase ownership of assets,

improve their productivity, and enhance their status. In fact, the social capital that groups generate has been recognized as an important asset in itself. Women draw on a range of social networks for their personal and their family's livelihoods. Infact, various forms of women's groups, and kinship ties, for example, are thought to further women's empowerment through building social capital, especially trust and norms.

## Looking ahead

Despite these constraints, the gender relations are thriving relatively well. The future of the Ntukungirwa community is starting to look good and the optimism about their future is reflected in their efforts to expand their networks to enhance their knowledge and skills.

One should appreciate the complexity of gender norms. Indeed some attempts to haphazardly challenge such norms may unintentionally result in an erosion of women's empowerment efforts or cause unforeseen friction within gender relations. So, mechanisms that seek to empower women especially in the agriculture sector need to consider the trade-offs inherent in challenging and respecting gender norms.



**More women now attend such village meetings called to discuss issues affecting the community**

It should also be recognized that women's empowerment is central to achieving gender equality. Through empowerment, women become more aware of unequal power relations, gain control over their lives and acquire a greater voice to overcome inequality in their homes, workplace and community.

