

E-MAIL CONTRIBUTIONS**Will more women in agricultural research change the agenda?**

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The International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR) has developed a proposal to investigate "Women in Agricultural Research" (WinAR). Funding hasn't been rounded off yet, there are still several options open. The proposal was developed because we realized that it is estimated that women produce between 60 and 80 per cent of the food in most developing countries. However, women represent only a small minority in agricultural research in developing countries. In many agricultural research institutes, 10-20 per cent of the research staff is female, and it is estimated for developing countries as a whole, 15 per cent of extension staff are female.

Clearly, women are under-represented in agricultural research. There are several arguments to raise the low number of women in agricultural research. One important argument is equity: women should have equal chances as men. A recent trend that can be observed is that more and more girls opt for a third-level education. However, the translation to more women as professionals in agricultural research has been slow. It seems that solutions are not to be found in increasing the supply of educated women, but more in the institutional realm. This is also the point that came out of the MIT survey: young professional women did not feel discriminated against. Older professional women had felt exactly the same when they started, but as they climbed the ladder, they felt more and more obstacles. An Indian colleague of ours, Sandhya Shenoy from National Academy of Agricultural Research Management (NAARM) has looked at Indian women in agricultural research. Although she said that women in tertiary agricultural education has increased immensely, and within NAARM also, older professional women made the same remarks as those at MIT.

A second important argument is efficiency. As stated, more and more highly educated women are available on the labour market. From an efficiency point of view, it would make sense for agricultural research organizations to make (better) use of this talent-pool. Or, as one senior manager from the agricultural research system in Mali remarked: "I used to go to school with girls that were very good: much better than I was. But now I never see them any more and I wonder what has happened to them."

The third argument is effectiveness. Around 60 to 80 per cent of the food in developing countries is produced by women, and the agricultural sector is becoming increasingly feminized. Paying attention to women's need has therefore a positive impact on the entire economy, as women are key, but often neglected, producers and consumers in developing economies. So, given that the clients of NARS e.g. farmers are a mixed group of both men and women, the agricultural research organizations should reflect this diversity in their staff composition to better serve the needs of that clientele.

Although women researchers are not necessarily more gender-sensitive, there is some preliminary evidence that women tend to focus more often on issues that meet the needs of rural women than their male colleagues. However, this argument is very much debated. As there is as yet no empirical research underpinning this, the proposed project WinAR will try to make a first step in investigating whether women researchers do make a difference in determining the agricultural research agenda. While the first two arguments are generally attested, the effectiveness approach is debated and not sufficiently underpinned by empirical research. Do more women in agricultural research make a difference, and if so, how? To answer these questions, the project proposes to take a first step in investigating this relationship. An analysis of the

research projects of the Consultative Group of International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) that had a gender focus revealed that although women researchers are a minority (less than 30 per cent) in the CGIAR, more than 60 per cent of the gender project were (co-) managed by women. This would suggest that women do make a difference.

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