

Gender research in N2Africa - going beyond target numbers for reaching women

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The N₂Africa acknowledges the importance of women in agricultural production, household food security and income. The project recognizes that in aiming to ensure long-term sustainable impact it is of crucial importance to address explicitly the needs of women farmers, processors and marketers and to develop specific strategies for meaningful inclusion of women in project activities to ensure women benefit from the project. The project team has therefore embraced the target of at least 50% women involvement in all farmer-related activities of the project, as formulated in the project proposal. Moreover, the NGO WOCAN has recently published a study on improving the gender responsiveness in the N₂Africa project.

In each of the areas where N₂Africa works, the situation regarding gender and agriculture, and legume production and processing in particular, is different. The baseline survey in N₂Africa has provided useful insights in the different roles of women and men in the control land and produce from this land. Baseline data from Nigeria for instance (Table 1), suggested that men almost entirely control land use and the use of the produce from the land, especially in the action sites in the north (Kano State and northern Kaduna State). In Rwanda on the other hand (Table 2), women more often control the use of land and the use of the harvest from the land than men, while men are more frequently involved in off-farm income generation.

Table 1. Control over land use and harvest by household members in different action sites in Nigeria (% of all fields).

	Kano State		Kaduna State (north)		Kaduna State (south)	
	Land use	Harvest	Land use	Harvest	Land use	Harvest
Wife	0.0	0.5	0.0	0.0	4.9	5.3
Husband	99.9	99.4	97.9	94.8	58.5	54.7
Both	0.1	0.1	0.8	5.2	34.3	37.7
Owner	0.0	0.0	1.3	0.0	2.3	2.3

Table 2. Control over land use and harvest by household members in Rwanda (% of all fields).

	Land use	Legume crop harvest	Non-legume crop harvest
	Wife	24.5	32.4
Husband	9.2	4.4	6.1
Both	62.1	59.1	64.4
Others (e.g. child)	0.7	0.7	1.1

A project such as N₂Africa widely promoting the cultivation of grain legumes for domestic consumption and sale is likely to affect gender balances. This impact is likely to greatly differ between the areas where N₂Africa works. In northern Nigeria where men strongly dominate farm activities, it can be hypothesised that men are likely to capture most of the direct benefits from increased sales of legume grain, even if activities specifically targeted to women farmers are undertaken by the project. In the more southern mandate area in Nigeria (southern Kaduna State) women probably have more opportunities to directly benefit from increased legume production and sales. In Rwanda, where legumes are primarily grown for domestic consumption, the benefits from increased legume cultivation are likely to spread rather equally over women and men. The impacts are unlikely to be static over time. Past experience demonstrated that when production of the grain legumes increases in response to market opportunities – and substantial amounts are sold by farmers – men often take over the cultivation and marketing of the grain legumes. Thus typical women's food security crops become men's cash crops. This may also become the case as a result of N₂Africa's activities aiming to improve the marketability of legume grains in the target countries.

Given the large investment in dissemination activities and the scale of the activities, N₂Africa offers unique opportunities to learn more about how agricultural development projects affect gender disparities, household income and assets across different countries. Such understanding will be helpful in current and future legume-based development projects to improve targeting of technologies and reach gender targets. Such work will also contribute to the general understanding of gender relationships in rural Africa. A number of key research questions that could be addressed with such studies have been formulated:

1. How does the promotion of legume-based technologies affect income and assets of households of smallholder farmers in different parts of Africa and how does it affect disparities between sexes within the household?
 - Who in the household controls and who carries out the various steps involved in legume production, processing and sale?
 - What is the role of grain legumes for household nutrition and income generation?
 - How is the income generated by the sale of legume products re-invested in the household?
 - How do changes in household income translate in changes in assets and how is this affected by the sex of the household member who controls sale and income?
2. How can legume-based technologies be targeted to specific groups of farmers or in specific environments to enhance the impact of the current and future legume-based projects on gender inequalities and asset disparities?
 - Where do opportunities exist within the N₂Africa project to have a strong impact on these issues?
 - What are the underlying factors (e.g. related to type of technology, market access, agro-ecology, culture, extension approach) determining the project's success in addressing these issues?
 - How can this knowledge be used to improve the design of future proposals?
3. Which indicators related to changes in assets or (control over) household income are most suitable to assess the project's impact on people's lives and ability to escape poverty?
 - Do indicators of child nutrition give strong evidence for women's control of income? Given that child nutrition indicators can reveal change within months of dietary improvement these could be more sensitive than income indicators.
 - Does re-investment of income – in farming, in education or in alternative enterprises – give the best insights into farmers strategies to escape from poverty?

The project aims to set up a series of detailed gender studies in a number of contrasting action sites could provide such learning in the next year. The depth and the number of sites targeted with these studies will depend on funding and available human resources.