



Mainstreaming Gender in the Sustainable Resilient Farming Systems Intensification (SRFSI) Project: A Gender Strategy

Maria Fay Rola-Rubzen, Roy Murray-Prior, Toni Darbas, John Dixon and Kuhu Chatterjee

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Sustainable Resilient Farming Systems Intensification (SRFSI) Project

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1. Introduction

South Asia has some of the poorest nations on earth. In particular, the Eastern Gangetic Plains (EGP) of Bangladesh, India and Nepal is home to some 450 million people with the highest concentration of rural poverty in the world. As in many developing countries, many people in the region depend largely on agriculture and agricultural activities as their main source of income and livelihood. However, many farmers still operate subsistence farms with low productivity and stagnant incomes. Due to their situation, farmers in the region are more vulnerable to climate change.

The Sustainable and Resilient Farming Systems Intensification (SRFSI) Project focuses on the EGP and intends to improve the livelihoods and resilience to climate variability and change among smallholder farmers in the region through the adoption of more productive, profitable and lower-risk farming systems. The research targets rice-based systems in eight districts across the three countries of the EGP.

The SRFSI project addresses two research questions:

- (1) Would farm management practices based on the principles of conservation agriculture (CA) and the efficient use of water resources provide a foundation for increasing smallholder crop productivity and resilience; and
- (2) Would institutional innovations that strengthen adaptive capacity and link farmers to markets and support services enable both women and men farmers to continue to innovate in the face of climate and economic change (Project proposal document 2014).

The overall aim of the project is to reduce poverty in the EGP by improving the productivity, profitability and sustainability of smallholder agriculture. Specifically, the aims of the project are to:

- 1) Understand farmers' circumstances with respect to cropping systems, natural and economic resource bases, livelihood strategies, and capacities to bear risk and undertake technological innovation.

- 2) Work with farmers to develop more productive and sustainable technologies that are resilient and profitable for smallholders.
- 3) Catalyse, support and evaluate institutional and policy changes that establish an enabling environment for the adoption of high-impact technologies.
- 4) Facilitate widespread adoption of sustainable, resilient and more profitable farming systems.

It is expected that the project will lead to sustainable and resilient farming systems intensification in the EGP such that, by 2018/19, about 7000 farmers will have adopted one or more SRFSI technologies rising to about 130 000 farmers in 10 years' time. It is projected that about 50 000 women farmers will have adopted and used technologies developed in the project within this time period. However, for this to happen, it is critical that both men and women are considered in the planning and implementation of the project. As the project proposal document has not specifically outlined how gender will be included in the project, this document proposes a strategy for incorporating gender aspects in the SRFSI project (Project proposal document 2014).

2. Gender Context in the Eastern Gangetic Plains

Women play a major role in agriculture in developing countries. According to FAO (2011a), women comprise 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries. In South Asia, women contribute 60-80% of agricultural labour (Paris et al. 2008). Their control of resources is therefore critical to poverty reduction. Yet women often have less access to resources and are often considered to have lower status than men (FAO 2011b; Meinzen-Dick et al. 2011; Skinner and Brody 2011; World Bank, FAO and IFAD 2009). Studies have shown that incorporating gender concerns in projects has benefits for households in terms of more income and improved welfare (Fafchamps et al. 2009; Quisumbing and Maluccio 2003). FAO (2011b) claimed that agricultural yields could increase by 20–30 per cent if women had similar access to resources as men. Such yield improvements would raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4 per cent and reduce the number of hungry people worldwide by 12-17 per cent (FAO 2011b). It is not surprising, therefore, that, since poverty alleviation requires that both men and women's concerns are addressed, gender equity is a specific focus in the Millennium Development Goals, and the new Sustainable Development Goals. As Meinzen-Dick et al. (2010) wrote, making agriculture development gender equitable is not just a matter of ideology, rather it is a matter of development effectiveness. Hence, it is critical that development projects are gender-inclusive.

3. Justification: Why does gender matter?

Considering gender is critical because men and women who work and live in risky and natural resource-dependent environments have distinct roles and responsibilities and different

access to resources that give rise to differences in vulnerability and ability to cope with change. Owing to social and cultural differences, men and women will be influenced differently and will react differently. With the challenges farming households face in relation to climate change, not only is it important to develop climate-resilient technologies and adaptation strategies, but also to do so with a gendered perspective. As pointed out by Paris (2011), analysing the impact of climate change through a gendered lens is important for the following reasons:

- Men and women perform different jobs/tasks owing to gender-based division of labour.
- Men and women have different access to and control of resources and assets, including physical resources, social resources and financial resources.
- Based on their distinct roles, women and men have different sets of knowledge and skills, such as knowing which seeds to plant during a dry spell or knowing how to dig a well. Therefore, recognising their contributions will result in a wider range of options for preparing for and coping with change.
- Climate change will alter what men and women can do, exposing them to different risks and opportunities.
- In times of change, they will have different options and ‘safety nets’ for coping with change and the impacts would also be different between men and women.

Paris (2011) noted that ignoring gender can reduce the sustainability of a project and worse, may inadvertently reinforce gender inequalities. Social and cultural differences between men and women mean that the two genders will be influenced differently and will react differently to changes to the environment and any policy and/or project interventions. As pointed by the Melinda and Bill (M&B) Gates Foundation, ‘Projects that do not anticipate impacts on women or do not identify barriers and constraints to women’s full participation often fail to reach their key objectives or may have inadvertent consequences on women and girls’.

The jurisdictions in which SRFSI is working, the ‘the borderlands’ of eastern Terai Plains of Nepal, Northwest Bangladesh and the Indian states of Bihar and West Bengal, are known for their poverty, food insecurity, landlessness, small and fragmented land holdings and high rural population densities. Furthermore, women’s low literacy levels, poor access to health services, and exposure to violence are maintained by the region’s patriarchal and patrilineal social system(s) (Kishor and Gupta, 2009; ADB, 2010).

4. Incorporating gender in SRFSI - key questions

How can we incorporate gender in SRFSI?

There are a number of overarching questions that should be considered when incorporating gender considerations in the SRFSI project. The key questions include:

- What are the roles of men in women in the target areas?
- How will the project accommodate the different roles of women and girls, men and boys?
- How will the project affect women and men?
- What is the potential of the project for enhancing the status of women and girls and promoting greater opportunities for them?
- How can the project contribute *long-term* to the significant involvement of women and their empowerment as leaders?
- How will the project measure the impact on men and women?

5. Implementation and pragmatics

There are a number of important considerations for gender inclusion in SRFSI.

Gender roles. First of all, we need to understand gender roles – what are the roles of men and women? What tasks do men and women do in the farm, the household and in the community? What do the youth do?

Goals and motivations. There is also a need to understand the goals and motivations of men and women. For instance, what drives men and women to respond to climate change the way they do? What motivates them? What are their goals?

Design of technologies. When designing technologies in SRFSI, we need to take into account men's and women's needs. For instance, heavier machinery may not suit women.

Gender inclusive training and capacity building. When conducting capacity building activities and training, we need to include the gender that is involved in that particular task and where both men and women normally perform the tasks, then both genders, should be included. We also need to consider the gender of the trainers. Where one group (e.g. women) is not participating in discussions, participatory facilitation techniques can be employed. Where there are social, cultural or religious considerations, separate training sessions could be held for men and women, with trainers of the appropriate gender. Women should also be trained in leadership so that they can be effective champions of SRFSI in the community.

Gender-sensitive extension. Similarly, in technology testing, demonstration, and dissemination, researchers and extension workers should be inclusive and sensitive to the needs of both men and women. For instance, meetings should be held at times that suit both men and women.

Gender responsive policy suggestions. Policy suggestions and recommendations should consider both men and women so all stakeholders can share in the benefit of the SRFSI project.

So how can we implement the gender strategy in the SRFSI project? Although gender is not specifically mentioned in the four objectives in SRFSI, gender should be considered a cross-cutting theme in all objectives. Outlined in Annex 1 are suggested actions to incorporate gender, as well as monitor and evaluate the impact on the project.

6. Summary and conclusion

For the SRFSI project to be more effective in its goal of poverty reduction, it is essential that the project incorporates gender consideration in all aspects of the project. Incorporating gender will lead to empowerment of women affected by the project, which, as demonstrated by various studies, leads to improvements in welfare of farm households. Women's empowerment is about improved agency: skills, knowledge, confidence, and aspirations. It may require changes to relations with communities, and families through collective action; as well as changes to societal norms, social structures, including especially reduced institutional biases – both overt or hidden, formal or informal (CARE 2015).

However, gender is not just about women. A common misconception is that when we talk of gender, we mean women. What about men? Experience has shown that to be successful in changing mindsets about the benefits of a gendered approach to a project, it has to be a win-win situation. Therefore, an effective gender strategy should consider all stakeholders –men, women and youth.

So how do we engender the SRFSI project?

Firstly, we need to consider gender in all aspects of the project. Gender needs to be a cross-cutting theme for all four objectives. We need to identify and agree on key indicators that will be monitored.

Secondly, we need to improve gender awareness amongst project team and project participants/ beneficiaries.

Thirdly, we need to conduct a gender analysis to understand gender roles, the issues and concerns to identify entry points for incorporating gender.

Fourthly, we also need to document what we intend to do and what we have done.

Fifth, we need to monitor and measure project activities and impacts, specifically disaggregating data to be able to provide evidence of the impacts of the project on men and women.

We also need to disseminate and communicate these impacts to increase awareness of how the technologies can better reach men and women.

Finally, we need to ensure that policy recommendations specifically address men and women's needs to ensure that the SRFSI project contributes to more equitable and effective poverty alleviation in South Asia.

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Annex 1

Action Plan for incorporating gender concerns in the SRFSI Project

Objective 1: Understand farmer circumstances in representative communities in the EGP and how these affect the opportunities for increasing agricultural productivity

No.	Objective	Gender equity actions	How will data be gathered
1.1	Identify representative communities, farming systems and farmer requirements in the target districts to orient project activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selection of participants needs to reflect types of farm-households including male headed households (MHH) and female headed households (FHH). Hence need to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather information on number of MHH and FHH Gender-disaggregated data on roles, labour allocation in the farm, off-farm and household income Barriers and constraints of men and women Opportunities for action/ improvement for men and women 	Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Socio-economic survey
1.2	Evaluate and document factors influencing household access to irrigation water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect gender-disaggregated data on access to irrigation, gender roles 	FGD Socio-economic survey
1.3	Characterise and quantify local water resources in the project target areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect gender-disaggregated data on access to local resources by men and women 	Survey/ FGD
1.3.1	Assess local water balances, depth of water table, and estimates of ground water availability	N/A	N/A
1.3.2	Quantify surface water resources	N/A	N/A

Objective 2: Develop, with farmers, high-yielding production technologies that are ecologically more sustainable, resilient to climate risks, and can be profitably practiced by smallholders

No.	Objective	Gender equity actions	How will data be gathered
2.1	Assess and document bottlenecks and entry points for the establishment of Conservation Agriculture (CA) systems through farmer consultations and participatory technology evaluations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include both MHH and FHH in sampling frame • Include both men and women farmer organisations in FGDs • Gather gender-disaggregated data on bottlenecks and entry points 	FGD
2.2	Evaluate costs, benefits, and climate resilience of current and innovative management technologies (e.g. CA, site-specific nutrient management, supplementary irrigation) for different farmer groups through on-farm evaluations and simulation models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather gender-disaggregated data on bottlenecks and entry points 	FGD Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
2.2.1	Develop with farmer participation profitable options for the efficient management of CA systems, including site-specific nutrient management and system intensification, especially in the rabi season	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include both men and women farmers in testing CA systems • Gather gender-disaggregated data when testing and evaluation options 	FGD Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
2.2.2	Assess the options for increasing system productivity and resilience through strategic supplementary irrigation, and assess the feasibility for different groups of farming households	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include both men and women farmers in testing CA systems • Gather gender-disaggregated data when testing and evaluation options 	FGD Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
2.2.3	Evaluate costs, benefits, risks and resilience of researched technology options with simulation models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include men and women in trials (Are there differences between men and women farmer behaviour? Attitudes to risk? Perceptions/understanding of costs and benefits?) 	FGD Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire

2.2.4	Evaluate farmer appreciation of costs, benefits, risks and resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include men and women in the evaluation 	FGD Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
2.3	Adapt Information and Communication Technology (ICT)-based decision frameworks for crop and nutrient management in the target regions for maize, rice, and wheat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include men and women in ICT-based decision tools trials/ training 	M&E questionnaire
2.3.1	Develop and refine ICT-based decision tools for nutrient and crop management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult both men and women farmers in the development of ICT-based decision tools 	FGD Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
2.3.2	Access information to establish the methods and value of integrating remotely-sensed information and weather forecasts into decision frameworks for crop selection and optimal nutrient management within the farming system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine both men and women's needs and preferences for accessing information; barriers to info access and factors that may influence access 	N/A
2.3.3	Develop decision support tools through crop and soil simulation modeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include both men and women farmers in training in the use of decision support tools • Include both men and women farmers when trialling/ testing ICT-based decision tools • 	M&E questionnaire
2.4	Adapt and evaluate CA implements for small tractors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include males and females in testing and evaluating CA technologies 	Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
2.4.1	Acquire promising equipment and new prototypes for evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine who does what in the farm activities • Consider men and women's needs when choosing type of equipment 	Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
2.4.2	Conduct participatory machinery evaluation events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include both men and women in participatory evaluation • Collect M&E data from both men and women • Share equipment adjustments and modifications needed by both men 	Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire

		and women with manufacturers for inclusion in new prototypes	
2.4.3	Support machine development and manufacturing activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate/ feedback of the relevant users of the machinery (men and women where applicable) needs to manufacturers 	Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
2.4.4	Test and demonstrate the efficiencies of laser levelling on small fields	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include men and women in training, testing and evaluating 	Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
2.5	Facilitate the availability of adapted and adequate pumps and water distribution systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure both men and women have access to pumps and water distribution systems Consider appropriate models that may suit men and women individuals and groups 	Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
2.5.1	Evaluate pumps including those using alternative energy sources, and water distribution systems adequate for smallholders and service providers in the EGP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure both men and women farmers have access to new pumps Include both men and women in participatory evaluation Collect M&E data from both men and women Share equipment adjustments and modifications needed by both men and women with manufacturers for inclusion in new prototypes (e.g. women may need lighter pumps) 	Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
2.5.2	Provide support for the manufacture of promising new pump models		

Objective 3: Support institutional changes that enable and encourage the adoption of high-impact technologies developed and adapted under Objective 2

No.	Objective	Gender equity actions	How will data be gathered
3.1	Assess and document farmer decision processes for investing in key climate-resilient technologies, including the role of risk and perceptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess men and women farmer decision processes, attitudes to and perceptions of risks Assess men and women farmers barriers/ constraints to technology adoption 	Survey questionnaire

3.2	Initiate and establish innovation platforms in each project district incorporating farmers and agents representing many of the principal components of the main agricultural value chains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure both men and women are represented in the innovation platforms • Understand principal bottlenecks/opportunities in the main local value chains for participation in the innovation platform for both men and women 	Adoption study Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
3.3	Catalyse and support markets for equipment and inputs for the management of sustainable systems by smallholder farmers to ensure availability and accessibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include both men and women in linkage activities • Communicate equipment requirements by both men and women with input supply dealers/ equipment dealers (e.g. women may need lighter pumps) 	Adoption study Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
3.4	Evaluate service provider models and systems for different farmer groups, especially women farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate needs of men and women for service provider models • Train men and women on basic financial analysis, leadership skills to improve confidence to negotiate with service providers and agro-dealers. • Engage women trainers 	Adoption study Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
3.5	Strengthen CA and irrigation business models for service providers to efficiently address the needs of different farmer groups, especially women farmers, through support and training by both the public and private sectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include gender concerns in the training • Communicate requirements by both men and women with input supply dealers/ equipment dealers (e.g. women may need lighter pumps) 	Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
3.6	Develop markets for inputs and services in the target areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate linkages between service providers and men and women farmers 	Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
3.7	Develop policy roadmaps for the sustainable development and use of water resources along with increased market-based access to scale-appropriate agricultural machinery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include gender considerations in developing policy roadmaps 	Report

3.7.1	Develop policy roadmaps for the sustainable development and use of water resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider and incorporate gender concerns in the policy roadmaps 	Report
3.7.2	Assess policies regulating the market availability of small farm equipment and explore with stakeholders options to overcome bottlenecks in equipment availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify policies that would ensure both men and women have access to complementary factors, such as financing for equipment to manufacturers and stakeholders 	Desktop studies. Literature review

Objective 4: Catalyse widespread adoption of sustainable, resilient and more profitable farming systems

No.	Objective	Gender equity actions	How will data be gathered
4.1	Establish on-farm technology validation and learning modules and use these to help build stakeholder capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include both men and women in the training Consider timing of training (will it suit women taking into consideration their multiple roles) Consider whether separate training/ workshops are needed for men and women Consider gender of trainer (considering socio-cultural sensitivities) 	Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
4.1	Establish on-farm technology validation and learning modules and use these to help build stakeholder capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include both men and women in the training Consider timing of training (will it suit women taking into consideration their multiple roles) Consider whether separate training/ workshops are needed for men and women Consider gender of trainer (considering socio-cultural sensitivities) 	Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire

4.2	Develop and enhance the capacity of local researchers and change agents from both the public and private sectors to manage the participatory development of sustainable technologies within the context of local innovation systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include male and female project partners 	Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
4.2.1	Conduct CA courses for project partners in each country at the start of the project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include male and female project partners in the training 	Training
4.2.2	Provide further training opportunities to potential CA champions through the CA course in India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include male and female project partners in the training 	Training
4.2.3	Provide further capacity building and stimulus to outstanding CA champions in the region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include male and female project partners in the training 	Training
4.2.4	Support and mentor project partners in key research and capacity building activities through linkages with Australian university personnel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include male and female project partners in the training/ mentoring • Facilitate scholarships for both males and females 	M&E questionnaire
4.3	Enhance the capacity of local service providers and agro-dealers to support smallholder farmers through technical training, business development services, and improved linkages to knowledge providers in the public and private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include both male and female in the activities/ course/ training 	M&E questionnaire Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire

4.3.1	Build the capacity of change agents in the region, especially agro-dealers and self-help groups, to facilitate farmer knowledge development, through short courses, field evaluations, farmer discussion groups and access to high quality technical and economic information relevant to the region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include both male and female in the activities/ course/ training • Share needs/ requirements of men and women farmers to change agents 	M&E questionnaire Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
4.3.2	Develop the capacity of local service providers to provide efficient irrigation and crop management services that directly and indirectly contribute to resilience, sustainable intensification and increased farm profitability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include both male and female in the activities/ course/ training • Share needs/ requirements of men and women farmers to change agents 	M&E questionnaire Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
4.4	Improve agro-dealers and service providers market intelligence on new opportunities in the target regions through better linkages with 'upstream' value chain actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include both male and female in the activities/ course/ training • Share needs/ requirements of men and women farmers to change agents 	M&E questionnaire Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire
4.5	Facilitate farmer-to-farmer information exchange facilitated through field days where public, private, and NGO partners play roles as facilitators and work to strengthen farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite both men and women farmers • Link women farmers to other (non-participant) women farmers 	M&E questionnaire Participatory evaluations/ questionnaire