

Enhancing the potential of family farming for poverty reduction and food security through gender-sensitive rural advisory services

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Family farming has the capacity to contribute effectively and significantly to poverty reduction and food security. It relies mostly on family members whose capacities, opportunities and constraints are greatly determined by their gender and age. These characteristics also define the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the farming activities, their decision-making power and productive efficiency. The effectiveness of family farming has an important gender dimension as women have less access to productive assets, resources, services and economic opportunities. This gender gap is determined by intra-household dynamics and is aggravated by a changing agricultural and rural landscape where increasing migration, climatic conditions, and new actors pose serious challenges to the family farm, its sustainability and enhancement of livelihoods. In this setting, failing to address such inequalities comes at the cost of lower productivity and perpetuating rural poverty with consequences for not only the agricultural economy but also family livelihoods and societies at large. Agricultural extension and rural advisory services (RAS) can play an important role in addressing gender inequalities to achieve the productive and long-term success of family farming. However, extension and RAS programs have been often falling short of expectations to design and implement relevant and demand-driven services to help rural women and men to achieve food security and generate more income. This paper has three objectives. The first is to review literature and document gender-differentiated barriers in access to extension and RAS and the challenges of effectively targeting women family farmers when delivering these services. Secondly, to apply the women's economic empowerment theoretical framework to assess case studies and identify good practice models of extension and rural advisory services that have been successful in responding to women farmers' specific requirements and in supporting their economic empowerment. Finally, the paper will provide policy level recommendations for the design and provision of demand-driven and gender-sensitive extension and rural advisory services for improved food security and reduction of poverty.

Key Words: family farming, food security, gender inequalities, gender-sensitive RAS, women's economic empowerment