

Module 7 /// Innovative Activity Profile 5

Sudan: Strengthening Agricultural Technical Training Using a Gender Lens¹

From the early 1980s, the United Nations Women's Decade brought worldwide concern to women in development, particularly in agriculture and rural development, which sparked a series of actions among international development agencies, national governments, and research institutions. Various forums started to identify and initiate programs and projects to address the role of women in agriculture, collect information and sex-disaggregated data, identify policy instruments, verify operational means, and analyze the contributions of female and male farmers to agricultural development (FAO 1993). One of the major undertakings was FAO's global extension survey, which revealed tremendous differences in the percentage of women among agriculturalists between regions, countries, and types of positions they hold. The bottom line, however, was that most of the countries had very few female agricultural extension workers.

What's innovative?

The mainstreaming of gender perspectives, which could be called "gender monitoring" of all actions of the project implementation, from policy-making, programming and mentoring to project operations, resource allocation, advocacy and evaluation.

To address this issue, international agencies and national governments initiated various technical assistance projects to address not only the policies, operations, and approaches of agricultural extension services but also the training of agricultural humanpower – both men and women. One of the FAO technical assistance projects in Sudan supported the training of agricultural technicians for rural development at Shambat

¹ This Innovative Activity Profile was written by Leena Kirjavainen (Consultant), and reviewed by Eija Pehu (World Bank); Marilyn Carr (Consultant), and Maria Hartl (IFAD).

College of Agricultural Studies at Khartoum Polytechnic, which was the only institute in the country to provide midlevel technical training. Because the basic concern was the improvement of living conditions of rural families, particularly women in agriculture, through strengthening extension services and increasing farm family income, the need for having midlevel female agricultural technicians was recognized both by the government and the international community. According to a human resources survey of the agricultural sector, the country had 8918 trained agricultural personnel at various professional and technical levels. Of them, only 506 (5.6 percent) were female. The Shambat College had a three-year training program with approximately 300 students, of whom about 10 percent were female (Gebre-Ab 1988).

Project Objectives and Description²

The long-term objectives of the project have been highlighted in various project documentation (Abdelnour 1988) and included: (1) to provide an adequate number of well-prepared female and male rural extension workers with the desire and ability to transfer information and skills needed to improve agricultural productivity and (2) to improve the quality of life of rural families by recognizing the economic importance of rural women in the traditional agriculture sector and offering opportunities for increasing their effective participation.

The overall goal of the project was to strengthen the program in the Shambat Training College through more adequate facilities, farm operations, administrative actions, academic planning, extension outreach programs, collaboration with other institutions, and initiation of applied research programs. This goal was to be realized through strengthening the capacities and numbers of both female and male staff and students and serving as an in-service training institution for upgrading the skills and capacities of agriculturalists.

The immediate objectives laid the foundation for the development objectives through the following techniques:

- *Reviewing and revising the agricultural technician curriculum* and specific syllabi with regard to inclusion of practical and field experience.
- *Enhancing staff development* through study tours, workshops, and interaction with international and national staff and consultants.
- *Upgrading library facilities* with the addition of recent publications and periodical subscriptions.
- *Planning and organizing in-service training* of currently employed rural extensionists and pre-service training of secondary agriculture school graduates.
- *Promoting the coordination* of all government and agency programs concerned with the needs of rural women.
- *Strengthening all departmental facilities*, especially extension and home science, by providing appropriate equipment, books, and facilities needed for practical work and field experience.
- *Developing appropriate teaching materials* and lesson guides (in English).

These objectives formed a basic operational framework for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The project was strongly supported by the donor, which allowed for flexibility and space, coming from the trust in the management team's creativity and decisions. The project activities were practical, realistic, targeted, time-framed, and budgeted. The underlining philosophy was hands-on capacity building by working and managing together and considering gender perspectives in all undertakings.

The project provided policy guidance, managerial counseling in information management, academic support for all technical sectors, technical training in professional capacity building, awareness building on gender roles, procurement of provisions for the upgrading of physical facilities, skills training for administrative and technical staff, and introduction of audiovisual materials production and communication tools for instruction methods in various subjects according to the project objectives and plans.

Some of the practical actions that worked are highlighted as follows:

- Organizing a series of workshops on curriculum revision and syllabi development through process involving all staff members

and guided by an international curriculum expert.

- Upgrading the physical facilities and equipment of the six agricultural research laboratories, horticulture field nurseries, poultry production units, and farm machinery training workshop.
- Initiating Agri-Home Economics as a major in the college training syllabi and equipping practical training kitchen facilities for the new department.
- Integrating population education concepts in the agricultural training curricula through participatory staff workshops in cooperation with United Nations Fund for Population Activities.
- Compiling longitudinal sex-disaggregated data on student intake and graduation to justify the women's dormitory construction project.
- Advocating the admission policy to recruit a minimum intake of 30 percent female students.
- Coordinating a National Conference on Women in Agriculture and Rural Development, using a gender-equality quota to ensure parity in participation from all administrative regions and commissioning major studies on women's role in various agricultural sectors.
- Organizing regional and international study tours for male and female teaching staff to visit other agricultural colleges in Kenya, Ethiopia, the United Kingdom, Norway, and Finland, thus promoting staff capacity building, interinstitutional collaboration, and professional networking.
- Conducting a nationwide human power survey on the agricultural sector workforce disaggregated by gender and educational levels.

Benefits and Impacts

Since the early 1990s, when the program support ended, there has been strong evidence that the college program has moved forward, using methods and approaches introduced during the project (Idris 2007). The college was upgraded to a university-level institution in 1990. The syllabi have been revised several times to reflect changing national and global demands. The facilities have

been upgraded according to information-technology requirements. The number and ratio of both female and male staff and students has overwhelmingly increased, changing along with national developments (see table 1), and now about two thirds of the students are female. Possible explanations include the fact that as the school became a university it has attracted more students, particularly female students, from privileged and well-off families. Also, more opportunities for women may have arisen due to male migration to Gulf states for income-earning employment.

Table 1. Gender-disaggregated data on student enrollment at Shambat, Kuku, and Soba Colleges, Sudan University of Science and Technology, Khartoum, October 2007.

College Campus	Female	Male	Total
Shambat —College of Agricultural Studies	1667 (71.9%)	650 (28.1%)	2317
Kuku —College of Veterinary Medicine and Animal Production	634 (68.5%)	292 (31.5%)	926
Soba —College of Forestry and Range Sciences	225 (54.5%)	188 (45.5%)	413
Totals	2526 (69.1 %)	1130 (30.9%)	3656

Source: Idris 2007.

Note: In the 1980's, the Shambat Agricultural College of the Khartoum Polytechnic included three campuses: Shambat Agriculture and Kuku Livestock Departments, which had approximately 10 percent female students, and Soba Forestry Department, which had no female students. Since 1990, as the Khartoum Polytechnic became the Sudan University of Science and Technology, and the three departments were transformed into independent colleges, the overall enrollment increased almost tenfold, up to 3565 students, 69 percent of which are female. Regarding academic and technical staff at the Shambat College, thirty seven (31 %) of the 120 academic staff members are women, and 12 (46%) of the 26 technicians are women (Idris 2007).

The “umbrella” achievements of the project have become sustainable due its long-term strong focus on human capacity building, gender considerations, and intangible benefits gained through collaborative working relationships between the international and national staff.

Ultimately, the project’s success was due to the more than 10 years of on-site support, the facility for which was located on college premises. This effectively institutionalized the support facility, which provided continuous and committed external material and expertise from various donors. Critical elements were the recognition of program by the high-level administrators of the government, the commitment and ownership by the professional staff of the college, the cooperation by partner institutions, and the extensive public recognition by the media. The principal goal of strengthening the program through a “gender lens” was systematically monitored throughout the years.

The project monitored women’s role and participation in all project activities and maintained professional mentoring and affirmative action for participation in trainings, workshops, and conferences. The recognition of women’s issues was also due to the support provided by the senior male government officials and college administrators. Concrete outcomes of these recognitions can be seen in the increased numbers of female staff, students, leaders, managers, and entrepreneurs among the women in the agricultural sector workforce.

Lessons Learned and Issues for Wider Applicability

The external project support was initially planned for three years in a typical fixed-term format. However, it was soon realized that participation, continuity, flexibility, and innovation are some of the key determinants for achieving attitudinal change and tangible results, which cannot be achieved within such a short time frame. Gradually, close collaboration with the government and other stakeholders continued building mutual trust and support to the project from various partners was ultimately extended to more than 10 years. During these years, solid communication and interactive working relationships were developed among female and male national and international staff. The mentoring relationships among colleagues and partners “with mission and vision” enhanced ownership, capacity building, credibility, visibility, political will, and sustainability regarding the project.

External support to the college has faded since the late 1990s, but the national capacity development approach introduced and nurtured by the project continues to attract interest. The college is now recognized as a gender-responsive, collaborative institution.³ The college has been recognized because it has created catalytic and collaborative linkages to numerous governmental, international, and local partnering institutions.

Some of the lessons learned include the need to:

- Establish participatory working relationships to foster mutual trust and respect across genders and generations among colleagues and higher-level administrators.
- Build on the local culture and customs of the institutional working environment.
- Incorporate flexibility and sensitivity in your management style but keep consistency in the gender approaches.
- Consider the participation of a mix of male and female stakeholders, policy makers, researchers, educators, and student leaders in various project activities.
- Introduce Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) perspectives that consider the sociocultural context of the society.
- Start the introduction to gender sensitization with very practical and technical concerns such as sex-disaggregated data collection, the use of time and task allocation records, student attendance, female/male participation in trainings, and gender statistics from workshops and conferences.
- Be consistent in monitoring that women's voices are heard in meetings.
- Lobby male counterparts to become spokespersons for women in development and gender issues at the highest level and mentor them in increasing their understanding of gender equality issues and women's empowerment in their sociocultural and political environments in the private and public spheres.
- Ensure that the steering committee as a decision-making body will have representation

from local women's organizations and multiple governmental partners.

- Partnering with various government and other national institutions, professional associations, and international and national nongovernmental organizations is a "must" in order to yield synergies.

References

- Abdelnour, H. O., and A. W. Abdalla. 1988. "Junior Colleges/Institutes of Agriculture in the Sudan: Review and Analysis of Current Curricula and Means of Orienting Them to the Needs of Rural Development," A Report Presented in the FAO Project GCP/SUD/030/FIN Workshop, January 17–20, 1988, College of Agricultural Studies, Khartoum Polytechnic, Khartoum North, Sudan.
- Beintema, N. M., and H. H. M. Faki. 2003. "Agricultural Science and Technology Indicators: Sudan," ASTI Country Brief No. 11, Nov. 2003, IFPRI, Washington, D.C.
- FAO. 1993. *Agricultural Extension and Farm Women in the 1980's*. Food and Agriculture Organization, Rome Italy.
- Gebre-Ab, N. 1988. "Agricultural Manpower Utilization and Training at Intermediate Level in Northern Sudan," Survey and Analysis Report for Training Agricultural Technicians for Rural Development Project (GCP/SUD/030/ FIN), FAO, Rome, Italy.
- Idris Ahmed, Youssif. 2007. Personal communication. Dean College of Agricultural Studies, Sudan University of Science and Technology, Khartoum, The Sudan.

³ This has been communicated to the author by Sudanese female college staff in international professional meetings.