

CONSIDERING GENDER IN FARMERS' GROUPS

by CRS/Madagascar

**A case study
from
Madagascar**



CASE STUDY



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Cover photo: Farmer in small family garden in Village Ambatoraty/Fokontany Betapoaka – Commune Jafaro – District Ambovombe Region Androy.
Raharinjanahary Holy for CRS.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	III
Introduction	1
Background	3
Study purpose and methodology	4
Key Findings	7
Group performance and gender equity	7
Household wellbeing and gender equity	13
Community influences on gender equity in farmers' groups and households	17
Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Future Programs	19
References	21

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INTRODUCTION

CRS strives to implement programs that enable men, women, girls and boys to fulfill their roles as equal yet distinct members of their families and communities. CRS' agricultural and food security programs involve partners who organize and train farmers' groups with the primary purpose of increasing production, household income and linking farmers to markets. The time and money invested to organize and train farmers' groups is expected to result in additional benefits for men and women members. For example, participation of women in farmers' groups is expected to have positive benefits over household decision-making, sharing of household labor, and ultimately household well-being. The actual benefits of gender equity¹ in terms of farmer group performance and household well-being, however, is not well known. Are men and women participating equally in decision-making and leadership roles? Do farmers' groups with women members who share in decision-making and leadership perform better? How does belonging to a farmers' group affect household gender dynamics? What are the unintended negative effects of belonging to a farmers' group?

Case studies of 14 farmers' groups in two regions of Madagascar were done to analyze links between gender equity, farmer group performance and household well-being. Key findings include the following:

- High performing farmers' groups appear linked to education and literacy of members, rather than to gender equity.
- The five farmers' groups in this study that integrated women more effectively in decision-making processes had high performance scores and more satisfaction with their group performance.
- The average gender equity score of all farmers' groups studied is 64%. This relatively high score illustrates that women do indeed

¹ In CRS, gender equity refers to the process of being fair to men and women, boys and girls and leads to the equal valuing in society of both the similarities and differences between men and women and the varying roles that they play.

participate in group activities and have access to information and resources. However, less than half of the groups effectively involve women in decision-making and men play dominant leadership roles in groups.

- Belonging to a farmers' group does not always benefit poorer, more vulnerable female-headed households.
- In some cases, belonging to a farmers' group increased workloads for women members. Increased workloads are often offset by help from female extended family members (grandmothers or younger sisters) – not by a more equitable division of household tasks between men and women.

This study provides a rich understanding of women and men's roles and gender dynamics within farmers' groups in Eastern Madagascar. Findings and recommendations from this study will help improve how CRS and its partners address gender equity in the design of agriculture and food security programs involving farmers' groups.

BACKGROUND

Madagascar, the fourth largest island in the world, is located off the southeast coast of Africa. Known for its unique environment and biodiversity, Madagascar is one of the poorest countries in the world: 69% of households live under the poverty threshold and it ranks 135 out of 169 countries on the Human Development Index (UNDP 2011). Madagascar's rural farmers largely produce food for their own consumption. Access to basic health care and improved water sources is still limited; rates of infant and maternal mortality are stagnating. A third of Madagascar's population is undernourished, no reduction in the prevalence of malnutrition has been observed during the last decade and important micronutrient deficiencies exist (FAO 2011). Only 60% of pupils complete primary school. Uneven economic growth is worsened by periodic political crises and Madagascar is subject to tropical cyclones and flooding.

Toamasina and Mananjary are respectively located in the Eastern and Southeastern Regions of Madagascar. These two provinces are relatively poorer regions of the country. In general, Malagasy traditional societies are hierarchical and individuals are ranked according to factors such as age and gender (and in some areas descent). Traditional male chiefs hold a universally respected and unchallenged role, expressed in Malagasy as *ray amendreny*. Community governing bodies (fokonolona) are dominated by conservative elders. In Toamasina, the dominant ethnic group is Betsimisaraka and male royal ancestry influences social status and decision-making. In Mananjary, ethnic groups include Antambahoaka and Antemoro (two groups with Arab origins and traces of Islamic culture and traditions), and Tanala (a matriarchal society). While cultural norms among these ethnic groups differ and women (particularly grandmothers) are consulted for community decisions, in general men dominate decision-making. Women's position in the household is called *atsimom-patana* – referring to the “south” of the household known as “the place where inferiors sit” (Dahl 1999).

Agricultural activities in these regions include rain-fed rice, cloves, coffee, sugarcane and pepper. The Tanala, who live in a mountainous forest area, hunt and gather honey, resins, medicinal plants and fruits in addition to farming. Household and livelihood tasks are traditionally divided between men and women.

The majority of farmers' groups in this study were organized and trained by CRS/Madagascar's diocesan partners in Toamasina and Mananjary² under two five-year projects funded by USAID: a food security, livelihood and nutrition project and a complementary agricultural marketing and Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) project. In general, farmers' groups initially received technical training (through Farmer Field Schools where improved practices are demonstrated) to improve agricultural production of rice, followed by training in marketing. The SILC project included training in group processes, savings policies and procedures, record keeping and meeting management. Both projects encouraged income-generation activities, particularly market gardening.

These projects were implemented from 2004 to 2009. Support and technical training from diocesan partners ended with these grants; although SILC activities continue to receive some technical support. The case study was conducted in August 2010.

Study purpose and methodology

The study was designed to answer the following key questions:

1. How does women's participation in farmers' groups influence group performance?
2. Is there a correlation between the degree of gender equity in farmers' groups and positive group performance?
3. Is there a correlation between gender equity in farmers' groups and positive changes in household well-being?

2 *Organe de Developpement du Diocese de Toamasina (ODDIT) and Bureau de Developpement de l'Ecar de Mananjary (BDEM).*



Family of farmer group
Mr. Norbert Beloha is the leader of
group Mahasambatse.
Village Amanda Andamilamy/
Fokontany Betapoaka
Commune Jafaro
District Ambovombe Region Androy

Gender: Gender refers to the two sexes, male and female, within the society in which we live. Gender roles can be affected by factors such as ethnicity, class, age and religion. Gender roles may vary widely within and between cultures, and often evolve over time.

Gender equality: Gender equality reflects the concern that women and men, boys and girls have equal opportunities, resources, rights, access to goods and services that a society values, and the ability to make choices and work in partnership.

Gender equity: Gender equity is the means by which we achieve equality. It is the process of being fair to men and women, boys and girls. Equity leads to equality – the equal valuing in society of both similarities and differences between men and women and the varying roles they play.

The study analyzed influences and links at three levels: within the farmer's groups, within households of farmer group members, and within the community.

Led by a Malagasy research team³ with technical support from an expatriate sociologist⁴, case studies of 14 farmers' groups (half considered as gender balanced) were completed. For each of the 14 farmers' groups, researchers held two focus group discussions (one female and one male) and reviewed group records. They also conducted semi-structured interviews of selected household members from each group for a total of 33 interviews. The research team developed indicators to score group performance and household well-being, identify gender-balanced groups, and to help compare data among groups and among households.

3 Rosoanirina Voahangy Brigitte (team leader)

4 Dr. Ruth Kornfield

KEY FINDINGS

Key findings are organized under these broad study categories: (a) group performance and gender equity, (b) household well-being and gender equity and (c) community influences. Key questions and sub-questions are used to organize findings. Reported scores refer to measures using the set indicators.

Group performance and gender equity

How does women's participation in farmers' groups influence group performance? Is there a correlation between the degree of gender equity in farmers' groups and positive group performance? How well do groups perform and what factors influence performance within farmers' groups?

The average performance score of all 14 groups was 68%. Indicators used to evaluate this score included performance related to the internal organization and management of the group, roles and responsibilities of group members, and performance related to production results, all linked to improving of farmer family well-being. High performing farmers' groups appear linked to education and literacy of members, rather than to gender equity. The majority of farmers' groups scoring higher on performance indicators have one or more members with secondary education; the majority of groups scoring lower had members with only primary education. Correlation analyses revealed a weak relation between gender equity within farmers' groups and the groups' performance. The five groups in this study that integrated women more effectively in decision-making processes had high performance scores and more satisfaction with their group performance.

SILC groups have slightly higher levels of performance than other farmers' groups, most likely linked to extended training in group organizational and management skills that other groups did not receive. For all groups, participation in decision-making (for example, when members regularly attend meetings) and clear roles and

responsibilities of group members appear to be key factors explaining successful farmer group performance.

At the time of the study, 5 of the 14 groups were no longer functioning. Reasons for this do not relate to gender issues but were reported to be due to the group's inability to apply training or repay loans, internal conflict, leadership problems and/or the end of outside support.

Study respondents were asked to identify indicators they felt most important to measuring farmers' group performance. Social cohesion, defined as absence of conflict, collaboration in communal work, and helping group members in their individual fields was named by many groups, as well as increased household revenue and projecting a positive image of the group (such as the ability to lend money to outsiders or having a visible office or store-room).

How is group performance influenced by the degree of gender equity in participation and decision-making? How do women and men influence farmer group dynamics in terms of decision-making and participation?

The average gender equity score of all 14 farmers' groups is 64%. This score was evaluated based on indicators of gender equity in relation to sharing of benefits and responsibilities and equal participation of women and men in group life activities. Ten groups scored higher than this average and 4 groups scored lower. This relatively high score illustrates that women do indeed participate in group activities and have access to information and resources. Gender dynamics within groups, however, reflect women's roles in their communities, where in general they exercise limited decision-making. Less than half of the groups effectively involve women in decision-making and despite high numbers of women members, men play dominant leadership roles in groups. Farmers' groups in the Toamasina Diocese scored higher on indicators of gender equity than those in the Mananjary Diocese where traditional values predominate. Gender equity indicators with low scores across most groups include: (a) women and men with equal access to control over group resources and (b) ability to benefit from opportunities arising from group membership.



Group meeting.

Group Miray Hina - Village Namalaza II/
Fokontany Marovato Befeno
Commune Marovato Befeno
District Ambovombe Region Androy

Veroniaina Ramananjohany/CRS

Since the 14 groups were organized in 2004, 79 male members quit while female member levels remained stable. Two farmers' groups dramatically increased female membership. Respondents explained that project activities, such as market gardening are considered the domain of women. Men left the groups to focus on forest-based agricultural activities, rice-growing and beekeeping. The shift may also reflect household dynamics whereby husbands verify what an outside NGO-group is doing, before allowing their wives to join.

Leadership: At the time of the study, ten groups had equal numbers of men and women members while four groups had more women than men. However, only one in 14 groups had a women president and less than 50% of group leadership positions were held by women. In a few groups, leadership positions were held exclusively by men. Women informants said this situation was due to their lower educational levels, their "fear of interacting with outsiders," and their household workloads. A slight majority of treasurer positions were held by women, reflecting community perceptions that women are more honest and have expertise in managing household budgets.

SILC groups where women members are double that of men have higher levels of gender equity: more women hold executive leadership positions, participate more in meetings, participate more in group activities outside of meetings, have more access to use and control of group resources, have more decision-making opportunities, receive more training and have stronger perceptions that they are respected by the men in their group.

Decision-making: Gender equity in group decision-making is mixed and

Contrasting views of decision-making in farmers' groups

"Men define the groups' objectives, the activities to do and we follow and execute their orders." (female focus group respondent, Fanavotana SILC)

"Generally, women have more ideas than men. We appreciate their ideas because these launch our group discussions." (male focus group respondent, Ambohimanarivo SILC)

reflects societal and cultural norms. The majority of male respondents said that women do have a role in group decision-making. This finding, however, was not shared by many women respondents. In many cases women do not attend meetings where decisions are made. When they do attend meetings, some fear contributing ideas or say they do not have enough information to make convincing arguments. Women, however, related how they protest in situations where male group members imposed decisions. In one group, men took a decision to raise pigs (against the desires of women members), then decided that women members would wash the pigs, but the women refused to do so.

Use and control of group resources: Women reported different and unequal access to group resources. In one group,⁵ control of group resources was reserved for the group's officers, entirely composed of men. In another group, women had no idea of the group's financial resources and commonly-owned tools were stored at the president's house who is the community's traditional chief (*Tangalamena*), making it difficult to monitor inventory.

Task distribution: Men and women focus group respondents perceive that group tasks are equitably distributed. Group task distribution reflects existing gender division of labor whereby heavy labor is reserved for men and "lighter" labor for women. For example, in group-managed fields men plow while women transplant. Note that the perception of equity does not consider the investment of time, which can be considerable for the "light" agricultural tasks done by women.

Access to information and training: The majority of groups reported equal access to information, although women in some groups reported unequal access to financial records held by men. The way service providers organize training has consequences for women's access. Training held on-site in communities was attended by both men and women, although women reported one notable exception where women group members were relegated to cooking for trainees

5 These cases are for non-SILC farmers' groups.

Community activity
with gender contribution.
Community of Fanivelona
Fokontany Fanivelona
Commune Nosy Varika
District Nosy Varika Region
Vatovavy Fitovinany

Veroniaina Ramananjohany/CRS



Farmer group.
Association Vehivavy Miray Hina
Fokontany Somangy Toerantsoa
Commune Antaritarika
District Tsihombe
Region Androy

Raharinjanahary Holy for CRS



Group meeting with
gender input.
Agribusiness Group Tsaramirindra
Village Antsiratenina
Fokontany Ampahibe
Commune Ampasimazava
District Vavatenina
Region Analanjirofo

Veroniaina Ramananjohany/CRS



instead of attending the training. Training held outside the community excluded women as their mobility is limited due to childcare and domestic chores.

Household wellbeing and gender equity

Is there a correlation between gender equity in farmers' groups and positive changes in household well-being? How does women's control over resources and decision-making within a group influence health and nutrition outcomes within the household?

Correlation analyses revealed that gender equity within farmers' groups has a very weak relationship with household well-being and a very weak relationship with household gender equality. Household well-being scores of farmer group members averaged 48%, but widely varied from 11% to 90%. The well-being scores of group members who are female-headed households were much lower than the scores of group members in households where one or both spouses are members.

Despite these variations, the majority of interviewed household members reported many positive changes linked to their membership in farmers' groups, no matter what the degree of control over resources or decision-making by women in the group. These include relatively large increases in production and income from applying improved agriculture techniques or introducing new crops. Many groups increased rice production, with some experiencing problems to market their surplus. Eighty-one percent of households interviewed were able to re-invest profits to acquire land, animals and poultry, agricultural inputs (such as paid labor), plant trees, or to start new schemes such as bee-keeping. Other examples of positive changes in household well-being linked to membership in farmers' groups include:

- increased rice consumption (and decreased consumption of “poor” foods such as cassava)

- increased availability of rice in the diet over the year (in one case lessening the “hungry season” from six months to two)
- increased income enabling households to buy vegetables, such as carrots, beans and *bredes* (local green leaves) and meat
- increased income to pay for medical and educational costs
- increased income to purchase clothes and household utensils
- increased savings and assets that helped to mitigate the effects of cyclones in 2008
- increased time (no longer obliged to work as paid agricultural laborers and can invest effort in their own fields; no longer obliged to stay up at night to weave baskets for extra income)
- increased self-esteem and decreased social exclusion related to increased revenues; one man said that he was no longer embarrassed when people came to visit and a woman reported that her children were no longer ashamed in front of their peers because of having to wear old clothes.

By belonging to a farmers’ group...

“We more than doubled our rice production as a result of applying new techniques: before we produced 2 tons per hectare and now we produce 4.5. Also, the price of cabbages was very good on the market.”
(Interview of a household belonging to the Ezaka/Ankarimaso farmers’ group)

“We’re healthier and now we can buy soap. When you are poor, cleanliness is the least of your worries. (female member of Maeva/SILC group.)”



Community meeting, Village Namalaza II/
Fokontany Marovato Befeno
Commune Marovato Befeno
District Ambovombe
Region Androy

Veroniaina Ramananjohany/CRS

Household wellbeing of female-headed households:

Belonging to a farmers' group does not always benefit poorer, more vulnerable female-headed households. Two female-headed household respondents said they could not put into practice improved farming techniques because they did not have enough labor or other required inputs. One woman member reported exclusion from the group's profit-sharing due to her status as a widow.

Not all members benefit...

"We're excluded by the group members when it comes to sharing profits. Being a widow is considered a burden in our society. But we do benefit from the training." (female-headed household member of Tsimilefitra farmers' group)

Division of labor: positive and negative effects of belonging to a farmers' group: Female membership in groups has both positive and negative effects related to the gender division of labor. Some respondents described how group membership led to a more equitable division of domestic labor. For example, a woman member reported that before joining the farmers' group, she did all domestic tasks. Since she and her spouse joined the group, however, her husband began helping with cooking, water fetching and caring for their infant.

In contrast, a female headed-household member reported increased income but also more difficulty carrying out her normal tasks. In many interviews of households where both spouses belong to a farmers' group, women described increased workloads. In these cases the groups undertook market gardening and women are traditionally responsible for this crop. Increased workloads are often offset by help from female extended family members

Increased workloads...

"The farmers' group activities are very important to our household. My wife gets up at 4:00 am to do household chores [in order to attend group meetings in the morning] and my mother takes care of our young son." (husband of a woman member of Tsimilefitra farmer's group)

(grandmothers or younger sisters) – not by a more equitable division of household tasks between men and women. Although no specific cases were described, increased workloads for young girls pose a risk for school interruption.

Is there a link between women's participation in farmers' groups and household decision-making?

Decision-making within households in these Malagasy societies is complex. Generally, men take what are considered as “important” decisions within the household (for example those concerning farming and use of income) while women manage harvested crops and household expenses. Membership in farmers' groups can have an effect on this dynamic. For example, some women respondents reported that they are more listened to by their husbands, even if the husbands take the final decisions. Another couple who belongs to a farmers' group said that since they became members, they jointly budget and manage household expenses. However, another respondent said that belonging to a group made no difference in decision-making norms, other than she had more cash for her own household expenses.

Community influences on gender equity in farmers' groups and households

What community-level values, beliefs and norms facilitate women's participation in farmers' groups?

Societal and cultural norms exercise considerable influence on gender equity and in general, men dominate community decision-making. However, there are notable exceptions. While men are typically traditional chiefs in Betsimisaraka society, there are cases where certain women have become *Tangalamena* and community decisions are often the result of consensus of men and women. Senior women and grandmothers have the right to speak in community meetings, are respected, and have a role to counsel younger men.

Women who have experience outside the village are more educated, and women who hold an office in a farmers' group are also freer to speak in public. While women can discuss "freely" within the households, they more rarely speak in public. In most cases, however, for men and women of the same age group, men are considered "more respected". Young women in particular, have limited freedom to speak in public.

How does women's participation in groups affect community norms and practices such as community leadership, decision-making and kinds of community actions taken?

Community decisions for investment of local development funds often favor ideas put forth by men (and decentralized governing structures – the *fokotany* usually only include men). For example, in an Antemoro community, men wanted to build a dam, while women wanted to repair classrooms. The local government prioritized the men's idea. When women get together, however, they have more power. For example, in one community, a women's group mobilized community members to contribute in-kind to a potable water project.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMS

This study of Malagasy farmers' groups in two dioceses in the eastern part of Madagascar provides a number of lessons learned and recommendations for considering gender more carefully when designing, implementing and monitoring agriculture and food security projects with farmers' group components. These lessons learned and recommendations are applicable to similar settings in other poor communities.

1. Promote leadership roles for women within farmers' groups in light of existing social and cultural norms. For example, this may include organizing groups with all female members so that women can be elected as leaders and take decisions.
2. Provide adult literacy training for men and women, given the importance of education on farmer group performance.
3. Work to raise awareness of men and women in the community on issues of gender equity; best-practice behavior change strategies that involve influential community members (traditional leaders, grandmothers) can be effective.
4. Ensure that CRS and its partners are trained and sensitized to more carefully consider gender realities when delivering training or choosing which crops and income generating activities to promote or support. For example, training must be organized in a way that respects men's and especially women's schedules and is delivered close to home; women farmers benefit from training and services to improve poultry raising, while men farmers benefit from training and services to improve beekeeping.
5. Provide differentiated agricultural services to farmers' group members with different sets of assets. For example, female-

headed households should receive agricultural training in techniques that they are capable of applying. Care, however, should be taken not to stigmatize poorer men and women.

6. Ensure that training of all groups includes sessions on group processes, organization and management, as this strengthens farmers' group performance.
7. Carefully monitor unintended negative consequences of belonging to farmers' groups, especially for women. The positive of belonging to a farmers' group may be offset if a younger sister is pulled out of school to help with household tasks. Monitoring systems should always include household visits and discussions with beneficiaries.

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