



Gender, Assets, and Agricultural Development: Lessons from Eight Projects

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Summary. — Ownership of assets is important for poverty reduction, and women's control of assets is associated with positive development outcomes at the household and individual levels. This research was undertaken to provide guidance for agricultural development programs on how to incorporate gender and assets in the design, implementation, and evaluation of interventions. This paper synthesizes the findings of eight mixed-method evaluations of the impacts of agricultural development projects on individual and household assets in seven countries in Africa and South Asia. The results show that assets both affect and are affected by projects, indicating that it is both feasible and important to consider assets in the design, implementation, and evaluation of projects. All projects were associated with increases in asset levels and other benefits at the household level; however, only four projects documented significant, positive impacts on women's ownership or control of some types of assets relative to a control group, and of those only one project provided evidence of a reduction in the gender asset gap. The quantitative and qualitative findings suggest ways that greater attention to gender and assets by researchers and development implementers could improve outcomes for women in future projects.

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Key words — gender, assets, property rights, agriculture, impact evaluation

1. INTRODUCTION

For many years development interventions focused on increasing incomes to reduce poverty; now a growing body of evidence emphasizes the importance of assets for poverty reduction (Adato, Carter, & May, 2006; Barrett & Swallow, 2006; Carter & Barrett, 2006; Carter, Little, Mogues, & Negatu, 2007; Carter & May, 2001; Jalan & Ravallion, 2002; Lybbert, Barrett, Desta, & Coppock, 2004; Naschold, 2012, 2013; Winters *et al.*, 2009) as well as for individuals' and households' current and long-term well-being (Schreiner & Sherraden, 2007). A body of work also exists on the importance of women's ownership of and control over assets for a range of development outcomes, both for women themselves and for their families (Haddad, Hoddinott, & Alderman, 1997; Meinzen-Dick *et al.*, 2011; Quisumbing and Maluccio, 2003). Yet, men are generally advantaged in owning assets, given the gender norms that govern asset ownership, which means that they tend to own more assets and assets of higher value than women (Deere & Doss, 2006; Deere, Oduro, Swaminathan, & Doss, 2013; Quisumbing & Maluccio, 2003).

While building women's assets has become a global development priority (Deere *et al.*, 2013; FAO, 2011; Meinzen-Dick *et al.*, 2011), few agricultural interventions consider their impacts on assets at the individual or even household level. To better understand the importance of gender and assets in agricultural development projects, and the potential of projects to build women's assets, the Gender, Agriculture, and Assets Project (GAAP) worked with eight agricultural development projects in Africa and South Asia to build explicit attention to gender and gendered ownership of assets into their monitoring and evaluation plans. The eight projects, which took place in seven different countries, covered different types of interventions with different implementation approaches. They took diverse approaches to gender—ranging

from gender blind to gender transformative—and to assets, with some projects distributing agricultural assets such as land, livestock, or machinery and others promoting increased productivity through access to inputs and training. In each project evaluation, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used to look at how participants understood gendered use, control, and ownership of assets; how assets influenced who was able to participate in and benefit from projects; and how projects impacted a range of outcome measures, including women's access to and control over assets.

This paper synthesizes the findings of the project evaluations and related analyses from GAAP. Section 2 presents the GAAP conceptual framework, and Section 3 describes the eight projects and the key elements of their evaluation designs. Section 4 characterizes the gender norms and context in project countries using secondary data. Section 5 summarizes the findings of the evaluations on changes in use, control, and ownership of assets. Subsequent sections unpack the findings by looking at links between assets and key outcomes identified in the conceptual framework—livelihood strategies (Section 6), control of income (Section 7), and well-being (Section 8). Section 9 summarizes lessons for program

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implementers on how to incorporate gender and assets into program design, implementation, and evaluation. It also identifies areas where further research is needed to better understand how to define and measure gendered asset ownership.

2. THE GENDER, AGRICULTURE, AND ASSETS PROJECT CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK¹

The term *asset* is often used very loosely in discussing resources that individuals, families, or other organizations (groups, corporations) control. Carter and Barrett (2006, p. 179) define assets as “conventional, privately held productive and financial wealth, as well as social, geographic, and market access positions that confer economic advantage.” The accounting definition of assets considers these as economic resources—“anything tangible or intangible that is capable of being owned or controlled to produce value and that is held to have positive economic value. Assets represent value of ownership that can be converted into cash (although cash itself is also considered an asset)” (Sullivan & Sheffrin, 2003, p. 272). In the international development literature, another way that assets are understood comes from the Sustainable Livelihoods framework (Scoones, 1998). This framework recognizes five capitals—natural (land, water), physical (agricultural and household durables), financial (cash or savings), human (health, knowledge, skills), and social (group membership, social networks)—and posits that these capitals underlie the ability of households to engage in livelihood strategies.

As suggested by the above definitions, a key part of the definition of an asset has to do with its ownership and control. Ownership is often understood simplistically as a binary variable; however, property rights over assets can be very complex, as suggested by the legal definition of property rights—the relationships among people over things (Cohen, 1954). Property rights are generally defined based on a person’s ability to use an asset for specific purposes or to make decisions about how it will be used by others. Ownership of an asset generally means possession of a “bundle of rights” over that asset. Schlager and Ostrom (1992) characterize different bundles of rights along a continuum from use rights to control rights to ownership rights. Examples of some use or access rights include the right to live in a house, to fish in a lake, or to milk a cow. Some control or decisionmaking rights include the right to decide who else lives in the house or fishes

in the lake, what the cow eats, what crops to plant on a plot of land, and whether to exclude others from grazing their animals on a particular pasture (Meinzen-Dick, Pradhan, & Di Gregorio, 2004). Full ownership often includes all of these rights as well as the right to dispose of an asset (the house or the cow), whether through sale, lease, gift, or inheritance transfers.

The GAAP conceptual framework diagram (Meinzen-Dick *et al.*, 2011) provides an illustration of the relationships between gender, assets, and well-being in the context of agricultural development (Figure 1). The shading in the figure reflects the fact that components are gendered, meaning that they might be different for men than for women within a household. Households are important units of analysis in development programming; and many projects, including the majority of the projects in GAAP, define their beneficiaries as, and design their programs to target, households. Households are made up of individuals, however, and an intervention may affect different household members differently. It is important to take this into account to understand how an intervention is likely to work. This applies even to the context as certain social, economic, or political factors may affect women and men differently, while others affect a household as a whole.

Assets² can influence the design, implementation, and outcomes of programs by determining who participates (and who does not participate) in the programs as well as how and how much they benefit. Some agricultural projects distribute agricultural assets such as land, livestock, infrastructure, or machinery. Agricultural interventions can also introduce improved technologies or institutional innovations that increase the returns to the productive assets used in agriculture-based livelihood strategies, potentially raising the returns to and value of some assets (and possibly lowering others) as well as producing surplus that can be reinvested in asset accumulation.

Although societal norms govern the gendered distribution of assets, it is by no means immutable. Agricultural development programs may shift the gendered asset distribution. This could happen directly through, for example, direct asset transfers to women, or training, perhaps in combination with efforts to influence attitudes. It can also happen indirectly through the downstream impacts of projects on gendered control of incomes and investment opportunities. These latter effects may be unintentional and may result in worse

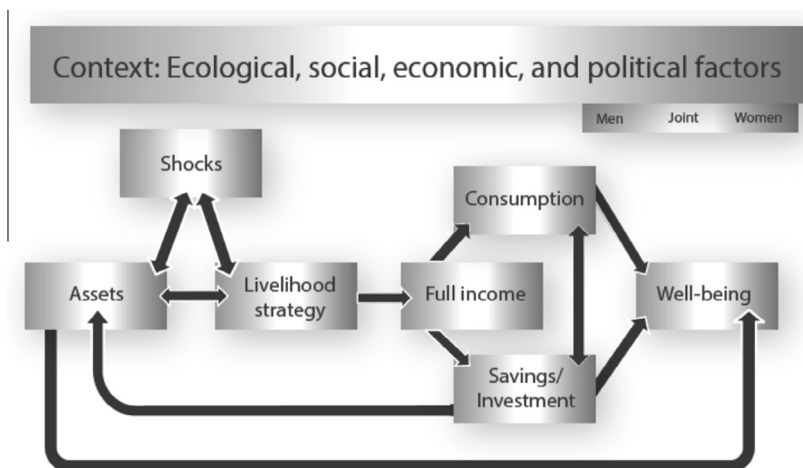


Figure 1. *The Gender, agriculture, and assets conceptual framework.* Source: Meinzen-Dick *et al.* (2011, p. 4).

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