

Session Nine: Gender and Agricultural Value Chains

Case Study - Natural Resource Management

Women (and sometimes girls) are often responsible for providing their households with the basic necessities of life—food, fuel, and water. They rely heavily on natural resources to do this. Men seldom have responsibility for collecting and using natural resources for household use.

It is now known that the major problems related to fuelwood collection include women's and children's exposure to indoor air pollution and heavy workloads for women and girls. Environmental degradation increases women's time for labor-intensive household tasks, such as having to walk longer distances for the collection of fuelwood and water. As a result of gender-differentiated roles in, women often have greater knowledge of indigenous plant varieties with important nutritional and medicinal values. As the keepers of seeds, women often possess knowledge of a variety of genetic resources to adapt to varying climatic conditions such as resistance to drought or pests. However, because men have more secure access to land or land tenure, they have more incentive to contribute to effective natural resources management.

A program supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has helped women and men in the domestication, cultivation, and sale of indigenous fruit and medicinal trees. Training on vegetative propagation techniques enabled many farmers to establish their own nurseries. As a result of project, average household incomes increased, and women and men farmers acquired new skills in propagation techniques, such as grafting and the rooting of cuttings. The program has been particularly effective in improving the livelihoods and status of women. Women's groups have established nurseries, enabling women to participate in income-generating activities which have led to an increase in school attendance among children. The tree domestication program has also contributed to increased nutritional well-being at the household level, because the women also produce a variety of food for household consumption previously unavailable to them. Men are able to market some of the wood produced, and the women sell the fruit at the local market.