


# **Promising Approaches to Address the Needs of Poor Women Farmers: A solution to the food price crisis?**



Agnes R. Quisumbing and Lauren Pandolfelli  
International Food Policy Research Institute  
June 17, 2008



# Main points

- Much of the discussion about policy responses to the food price crisis has not paid adequate attention to gender
- Impacts of the crisis may be different, and men's and women's role in solutions to the crisis may be different
- We already know a lot about factors that may constrain women farmers' ability to respond to better agricultural incentives
- We also know about some promising approaches that have been tried in the field
- However, many of these approaches have not been rigorously evaluated, and little is known about how to bring them to scale



## What we already know

- In **most** countries, distribution of physical (land, agricultural equipment, livestock) and human capital (schooling, experience) favors men
- In **many** countries, differences in rights and responsibilities within the household brings about inefficient resource allocations and constrains women's abilities to respond to better price incentives



## We have known about this for a while...

Example from Burkina Faso (Alderman et al. 1996; Udry 1996; Smith and Chavas 1999)

- Plots managed by women have significantly lower yields than plots controlled by men
- Men's plots have higher labor inputs by both men and children
- Fertilizer is more intensively applied on men's plots
- In Burkina Faso, output of households, where men and women did not share the same preferences, was 25% less responsive to cotton prices than in households where preferences were the same

# We know that, relative to investments in men, increasing women's control of resources benefits families




- Equalizing resources held by women and men can increase agricultural yields by up to 20% (Alderman et al. 1996)
- Increases in women's resources have the strongest effects on education, health, and nutrition (Hallman 2000; Smith et al. 2001)
- Women's social networks help families cope with income shocks (Maluccio et al. 2001)

# We also know that increasing women's resources improves agricultural productivity




- **Burkina Faso:** Output of women's plots, and total household output could be increased by 10-20% by reallocating resources from men's plots to women's plots (Alderman et al. 1996)
- **Ghana:** strengthening women's property rights increases incentives to adopt agroforestry and is good for environmental management



## What do we know that's new and relevant for the food price crisis?

- IFPRI was commissioned to do a review of promising approaches to improve welfare of poor rural women farmers, mostly in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.
- This review can yield insights into gender-responsive agricultural strategies that are relevant for the food price crisis.



# Key questions addressed in the review

- Are women more constrained in control and access to these resources?
- What are key intervention strategies?
- What are some promising approaches that have been used in the field?
- To what extent have these approaches been evaluated?




# Key lessons

- Women are more constrained than men in control and access to resources.
- Interventions targeted to women must understand unique dimensions of their poverty.
- Women may lack assets and income needed to respond to increased food prices, and are subject to **gender-based vulnerabilities**:
  - fewer benefits and protections under customary or statutory legal systems than men;
  - lack of decision-making authority and control of financial resources;
  - greater time burdens, social isolation, and threats or acts of violence.



## Key lessons (cont'd).


- Interventions targeted to help women cope with food price crisis cannot be blueprint designs.
- Need to be tailored to specific **sociocultural contexts** in which gender relations unfold.
- In responding to food price crisis, must make sure that we “**get institutions right,**” (not just about getting short-term response right)



Key intervention strategies include both a short-term response, and laying the foundations of the long-term response:

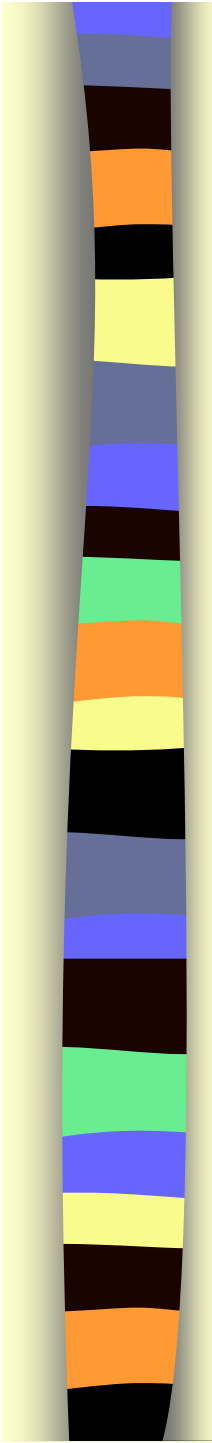
**Land, water, and soil: Mostly long-term, but also short-term**

- Strengthen property and contractual rights of women, particularly over land, and increase knowledge of these rights.
- Identify key tenure patterns at the onset of projects so that women's property rights are not inadvertently eroded.
- Improve women's access to, and control of, water in productive and domestic uses.
- Improve poor women's access to soil fertility improving inputs and technologies



## A closer look at fertilizer: increasing fertilizer use, especially by poor farmers, often viewed as key to increasing food supply

- Improve poor women's access to soil fertility improving inputs and technologies
- Introduce fertilizer and improved seed vouchers targeted to smallholders, with explicit attention to reaching women farmers in the poorer female-headed households.
- Use a fertilizer-for-work program for those who do not have enough cash to pay for other inputs.
- Improve women's access to inorganic fertilizers by introducing *credit or microcredit* for fertilizer to women farmers.
- Introduce a *cash crop* into women's cropping systems whereby women farmers can pay for fertilizer use on their food crops with cash-crop receipts (Gladwin 2002, ed.)



## Reducing purchase costs through small bags, or using flexible vouchers, may help poor women afford fertilizer

- Some elements of a fertilizer strategy include:
  - Use of flex vouchers for seed and fertilizer (denominated in face value, not in kind)
  - Sale of fertilizer in small bags for women who do not have enough cash to purchase large bags
  - Poor men may also benefit from being able to buy small bags, but women likely to benefit more because their access to credit is weaker
- Elements of approach have been proposed, but not tested against alternative delivery approaches in the field.
- Very little on-the-ground evaluation (e.g. vouchers vs. starter packs).



## Long-term: Gender-responsive agricultural development strategies

### **New varieties and technologies**

- Take into account both women's and men's preferences when developing and introducing new varieties
- Disseminate high-valued crops that do not require large initial investments or asset ownership; or provide mechanisms for women to pool resources or obtain access by other means.
- Assess how the introduction of new technologies targeted to women will affect gender norms within households.
- Recognize that women of different ages and status may have different agricultural roles that can influence the adoption process.



## Short- and long-term:

### **Extension**

- Recruit and train female extension workers, esp. in areas where cultural norms restrict male-female interaction.
- Take into account socio-cultural norms that may limit women's participation as extension agents.
- Provide extension messages in simplest way possible. Where women have lower literacy or schooling rates than men, adapt training materials so they can easily be understood by women.
- Utilize informal networks for information diffusion; these may differ for women and men



# Other elements of short- and long-term gender-responsive strategies

## **Labor**

- Introduce labor-saving technologies that reduce women's time and energy burdens.
- Eliminate barriers to women's participation in labor markets, particularly informal markets women turn to in times of crisis

## **Markets**

- Invest in market-oriented interventions that facilitate women's market access, strengthen their asset base and address gender norms.



# Other elements of short- and long-term gender-responsive strategies

## **Credit and financial services**

- Use credit groups targeted to women to disseminate new agricultural technologies and increase farm productivity, as well as achieve empowerment and poverty reduction objectives.
- Provide women access to savings instruments and opportunities to build up their asset base

## **Services and support infrastructure**

- Use women's groups for service delivery and resource distribution
- Gender advocacy can boost women's participation, but is not enough—technical and leadership training is also important.



# A plea for evaluation

- Most of the approaches reviewed have undergone very limited rigorous evaluation. (For example, according to an evaluation of Drumnet's export crop adoption and marketing intervention in Kenya, no other randomized evaluations have been conducted of such interventions (Karlan et al. 2008).
- Where rigorous evaluations have been done, little attention to gender impacts.



## A plea for evaluation (cont'd.)

- Greatest limitation has been lack of exploration of alternative design mechanisms.
- Without evaluation, it is difficult to recommend which programs can be scaled up.
- It is also difficult to know which design features can be modified for local conditions without adversely affecting the overall outcome of the intervention.



# Final Note

- A more detailed presentation and review of these promising approaches is available from us