

Gender Sensitive Curricula and Pedagogical Practice in Agricultural Education

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Engaging in practices that deter gender bias falls in line with the aims and commitments stated in the global [Sustainable Development Goals](#). One way to transform gender biases in agricultural education is through gender-sensitive curricula and the pedagogical practices of teachers within the classroom.

Gender Sensitive Curricula

Not all college curricula are created equal. In fact, most tertiary-level educational curricula are characterized by gender bias as a result of long held socio-cultural traditions that ascribe particular roles to women and men in agriculture-related fields (Leathwood and Read, 2009). Creating gender sensitive curricula entails the incorporation of gender perspectives and epistemologies in program curricula and course content.

The Women's and Gender Research Network (WGRN) provides insight as to how gender can be incorporated into agricultural curricula including [horticulture](#), [forestry](#), [environmental science](#), and [farm management](#). WGRN's approach combines the use of empirical studies, theoretical approaches and applied knowledge to expose students to gender dynamics, biases, and social, cultural and political structures that reproduce gender-based inequality. This three-pronged approach encourages the gendered analysis of dominant theoretical paradigms in particular fields within the agricultural sciences, situates the roles that women and men play within society, and supports reflexivity in the practice and professionalization of students in agricultural-related fields.

Gender Sensitive Pedagogical Practice

For it to be effective, gender-sensitive curricula must be coupled with appropriate pedagogical practice. Gender-sensitive pedagogical practice requires reflexivity on the part of teachers. An example of how this can be achieved is encapsulated in the Forum for African Women Educationalists' (FAWE) gender-sensitive pedagogical

Forum for African Women Educationalists

A non-governmental organization, the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) encourages the incorporation of gender-sensitive pedagogical practices in all levels of education across Africa. Operating in 32 countries FAWE's focus is to encourage school enrollment, sustained attendance and participation of women and girls in the areas of science and technology by utilizing a number of methodologies, such as the Gender-Responsive Pedagogy (GRP) model, and the Science, Mathematics and Technology (SMT) model. The GRP model has been introduced in 13 African countries and is practiced by over 6,600 teachers. A total of 15,412 students in 123 schools in 12 African countries have benefited from the introduction of the SMT model. FAWE reported a 22% increase in the total number of years of primary schooling for girls in countries that employ the SMT and GRP gender-sensitive pedagogical approaches between 1999 and 2005 (FAWE, 2008).

approach. FAWE utilizes cultural norms, institutional dynamics, and role models to inform the creation and application of lesson plans that seek to gradually remove the barriers that women and girls face in classroom settings and that may hinder their ability to equally participate and reach their full academic potential.

Some examples of gender-sensitive pedagogical methods in the Gender Responsive Pedagogy model call for educators to be mindful of how they interact with the students and deliver course content. From this perspective, a gender-sensitive pedagogical practice requires awareness on the part of the educator of their own verbal and non-verbal cues when carrying out their lesson plans. For instance, FAWE's guide to Gender Responsive Pedagogy found [here](#), points out how educators' authoritative and unapproachable attitudes adversely affect girls' participation in the classroom, hindering learning. In terms of class dynamics, they suggest experimenting with classroom set-up and classroom activities to encourage girls' class participation. These activities include small group discussions and role playing. In FAWE's Science, Mathematics and Technology (SMT) gender-sensitive pedagogical approach, educators engage local women leaders, parents and other role models to promote awareness about women in SMT fields. They also organize science camps to dispel gender stereotypes, familiarize and spike girls' interest in SMT.

Educators can also engage in more structured gender-sensitive pedagogical practices. For instance, UNESCO points to cultural beliefs and values that may create barriers for women in the classroom, such as the belief that gender roles are biologically determined. They provide specific guidelines for educators to discuss the difference between gender and sex in a classroom setting. The UNESCO training module manual targets teachers, career guidance counselors, and school administrators who are interested in promoting women in science. The manual can be found [here](#).

Curriculum Tools: The following link provides a list of resources for creating gender-sensitive curricula.

- [Gender and the Curriculum, a List of Resources](#)—UNESCO and the International Bureau of Education (2012)

Educator Training: The following link provides a manual for a gender sensitive training for educators:

- [Gender Sensitivity: A Training Manual for Sensitizing Education Managers, Curriculum and Material Developers and Media Professionals to Gender Concerns](#)—UNESCO, 2004

For School Administrators:

- [Checklist for Gender Sensitivity in Schools](#)—created by the Central Board of Secondary Education of India

Change Begins with You

Although there is an expectation that university-level students, faculty and administrators would have basic knowledge of what gender is and why it matters, this is not always the case. As such, it is important to question assumptions associated with the roles that women and men play at all educational levels. This is specially the case in agricultural science fields where the prevalence of males in positions of power is often seen as a natural occurrence and not as the result of gender-based power and privilege.

University administrators and faculty in the agricultural sciences need not wait for momentous change to occur at the national level or even at their schools or universities to make inroads into eradicating gender bias. Through classroom gender-sensitive curricula and pedagogical practices, educators can make great strides toward alerting and sensitizing students—the future generation of leaders—to the biases that plague women and other marginalized populations.

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