

The Why of Gender

In the breakout discussions the gender group spent much of the first half discussing various aspects of gender and agriculture- cultural differences in perception, curriculum content, barriers or challenges to women in agriculture, the needs of rural women, and specifically what skills and training women need to succeed in this field. The following are notes from the group that began to discuss the needs of rural women and how training can help them.

We based our discussion on the experiences of one participant who works with a women's association in Senegal. All of the women are hibiscus growers, traditionally a women's crop. However, now that hibiscus is gaining notoriety as being an exportable and highly nutritious food product, the men have been entering the business and are edging the women out. Our discussion focused on what skills the women have and what they are lacking. Additionally, we discussed the role of men and how it is very important for them to be in the conversation and gain awareness of the skills and responsibilities of the women so that both sexes can best their limitations and take advantage of the opportunities that come from working together.

Below are our discussion points and recommendations:

- All trainings should be with both men and women so that they can understand each other better and this should begin in primary school
- When two family members are invited to a training this increases the chances of both the husband and wife attending (when only 1 family member is allowed to attend this usually results in the man attending)
- Trainings are needed in marketing, exporting and negotiation so that existing commodity groups can be mobilized to expand their reach and capacity
- The commodity groups or associations become platform for the promotion of women's rights
- A certification on skills and experience from local institutions of higher learning can benefit the women and men to increase their business opportunities in agriculture
- The rural women need access to literacy and numeracy education
- We need to include men in trainings as a way to reduce the incidence of domestic disputes and violence that can occur when a woman begins to earn an income
- Access to finance and financial literacy are huge barriers to the advancement of women's enterprises. Microfinance institutions, savings groups and other financial institutions need to become more gender sensitive so that women can benefit from their services.