

Institutional Reforms to Strengthen Gender Outcomes through Improved Rural Services Delivery

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For the past year, I have had the opportunity to carry out research with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) on the gender outcomes of investments in agricultural development projects under the U.S. government's assistance framework, the President's Initiative to End Hunger in Africa (IEHA). Since its launch in 2002, IEHA has been USAID's primary delivery mechanism for support to the implementation of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP), which targets six percent annual growth in the agricultural sector of signatory countries. The expected outcomes of this targeted goal are improved rural incomes and reductions in poverty and hunger. As USAID prepared to launch its new global food security initiative, Feed the Future (FTF), it sought to gather lessons on the gender outcomes achieved under IEHA. These lessons would be used to guide the design of FTF agricultural programs and projects to improve gender integration and strengthen gender outcomes.

My involvement included participating in building the conceptual framework and methodology for a multi-country program assessment. This leveraged my disciplinary background from UF in agricultural economics, farming systems, and political science. Combining gender analysis with the agricultural value chain analytical framework proved to be the most sensitive and effective tool for identifying and weighing up the various constraints limiting gender equity. This was evident when comparing the results from three country field studies – Mali,



Mozambique, and Uganda – where a mix of institutional reform approaches was required to address binding constraints up and down the value chain.

My experience working with USAID has had a tremendous influence on how I approach and communicate my research to increase its value and uptake by international development organizations. Bridging the distance between theory and praxis is a challenge that I believe all young scholars must face, in particular, those who aspire to careers outside academia. I find this to be especially true when trying to operationalize what is essentially a conceptual device like gender in common development tools such as logical frameworks and monitoring and evaluation plans. The theoretical critique represented by gender quickly drifts in practice to targeting resource distribution to women. Changing the 'rules of the game' faced by women remains a much more difficult task.

I have taken this experience into my ongoing dissertation work on the governance of public sector irrigation services in

Swaziland. Here, I am problematizing the integration of local institutions, specifically a traditional authority system, into the governance of a large irrigation scheme designed to facilitate the increased participation of smallhold farmers in commercialized agriculture. I am investigating the effects of this integration on the overall performance and sustainability of the service delivery chain through the prism of accountability relations. In so doing I am building upon continuing work by the World Bank on approaches to strengthening rural services delivery to improve rural development outcomes. From a theoretical perspective, I am also contributing to the debate over whether traditional authorities, as a potential source of clientelistic behaviors, strengthen or weak development outcomes.

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