



Gender has become an important subject in agriculture research and development. At a time when we are aiming to put our economy on high trajectory growth path, it is important that we address the gender issues because these have implications for development. Gender bias is one such issue that all societies are beset with. It is manifested in myriads of forms. An array of problems that we face today in realms of social and economic development can, in some way or the other, be linked to gender bias. A bias-ridden society entails high cost for different kinds of social and economic transactions, access and use of information in decision making. Therefore, creating a socio-cultural climate that discourages gender biased practices and promotes rational behaviour and action on part of men and women is very significant in this context. To this end, gender sensitization should be seen as an important action point.

The Goal

Sensitization is by far the most effective and non-confrontationist approach of reforming the society. Gender sensitization is the process of changing the stereotype mindset of men and women - a mindset that strongly believes that men and women are 'unequal entities', and hence have to function in different socio-economic space.

Gender sensitization increases the sensitivity of people at large towards women and their problems. In the process it creates a class of responsive functionaries at different level, from policy making to grass root level, who are convinced that any form of gender bias is an obstacle on the way of attaining an equitable social and economic order and therefore consider addressing gender related issues in their situation as a matter of priority.

Gender is a social construct that denotes the social relation between men and women leading to differential position and importance in the society. The role script prescribed for men and women in a giving society has systematically resulted in women's sub-ordination which women themselves have accepted without realizing its implications. Therefore gender sensitization should seek to change not

only the impression of men towards women i.e. the way men think of and treat women, but also the attitude of women i.e. the way women think of men and of themselves and their behaviour in this context.

Its goal is essentially to create a value system in society that accords explicit and spontaneous recognition to the contributions of women in socio-economic development, and respects their wisdom; a system that makes women sensible and courageous enough to recognize their own contributions and make them feel proud of it.

The gender sensitization process

Gender sensitization programmes are generally organized for groups of people. The very aim of such programmes is to bring a definite orientation in the thinking, practices and approach of individuals concerning gender. Insights from monitoring of gender sensitization programmes conducted under different gender related projects in rural areas suggests that gender sensitization process that individuals, particularly the men, undergo involves four stages namely, change in perception, recognition, accommodation and action. These changes take place in response to certain interventions i.e. sensitization courses or training.

Change in perception

Gender sensitization, in first instance, tends to change the perception that men and women have of each other. It creates a mindset in men that no longer sees in women the stereotypical image. The impression that women are a 'weak and unequal entity' no more clouds the minds of common men. Rather, they are seen as responsible and equal partners in socio-economic development. At this stage men realize the ill-effects of prevailing biases against women on family and society. The general perception of men and women on the rigid gender division of labour and other orthodox practices relating to gender begin to die down. Women also tend to develop the perception that they are no subordinate to men and they have an equally important

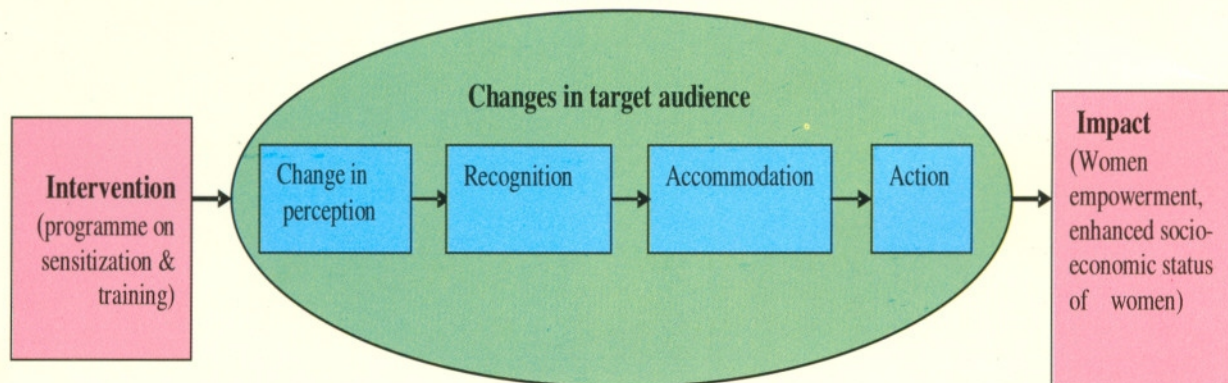
Gender is a component of Visioning, Policy Analysis and Gender (V-PAGe) under NAIP. Gender notes are meant to disseminate gender related concepts and information to initiate debate and discussion on gender issues in agricultural research and development.

role to play in decision making at household, community and organizational level.

Recognition

Persons exposed to gender sensitization also start behaving differently. They look at the positively endowed qualities of women. At this stage the male folk begin to recognize the virtues of women and their importance to the family and society. There is open and spontaneous appreciation for women's involvement in multifarious activities. The men, who were reluctant to acknowledge of women's contribution, come forward under the influence of sensitization to recognize their contribution. As a result women's contributions become more and more visible.

adjustment between them. Men tend to rationalize their behaviour by shedding their ego as far as gender relations are concerned. Instead of complaining or reacting to the behaviour of women, men learn to exercise patience and restraint, and take the things in a positive way. The difference between men and women narrows down as men allows women to function in a comfortable environment in the available socio-economic space. Problem creators, i.e. those who were discouraging and obstructing women in their socio-economic participation, become supporters of women empowerment. In the family, women start gaining importance as their opinions and suggestions are counted for overall development and management of family. At community and organizational level too, women are encouraged to play their role in matters of management. It



Gender sensitization process

Further, women's talents and capabilities that were going unnoticed and unexplored become subject of attention. Women too become more conscious of their capability and contribution, and take pride in the same.

The message that gender sensitization conveys is loud and clear. Women do possess wisdom and therefore they must be involved in decision making process. They have concerns and therefore they should be treated with dignity and given equal chance in sharing of social and economic benefits.

Women, cutting across socio-economic boundaries, tend to see their problems in larger perspective of women development and come forward to recognize the efforts of fellow women. They even visualize the important role that men can play in their socio-economic development.

In a nutshell, such an orientation marks the beginning of a definite realignment in gender relations. Social image of women improves and their concerns are shared by men.

Accommodation

The barrier between men and women starts crumbling down and the society slowly gets over the perennial problem of

is also observed that women, on their part, tend to underplay the problems with their male counterpart and wish to solve their problems through dialogue.

Action

Gender sensitized persons become instruments of change as far as status of women in the society is concerned. They become action oriented and alert to see that women are neither neglected nor discriminated against and they get their due status in the society. Conscious efforts are made to create a favourable climate that allows nurturing and flourishing of women's talent and provides more flexibility and freedom to women. Moreover, sensitized persons become more inclined to take such steps that would make the gender equations more even and balanced. A number of affirmative actions are initiated to bring improvement in conditions of women. Women also become open votaries of women empowerment and organize themselves for collective action against different forms of bias and discriminatory practices. They tend to become pro-active to gain a respectable position in family and in the society.

At different levels, from top echelons of decision making down to the household, different kinds of measures may be initiated. There could be gender sensitive policies and

programmes to allow meaningful participation of women in development and decision making process, and foster equitable sharing of benefits. Some of the actions that are making visible impact are gender focused programmes and policies by different Ministries of Government and department under National Policy on Women, initiatives like identifying and addressing gender concerns at organization level and gender budgeting. All these are testimonies to the shift in approach that has taken place in recent years. Similarly, actions could also be in the form of research and extension initiatives and linkages to reach out to the women with appropriate technologies and institutional innovations on which several organizations are working.

Similarly, it is also important that action should reflect at other levels, importantly at household level. Very often the persons involved in gender development argue, "Is there a need for restructure of gender roles?" women normally find themselves sandwiched between several demanding tasks and feel overburdened and exhausted. Can not male members come forward to support women in completing household chores? Gender sensitization has a role to play. Men who are sensitized do volunteer to share the burden of women and try to complement the efforts of women. Importantly, they can encourage and support women in their fight for equality. Ultimately we have a situation where both men and women complement each other within the family and outside.

Gender sensitization Strategy

Forms and intensity of gender bias varies greatly according to the socio-cultural and economic contexts. Therefore, in order to bring desired changes in people and in the society, we need to develop a well thought-out gender sensitization strategy considering the prevailing socio-cultural, economic and psychological situation of target group. The strategy basically involves three components; selecting the target audience, deciding the content and deciding the methodology. Since the content and methodology of the programme are decided according to the target group, one should be clear about the composition and characteristics of the target groups before designing the sensitization programmes.

Target audience

Sensitization programmes should target not only the collective consciousness of men in society to create more space for women but also those women who directly or indirectly tend to act against the larger interest of women by trying to conform to the traditional socio-cultural norms. For example, elderly women from families can be educated about ill effects of gender bias so that they develop a favourable attitude towards younger generation. Similarly, socially and economically progressive women in village or

locality can be sensitized to encourage and support the underprivileged women.

Different programmes can be designed targeting different groups. Men and women could be taken either together or separately in the target group. They could be from similar background or from different background. Even both men and women from different age-groups could be considered either separately or together. For example, separate sensitization programmes can be designed for researchers, policy makers and personnel associated with social and economic services delivery system. Even there can be programmes in rural areas wherein men and women from different age groups and from same households can be involved in participatory discussion in an enabling environment so as to make them realize the adverse effects of gender bias depicting real life experiences.

Methodology

Methodology part deals with overall designing of the programme, its structure, form and style of presentation, language to be used etc. Since reaching the target audience, impressing upon them and changing their traditional mindset are crucial to make the programme effective, a great deal of thought should go into deciding the methodology.

Gender sensitization materials need to be developed for different category of people; men, women and children of different age groups and background. We will inevitably require some gender sensitive modules containing case studies; situation analysis etc. to sensitize planners, researchers and middle level functionaries. Even gender sensitive materials could include leaflets, booklets, posters, and videos on different theme areas. Organization of sensitization camps in rural areas coupled with sustained campaign by mass media, and plays will go a long way in creating a healthy environment in rural areas as far as gender relations are concerned.

Content of the programme

The content part basically means the topics, theme areas or issues to be considered for the programme. Topic should be relevant and content should have the power to communicate the intended message to the audience, and should be easily understandable by them.

Content of the programme can be decided depending on its very purpose. It could be to sensitize people about ill-effects of gender bias and discriminatory practices on women, men, family and society. Gender sensitization may focus on spreading the message 'how women play important role in family and in the society' and 'how both men and women in their mutually supportive role can contribute immensely to family welfare, growth and development of their villages'.

Contents should initiate friendly debate among larger audience on the ill effects of gender bias and what can be done to remove gender bias. It can highlight the conduct of men and women in households based on case studies and even spread the message of some kind of affirmative action. To make them more effective, findings from existing studies can be used for designing sensitization programmes. At the same time more and more research should be undertaken to address the issue of gender bias and its consequences in varying situations. In fact, the content, structure and method of gender sensitization measures can draw upon the research findings.

Sensitization through education

Education is an important vehicle of social change and students, particularly children, can become important instruments in the process. Topics relevant in the context of gender sensitization should be introduced in school curriculum to sensitize the children on the prevailing gender bias in our society and the way it is impeding the socio-economic development. This calls for somewhat higher doses of social science including gender studies in educational institutions. To make students awakened to the realities, both boys and girls can be encouraged to debate and discuss the gender issues and examples from real life experiences. Such an exposure will bring a definite change in attitude and perception of students towards gender. While boys, as they grow, can become more sensitive to and more concerned about issues affecting the girls and women; the girls and women, on the other hand, will become more vigilant against prevailing biases and awakened to the emerging opportunities. At the same time, we can expect more friendly relationship between boys and girls or men and women characterized by spontaneity in adjustment and collective efforts to find solutions to gender problems. This would create a long term impact on society by reducing abuses and violence against girls and women. Can we not create a social climate that would hold discrimination against girls and women a sin or taboo?

Implications

- Gender sensitization can contribute to women empowerment by hastening the process of both horizontal and vertical flow of ideas, knowledge, information and technology.

- It can reduce the chances of gender conflict and promote gender harmony thereby creating a congenial climate wherein both men and women can perceive and play their role in mutually complementary mode.
- Lack of sensitization at different levels, i.e. household, project and programme levels, is an important reason for poor implementation and poor outcome of development interventions. Gender sensitization, therefore, can foster meaningful participation and better integration of women into development process and can lead to better impact on women of different projects, programmes and policies.
- Gender sensitization can induce restructuring of gender roles based on efficiency and can help realize higher productivity of men and women in household and outside work through rational and effective use of resources including available time.

Conclusion

Gender sensitization should pervade all levels, from top to down at household level. The good thing is that the persons at top level of management and policy making are becoming more and more sensitized on the issue. However, a large part of the system and large segment of our population are not really sensitive to gender concerns. This calls for serious efforts to launch gender sensitization programmes for R & D organizations, and for the people at large to achieve gender equity in sharing of benefits.

To begin with, selected personnel at different levels involved in research, extension and rural development should be given necessary orientation and training and they in turn can carry on such sensitization programmes for men and women in different organizations and in villages. As meaningful participation of women is paramount for good outcome of rural development programmes, gender sensitization should be made in-built into the broad framework of rural development process. In this way the message of working towards gender equality can be propagated across our social, economic, research and development systems. We can visualize a situation where both men and women should be in readiness to perceive each other's needs and act in a more cohesive way to harness their combined potential. In ultimate analysis, gender sensitization is very much required to create gender synergy at household, organizational and community level for producing more output and attaining gender equality.

March 2008

National Research Center for Women in Agriculture (NRCWA) has been established to carry out basic, strategic and applied research to identify gender issues and test appropriateness of available farm-technologies/ programmes/policies with women perspective. To do training and consultancy for promoting gender mainstreaming in research and extension for empowerment of farmwomen and capacity building of scientists, planners and policy makers to respond to the needs of the farm women.

© National Research Centre for Women in Agriculture (ICAR) 2008

Published by : Dr. K. Srinath, Director, National Research Centre for Women in Agriculture,

P.O. Baramunda, Bhubaneswar - 751 003, Orissa, India,

Phone : 91-674-2384220, Fax - 91-674-2384242, Email : nrcwa@ori.nic.in Web : www.nrcwa.org.in

Please send your comments to the Director, NRCWA