

POLICY BRIEF

Including Women in Dairy Extension

Recommendations for the inclusion of female smallholders in dairy development support

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Executive summary

Women are engaged in farming and play an important role in almost every agricultural operation. Nevertheless, they continue to receive very limited extension support. While organizations like the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Cooperative Association (ICA) have proposed interventions to address this 'gender' bias in extension delivery, there continues to be a shortfall between the kind of support that is provided and the needs and demands of rural women. This gap between supply and demand needs to be addressed in order to improve the lives and livelihoods of families in the rural farming sector.

In this policy brief, major findings in the "Making Dairy Development Do Better" research contributing towards this aim are summarized in policy recommendations for Thailand.¹

Research

Dairy development extension services are an important instrument for innovation and improvement of the traditional practices of smallholder dairy farmers in dairy cooperatives. From 2016 to 2018 the "Making Dairy Development Do Better" study has been conducted and focused, among others, on Thai milk quality improvement practices. Practicing an institutional analysis, this study questions how dairy development extension services can support milk quality improvement by more effectively involving the female farmers working in smallholder dairy production. Dairy cooperatives (organizational – meso- level) are the entry point in this multi-levelled analysis that also includes the national governmental level (macro) and smallholder farmer households (micro).

Why?

Female involvement is important as the upgrading of dairy value chains will contribute to economic progress and rural poverty reduction. Also, equalizing gender relations in dairy production may contribute to female empowerment at the individual household and the community level. This will improve household resilience by creating power balances in enabling women to also control resources, benefit from profits and take part in decision-making processes.

¹ For more information on the "Making Dairy Development Do Better"- project as part of the international LIQUID program see: <http://liquidprogram.net>.

The business case for including women in dairy extension

Women are important actors in smallholder farmer milk production, yet, it seems female contributions are not yet formally acknowledged or rewarded within most dairy cooperatives. While little data is available and limited research has been done on gender in cooperatives, research has shown that female inclusion in training activities is essential to dairy development in emerging nations. There is a good business case to be made for a transformation of the current situation. Experiences in other countries indicate that explicit policy focus on providing extension to female smallholder will lead to an advance in dairy development because, among others:

1. Inclusion of female farmers increases production (Clugston 2014)
2. Female 'invisibility' in dairy production causes deficiencies in current studies on the efficiency of smallholder farmer livelihood choices and, thus, in the solutions towards poverty reduction that are formulated (Perrons 2005).
3. Training women has a major effect on improving livelihoods because of the role they can play in improving the health, nutrition and education of farmer families (LeCoutere 2017).
4. Female farmers are early adopters of new or improved farming techniques (Bock 2015)

Recommendations for Thailand

Given the relative recent appearance in Thailand of dairy production as a viable livelihood choice and the extensive governmental involvement in this sector, an opportunity to initiate change presents itself. The promotion of the dairy sector within the 4.0 Masterplan for the Agricultural sector could provide a stimulating context to make change happen. The explicit inclusion of women in dairy extension services holds many challenges but could contribute to initiating a transformation in the decision-making pattern on dairy issues within the household. However, experiences show that the process of inclusion is not easy as both men and women seem to uphold the accepted status quo and maintain the gender gap in the agricultural sector. These actions are recommended to make change happen:

*In the future, more than setting numerical goals is needed to produce desired outcomes. A critical analysis of project organizations and their settings is required. New approaches may differ depending on, for instance, regional cultural norms, organizational history and environmental context as well as the different types of households (size of farm) and roles (leader, main producer) the target group females they are active in (see also: Auma Odiol et al. 2017).

*Formulating a gender strategy to guide the implementation of gender policies, including activity and output -based indicators (see also: Mkenda Mugittu 2003)

* Women often use networks to gather information for decision-making and exploring new methods of work. These networks could be facilitated in several complementary ways, for instance,

1. by establishing real -life Communities of Practice,
2. by creating female-only social associations that meet regularly,
3. by starting smartphone-based group apps on issues that interest female dairy farmers, as well as
4. by establishing forums on a dairy development knowledge platform

How to include women in extension services

Please consider: Would it be an option to hire female dairy extension officers? Maybe to work only on farm? Additionally, exploring gender-sensitive extension training for staff at all levels is needed to create a common understanding on gender and gender sensitive approaches

Relatively small changes can make a big difference! There are four critical episodes that offer opportunities for female farmers' engagement:

1. Preparation: Identifying needs, action planning, creating content

At this stage, analyzing the farming system with inclusive action research is required. Involving participants in this process allows for:

- Distinct needs identification
- Engagement in content co-creation
- Relevance, upgrading and innovation of extension activities
- Participants commitment to making the training succeed

2. The invitation

Attention should be given to the invitation's:

- Urgency (forceful and women only)
- Sender (preferable a phonecall by a governmental representative)
- Community location (no hotel and not overnight but respected known host)
- Accommodating daily schedules, farming systems and distinct needs (timing in the 'low season' for harvesting, child care)

3. During the training: who, what and how?

As a trainer ask yourself:

- What are the requirements for group composition (women only?)
- What are the implications of the training's objectives (addressing a non- gender technical or a social issue?)
- How can I create an approach that blends gender in practice?
- What methods are best suited to make a sustainable impact and equalize gender relations?

4. Afterwards: space and place for sharing and support, regular monitoring and upgrading.

Create optimal sustainability of the training by paying attention to:

- Building a medium-term 'personal' supportive relationship
- Creating a community of change
- Plan for a regular meeting time, space & place for the community to meet, to exchange knowledge and experiences and share worries (which is why apps don't work at this time)
- Maybe create a mentorship schedule?

Useful references Thailand

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