

SOCIAL ASSESSMENT (III. GENDER ACTION PLAN)

A. Summary Gender Action Plan

1. Preparation

1. Special attention was given to gender issues during project formulation. The participatory RRA exercises conducted in Ninh Thuan, Quang Nam, Dak Nong, Nghe An, and Thanh Hoa have encompassed a gender-disaggregated perspective on various issues related to project activities. Gender issues have been explored by separately looking at the division of labor within the household with special attention given to agricultural activities. The gender characteristics of the people in charge of commune or provincial administration have also been pointed out. The RRA also involved the provincial women's unions (WU). Interviews with key informants of women groups provided important insights on the existing livelihood strategies, feature of poverty, and ethnicity. WUs have also been analyzed by looking at their role in extension. There are in fact many extension services implemented by WU, which focuses on activities typically performed by women (livestock raising, gardening, and weaving).

2. Project Formulation

2. Various actions were identified during project formulation in order to promote the active involvement of women in the project activities. First, a gender-disaggregated approach to extension will be encompassed in the provincial plan for agricultural extension services. The plan relies on the needs' assessment conducted in the first year, which will be conducted in cooperation with WU and other grassroots organizations operating in each province. A special section of the plan exclusively focuses on extension intervention for women's farm activities (livestock, gardening, etc.). Second, the AST Project will stimulate the participation of women in its activities by keeping a bottom-up demand-driven approach. This will be done through targeted awareness campaigns aimed at ensuring that the "human capacity strengthening" opportunities available under the AST research component will be disseminated among Women's Union and other women groups. In addition, a gender disaggregated screening procedure of applications will be adopted with a higher score given to female applicants. Finally, the strengthening of the "on-the-job" and "experimental" training skills of extension officers (irrespective of gender consideration) is in accordance with one of the key findings of the RRA. Women participating in extension and demonstration trials often report the lack of effective dissemination of knowledge and information. This is particularly relevant for women living in remote rural areas due to their limited education and language capacity.

3. Implementation

3. A social development officer position will be created in the Central Project Management Unit. The officer will be responsible for ensuring that the Project will continuously address gender issues and monitor the implementation of the gender action plan. In particular, (s)he will be responsible for (i) controlling the coherence of project activities with the gender action plan; (ii) controlling the mainstreaming of gender issues in the needs' assessments exercise; (iii) ensuring that the provincial project plans adopt a gender-disaggregated perspective in the definition of extension and training activities; (iv) controlling the gender-disaggregated perspective in monitoring and evaluation.

4. Gender Sensitive Perspective in Monitoring and Evaluation

4. The Project will adopt a gender sensitive approach to monitoring and evaluation, which will consist of the identification of gender-disaggregated indicators and targets for evaluation of project activities. This will be supported by a data-gathering system, which will extensively involve women groups, female-led enterprises and women employees. The reporting on Project achievements in terms of impact and benefits will also be constructed on a gender-disaggregated basis.

B. Gender Plan

5. The gender plan considered during the formulation of the Agriculture Science and Technology (AST) Project is in accordance with the “Gender Strategy in Agriculture and Rural Development to the Year 2010” of MARD. The MARD strategy starts from the consideration that gender inequalities undermine socioeconomic development in all areas and sectors. Countries that actively promote gender equality experience faster and more sustainable socioeconomic growth. The overall objective of the gender strategy is that national agricultural and rural development policies and programs contribute to increased income and reduction of rural poverty for men and women. This would be achieved through (i) improved gender equality and women’s status in agricultural development, and (ii) enhanced gender responsiveness or rural development plans, programs and projects.

6. Most of the activities of the AST Project can be categorized within Objective 4 of the Gender Strategy. Objective 4 aims to achieve gender sensitive practices and gender equality in agricultural research, public services and training. The rationale behind this objective is that research on new technology and business development opportunities should be targeted to those fields from which both male and female workers have the potential to benefit. Regarding extension, the strategy aims at introducing gender consideration in the delivery of extension services. For this purpose, extension should give particular attention to the dissemination of new technologies in crop production, livestock and other subsectors. Moreover, consideration including location and duration of activities must be taken into account during the formulation and implementation of extension programs to ensure that both men’s and women’s needs are met.

7. The analysis outlined above is substantially in accordance with the findings of the RRAs conducted during the PPTA. The RRAs found that the provision of extension services was affected by a strong gender-bias. Little importance was given to the agricultural activities traditionally performed by women. Men were considered the main target for training and demonstration. While women represent above half to three quarters of the workforce in animal husbandry, depending on the region, only 20% of extension training course on animal husbandry have women participation. Similarly, although 80% of rural women work in cultivation, they only represent 10% of participants in horticulture training courses of MARD. As a result, women are not provided with the development capacity to use more advanced technologies and are less able to contribute to development objectives.

8. Strengthening the capacity of research and extension practitioners to mainstream gender concepts in their activities is one of the key gender actions of the proposed AST Project. In the current situation, failure to mainstream gender issues in agricultural research and extension relates to social and cultural norms which give more importance to the activities and role of men within the households. At the same time, it is important to point out that knowledge and awareness of key gender concepts and the capacity to mainstream gender equality are

rather limited among civil servants in the MARD system. With a few exceptions, national and provincial level civil servants have limited knowledge of basic gender concepts; skills of gender analysis, gender planning, gender budgeting, and concept of engendering policies, programs, and services are also limited.

9. The Strengthening of Rural-Based Technical and Vocational Training component of the AST Project also includes a strong gender rationale. In Viet Nam, educational curricula, including university programs, management schools and other professional development and retraining programs, rarely mainstream gender into teaching of socioeconomic development concepts and theories, technical concepts and skills and management development. Teaching of in-depth concepts related to gender is generally absent from the educational system. On this issue, the MARD Gender Strategy argues that vocational training courses should specifically target women to both raise their technical knowledge and enhance their self-confidence. At the same time, gender issues in agriculture and rural development must be considered a compulsory subject in education programs of all education and training institutions in the sector.

C. Review of Proposed Actions by Component

10. A group of actions are hereby proposed, and are regarded as essential for mainstreaming gender issues in the project activities. The actions are categorized according to each project component, namely (i) Client-oriented Agricultural Research and Capacity Strengthening, (ii) Grassroots Agricultural Extension Improvement, and (iii) Rural-based Technical and Vocational Training. The gender aspects in the activities to support project management are also considered.

Component 1: Client-Oriented Agricultural Research and Capacity Strengthening

11. **Rationale 1.1: Reduction of household vulnerability.** Intervention under the Sub-Component to provide key equipment and facilities to support the agricultural research system can be considered as functional to the scope of reducing vulnerability and improving food security of farm households, including more vulnerable female-headed households. The interventions listed under this sub-component aim at producing a positive impact on household resilience to crop losses through support to crop production and biotechnology research, livestock diseases through support to veterinary and epidemiological research, and market risks through improved post-harvest handling and dissemination of market information.

12. **Action 1.2: Human capacity strengthening for female scholars—Screening.** The AST Project includes a special intervention aimed at strengthening technical and practical skills in agricultural research. Under the Project, at least 10% (more than 6 persons) of the total trainees (55 persons) will be women. This will be achieved through a screening procedure for evaluation of applications, which can give higher weight to female candidates. The Government assured to give favorable consideration for female applicants.

13. **Action 1.3: Development of technologies suitable for female farmers—Screening.** In the provision of competitive research funds, the Project will have a special focus on strengthening of applied and adaptive agriculture research linkages which aims at enhancing the cooperation between farmers, extension, applied and adaptive research and policy making, thereby promoting client-oriented agricultural research based on improved linkages between research and extension. The rationale behind this sub-component relates to the objective of making research activities more responsive to stakeholder needs. A fund is created to finance applied and adaptive research that has a focus on development of appropriate technologies for

the regions serviced by the regional research institutes. Special emphasis may be given to technologies appropriate for activities traditionally performed by women.

Component 2: Grassroots Agricultural Extension Improvement

14. **Action 2.1: Gender focus during the farmers' needs assessment**". In compliance with a bottom-up approach to the development intervention, elaboration of the provincial plan for agricultural extension services will extensively rely on an in-depth needs assessment, which will be conducted during the first year. The exercise will be conducted at the provincial level in order to take into consideration the social and environmental differences within the country. The exercise will serve as an input for selecting appropriate contents and methods in the delivery of extension services. Special care will be given to identifying needs and priorities of farmers operating in upland and remote areas. A special set of interventions will be identified for activities within the farm households implemented by women.

15. **Action 2.2: Special section for women-oriented activities in the provincial plan.** The provincial plan will include a special section, which focuses on activities traditionally performed by women. The actions will be organized at the provincial level in order to take into account the social and agro-economic differences across the country. The provincial plan's section for women-oriented interventions will identify the targets, objectives, methodologies, contents and schedule of extension activities. Also, the actions needed for enhancing communications and training capacity will be specified. Particularly relevant to this purpose will be the strengthening of extension staff capacity to adopt on-the-job or experimental training approach.

16. **Action 2.3: Strengthening of capacity to implement on-the-job or experimental training.** The RRAs conducted during the PPTA showed that agricultural extension services often did not provide benefits since the training was too theoretical and did not provide practical information. On-the-job or experimental training methodology was instead identified during RRA as the training methodology more suitable to the educational and inter-personal attitudes of female farmers. Under this action, capacity of extension service providers in conducting on-the-job or experimental training will be enhanced.¹

17. **Action 2.4: Increased participation of women farmers in the project activities.** The extension contracts to be funded under the Project will have provisions that at least 40% of beneficiaries of these services are women. The contracts to be awarded in the final year of project implementation will have provisions that at least 50% of beneficiaries are women.

¹ The on-the-job approach requires regularly scheduled training (...) and is provided by the superior officer or the subject-matter specialists to the subordinate field staff. This training is generally problem- or technology- oriented and may include formal presentations, informal discussion, and opportunities to try out new skills and knowledge in the field. The superior officer, administrator, or subject-matter specialist of each extension department must play a role in providing on-the-job training to the staff while conducting day-to-day normal activities (Halim, A. and Ali, M., "Training and Professional Development" in FAO. 2003. *Handbook of Agricultural Extension*). The experiential approach is based on the idea that the trainer incorporates experiences where the learner becomes active and influences the training process. Unlike the traditional academic approach, experiential training emphasizes real or simulated situations in which the trainees will eventually operate. In this model, the objectives and other elements of training are jointly determined by the trainers and trainees. Trainers primarily serve as facilitators, catalysts, or resource persons (ibid.)

Component 3: Rural-based technical and vocational training

18. **Action 3.1: Inclusion of gender issues in the development of agricultural curriculum guides.** The revision of agricultural curricula at the secondary technical and vocational level will include a special focus on gender issues. By doing so, a better understanding of the social and agro-ecological heterogeneity of the country will be developed in the rural-based training programs.

Component 4: Project Management

19. **Action 4.1: Creation of a social development officer position in the CPMU.** A social development officer position will be included in the CPMU. In general, the officer is responsible for monitoring of project activities with respect to their capacity to address social development and poverty reduction. In the first year, the social development officer will supervise the execution of the needs assessment exercise and ensure focus on gender issues. (S)He will support the development of provincial plans by ensuring the inclusion of specific extension interventions for women. In the course of project implementation, the officer will monitor the schedule of all the AST activities and their compliance with the Country Poverty Reduction Strategy and the “Gender Strategy in Agriculture and Rural Development”. (S)He will be also responsible for an ongoing control of the inclusion of women and indigenous people in the research, extension and training activities promoted by the AST Project. The recruitment procedure will encourage application of female candidates or people from ethnic origins.

20. **Action 4.2: Adoption of a gender-disaggregated scoring system for evaluation of proposals.** The Project will adopt a scoring system for screening and selection of funding proposals under the extension and research components. The system will attribute higher weight to those proposals, which explicitly address gender issues.

21. **Action 4.3: Gender-disaggregated M&E System.** The Project will adopt a gender-sensitive approach to monitoring and evaluation, which consists of the identification of gender-disaggregated indicators and targets for monitoring and evaluation of project activities. This will be supported by a data gathering system, which will extensively rely on participatory techniques, client-satisfaction analysis, etc. The reporting of project achievements in terms of impact and benefits will also be constructed on a gender-disaggregated basis.

22. **Action 4.4: Review of the Action Plan at Mid-Term.** This gender action plan has been designed in a way compatible with a demand-driven approach to development intervention, and is considered adequate to mainstream gender issues in project activities. However, a fairly detailed assessment of project impact on gender is recommended for inclusion in the project mid-term review. This will be based on the gender disaggregated data provided by the M&E system. The evaluation will focus on the capacity of AST activities to address gender issues and the overall performance of the gender action plan. The findings of the analysis will be utilized for reviewing the plan and to identify new corrective actions where needed.