GENDER-RESPONSIVE APPROACHES
FOR ENHANCING THE ADOPTION OF
IMPROVED MAIZE SEED IN AFRICA

A TRAINING MANUAL FOR AGRO-DEALERS

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The Stress Tolerant Maize for Africa (STMA) Project was launched in 2016 with the aim of helping farmers in sub-Saharan Africa to mitigate the combined effects of multiple stresses such as drought, heat, poor soil fertility and diseases that affect maize production and farming, and to improve food security and livelihoods. STMA builds on strong partnerships formed under the Drought Tolerant Maize for Africa (DTMA) and Improved Maize for African Soils (IMAS) projects that achieved major successes in African maize seed systems. For more information, visit https://stma.cimmyt.org/.

International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) is the global leader in publicly-funded maize and wheat research and related farming systems. Headquartered near Mexico City, CIMMYT works with hundreds of partners throughout the developing world to sustainably increase the productivity of maize and wheat cropping systems, thus improving global food security and reducing poverty. CIMMYT is a member of the CGIAR system and leads the CGIAR research programs on maize and wheat and excellence in breeding platforms. The Center receives support from national governments, foundations, development banks and other public and private agencies. For more information, visit www.cimmyt.org.

Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) – guided by the belief that every life has equal value, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation works to help all people lead healthy, productive lives. In developing countries, it focuses on improving people’s health and giving them the chance to lift themselves out of hunger and extreme poverty. In the United States, it seeks to ensure that all people – especially those with the fewest resources – have access to the opportunities they need to succeed in school and life. Based in Seattle, the foundation is led by CEO Dr. Susan Desmond-Hellmann and Co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett. For more information, visit www.gatesfoundation.org.

United States Agency for International Development (USAID) works to end extreme global poverty and enable resilient, democratic societies to realize their potential. USAID invests in ideas that work to improve the lives of millions of men, women and children in the following ways: investing in agricultural productivity so that countries can feed their people; combating maternal and child mortality and deadly diseases like HIV, malaria and tuberculosis; providing life-saving assistance in the wake of disasters; promoting democracy, human rights and good governance around the world; fostering private-sector development and sustainable economic growth; and helping communities adapt to a changing environment. USAID elevates the role of women and girls throughout all its work. For more information, visit www.usaid.gov.
Agro-dealers are critical to the process of transforming African agriculture because of the role they play in supplying high quality seed and other agricultural inputs to smallholder farmers, often in hard-to-reach locations. CIMMYT supports seed companies who produce high-quality, improved maize seed varieties that are distributed to agro-dealers, who then sell to the end consumers male, female, young, elderly and disabled farmers. Women make important contributions to agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa, but they have less access and control compared to men over critical agricultural resources, including improved seed. CIMMYT seeks to develop maize technologies that are responsive to the needs and preferences of both men and women, and is committed to improving women’s access to improved maize seed from the formal seed sector. Through research undertaken by the Stress Tolerant Maize in Africa (STMA) and other projects, CIMMYT is working to close the gender gap in agricultural productivity. Through its work with maize breeders, seed companies and agro-dealers in Africa, CIMMYT raises awareness of the specific constraints that women farmers face and provides these actors with the knowledge and skills to address these constraints.

This publication provides a resource to help agro-dealers be gender-responsive in their daily operations as they seek to meet the needs of a diversity of farmers. It provides practical suggestions on how to develop an agro-dealer business that considers the needs of both women and men and presents gender-responsive approaches to promoting an agro-dealer business. The main message of the manual is that it makes economic sense for agro-dealers to recognize men and women farmers as customers that may have different needs. CIMMYT is proud to make a contribution to developing a new breed of gender-responsive agro-dealers. This manual is also a valuable resource for trainers charged with supporting the development of well-trained and well-equipped agro-dealers through the implementation of training courses covering a range of topics and tailored to specific locations.
Agro-dealers play an important role in agricultural development in Africa by linking suppliers of seed, fertilizers, agrochemicals and other farming and veterinary products to farmers, and by providing services to farmers. An agro-dealer is an independent stockist or input dealer who distributes agricultural inputs. Together with seed companies, agro-dealers are the main sources of certified seed for African farmers. Agro-dealers not only sell agricultural products but also provide farmers with information about these products. Agro-dealers may also provide services such as training, hosting demonstrations and field days, buying produce from farmers and reselling it, and establishing links with farmer savings and loan groups. The exact number of agro-dealers in most African countries is not known. For example, it is estimated that there are between 3,500 and 10,000 agro-dealers in Kenya (Bayesian Consulting Group Limited, 2016). Agro-dealers’ businesses range in size from small businesses located in villages that sell directly to farmers, to larger businesses located mainly in towns and cities that sell to other dealers. Most agro-dealer businesses in Africa are owned by men, but women may be co-owners with their husbands or operate their own businesses. In some countries, agro-dealers must obtain a trade license from local authorities as well as be certified by plant health authorities.

Meru Agro’s Martha Mbena explains the benefits of improved maize seed to a client at the company’s retail shop in Arusha, Tanzania. Photo: CIMMYT/Kipenz Films
To operate a profitable business, agro-dealers need to have an in-depth knowledge and understanding of their customers – farmers – and respond to their needs. African farmers are not all the same; many of their characteristics vary, such as the size of their farms and farming enterprises, the types of crops they grow, and whether they grow crops mainly for sale or for both food and sale. It is important that agro-dealers are aware of these differences, as farmers’ characteristics determine the products and services they want. One area that is often overlooked by agro-dealers is the difference in the needs and buying behavior between men and women farmers.

This training manual is intended to help agro-dealers in Africa have a better understanding of the importance of gender for their business. It provides practical suggestions for how agro-dealers can address the needs of both women and men farmers to make their business more profitable. The manual can be used by agro-dealers to improve their knowledge, or by trainers as part of a broader training program for agro-dealers. It is based on workshops organized by CIMMYT in 2017 for agro-dealers in several African countries, and also draws on research carried out by CIMMYT and partners on gender, plant breeding and seed systems.

The first section of the manual explains what gender means and why it is important for agriculture and agro-dealers in Africa. Section two suggests ways to develop an agro-dealer business that considers the needs of both women and men, while the third section focuses on how to take gender into consideration in promoting an agro-dealer business.
2. What is gender?

The word gender is widely used but is often not well understood. Gender refers to learned social roles and responsibilities associated with what it means to be a man or a woman in a given society. Sex is related to the ways in which men and women are biologically different. Sex and gender are not the same thing.

Gender roles are shaped by culture, religion, economic, political and social factors. They determine how responsibilities and resources such as land and livestock are distributed between men and women. Worldwide, women as a group face discrimination and inequalities compared to men; their access to resources such as land is frequently more restricted, and they are often not allowed to do things like travel on their own, grow certain crops, do certain jobs, attend school etc. The concept of gender sees inequality between men and women as a problem rooted in power at both the personal level and at the level of society as a whole. It is important to understand that gender is not about women but about the relationship between men and women. Because gender is defined by society based on traditions and practices and is shaped by economic and political factors that change over time, gender roles and responsibilities can and do change.

The concept of gender also recognizes that all men and women are not the same and differ in terms of age, ethnicity, wealth, education, marital status, religion etc. For example, both wealthy women and men producers may have sufficient land, labour and cash, whereas poor women and men producers may have less of these resources. According to the culture in some societies, however, women, whether wealthy or poor, are not allowed to travel on their own or go to secondary school.
Box 1: Sex and gender are not the same thing

**Sex**

- Determined by biology: women give birth, have breasts and menstruate; men have testicles, facial hair and higher muscle mass.
- Universal for all human beings
- Unchanging, although surgery and other treatments can change sex characteristics

**Gender**

- Constructed by society; in many societies, it is mainly women who are responsible for cooking and looking after the home
- Differs between and within cultures: in many societies, both men and women can only have one spouse; in other societies, men are allowed to marry more than one woman, while in a few societies, women can have more than one husband
- Changes over time; in the past in many societies, only men were allowed to vote, run for political office or drive
2.2 Why gender matters in African agriculture

In sub-Saharan Africa, women play an important role in agriculture. Women make up nearly 50% of the agricultural labor force in Africa, with huge differences in this figure among countries and by crop (FAO, 2011). As Figure 1 shows, women’s contribution to cereal production in Uganda, Malawi, Tanzania, two regions of Nigeria, and Niger ranges between 21% and 55%.

![Figure 1. Female share of agricultural labor in cereals, legumes, and root and tuber crops in selected African countries, 2009-2011. Source: Palacios-Lopez et al., (2017).]

However, even though African women play an important role in agriculture, they represent only 15% of land owners and often have access to smaller plots and land with poorer soil quality (FAO, 2011). Compared to men, women tend to have less access to labor (both household and hired), which leads to lower productivity. Generally, in Africa, women have less access than men to extension and advisory services, technologies, inputs and credit.

Women are usually less aware of new crop varieties and technologies and are less likely to adopt modern crop varieties than men. As a result of these disadvantages, among other reasons, women farmers tend to have lower yields than men. The United Nations estimates that improving women’s access to land, information, improved seed and other resources would enable women to increase yields on their farms by 20-30%, which would increase agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4% and reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12-17% (FAO, 2011).

Gender is important in African agriculture because it determines who grows which crops, who does which tasks in farming and who makes what decisions. In many African societies, women are responsible for providing much of the food for their households, and they play a key role in food selection and preparation, child feeding, and nutrition decision-making.
They also sell crops and engage in other economic activities to get income. While men may also be responsible for providing food, in many societies they focus more on producing crops for the market.

Men’s and women’s roles and responsibilities are also influenced by the type of households they live in and how they organize themselves to grow crops. Most African women live in households headed by a man, but women are also household heads, either because they are divorced or widowed, or because their husbands live somewhere else most of the time. It is important to recognize that married women in male-headed households are also farmers, may have preferences about crop varieties and technologies that differ from those of their husbands, and do not necessarily receive technical information from their husbands. Women who live in households without a male head often face problems of access to land and male labor.

Women make up nearly 50% of the agricultural labor force in Africa and women represent only 15% of land owners and often have access to smaller plots and land with poorer soil quality.

**2.3 Why gender matters for agro-dealers**

Gender is important for agro-dealers because addressing the needs of different types of farmers – women, men, young, old, large and small, can make your business more profitable. Because men and women have different roles and responsibilities in farming and often face different problems and challenges, they may have different needs and preferences for your products and services. They may also face different challenges in buying your products. It therefore makes economic sense for agro-dealers to recognize both men and women farmers as customers that may have different needs.
Common Assumptions About Women Farmers

The needs and preferences of women farmers are often not known or not seen as important due to the following common assumptions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumption:</th>
<th>Fact:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women, especially married women, are not real farmers.</td>
<td>Most African women farmers are married, and depending on the context, they play an important role in farming, growing crops together with their husbands or on plots that they manage on their own. Women who are not married also play an important role in farming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumption:</td>
<td>Assumption:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are not involved in making decisions about farm operations.</td>
<td>While men make many of the decisions about farming in most parts of Africa, they often consult their wives or make decisions together with them. Women farmers also make farming decisions on their own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumption:</td>
<td>Assumption:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are not important customers for agro-dealers.</td>
<td>Because women are important producers and sellers of agricultural products, often growing crops on their own plots and owning their own livestock, they too need the products and services provided by agro-dealers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But it’s not just gender...

Young people (youth), both male and female, are another group that agro-dealers need to pay attention to. Young farmers are the future of farming but face their own challenges and have their own needs. They tend to focus on producing for the market, and most are more educated than their parents and are interested in using new technologies for production and marketing and obtaining information. But they often face some of the same challenges as women farmers in accessing resources such as land, labor and credit.
Developing an agro-dealer business that considers the needs of both men and women

Because of the direct contact that agro-dealers have with agricultural producers, they can help improve women’s access to information, improved seed and other technologies, and in that way improve women’s productivity. By considering the needs of both women and men farmers, agro-dealers can contribute to broader national development goals such as food and nutritional security, increased agricultural productivity and economic growth. Agro-dealers can also help to avoid creating new gaps between men and women producers.

Depending on customers’ needs, agro-dealers can offer a range of products such as seed, agricultural chemicals such as fertilizer and pesticides, tools, veterinary drugs and animal feed in addition to information about these products. Training, demonstrations, product marketing and linkages to farmer credit and saving groups are some of the services that agro-dealers can provide. Agro-dealers also provide information on new products and events of interest to farmers.

3.1 Targeting women and youth

Agro-dealers should consider gender in all aspects of their business and at all stages of developing their business. Having a gender policy for your business will help ensure that gender issues are addressed.

Think about the following questions:

Who are my customers?

It is not enough to know that your customers are men, women, youth, elderly or disabled. You should also be aware of the type of household they live in as this determines which resources they can access. Based on gender and other differences, it may be useful to identify the following six categories of small-scale agricultural producers:

1. Men living alone or with others
2. Women in male-headed households
3. Women in female-headed households
4. Young farmers, both male and female
5. Elderly men and women living alone or with others
6. Disabled men and women living alone or with others
Women farmers generally face greater challenges compared with men in obtaining information about new crop varieties and in buying seed from agro-dealers and other seed suppliers.
Some challenges women face

Higher rates of illiteracy, especially in official languages

More work looking after the home (cooking, cleaning, fetching water), looking after children and doing farm work

Not allowed in some cultures to travel away from their homestead

Smaller plots

Less money to spend on inputs (seed of improved maize varieties, fertilizer, pesticides etc.)

Less money to spend

Less contact with extension/rural advisory services and seed company representatives

Difficulty reading seed package labels, printed materials generally, and billboards

No time to visit an agro-dealer, attend agricultural events such as demonstrations, agricultural fairs or listen to radio programs

Unable to visit an agro-dealer, attend agricultural events such as demonstrations, agricultural fairs

Interested in smaller package sizes

More interested in open pollinated maize varieties rather than hybrid maize varieties

Interested in smaller seed packages

Less awareness about new varieties and technologies; less knowledge about good agricultural practices

Outcome

Box 2: Challenges women face in getting information about agriculture and buying seed from agro-dealers
3.2 Packaging information and labels

To address the needs of women and men with low levels of education, pay attention to how you provide information. Inform your suppliers that labels on seed packages should be in the local language with a lot of pictures and symbols, so that low literacy groups can easily identify products and understand instructions for using them. Don’t just rely on written information to provide information to customers. Take the time to talk with customers, explaining the products available in your store and encourage them to ask questions. If necessary, translate what is written on seed package labels into local languages.

3.3 Packing size and price

For various reasons, rural women often have less money than men. Providing several packaging sizes for seed helps to make seed affordable for women and men who do not have a lot of cash to spend and who cultivate smaller plots. Smaller packages are also easier for women to transport. Find out what seed packaging sizes women prefer and provide this information to your suppliers. Agro-dealers owned by seed companies should consider selling small packets of seed as a way of encouraging farmers to try certified seed of new varieties with little or no risk. Small seed packets can also be distributed during demos and field days.

All agro-dealers should consider the following ideas to make certified seed more affordable:

- Bulk sales to womens’ groups
- Setting up a system of loyalty points and discounts
- Allowing clients to pay in instalments
- Allowing clients to pay in kind e.g. grain buy-back by agro-dealers
- Working with local-level micro-finance programs such as rotating savings and credit
- Setting up credit guarantee schemes managed by Non-governmental organizations/community-based organizations

3.4 Local outreach

Explore new and different ways to take your products closer to farmers. Some ideas for local outreach include working in partnership with local traders, small shops, cooperatives and farmer groups, and setting up a mobile unit to sell your products. One seed company uses motorbikes with attached trailers to sell improved seed at the doorsteps of its customers (see picture on the right). Consider the pros and cons of these local outreach approaches. One area of concern will be how to guarantee the quality of products sold by others.
3.5 Customer service

Agro-dealers should take gender into account when dealing with customers.

Consider the following questions:

What do customers think about you?

Do your customers enjoy dealing with you? Do you treat all your customers with dignity and respect? Is the shop-keeper friendly and polite even when dealing with many customers who may want different kind of products?

Is the shopkeeper knowledgeable enough about the products sold in the shop to provide accurate information to different kinds of customers?

It is important for shopkeepers (the owner of the business or someone else) to treat all customers politely, patiently and in the same manner, regardless of gender or age. Where possible, make sure that both men and women work as shopkeepers in your business. Shopkeepers need to be knowledgeable about all products sold in the store, so that they can provide the right information to customers and advise them according to their needs. Be aware that women often have less information than men and make the effort to give them information about new products.

How do you handle and settle complaints and grievances?

Encourage customers to contact you at any time if they have questions about a product they have already purchased. Listen to customers, especially if they have a complaint. Respond to customers’ requests as much as possible. Make sure that your shop is clean and well organized so that it is easy to find products.

It is important for agro-dealers to have a policy on how to handle clients’ complaints and grievances, which may include a return policy. Knowing how to handle complaints will build trust with customers and increase their loyalty to your shop.
Demonstrations and field days: These two approaches are highly effective in increasing awareness of new crop varieties for two main reasons. Firstly, demonstrations (demos) and field days demonstrate the actual performance of crop varieties from planting to harvesting and can be understood by all farmers regardless of educational level. Secondly, demos can also be used to promote good agronomic practices (e.g. timing of planting, weeding, harvesting, correct spacing etc.). To ensure that demos are gender sensitive, it important to pay attention to who hosts demos and field days, where these are located, how information is provided about the demos (signage), how these events are organized and who attends.

Ensure that women and youth from different socio-economic groups and women’s groups have the opportunity to host demonstrations and field days. Try to ensure that 50% of demonstrations are hosted by women and 50% by men. Rather than leaving the task of selecting farmers to extension or seed company representatives, consider using a more participatory process led by the community.
One way to make your business more attractive is to support and invest in the local community. This shows that you are not just interested in making money but also in helping people. Consider investing a percentage of your operations budget to support a local football team, a clinic or maternity ward, a local group (women’s, men’s and youth’s) or an event for extension workers.

Distributing clothing with your company’s name is a good way to create awareness. But common branded clothing such as T-shirts and caps are usually worn by men and may not be appropriate for women. Find out what type of clothing women prefer. Items of interest to women include branded wrap cloths (kitenge, chitenje, lappa, wrapper), head gear/ties and cloth shopping bags.

Community meetings

Community meetings: Organizing community meetings is a good way to raise awareness of your business and the products and services you offer. Make sure that meetings are planned well in advance and that the day and time is convenient for women’s schedules. Provide child care to encourage the participation of women with babies and small children. Make efforts to ensure that women feel comfortable expressing their views.

Branded clothing

Distributing clothing not just along the roadside, but in several areas frequented by different groups e.g. women, youth, etc. Demo signs should be in the local language and use simple language and illustrations.

Demos and field days need to be planned well in advance. Make sure that you publicize these events widely through multiple channels, such as through radio and announcements in churches, mosques, markets, health centers, among others, in order to reach women, youth and men. The day and time for such events should take into consideration women’s schedules. Organizers should provide child care to encourage the participation of women with babies and small children. Efforts should be made to ensure that women feel comfortable expressing their views.

Locate demos not just along the roadside, but in several areas frequented by different groups e.g. women, youth, etc. Demo signs should be in the local language and use simple language and illustrations.

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4.1 Appealing to women customers

In addition to selling products that women want to buy, it is important to make your shop attractive to women so that they want to come to your shop rather than go somewhere else.

Consider providing the following:

- Clean bathroom facilities
- An area where women can breastfeed
- Seats that can be used by parents with small children and the elderly
- Clean drinking water
- Small gifts for children

4.2 Final words

- Consider gender in all aspects of your business to ensure success and increase profits
- Respond to the different needs of women, men and youth and create demand for your products and services from these groups
- Offer options in products and services
- Offer more than just products and services: build relationships, support your community, create a “feel good” effect
- Integrity is EVERYTHING
- Be the shop everyone wants to go to!
References


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