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## **Rural women's participation in producer organizations: An analysis of the barriers that women face and strategies to foster equitable and effective participation**

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### **Abstract**

Over the last several decades, participation in producer organizations has become a key principle of development, enabling people's empowerment, inclusiveness, and facilitating democracy. Producer organizations have become crucial actors to provide services to the rural poor, and women's participation and leadership in producer organizations has become a focus of rural and agricultural development efforts. This review paper aims to document the factors that hinder women's participation in producer organizations. The review identifies several factors as major barriers for women's participation, including: socio-cultural norms; women's double burden and triple roles; women's status, age and previous membership in organizations; access to assets and resources; educational level; organizations' rules of entry, and; legal and policy environment. The paper also provides a review of lessons and good practice that can be applied by Agricultural Research for Development institutions. The review identified strategies for strengthening women's participation in producer organizations at the individual/household, community/producer organization, and policy level. The review found that at the individual/household level, strategies to improve individual capabilities and intra-household relations were crucial for promoting women's participation and leadership in producer organizations. Similarly, at the producer organizational level strategies to ensure that the structures and governance mechanisms are more gender sensitive, and promote women's inclusion, are crucial. Equally important are policies for promoting gender-sensitive producer organizations and specific measures geared at promoting women's active participation in producers' organizations.

**Key words:** Rural women, participation, producer organizations, agriculture

### **Introduction**

Formal and informal producer organizations can help rural communities to overcome poverty and facilitate their access to resources, assets, markets and services. In their review of various good practice case studies, Herbel *et al.*, (2012) found that with capacity development and innovation, producer organizations can provide an array of services to smallholder farmers, ranging from enhancing access to and management of natural resources, accessing input and output markets, improving access to information and knowledge and facilitating small producers' participation in policy-making.

Nevertheless, significant sections of communities, such as women, may be either excluded or poorly represented in producer organizations. One reason for this exclusion may be because the organizations' bylaws often hamper membership thereby leading to ineffective or weak participation. Rural women almost everywhere face more constraints than men in participating in producer organizations because they lack the time and have limited mobility due to cultural norms, domestic and reproductive household tasks (FAO, 2011). The report further argues that this "gender gap" in access to producer organizations hinders women's productivity and reduces their contributions to the agricultural sector and to the achievement of broader economic and social development goals.

This paper analyzes the factors that hinder women's participation in producer organizations, with the aim of identifying and documenting good practice in strengthening women's participation that can be applied by agricultural research and development institutions. The paper addresses the following research questions: Why is the participation of women in rural organizations important? Which factors hinder women's participation in producer organizations? What lessons and good practice guidelines/principles can be applied by Agricultural Research for Development (ARD) institutions?

## Literature review

### Important role of producer organizations

Recent estimates indicate that about 795 million people are undernourished globally, or around one in eight people in the world are suffering from chronic hunger (FAO, IFAD, and WFP 2015). According to the Rural Poverty Portal data, at least 70 percent of the world's poor people live in rural areas and a large proportion of the poor and hungry are children and young people. Rural poverty is multidimensional and it is the consequence of deprivations and inequalities in the economic, social and political spheres (Alkire, *et al.*, 2015). These dimensions include inequalities in access to and control over assets and productive resources, lack of education and skills development, ill health and malnutrition, social and cultural norms, among others. Inequalities can include a variety of socio-economic and political exclusions, and can contribute to poverty by creating and/or perpetuating disadvantages that limit people's opportunities to improve their livelihood, as well as their capabilities to participate in and benefit from development (Grusky and Kanbur, 2006).

The World Development Report (World Bank, 2008) argued for the important role of Agriculture as an engine of economic growth, as well as a key driver of development and poverty reduction. This resulted in an increase in initiatives seeking to revitalize agriculture in global and national contexts. The interest in promoting agriculture as an engine of growth has also brought attention to producer organizations and the role they can play in reducing inequalities and fostering rural development. For instance, governments and development partners alike now see producer organizations as a useful mechanism for reducing poverty and improving small producer livelihoods (Oxfam 2013). Other studies have argued that producer organizations can help small scale producers and marginalized groups to influence policy making and to surmount the major constraints they experience. For example, Herbel *et al.*, (2012) carried out a review of good practices in producer organizations and rural institutions and found that producer organizations can provide an array of services ranging from enhancing access to and management of natural resources, accessing input and output markets, improving access to information and knowledge and facilitating small producers' participation in policy-making. In addition, they found that producer organizations can help members to reduce transaction costs, increase rural producers' access to natural resources and inputs and, strengthen collective action.

However, to meet the needs and priorities of its members, both men and women need to be active participants in building and shaping producer organizations. Evidence however shows that producer organizations often do not represent the interests of the most marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Various studies have found that women and youth often remain excluded from participation and leadership roles, decision-making processes and services (Agarwal, 2001; Gotschi *et al.*, 2009; Tanwir and Safdar, 2013). Other evidence suggests that in many instances producer organizations, cooperatives, workers' unions and out grower schemes are generally controlled and managed by men (Gotschi *et al.*, 2009). With women

excluded, organizations are shaped in a way that overlooks female interests, priorities and needs.

### **Women's participation in producer organizations**

Women's active participation at various levels within producer organizations has been found to positively contribute to different development outcomes. In terms of organizational performance, greater gender equality in membership and participation has been found to improve members' collaboration, increase groups' collective benefits and knowledge, as well as decrease the level of conflict and improve the organization's outcomes (Agarwal, 2001; Meinzen-Dick And Zwartevann, 1998; Coleman & Mwangi 2012; Pandolfelli er al., 2005, Westermann *et al.*, 2005). Several authors (Coleman and Mwangi , 2012; Sultana & Thompson, 2008; Agarwal 2001), have documented that the improved participation of women in user groups can lead to better governance practices, thereby improving the management and conservation of natural resources. For instance, it has been demonstrated that when women are empowered to participate in decision making committees in community forest institutions, this leads to improved forest governance and resource sustainability (Agarwal et al., 2006).

Equitable participation by women and men can also translate into greater benefits for members and their families. Agarwal (2001) found that in order for producer organizations to perform better and equally share the benefits, it is important that both men and women are empowered to participate in meetings, activities and decision-making. Most importantly, there is evidence that when women are enabled to actively participate in producer organizations and to access income and benefits, it can have positive spillover effects at the household level. In Nicaragua, for example, Bacon, (2010) found that the percentage of primary-school aged children that attended class was higher for mothers who participated in a cooperative compared to that of children whose mothers did not participate in the cooperative. An FAO study (FAO, 2016) shows that the women members of the Mzuzu Coffee Planters Cooperative in Malawi have been enabled to fulfill 'their' roles, such as clothing children, putting food on the table, and paying school fees, more easily. It also enabled them to take on 'male' expenditure responsibilities such as improving housing.

### **Factors affecting women's participation in producer organizations**

The participation of men and women members in producer organizations are conditioned by economic, social and cultural factors, including their access to natural and other productive resources. Several authors (Bacon, 2010; IFAD, 2010; Oxfam, 2013; Gotschi *et al.*, 2009; Meinzen-Dick and Zwartevann, 1998; Coleman and Mwangi, 2012; Agarwal, 2001) have analyzed the factors affecting women's participation in producer organizations and identified major barriers for women's participation. These include: socio-cultural norms and gender perceptions; women's double burden and triple roles; women's status, age and previous membership in an organization; access to assets and resources; organizations' rules of entry; legal and policy environment; women's preferences and motivations; and women's education, training and access to information. These are summarized in Table 1 and discussed in detail below.

**Table 1: Factors affecting women's participation in producer organizations**

Determinant/Factor	Definition
Socio-cultural norms and perceptions	Refer to beliefs about men's and women's capabilities and skills, it also refers to the norms that guide what public spaces men and women have access to, how they should behave in those spaces
Time burden	Refers to the availability of time that women's can dedicate to producer organizations.
Status, age and previous membership in an organization	The social status is determined by age, marital status, economic wealth, and caste, amongst others.
Access to assets and resources	Refer to men's and women's access to and control over resources, both physical and social, that affect their status in the community
Rules of entry	Refer to membership criteria for producer organizations. These may be set by individual associations or by government policies
Legal and policy environment	Refer to the laws and policies that govern membership in producer organizations, which are often gender-blind
Preferences and Motivations	Refer to men and women's preferences, which in turn determine their motivation for joining rural organizations
Education, Training and access to information	Refers to the level of literacy and to leadership skills. It also refers to education about gender equality.

### ***Socio-cultural barriers***

Evidence suggests that social and cultural norms significantly influence the type and level of participation women may have in producer organizations. Traditional gender roles in many cultures associate men with public sphere, while women's role tends to be seen as within the domestic sphere. Women are seen as responsible for childcare and housework, including fuel wood and water collection, while men are seen as responsible for productive activities and income generation (FAO 2010-11; Agarwal, 2001; Pandolfelli *et al.*, 2007; Westermann *et al.*, 2005; Tanwir and Safdar, 2013). Therefore, women might be discouraged from participating in the public sphere and thereby in producer organizations (Massolo, 2007; Meinzen-Dick and Zwarteveen, 1998). Traditionally, in many Latin American countries, women are registered as housewives (*amas de casa*) rather than producers in their identity cards, which hinder the possibility to become members of producer organizations.

Another socio-cultural barrier that hinders women's participation and particularly leadership in producer organizations is the frequent perception that men are better leaders. Women are meanwhile perceived as lacking the knowledge or self-esteem to lead (Manfre and Rubin, 2012). Women are often depicted as 'housewives', not capable of making their own voices heard in public settings, and are likely be represented by their husbands in public spheres. Married women's mobility might be restricted in some contexts (Manfre and Rubin 2012, Oxfam 2013, Gotchi *et al.*, 2009). For instance, in Mozambique, married women tend to have less possibility to engage in activities outside the household, and in many instances cannot participate in groups without the permission of their husbands (Gotschi *et al.*, 2009). This is especially true in contexts where it is not socially acceptable for women to interact with men



who are external to the family, such as societies which practice female seclusion and with low levels of female education.

### ***Women's double burden and triple roles***

Evidence shows that rural women spend a significant amount of their time on reproductive and household activities, increasing their daily hours of work (productive and reproductive, paid and unpaid) in comparison to men. Time-use surveys across a wide range of countries estimate that women provide 85–90 percent of the total household time spent on childcare, water and food collection, cooking and other care activities (FAO 2011; FAO 2015). Additionally, child bearing and breastfeeding responsibilities take up women's time (Tanwir and Safdar, 2013). As a result, the labor burden of rural women exceeds that of men, a significant proportion of which is unpaid household responsibilities related to preparing food and collecting fuel wood and water (FAO 2011; FAO 2015).

This multiplicity of roles reduces women's time that would be available for participation in producer organizations. As a result, female members may not be able to attend meetings nor take advantage of related training or extension opportunities because they simply do not have time (Tanwir and Safdar, 2013) and the opportunity costs of participating in a producer organization may be too high (IFAD, 2011). Although the proportion of time allocated between their various responsibilities varies across and within regions, as well as across different types of households, it is estimated that on average, most women work for approximately 16 hours a day (Carr and Hartl, 2010; Tanwir and Safdar, 2013). Opportunities to participate in producer organizations are therefore severely limited, and in these circumstances, participation would add to the work burden.

### ***Age, status, and previous membership in other organizations***

Age, social status and previous experience in organizations are the other factors that can affect women's participation in producer organizations. Although these factors are analyzed separately, they are often inter-linked, in the sense that they all contribute to a women's self-perception and level of confidence. The way in which these factors influence female participation varies across different contexts. Several studies found that older women from wealthier households tend to participate more in producer organizations (Warner *et al.*, 1997; Oxfam, 2013; Agarwal, 2001). This was arguably due to better access to assets and resources by these women. Another study found that female heads of households were more likely to actively participate and speak freely in producer organizations compared to women in male headed households (Manfre and Rubin, 2012). While the impact of marital status on participation varies from context to context, it is an important category of analysis in understanding women's role in producer organizations. Similarly, women participating in producer organizations are likely to have had previous experience in organizing, often in informal organizations. They also found that women joining and actively participating in producer organizations often have had previous memberships in other groups, and have built a certain level of confidence and experience (Oxfam, 2013 and Warner *et al.*, 1997).

When discussing gender issues, literature and development actors tend to conceptually distinguish men and women as two separate categories, however, neither of the two is a homogenous group. Heterogeneity can be found across the levels of economic status, social status, marital status, ethnicity, age, religion etc. (Agarwal, 2000). Whitehead, (1984), analyzed the cultural factors that can divide women and demonstrated that women are not a homogenous category and their solidarity is not a given. Divergences between women can raise the social pressure that some women exercise on others (mothers and mothers-in-law

over daughters and daughters-in-law). Conflicts can also arise between women of different castes and backgrounds.

Similarly, Stuart (2007), in his case study on mixed and women-only cooperatives in rural India, found that the groups that women formed to establish the cooperatives, reflected the existing caste structure. Although the rules of the cooperatives did ensure that the cooperatives' membership positions were open to people of all castes, the data collected showed that most of the group presidents were from a higher-caste. Rural cooperatives operate in and reflect the context of a rural social structure in which caste and gender played a powerful role in determining how people participate.

### ***Access to assets and resources, rules of entry and requirements***

FAO (2011) provides evidence that women control less land, use fewer inputs and have less access to extension services compared to men. This limited access to assets, land and income may decrease women's bargaining power in and outside the household and, therefore, hinder their possibilities to join producer organizations, especially when membership rules require asset ownership such as land, or cash (Agarwal, 2001; Wiig, 2013; Pandolfelli *et al.*, 2007).

Evidence shows that access to land and income can affect women's participation in producer organizations. For example, membership in many producer organizations requires land for cultivation or cash to pay membership fees, which women often lack. Meinzen-Dick and Zwarteveen (1998) found that in Sri Lanka, only formal land owners can become members of water users' associations. Since men tend to have the legal rights over land, most women are not eligible for membership. In addition, more recent evidence corroborates these earlier findings and demonstrates that a lack of income and economic empowerment can affect women's self-confidence and prevent them from obtaining leadership positions in producer organizations (Ouattara *et al.*, 2010).

A study carried out in Ghana found that the requirement for entering a mango out-grower scheme was a bag of maize, a man's crop, which limited women's ability to register with the company as out-growers (FAO, 2013a). The study also found that even when women could obtain a bag of maize they were often more reluctant to relinquish it, since maize is a local staple crop and women were more concerned with household food security activities. Although this last example refers to the implementation of out-grower schemes, these findings can be applied to producer organizations, since many organizations do adopt similar rules of entry. In Mozambique, when only one member per household was allowed to participate in a producer organization, the husband was more likely to participate than the wife, limiting women's participation (Gotschi *et al.*, 2009).

### ***Preferences and motivation for participation***

Women and men have different interests that can influence their willingness to participate in producer organizations (Pandolfelli *et al.*, 2007). Depending on women's preferences, they might prefer to join producer organizations that place more emphasis on food self-sufficiency, and may not be as interested in joining producer organizations focused on cash crops (IFAD, 2010).

As noted by Kariuki and Place (2005), men and women may be part of the same producer organization but their motivation for joining and the extent of their participation may differ substantially. Men and women have different priorities, which influence their decision to join groups. Kariuki and Place (2005) found that access to markets and social insurance are the

main reason why men join groups while for women, social insurance and building household assets are the primary reasons why they join groups. In addition, they found that men are more interested in joining groups that have an element of commercialization and marketing. Agarwal's (2000; 2001) work on forest user groups equally demonstrated that men are more likely to be motivated by income and may promote strict controls on forest areas to encourage rapid regeneration of mainly "cash trees" that they can sell. In addition to income, women, on the other hand, also prefer to collect fuel and other forest resources from forests and may be less inclined to prioritize cash trees. This does not mean that women are not interested in activities that generate an income, but it does show that women's preferences are also influenced by their many roles including food provisioning.

When the primary focus of a producer organization is on promoting crops, which are traditionally controlled by men, women might be more reluctant to participate in farmers groups, as they might not see their interest being addressed (FAO, 2011).

### ***Education, training and access to information***

Multiple studies have suggested that lack of education opportunities and training can negatively influence women's self-confidence, and therefore, their participation in producer organizations. This is because they may fear that their views will not be fairly considered (Ouattara *et al.*, 2010; Coleman and Mwangi, 2012).

Coleman and Mwangi (2012) used a probability model to assess women's participation in forestry groups across four countries (Bolivia, Kenya, Mexico, Uganda) and they found that education (measured by years of schooling) significantly affects women's participation in producer organizations. The results showed that the probability of participating in producer organizations and attending meetings increased with the number of schooling years a woman had. The study argues that this is largely due to education building skills and confidence of women. Untrained and illiterate women are likely to experience difficulties in speaking in public and thus lack authority and recognition (Agarwal, 1997b), elements that are fundamental in order to be a more active member in the group. In their analysis of the factors that influence gender and political participation in Latin America, Desposato and Norrander (2009) also found that male education can influence attitudes towards gender roles and increase acceptance of women's ability to represent household interests even in the public sphere.

Without being members, women usually hear little of what transpires in producer organizations' meetings (Agarwal, 2001), and typically receive little information on what happens in the meetings from their husbands. Therefore, lack of access to information is also an important constraint for women's participation in producer organizations.

### ***Legal, policy and institutional environment***

Legal, policy and institutional structures shape the environment in which producer organizations are created and influence the conditions and ways in which they operate (Herbel *et al.*, 2012, Oxfam 2013). The policy and regulatory framework in a given context can, therefore, facilitate or hinder women's participation and leadership in producer organizations.

When policies and legislation that address issues such as access to land and productive resources discriminate against women, these policies can hamper women's participation in producer organizations. For example, limited access to land due to prevailing conditions



under customary law may privilege male access to natural resources, thus undermining access to land by women (FAO, 2010). As mentioned in the previous section, this can hinder their participation in situations where access to land is crucial for joining producer organizations.

Evidence from Tanzania shows that when the primary focus by government policy was on promoting export crops, which is an area where women are less represented, women were less likely to participate in farmers groups (FAO, 2010). In Uganda, women may still encounter constraints in joining producer organizations despite the existence of a gender sensitive national policy and legal framework. This was the case when gender equality was not included in the producer organizations bylaws and other policy instruments (Najjingo and Seguya, 2004).

### **Strategies for strengthening women's participation in producer organizations**

Following the discussion on barriers of female participation, this section of the review paper focuses on strategies to foster the effective participation and leadership of women in producer organizations. The section reviews strategies at the individual/household, community/producer organization, and policy level.

At the individual/household level, it will highlight strategies that endeavor to improve individual capabilities and intra-household relations thereby generating spill-over effects that positively contribute to promoting women's participation and leadership in producer organizations. At the community/producer level, it will illustrate strategies adopted by producer organizations to ensure that their structures and governance mechanisms are more gender sensitive, promote women's inclusion and enhance their leadership roles. At the policy level, it will analyze measures that encourage women's participation and leadership in producer organizations by creating a more gender-sensitive and enabling environment.

#### ***Strategies at the individual and household/intra-household level***

This section reviews strategies at the individual and household level, and focuses on those that influence gender relations in the household, reduce women's work burden, and strengthen women's capacity.

##### ***Changing relations between men and women***

Women's bargaining power depends on various factors, including access to resources, the extent of personal agency and support of family members (Farnworth, 2012). Interventions that focus on increasing women's participation in producer organization as well as their leadership capacity may also have a positive spill-over effect on women's bargaining-power within the household.

The "household methodologies" are approaches that have been applied to enable all household members to jointly plan and analyze intra-household relations (Farnworth, 2012). These approaches aim to promote the understanding that unequal power relations between women and men result in failures to make the best decisions possible, and thus contribute significantly to poverty (Farnworth, 2012). Household methodologies offer a tested approach for challenging gender relations within the household, and have proven to not only renegotiate household responsibilities, but also to reduce gender-based violence, increase productivity, as well as improved income and food security (IFAD 2014c). The methodology facilitates the formation of a 'family vision' that enables the family to conceptualize and work towards a shared, time-bound goal in relation to the improvement of their livelihoods.

The experience of the cooperative Bukonzo Joint in Uganda, which piloted the approach in the coffee value-chain, is notable in this regard. The methodology transformed the perception of coffee from a male crop to a family crop (Baluku *et al.*, 2009). Therefore, women gained better control over coffee production and marketing, and thus were more empowered within the coffee cooperative. The methodology promoted improved collaboration within coffee producer families, as well as stimulated a re-negotiation of roles and responsibilities within the household, e.g. by encouraging men to take on new responsibilities in both farming and domestic work. It also led to an expanded membership base of the cooperative, as well as improved the quality and quantity of coffee (Baluku *et al.*, 2009).

#### *Reducing women's work burden*

The triple roles of women are a key constraint to women's access to producer organizations because of women's time poverty. Equally, participation in producer organizations can further increase women's workload. This might not be immediately visible, as female extended family members or younger female members (daughters) tend to take over house and care work (CRS Madagascar, 2012).

Tanwir and Safdar (2013) analyzed various strategies that had been applied by IFAD development projects to successfully alleviate women's work burden and enhance women's participation and empowerment. The review of projects found that the introduction of culturally appropriate, labor-saving technologies that reduce women's time and energy burdens were an important means of ensuring their empowerment and participation. Strategies applied by successful IFAD projects included: women-friendly agricultural tools (in the Gambia); water sources located close to homes, improved cooking stoves (in West Africa, Guatemala), Improvement in roads (in Bangladesh and Peru); changing gender relations and promoting shared decision-making (in Zambia), and; providing child care. Some producer organizations provide child-care services to female members, as well as to female relatives of male members to facilitate women's participation organization's activities including training. For example, Ghana's Kuapa Kokoo, a cocoa-growing co-operative, invests part of the premium from fair trade in labor-saving initiatives. These include child-care facilities, access to free medical services, labor saving processing equipment, such as millers and machines for cracking palm kernels (Solidaridad, 2009).

#### *Strengthening women's capacity and leadership skills*

Building women's capacity, especially leadership skills, is crucial to build women's self-confidence. Capacity development enables women to access information about existing producer organizations and to become members, and to participate more actively in producer organizations activities as well as decision making processes.

In 2010 IFAD held a Special Session on Promoting Women's Leadership in farmers' and Rural Producers' Organizations which was attended by over 60 participants from Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. Participants agreed that women need to acquire entrepreneurial and marketing skills, confidence building, leadership skills, negotiation skills, as well as a solid understanding of policy issues that affect them as farmers. Key recommendations emerging from the conference were that capacity development should be targeted to better match women's needs and that it should include farmer-to-farmer exchange and learning.

The *Self-Employed Women's Association* of India (SEWA) Academy is an exceptional example of an organization that has designed locally adapted leadership skills training to

build women's capacity and support them in their role as leaders and decision-makers. It is a trade union of poor, self-employed women workers. The SEWA Academy, created in 1991, is the organizational wing responsible for members' education (including literacy), capacity building and leadership training. SEWA's training programs aim to develop women's self-confidence and leadership, as well as their technical and managerial capacity. SEWA follows an interactive training approach to prepare them for real life situations. Egalitarianism, participation and self-reliance form the values underpinning the content of the training. The overall aim is to contribute to the critical mass of active women citizens, who challenge mainstream patriarchal and hierarchical norms within society and take over leadership roles (Chen, 2006).

FAO's Dimitra peer-to-peer training approach, which has helped to foster women's active participation in a range of rural organizations, is another successful example (FAO 2013b). Dimitra Community Listeners' Clubs is a participatory information and communication project which contributes to improving the visibility of rural populations, and women in particular. Dimitra applies the approach of role models for women as effective drivers of participation. Women are inspired to explore new roles, including leadership and decision-making outside conventional norms. This approach has proven to positively impact on self-confidence, participation and the ability to self-organize (FAO 2013b).

### ***Strategies at the producer organization level***

This section provides a review of strategies that have been applied at the organizational level. The section is also concerned with identifying strategies for creating gender sensitive producer organizations. In this paper, gender sensitive producer organizations refer to those organizations in which the rules, structures and practices ensure that women and men can equally participate in and benefit from the organizations' services, networks and activities (FAO 2013c; FAO 2013d).

#### ***Rules of membership and entrance***

Rules of membership in producer organizations are a key constraint to women's participation, as illustrated in part one of the paper. Changing the membership rules can therefore enable women's access to producer organizations, as well as organization's activities, services, resources and networks. The strategies below highlight some good examples that have made membership rules more gender-friendly.

One strategy that has been applied to increase women's participation in producer organizations is to base group membership on an individual basis rather than a household. As explained previously, when membership is limited to one person per household, then it is often taken by a man, or conversely, restricting membership to household heads or one member per household is likely to disadvantage women. There are examples of how producer organizations have changed membership rules to address this. For example, the National Smallholder Farmers' Association of Malawi (NASFAM) bases membership on an individual instead of a household (FAO forthcoming 2016). As a result, several members from the same household are allowed to join. Evidence from a study in Ethiopia also found that cooperatives that allowed dual membership by husbands and wives also experienced a rise in female participation (Oxfam 2013). Likewise, forestry groups in India that introduced dual membership had a higher female participation rate than forestry groups that continued to base membership on a household basis (Agarwal, 2001).

There is evidence that linking entrance requirements to what women can actually control may increase participation. Gotschi *et al.* (2009) found that when membership required labor or time investments rather than income contributions, women were more likely to participate. This was particularly the case for women with less control over financial resources (especially in the case of married women) and women who were generally poorer (especially in the case of female-headed households). One example where this is working is in the UDAC Buzi, a division of the National Farmers Union (UNAC) in Mozambique. UDAC bases its membership on reciprocal exchange of labor. As a result, it is better able to overcome women's constraints and has had higher numbers of female memberships (Gotschi *et al.* 2009).

Another important strategy is lowering of membership fees and creating financial incentives for women members. Financial discounts and incentives are likely to increase female membership in producer organizations. The Bukonzo Joint Cooperative in Uganda, for instance, increased the level of female membership, through offering a reduced membership fees for women. In addition, a higher share (60 percent) of the cooperative dividends was offered to female members, which motivated many men to bring their spouses into the organization (Farnworth 2011).

It is important to note that the strategies listed above merely serve to bring women into a mixed organization. They do not automatically guarantee or encourage women's active participation, neither do they facilitate women's access to leadership positions within the organization.

#### *Changing organizational governance and structures*

Specific measures can be taken to create more gender equitable organizational governance structures within mixed producer organizations.

Quotas have been used to help establish the necessary critical mass of women as members and leaders to bring about change in policy and institutional culture of a producer organization. Quotas are typically implemented by mixed organizations, when they intend to increase the number of a category of members, often women. This can stem from a genuine commitment to strengthening the gender focus of the organization, but also from a process of conforming to donor or government policy. There is consensus that quotas can successfully increase women's participation. However, on their own, quotas are not sufficient conditions for women to exercise leadership in farmers' organizations (IFAD, 2010). The authors also argue that quotas need to be accompanied by tools, charters, and bylaws as well as monitoring systems, and that economic empowerment and capacity building are essential complements to any quota system. When establishing quotas it is important to establish quotas for participation of male and female members across all activities and structures of the organizations, including leadership positions.

On the one hand, quotas may reduce gender inequalities only on the surface, i.e. by increasing the proportion of women relative to men, and making them more visible in terms of numbers, and yet may not increase the influence and decision making power of women's roles within the organization (Gotschi *et al.*, 2009). Quotas as such can change numbers, but may not automatically change power relations. Various authors have proposed that quotas need to take into account women's capacity as leaders, and should be accompanied by capacity building to ensure women's voices do not go unheard (Gotschi *et al.*, 2009; Oxfam, 2010; Ouattara *et al.*, 2010; IFAD, 2010). Producer organizations in El Salvador offer a good

example of successful quota implementation. Through quotas, incentives and training, producer organizations have included women in leadership and managerial roles. This has not only given the opportunity to young rural women to improve their livelihoods but has also contributed to better organizational performance overall (Gallina 2010).

The Cooperative Bukonzo Joint in Uganda also introduced quotas on leadership positions, which required that three out of five committee members and six out of nine executive board members must be female members of the cooperative (Farnworth 2012). This measure, along with other incentives (i.e. reduced membership fees and higher share of the cooperative dividends for women, the provision of pro-women services etc.) have successfully enhanced women's participation as both members and leaders. Additionally, a recent report (Twin, 2013) shows that when women formed their own committees, some of which were outside the organizational structure, it offered women a higher level of decision-making. This is because their voices could be officially represented at a board level, and they were usually allocated some of the annual budget. As a result, the majority of producer organizations assessed in the report have introduced quotas for female representation on boards and are actively encouraging more women to join.

#### *Promoting and protecting women products and by-products*

The promotion, protection and branding of women products is an important strategy to increase female participation and benefits within a producer organization. Examples include the creation of a separate label for women's products which can give women greater recognition for their work, and develop a sense of pride and ownership of their products. In Peru, a male-dominated coffee producer organization has formed the women's group Café Femenino, which has been producing organic coffee under its own label since 2004. This women group is supplying large coffee retailers who are eager to meet consumer demands of social responsibility (Oxfam 2013). This strategy has been shown to strengthen women's sense of confidence and status within the organization, and women can gain a clearer sense of identity within the organization in terms of the role they play and the products they control. As a result, women may exert a bigger influence in decision-making processes in mixed meetings. In the Café Femenino program in Guatemala, for example, women have started to be elected to the Board of Directors (Oxfam, 2013).

#### *Building the institutional capacity to ensure long-term gender-sensitive change*

Various organization have been developing tools and methodologies for strengthening the institutional capacity of producer organizations to ensure that gender goals can be achieved and sustained in the long run. An important element of these approaches is the inter-linkages between actions at the individual, organizational and policy levels to improve the capacity of producer organizations.

FAO's CoOPequity approach focuses on strengthening the organizational capacity of producer organizations in governance, gender equality, economic performance, market access and the capacity to influence the development of agricultural policies (FAO, 2013c). CoOPequity's approach stresses the need to link interventions at all levels (individual, organizational and policy) thereby creating an enabling environment. The approach includes training activities designed and conducted according to the needs, priorities and strategies as identified by the producer organizations. The focus is on strengthening governance, gender equality, economic performance, market access and the capacity of producer organizations to influence the development of agricultural policies. Through a series of capacity development activities, CoOPequity strengthens women and men producers within their producer



organizations to play a more active role in their organizations (FAO, 2013d). Learning events and exchange visits between producers from different producer organizations are organized to raise awareness on the importance of addressing gender issues in organizational development processes and learn how to promote effective change (FAO, 2013d).

### **Creating an enabling policy environment**

Governments play an important role in creating the enabling environment so that effective, inclusive and gender equitable producer organizations can flourish and act as important contributors to poverty reduction and the achievement of food security.

As highlighted in the previous section, the policy context does not always facilitate and in other instances may even hinder women's participation and leadership producer organizations. An enabling environment is gender sensitive when policies and legislation that directly or indirectly affect and influence those organizations recognize that women and men from various social groups have differentiated roles and priorities; and therefore, adopt the appropriate measures so that all rural women and men can participate in, and benefit from emerging opportunities (FAO, 2011). Likewise, the strategies and mechanisms to implement and monitor these policies also have to take gender into account.

Within this context, this section reviews evidence of measures that have been implemented to create an enabling environment for fostering women's participation and leadership in producer organizations. The measures listed here fall into the following three areas: gender-sensitive organizational development; change in discriminatory laws and agricultural policies; and revision in family and land laws.

#### *Policies for promoting gender-sensitive producer organizations*

There are good examples of countries that have adopted specific measures geared at promoting women's active participation in producers' organizations:

The Philippines has introduced specific measures to promote gender equality at the cooperative level. Cooperatives in the country are regulated by the Cooperative Development Authority and the Cooperative Code of 2008. The Cooperative Development Authority is responsible for formulating, adopting and implementing integrated and comprehensive plans and programs on cooperative development consistent with the national policy on cooperatives and the overall socioeconomic development plans of the government. A set of guidelines for mainstreaming gender and development in cooperatives have been recently adopted by the Cooperative Development Authority as a strategy to help to close the existing gender gap in cooperative membership and decision-making. The guidelines require the definition of a gender policy, the approval of a plan of action with a clear budget allocation, and the establishment of accountability and monitoring mechanisms (Leonard, *et al.*, 2015). In addition, eight gender resource centers have been established nationwide, with a pool of gender experts to provide support to government units and to monitor the implementation of the government's gender and agriculture development policies.

Similarly, in 2009 the Government of Uganda approved the first cooperative development policy since the countries' independence in 1962 (ILO, undated). The policy seeks to strengthen cooperatives capacity to respond to the needs of male and female members. The policy aims to promote equal representation of men and women in cooperatives. It promotes the creation of opportunities for equal participation in cooperatives' activities. Through

entrepreneurship development, promoting gender balance and gender mainstreaming, as well as sensitizing cooperatives on gender specific concerns in the conduct of cooperatives' business. The policy states that a vibrant and prosperous cooperative movement can only be achieved if cooperatives are gender-responsive.

In another example, the Cooperative Reform and Modernization Program (Government of Tanzania 2005) in Tanzania identified gender as a key problematic issue hampering the progress of cooperatives to fulfill members' economic and social needs. A key measurement of the Cooperative Reform and Modernization Program is the implementation of gender sensitization programs and skill training for cooperative members and support workers to address the challenge of gender imbalance in cooperative membership and leadership. The aim of the training is to strengthen women's role in cooperative activities, in order to transform cooperatives into truly member-driven democratic institutions. The program has also called for more women-only-cooperatives, which would offer an ideal platform for women to learn leadership skills and to build self-confidence.

#### *Reforms in discriminatory laws and practices*

Agricultural policies strongly influence the engagement of women in productive activities and their participation in producer organizations. In Zambia and Malawi, women have benefited from a government strategy to move away from the "green revolution" technologies (hybrid maize) towards traditional "female" crops (roots, tubers and legumes). This is part of the commitment of these governments to mainstream gender into agricultural policy. This shift has arguably facilitated the entry of women into farmers' organizations, and thus enabled women to gain access to finance, services, networks and logistical support in marketing offered by these organizations (Charman, 2008).

In El Salvador, changing the occupation of women as written on their identity cards from housewives (amas de casa), to producers, has enabled these women to acquire formal membership in the local Associations for Communal Development (ADESCOS). Previously, the occupation noted on identity cards formed a legal obstacle to women's participation in these local associations (Vargas-Lundius and Ypeij, 2007).

Family and land laws have a significant impact on women's participation in producer organizations, since they regulate asset ownership, which in many instances is a requirement for membership. The revision of Ethiopia's Family Code in 2000 gave equal rights to women and men in terms of marriage, inheritance, and property (Kumar and Quisumbing 2012). As a result, the land registration process started to have joint certification of spouses in most rural areas, and has given greater power to women to participate in community-based decision-making (Kumar and Quisumbing 2012). These revisions also seem likely to have a positive impact on women's ability to fulfill membership requirements and join producer organizations.

Similarly, Zambia has revised the inheritance law, granting women the right to inherit their husbands land and property. In many areas in Zambia, ethnic groups follow a matrilineal inheritance system, whereby a man's property is distributed among his sisters' children, instead of his own offspring and spouse after his death (Charman, 2008). This system often caused incidents of 'property grabbing', that is, the relatives of a deceased man would acquire his assets leaving his widow and children destitute. The revised law stipulates that the property and land is to be shared among a deceased widow, parents or siblings, and at least

half of his property is transferred to his children (Charman 2008). More property and secure ownership rights can equally improve women's likelihood to acquire membership in producer organizations.

### Lessons and good practice for promoting women's participation in producer organizations

From the review of the "strategies", these are some key recommendations for enhancing women's participation in producer organizations that are summarized in Table 2.

- Addressing gender-inequalities at the household level, by adopting family-based methodologies and approaches that seek to change relations between men and women. Increasing women's bargaining power within the household is a key entry point for increasing women's participation in producer organization as well as their leadership capacity.
- Increasing access to resources and assets such as land and income which are critical for participating in producer organizations can enhance women's participation. On the other hand, changing entrance requirements to correspond to assets and resources that women can actually control may increase participation.

**Table 2: Summary of strategies for strengthening women's participation in producer organizations**

Individual/household	Community/producer organization	Policy
<p><b>Capacity development for</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Better access to information on markets, networks, products, seeds, fertilizer, materials etc.</li> <li>• Active participation in Producer Organizations</li> <li>• Increase self-confidence</li> <li>• Improve leadership skills</li> </ul> <p><b>Increase access to assets and resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interventions that increase access to productive resources (seeds, fertilizer), markets, land, etc.</li> <li>• Promote asset-building for women</li> </ul> <p><b>Reduce women's work burden accordingly</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that participation in POs does not add to work burden</li> <li>• Provide child-care services and well-targeted labor-saving technologies</li> <li>• Stimulate positive discussion around renegotiating the roles and responsibilities within the household towards greater collaboration, sharing and equity</li> </ul>	<p><b>Change rules of membership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Base membership on individual rather than household level</li> <li>• Linking entrance requirements to assets women control</li> <li>• Lower membership fees and financial incentives for women</li> </ul> <p><b>Change organizational Governance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduce realistic quotas at all organizational levels</li> <li>• Create support and protect women's own product or by-products (also through branding)</li> <li>• Adapt meeting times, location and agenda</li> </ul> <p><b>Build institutional capacity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct gender analysis</li> <li>• Create gender awareness</li> <li>• Encourage gender-sensitive policies and plans</li> </ul>	<p><b>Introduce direct Policies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote gender equality at the cooperative level</li> <li>• Train cooperatives in gender mainstreaming</li> <li>• Revise gender-discriminatory laws</li> </ul> <p><b>Introduce indirect Policies</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide labor-saving technology</li> <li>• Changing agricultural policies</li> <li>• Revise family and land laws</li> </ul>

- The triple roles of women are a key constraint to women's access to producer organizations because of their time poverty. Therefore, providing labor-saving technologies, access to free medical services and child-care services to female members, as well as to female relatives of male members can facilitate women's participation organization's activities including training.
- Building women's capacity, especially in leadership skills, is crucial to build women's self-confidence. This is important for enabling women to access information about existing producer organizations, become active members and leaders, and to participate more actively in producer organizations activities as well as decision making processes.
- Specific measures can be adopted to create more gender equitable organizational governance and structures. This includes the establishments of quotas to help establish the necessary critical mass of women as members and leaders. This is important for enhancing women's voice in producer organizations.
- Finally, governments can play an important role by creating the enabling environment gender equitable producer organizations. This means that policies and legislation aims to promote equal representation of men and women in producer organizations, and the creation of opportunities for equal participation in organizations activities. This also includes the adoption of specific measures geared at promoting women's active participation in producers' organizations.

### **Conclusion**

This paper aimed to document the major barriers that women face in participating in producer organizations. The paper also reviewed strategies that have been applied at the individual, organizational and policy level to promote women's participation in producer organizations.

The paper argues that women's enhanced participation in producer organizations can lead to several development outcomes (i.e. improved governance and organizational performance, better management of natural resources, improved household well-being). However, despite this evidence and the benefits that more gender-inclusive producer organizations can bring to rural communities and families, multiple barriers still hinder the possibility for women to become members in their own right and access the services and benefits that these organizations can provide.

Some of the most important factors that influence women's ability to participate in producer organizations have been well documented and include, among others; socio-cultural norms and gender perceptions, women's double burden and triple roles; women's status, age and previous membership in an organization; access to assets and resources; organizations' rules of entry, the legal and policy environment, women's preferences and motivations as well as their education, training and access to information.

Challenging existing gender discriminatory norms in organizational structure and governance is a long-term process that requires a holistic approach. Gender discrimination in participation and membership needs to be tackled at multiple institutional levels. This requires the development of multi-pronged strategies that seek to address gender inequalities at the household/individual, community/organization and policy level. Opportunities and entry points need to be identified to enable gender sensitive change at one level to trickle down to other institutional levels.

Finally, it is important to note that identifying the most appropriate strategies requires cultural-sensitivity and attention to the local context. This requires programs to develop a deep understanding of local gender dynamics in order to identify opportunities, incentives and practical options for promoting gender sensitive organizational change. For instance, promoting women's participation in male-dominated organizations might be feasible in some contexts but very difficult in others. In very conservative societies, where women are not expected to talk in front of men, the only viable strategy would be to promote women-only constituencies, often around traditional female activities taking place near the household. However, making mixed producer organizations more gender sensitive might also be difficult, especially when these are associated to high value, often male-controlled crops. These organizations might embed deeply rooted gender discriminatory norms and perceptions, which can make them unsuitable places for women. Changing these norms and perception can be difficult and require a long term perspective.

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