Inclusive agricultural advisory services: vectors of change

ONE OF THE CHALLENGES when it comes to agricultural advisory services is ensuring that gender is taken into account. This article looks back at an experience where gender was taken into account when providing advisory services for family farms in Senegal with regard to the joint management of dairy production, and highlights the challenges that were encountered.

Since 2014, as part of the Asstel project, GRET and the Southwest Association for International Agricultural Development (Association Sud-Ouest pour le Développement International Agricole) have been testing managerial advisory services for family farms (conseil à l’exploitation familiale, or “CEF”) specially designed for dairy farming in the Dagana and Podor departments of northern Senegal. The goal is to help family livestock farms boost their milk production and their income.

This CEF initiative—which includes technical/economic advisory support, a teaching/training programme, and experiments—has provided support for a network of 22 pilot livestock farms (PLF). In four of them (only in the Jeeri zone), women are in charge of dairy production.

Specific roles assigned to everyone. Women in the Jeeri zone are highly involved in milk production, a role they were assigned by tradition. They are in charge of milking and feeding the cows. Some of the women are responsible for testing the milk, monitoring the collection of the milk, selling to the Laiterie du Berger dairy (LdB)—which collects between 1,500 and 2,000 litres of milk a day locally from 600 to 800 livestock farming families in northern Senegal—or selling some or all of the milk (whether processed or unprocessed) at local markets. Women who are registered with LdB as “milk container supervisors” also collect payment for the milk each month and manage orders for concentrated feeds and fodder.

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Male and female advisors. The scheme mobilised a male advisor and a female advisor to advise on livestock farming techniques. It was shown that the advisor’s gender does not affect how advisory services are perceived or adopted. It’s the advisor’s skills and abilities that matter most. Gender diversity also creates a positive image highlighting professional possibilities for girls in the community, who receive very little education.

In order to renew family farms, advisory services must therefore cover the entire family farm and take into account the contributions and needs of everyone—men, women, and young people.