

Inclusive agricultural advisory services: vectors of change

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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.

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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.

In the Waalo zone near the Senegal River, milk is sold exclusively at local markets, and seven PLFs are monitored there. On those farms, it is mainly the men who are in charge of dairy production. The men milk the cows, feed the herd, etc. But on certain PLFs, women are still involved and are in charge of processing and selling the milk at the local market.

The "family advisory services" approach: achievements and challenges. CEF is implemented in accordance with the "family advisory services" approach developed by FONGS and APESS. All members involved in dairy production (contact person for the PLF, person in charge of the herd, people in charge of milking and feeding, herdsman, etc.) are invited to take part in work sessions. Both men and women

participate in the annual review of the milk year, which involves: a global presentation of the technical and financial results for the dairy activity, analysis of strong and weak points from the period under review, and identification of adjustments that should be made in order to boost production in future years.

Thanks to this inclusive approach, women are involved in the decision-making process for dairy: quantifying concentrated feed and fodder needs; measuring a cow's milk potential; managing reproduction within the dairy herd and selecting offspring, etc. One pilot livestock farmer in Boffel says: "*LdB called yesterday to find out how much feed to order. My husband handed me the phone and said that I'm the one who knows how to handle that and who is passing that knowledge down to my children.*"

It is important to note, however, that even with this approach, some decisions – such as leaving for transhumance and selling animals – are not always open for discussion. Often the man decides without discussing with his wife, or without taking her opinion into consideration. A female livestock farmer in Souyéline says: "*Last year, I left for transhumance against my will. I wanted to stay and manage the farm. But if your husband refuses, you follow him. I sold nine animals, and since then the level of milk production has fallen. I'll never go again, and my husband understands now.*" A male livestock farmer in Fourarat says: "*I'm the one who decides when to sell members of the herd, and I just inform my wife.*" Those statements reveal the challenges faced when it comes to taking gender into account in advisory services for family farms where roles are firmly rooted.

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. ■