



# Creating Gender-Responsive Agricultural Development Programs

**An Orientation Document**

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BILL & MELINDA  
GATES *foundation*

**“Poor farmers are not a problem to be solved; they are the best answer for a world that is fighting hunger and poverty, and trying to feed a growing population.” —Bill Gates**



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# **The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's work in agricultural development helps small farmers improve their lives.**

We are a grantmaking and advocacy organization—  
we achieve impact by working through our grantees  
and partners.



**He is our client.**



**He is our client.**



**And so is she.**



Together they are responsible for the food security of the world's poorest families.

While she plays a major role in food production, often only her husband or father has access to productive agricultural resources (like seeds or land) or benefits from income earned on the farm.

**Ignoring a woman's role in agriculture has consequences for the success of our work. ▶**



## ▶ Households are less productive.

**When women farmers are not meaningfully included in agricultural development opportunities, they don't receive critical knowledge, skills, and assets that contribute to increasing their household productivity.**

- » Women farmers contribute up to 60 percent of labor on farms in sub-Saharan Africa.
- » If women farmers across the developing world had the same access to productive inputs (such as labor, fertilizer, and seeds) as male farmers, yields would increase as much as 30 percent per household.
- » As a result, countries could see an increase of 2.5 to 4 percent in agricultural output.





## ▶ **New approaches aren't adopted.**

**When women don't have access to education or information, they cannot influence research agendas to get what they want. As a result, they are less likely to adopt new practices and technologies.**

- » Evidence points to a significant difference between men and women in the adoption of improved varieties:
  - » In Ghana, only 39 percent of female farmers adopted improved varieties, compared to 59 percent of men.
  - » Adoption differences are largely explained by women's unequal access to land, labor, and education, which reduces the likelihood of women's awareness of new technology or practices, and limits women's resources for obtaining them.
- » Evaluations of NERICA rice adoption in Niger suggest that women's involvement in participatory varietal selection (PVS) led to preferred traits like weed competitiveness and short maturity cycles. Varieties with these traits were more frequently adopted by women than varieties without them.



## ► Nutrition is not prioritized.

**When women don't control resources and income, their households may suffer from malnutrition. Men are less likely than women to reinvest their income in the health of the family.**

- » A simple but powerful equation holds true across the developing world: Increases in women's income and influence over household expenditures translate into more household investment in childhood nutrition.
- » Evidence from Brazil shows that maternal income exerts a larger effect on children's nutritional outcome indicators than paternal income.
- » In Rwanda and Malawi, children from women-headed households were healthier than children from male-headed households—even when the male-headed households had higher incomes.



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**We believe we must be responsive to both women's and men's roles, responsibilities, and priorities to effect sustainable change for small farming families.**

By working together to be responsive to gender in our programs, we have the opportunity to improve the lives of millions of farming households in the developing world.

**This is what we mean by gender responsive. ▶**

**These are three requirements for our grantees to ensure grants are gender responsive.**

## ▶ **Know Her**

Understand the context and situation of women farmers in the proposed intervention. Investigate their needs, constraints, responsibilities, and priorities. Anticipate how your grant will impact women's labor, time, and current practices and resources.

## ▶ **Design for Her**

Develop a project that is intentionally designed to reach and benefit women as well as men. Create goals and milestones that account for women's participation. Establish a program culture of recognizing and supporting women's roles from the very start.

## ▶ **Be Accountable to Her**

Strive to meet objectives that include women's active involvement in your program. Continually evaluate your progress in relationship to women's successes as well as household successes. Collect feedback, measure results, and iterate your design to ensure that women are participating and benefitting from the program's resources.



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**We see a range of approaches to gender responsiveness in the proposals we receive.**

**The following three examples from our work show the range of approaches our grantees take to be responsive to gender. ▶**

## ▶ Gender Transformative

Some programs account for gender differences and inequalities from the start, with a sound strategy for transforming the relationships between women and men with an emphasis on equity. We consider these programs **gender transformative**. We support these activities and have several grants that are transformative.

## ▶ Gender Aware

Many more grantees have a sense of how women and men farmers will participate in their projects, and work with us to create high-impact programs that meet both women's and men's needs. These projects result in designs that ensure that both women and men benefit, and that neither are harmed. We consider these programs **gender aware**. These are the majority of our grants.

## ▶ Gender Neutral

Lastly, we receive proposals that do not account for the differences between women and men and do not consider how women and men may be marginalized or may not benefit from projects. We consider these programs **gender neutral** and they are typically less effective in their design. We do not support gender-neutral grants.



## ▶ Gender Transformative

### LANDESA

#### “Micro-Plots for Landless Agricultural Laborers”

Reshaping gender roles and relationships to promote household food security in India.



Landesa, formerly Rural Development Institute (RDI), is working to facilitate allocation programs for state governments in India. Landesa supports the states' allocation of small plots of land (for both a home and a kitchen garden) to low-caste populations to increase food security and income for 200,000 households. Recognizing that women have few assets and are more likely to put an asset like a land title to use for their families, Landesa works with the government to put land titles in women's names, either jointly with their husbands or individually.

Landesa **knows** the relative position of low-caste women in India and understands their limited access to assets. It works to change the systems that can undermine women's empowerment and productivity. Landesa has **designed** a project that works with men and women through community dialogues to discuss the practicalities and benefits of land ownership for women, and Landesa encourages men to support this social change. Landesa is **accountable** to women by monitoring how the project is serving women and measuring how women's lives have been impacted by land ownership through baseline surveys and periodic focus groups.

## ▶ Gender Aware

### WORLD FOOD PROGRAMME (WFP)

#### “Purchase For Progress”

Demonstrating how gender responsiveness can improve program design and implementation.



WFP's Purchase for Progress (P4P) project is developing ways to increase engagement with smallholder farmers in its food aid procurement in 21 pilot countries. The project began with specific plans to include and empower women, but field staff found the targets extremely challenging and sought additional help. WFP and the foundation collaborated to refocus the project around gender. They are now working with external support to better understand farming community contexts and find approaches to achieve the ambitious gender targets.

For example, P4P is working to **know** women farmers by conducting gender audits around women's and men's roles in farming. It is also analyzing the intended and unintended impact of its work on women and men. P4P is **designing** steps to ensure that its programs take additional measures to reach women, including pilots that:

- use illustrations and local languages to span literacy and language barriers
- include childcare services for project trainings
- encourage farmer organizations to move women into leadership roles

WFP and the foundation hold themselves **accountable** with gender-disaggregated measurement and reporting in all program activities, including those with participating organizations.

WFP is now running a gender-aware program. It plans to continue to learn and refine its program to be more gender responsive and ultimately gender transformative. P4P is evolving to not only include women, but also empower their position in the community.



## ▶ Gender Neutral

### ANONYMOUS

#### “Improved Staple Crop Project”

Ignoring gendered divisions of labor and women's preferences, and consequently undermining women's roles and responsibilities.



Very few programs set out to exclude women, but they may inadvertently have this effect. Take, for instance, an organization that aims to breed and distribute improved varieties of staple crops. When its breeders conducted field testing, the farmers they reached out to for their opinions were primarily male. Male farmers prioritized yield above all other traits and the breeders iterated the variety design based solely on this feedback.

While the improved variety did show improvements to yield, the household adoption rate was lower than expected. Women farmers, who were not consulted, prioritized other traits, in addition to yields. Because their responsibilities include land preparation, weeding, and cooking, they prioritize traits like pest resistance, cooking time, and taste. Because these new varieties increased the time women spent on their other tasks, women were less likely to use them.

Instead of excluding women, the organization could have done an analysis to **know** women and men's varying responsibilities and then gathered complete farmer feedback. The organization could have **designed** a strategy to include women's trait preferences, and they could have been **accountable** to women by involving them in farm trials and evaluating how women's preferences contribute to improved take-up. Ultimately, if the organization had included women, the end result may have been a more successful variety with a high rate of adoption, and ultimately may have changed income and health.



**We are asking grantees  
to put both women  
and men at the heart  
of their programs.**

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# We are committed to working with our grantees throughout this process and realize that what we've outlined can require a great deal of intention, research, and preparation.

Together, we can support opportunities that ensure that women farmers are meeting their potential, contributing to sustainable productivity, and driving poverty reduction and hunger alleviation.

We understand that many agricultural programs have a focus on crops and not necessarily on the people who produce or consume them.

We also know that not all organizations have experience or the mandate to implement gender-responsive approaches.

We will work to assist you to design an approach that is responsive to female and male farmers, and we will continue to provide you with the tools to be successful.

**We have designed a toolkit** to help guide you through the requirements for a gender-responsive design. The toolkit is available to you from your program officer. In addition, resources such as gender experts and other sectoral specialists can be made available at any point during your proposal or grant process.

# Common Concerns

Over the past four years we've been working with grantees to develop gender-responsive programs into many different types of grant proposals. What follows is a list of common challenges and the ways in which we can help.

## **My project doesn't reach farmers and doesn't matter to women.**

We acknowledge that for some projects, having a gender-responsive approach will be more important than it is for others. However, we fund many projects that work on upstream science or research and development that will one day impact farmers. We ask that all grantees clearly design a logical path to the ultimate user of a service or a technology. In most cases, women and men will both be affected by your intervention, and we ask that you anticipate now what those impacts might be.

## **Won't this be expensive?**

It might be. Because women are often burdened by child-bearing, lack education, and can be removed from public life, it can cost more to proactively reach and involve them. We recommend that you work with your program officer to clearly lay out what additive costs you feel are necessary to design and implement a gender-aware or gender-transformative program.

## **Changing culture and society is not our role.**

We acknowledge that all projects, regardless of their orientation, impact individuals, households, and communities—we hope always for the better. When we ask that you know and design for women as well as men, we are simply asking that you apply smart design principles that support women's roles, not undermine social norms or affect change in ways that are unsustainable and unwanted by the community itself.

## **I don't know where to begin.**

Begin with a conversation with social scientists or gender staff within your organization who have worked with smallholder farmers or with gender issues before. Use the internal resources that you have to begin asking questions about how your idea will impact both women and men farmers and how your opportunity can proactively include women. If no such resource exists, please reach out to your program officer seeking assistance and resources to begin planning for your gender-responsive design.



Please ask your program officer for a detailed toolkit, which provides specific answers to more of your questions.

## The chart below illustrates how to design a gender-responsive program.

This is not an exhaustive list; rather, these are examples to help you apply the gender requirements to your specific opportunity.

	KNOW HER	DESIGN FOR HER	BE ACCOUNTABLE TO HER
Gender Aware	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Do a gender analysis of your sector and region.</li> <li>» Understand the differing roles and responsibilities of women and men.</li> <li>» Recognize the context and circumstances of women on the farm, in the market, and in their community.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Create targets for women’s participation and leadership in activities.</li> <li>» Hire and train women when relevant to reach women farmers.</li> <li>» Anticipate changes to women’s time and labor as a result of your program.</li> <li>» Design for women’s productive and reproductive workloads, and account for multiple responsibilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Conduct a review of how your project is meeting women’s aspirations and how women and men are benefitting.</li> <li>» Monitor women’s involvement and their influence on the project goals.</li> <li>» Revise and iterate the project strategy to deepen women’s participation in the project.</li> <li>» Collect sex-disaggregated data.</li> </ul>
Gender Transformative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Understand the structures and systems that determine women’s position in society.</li> <li>» Study social dynamics and determine how the project can affect women’s power and influence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Include a program objective dedicated to achieving more equitable and efficient outcomes for women.</li> <li>» Partner with women’s rights organizations to shift and challenge inefficient social norms or perceptions.</li> <li>» Engage men to change perceptions and behaviors about gender roles and efficient allocation of resources between women and men.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Measure the project’s impact on men and the entire community as well as on women.</li> <li>» Account for goals that are bigger than a single intervention, but that achieve a change in the status and position of women at large.</li> </ul>

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## RESOURCES

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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, Washington, the foundation is led by CEO Jeff Raikes and Co-chair William H. Gates Sr., under the direction of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett.

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