Chapter 12
Gender Equality as a Development Factor in the Application of ICT for Agro-Forestry

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ABSTRACT

Agriculture continues to be the backbone of peasant economy and a source of subsistence in Botswana, and as such, innovative agricultural programs are introduced to benefit villagers. The case described in this chapter is that of Gamolele/Gakgatla watershed agro-forestry project, whose goal was to raise awareness of the existence of the six hectare plot and how it could be turned into viable agro-forestry and horticulture ventures mainly for sources of livelihood for community and its neighborhood. Technologies used during the life of the project included a computer and other modern ways of planting. Participants emerged with survival skills like knowledge of planting in rows, transplanting of seedlings and harvesting in rows, medicinal plants production, harnessing, and promotion of growing healthy foods by seasons. Participants learned to manage, use, and maintain technology by quick fixes or taking it to experts for more complex troubleshooting and final repairs. Overall, the emphasis was on attracting women to be part of experiencing using ICT in agro- forestry businesses, and this project successfully did this. This chapter thus shares experiences and lessons learned from the involvement of women together with challenges facing their involvement.

INTRODUCTION

Gender is s set of relationships based on notions of masculinity and feminity. Men and women are key actors in agro-forestry though different in the use and application of technology. Men use capital intensive technology while women use mainly labor intensive methods of relating with both plants and animals (SOURCE). Although Botswana is a usually very dry country, agriculture has continued to be the backbone of peasant economy and a source of subsistence. Innovative agricultural pilot programs have been introduced with the intention of using technology for agriculture to contribute to gainful formal and informal employment. The goal of the seasonal pilot project presented in this chapter was to raise awareness of not only the existence but the potential use of the six hectare plot for agro-forestry and horticulture. Its implementation period was between the year 2003 and 2006. It involved communities in the indentified catchment areas. Although the project could not be sustained after the end of the funding, there are lessons learnt from the three years that it was in operation.

The ideas of gender parity as facilitated by the global gender movement led a transition from the Women in Development Approach to the Gender and Development Approach as adapted by Botswana (The National Gender Framework, 2000). This paper thus showcases a pilot project in agro-forestry that was run in one of the pilot districts of Botswana from 2006 to 2008. It specifically focused on Molepolole village in the Kweneng District. From a Critical Third World Feminist standpoint, any efforts to make agro-forestry a viable project for both men and women must include a continuous training in the use of ICT so as to develop technological skills for gainful employment in agro-forestry (SOURCE). Feminist actors of all streams have never advocated for favoritism for women. Their main point of focus is that where deserving like

in politics, recruitment, employment, training and promotions, capable and willing women must be included. This can be facilitated through inclusive systems to ensure that both men and women are given equal opportunities. This chapter thus reports how the community of Gakgatla/Gamolele was engaged in this project and what their successes, shortfalls and challenges have been. This community is situated within and in the outskirts of Kweneng district.

BACKGROUND

One of the key indicators of good democratic governance is the promotion of gender equality as a human rights endeavour in all sectors where discrimination by one's sex persists. The involvement of women and men in the use of ICT across the globe indicates the need for a gender balanced participation especially in the field of agro-forestry which, in Botswana, is still a male province. Based on the findings of a qualitative study of an experimental, seasonal agro-forestry project in Botswana, this chapter argues that there is a need for developing countries like Botswana to be responsive, promote equity and participation of both men and women in the use and integration of ICT in all sectors including agro-forestry. The chapter thus presents a case of Gakgatla/Gamolele communities in Botswana in which accessibility of both men and women is not restricted by their sexes, but rather, gender roles. This case indicates the need to put in place gender specific legislations and promote socio- cultural practices that do not discriminate against women and men, girls or boys in agro-forestry from early childhood to adulthood.

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