



Why we need to look inside the family, in the International Year of Family Farming

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The **International Year of Family Farming** is an opportunity to reaffirm the global importance of smallholder family farmers, as producers of food, caretakers of land and natural resources, and contributors to rural economic activity. However, unlocking the potential of family farming requires more than ensuring smallholders' access to productive inputs and technologies, natural resources and land, financial services, and an enabling policy environment. We also need to look within the family.

Intra-household dynamics are crucial to the productive and long-term success of family farming. Farming families usually share the same living space, eat from the same pot and rely on the family to undertake most of the work. Yet there is often a disconnect between the workloads of family members, their voice in decision-making and their share in the benefits. In some parts of the world, men and women within a household even pursue separate livelihood strategies, with women typically disadvantaged in terms of access to resources, services and markets, and burdened by more onerous daily tasks.

Consequently, what happens inside the family has substantial implications not only for individual motivation and well-being, but also for the productivity and investments of smallholder family farmers. It is essential to consider the family dimension, if this International Year is to generate a commitment to developing the full potential of family farms.

How can this be done?

In recent years, several methodologies have been developed to work within the 'black box' of the household. The creation of a 'family vision' by adults and children enables the family to conceptualize and work towards shared, time-bound goals they believe in. Households are facilitated through this visioning process in various ways, including individual home visits by a trained mentor or extension worker, or initial skills development at a group level which can then be replicated and sustained at the household level with the support of peers and trained facilitators. One of the strengths of these methodologies is that they can be adapted to local situations and household forms (such as polygamous or female-headed households).



Household methodologies are currently being implemented by governments, development agencies – including IFAD - and NGOs. The experiences of IFAD-supported programmes in Malawi, Sierra Leone and Uganda, and an IFAD grant-supported project led by Oxfam Novib in Uganda, Rwanda and Nigeria, demonstrate that these methodologies can contribute significantly to development objectives, as well as gender equality in family and small scale farming activities.

Such transformation approaches to development show that cultural norms that have existed for generations can be changed within one or two years, simply because the benefits of collaboration come so rapidly. There is more understanding and respect among household members. Decision-making on household income and expenditures becomes more transparent, and women exercise more influence in setting priorities for the use of household resources. Women have a much wider range of items they can buy, independent of their husbands, including land and mobile phones. Men start to take on domestic and caring tasks and share work on the land, thus freeing up women's time and securing many personal benefits for themselves, such as more positive relationships with their children.

As a result, participants in IFAD operations using household methodologies report that their livelihoods are now more sustainable and resilient. Farm productivity has increased, along with food security and incomes. Individuals are happier with themselves and with other household members. More girls and boys attend school. And as an indicator of profound behaviour change, the incidence of gender-based violence, such as wife beating, has fallen.

Moreover, this tool is proving very powerful in identifying and addressing gender and inter-generational inequalities, as well as health-related issues such as HIV/AIDS, by generating changes from within the household, rather than imposing them from without. Since household methodologies do not seek to empower women at the seeming expense of men, during the process of planning a household livelihood strategy all household members come to realize that working together is a win-win solution that benefits everyone.

'It was a taboo for men to carry a hoe. Women carried two hoes - the husband's and hers - and from the farm also carried water, while the man walked freely carrying nothing. Once at home, the man would wait for food, while the woman will rush to the kitchen to begin preparing food. Our husbands now carry hoes, can fetch water and cook. This is a change for the better, and I am no longer burdened. Planning together has made us more united and my relationship with my husband is very good.'

Abigael, wife in male-headed household participating in Irrigation and Rural Livelihoods Project, Malawi.

What role is IFAD playing in promoting household methodologies in family farming?

IFAD is one of the leading agencies innovating with household methodologies to have more effective reach among poor households and to improve intra-household gender relations. The Fund has a critical mass of initial experience, is a catalyst for knowledge exchange on innovative methodologies related to rural development, and has a strong presence at the field level. IFAD has played a key role in promoting household methodologies and, with the support of funding from the Government of Japan, organized a workshop/writeshop in Uganda in late 2013 to develop a sourcebook on household methodologies. This brought together 25 practitioners from all over sub-Saharan Africa working on different transformative methodologies at the household and community levels.

Special events for 2014

Given the importance of intra-household dynamics for the sustainable development of family farming, the IFAD Gender Desk will be pleased to provide technical support to regional and country level initiatives during 2014 to promote the adoption of household methodologies. The sourcebook will be released in the first half of 2014 and specific training activities will be organized to up-scale the adoption of these methodologies.

For further information, contact: gender@ifad.org