

Gender and Governance in Rural Services: Insights from India, Ghana and Ethiopia

Executive Summary

World Bank/IFPRI Book Published 2010

Gender and Governance in Rural Services: Insights from India, Ghana and Ethiopia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Three out of four poor people in the developing world live in rural areas, and most of them depend—directly or indirectly—on agriculture for their livelihoods. Providing economic services, such as agricultural extension, is essential to using agriculture for development. At the same time, the rural poor need a range of basic services, such as drinking water, education, and health services. Such services are difficult to provide in rural areas because they are subject to the “triple challenge” of market, state, and community failure.

As a result of market failure, the private sector does not provide these services to the rural poor to the extent that is desirable from society’s point of view. The state is not very effective in providing these services either, because these services have to be provided every day throughout the country, even in remote areas, and because they require discretion and cannot easily be standardized, especially if they are demand driven. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and communities themselves are interesting alternative providers of these services, but they too can fail, because of capacity constraints and local elite capture. This triple challenge of market, state, and community failure results in the poor provision of agricultural and rural services, a major obstacle to agricultural and rural development.

The perception bias that “women are not farmers” makes it even more challenging to provide agricultural services—to women. Providing better services to women is not only necessary for them to be able to realize their rights, it is also essential to promote development and to use agriculture for development. Yet the multifaceted role that women play in agriculture and livestock rearing is often overlooked, and the perception that “women are not farmers” remains widespread, despite ample evidence to the contrary. This perception bias against the role of women in agriculture adds a fourth challenge to the triple challenge of market, state, and community failure.

Various governance reform approaches have been adopted to improve agricultural and rural service provision, but major knowledge gaps remain regarding what works where and why. The past two decades have seen a range of governance reforms that can help improve agricultural and rural service provision, including democratization, decentralization, public sector management

reforms, and community-driven development. These approaches have been linked with diverse efforts to make service provision more gender responsive, including the reservation of seats for women in local councils and national parliaments, the formation of women's self-help groups and quorums for women in community meetings, gender budgeting, and the creation of gender-specific units in the public administration ("gender machinery").

The empirical evidence on their effectiveness has been mixed. In particular, it is often unclear how to create effective mechanisms of accountability that result in a better provision of agricultural services for rural women and the rural poor.

OBJECTIVES OF THIS REPORT

As the first output from the Gender and Governance in Rural Services project, this report presents descriptive findings and qualitative analysis of accountability mechanisms in agricultural extension and rural water supply in India, Ghana, and Ethiopia, paying specific attention to gender responsiveness. The Gender and Governance in Rural Services project seeks to generate policy-relevant knowledge on strategies to improve agricultural and rural service delivery, with a focus on providing more equitable access to these services, especially for women. The project focuses on agricultural extension, as an example of an agricultural service, and drinking water, as an example of rural service that is not directly related to agriculture but is of high relevance for rural women. A main goal of this project was to generate empirical microlevel evidence about the ways various accountability mechanisms for agricultural and rural service provision work in practice and to identify factors that influence the suitability of different governance reform strategies that aim to make service provision more gender responsive.

This report presents the major descriptive findings from the quantitative and qualitative research conducted in the three countries. It identifies major patterns of accountability routes and assesses their gender dimension. Because the report is exploratory, the policy implications derived from it have been formulated in a cautious way. The results should nevertheless be of interest to a wide audience interested in agricultural and rural service provision, including researchers, members of the public administration, policy makers, and staff from NGOs and international development agencies involved in the design and management of reform efforts, projects, and programs dealing with rural service provision.

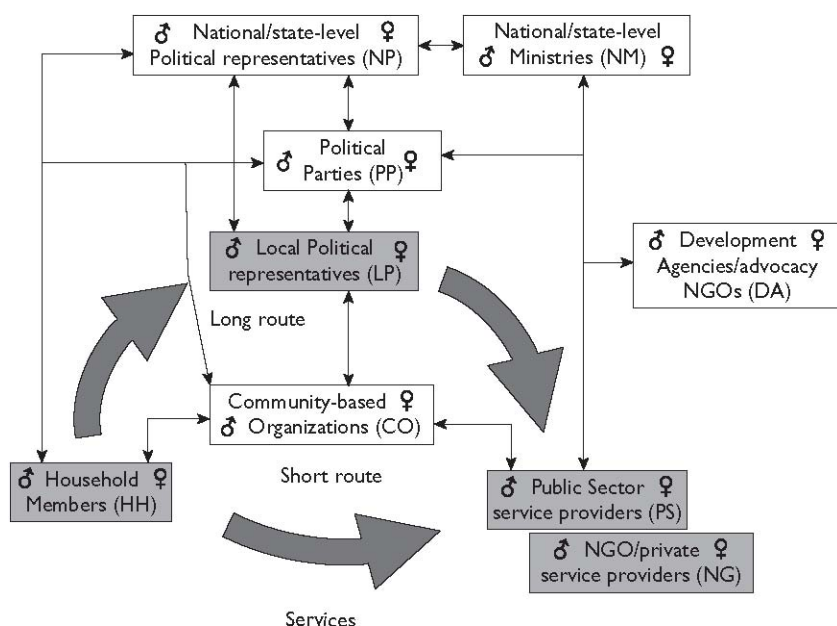
RESEARCH METHODS

The findings presented in this report are based on quantitative surveys of households, community members, community-based organizations, and service providers and on qualitative case studies. The quantitative analysis

draws on household surveys (of about 1,000 households in each country), in which both male and female household members were interviewed; surveys of service providers for extension and water supply; surveys of user organizations involved in water supply and agricultural extension; and surveys of local political representatives. Case studies investigated similar agents and employed various interview techniques to explore the research questions in greater depth.

This study applies an extended version of the conceptual framework used in the 2004 *World Development Report* (figure 1). Within this framework,

Figure 1 The Long and Short Routes of Accountability



Source: Authors, adapted from World Bank (2003).

accountability is achieved through a short route, through which citizens hold service providers directly accountable, and a long route, through which citizens hold to account local political representatives, who seek to ensure that service providers deliver services effectively.

The framework adopted in this report disaggregates and expands the World Bank Accountability Framework in several ways:

- It includes male/female gender signs in all boxes to indicate the gender dimension of all actors involved in service delivery.
- It distinguishes between public sector service providers at the local level and the ministries at the national/federal or state level to which the local public sector service providers may belong.
- It disaggregates political representatives at different levels of local government and members of parliaments at state and federal levels.

- It includes NGOs and private sector organizations that provide services as a separate category.
- It includes development agencies and advocacy NGOs as a separate category because they often influence service provision.
- It explicitly introduces community-based associations, which may empower citizens to interact more effectively with their political representatives or act as service providers themselves.
- It includes political parties, which can play an important role in formulating policies and laws that influence the gender responsiveness of public service provision and in selecting political candidates and at times public officials.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The accountability framework guided the collection of empirical data on agricultural extension and drinking water supply in the three study countries. The findings are summarized below.

Agricultural Extension

Access to extension is moderate in India and Ethiopia and low in Ghana. In Ghana, the gender gap in access to extension is pronounced. Access to extension by women was highest in Ethiopia, where 20 percent of the women covered in the sample were visited by an extension agent at home or on the farm (27 percent of the men in the sample had access to agricultural extension visits, the same percentage as in Karnataka, India). However, access to extension in Ethiopia varied widely across regions, ranging from 2 percent in Afar to 54 percent in Tigray. Moreover, a high level of access does not necessarily mean the service is being used or that it is of good quality. As a result of the top-down approach and the focus on getting model farmers to adopt fixed-technology packages, extension tends to neglect poor farmers, particularly women. The extension system is not client oriented, and users have limited demand capacity.

Access to extension was lowest in Ghana. About 12 percent of the male-headed households received individual visits of agricultural extension officers, and 10–15 percent attended group meetings organized by agricultural extension officers, with some variation across agroecological zones. Access to a livestock agent was best in the savannah zone, where livestock is most important. Despite the predominant role of women in Ghanaian agriculture, access of female-headed households to agricultural extension turned out to be very low: 2 percent of the female-household heads in the transition zone received agricultural extension visits, and none of the sampled female-headed households in the forest and savannah zones received such visits. Less than 2 percent of female spouses in male-headed households received agricultural extension visits. Access to livestock extension was somewhat better.

Access to agricultural extension was also limited in Karnataka, India. During the year before the survey (2006), 29 percent of male-headed households with land and 18 percent of female-headed households with land met with extension agents. Access to livestock services was better for male-headed households (72 percent) and for female-headed ones (79 percent).

Alternative providers of extension still play a rather limited role. NGOs were not active in providing extension in the surveyed districts in Karnataka, and they played only a limited role in Ghana and Ethiopia. In Ghana, only one of all sampled farmers had received a visit from an NGO extension provider in the year preceding the survey. Private sector enterprises did not feature as providers of extension services per se in any of the surveyed regions in any of the three countries. However, farmers who buy inputs from private input dealers receive advice related to these inputs.

The involvement of farmer-based organizations (FBOs) in extension services remains low, and these organizations are not typically inclusive. The case study evidence from Karnataka and Bihar indicates that the main farmers' organizations, the farmers' cooperatives, play roles chiefly in facilitating access to subsidized inputs. Dairy cooperatives play an important role in providing livestock services, such as veterinary services and artificial insemination, which may contribute to the fact that livestock services have higher coverage. The survey in Karnataka indicates that the leadership of the farmers' and dairy cooperatives is not inclusive with regard to gender.

In Ghana, it has been a policy of the Ministry of Agriculture to form villagebased FBOs to improve access to extension. These organizations have limited coverage, and women are less likely to join them than men.

In Ethiopia, cooperatives are the main type of FBO. They are in charge of providing inputs and, therefore, are closely linked to the "package approach" used by the Ethiopian extension system (they do not provide extension services themselves). Government rules mandate that women be represented on the committees of cooperatives, but they generally do not serve as chairpersons. Making agricultural extension demand driven remains a challenge, for a variety of reasons. These reasons differ across countries, as explained below.

Lack of Capacity in India

In India, the main problem seems to be the lack of overall capacity. As a result of a policy of not hiring agricultural extension workers for more than a decade, there is almost no public capacity left for providing extension, and the private and civil society sectors have not filled that gap. Also, the extension agents' main task was to implement a wide range of government programs, most of which focused on the provision of subsidized inputs. The survey also indicates that agricultural extension workers and veterinary assistants identify

political interference in their work as another main constraint, along with staff shortages.

Lack of Focus on Outcomes in Ghana

The ratio of extension agents to farmers is higher in Ghana than in India, although vacancies in remote areas are high. There seems to be little direction as to what kinds of goals extension agents should actually achieve, however. Extension agents seem to be able to respond to farmers' individual demands, but they do not seem to be focused on reaching overall goals for the sector.

Overreliance on a Package Approach in Ethiopia

Staff capacity is generally not a problem in Ethiopia. It is the top-down nature of public service delivery in Ethiopia that makes it difficult to tailor agricultural extension to farmers' demands. Strategies to increase women's access to agricultural extension suffer from the general problems faced by the extension system and from the perception bias regarding the role of women in agriculture.

Strategies to Increase Women's Access to Extension Services Differ Across Countries

The three countries have adopted very different strategies for promoting women's access to agricultural extension. In India, these efforts were confined largely to the extension reform model called the Agricultural Technology Management Agency (ATMA). Case study evidence indicates that extension workers make dedicated efforts to increase the participation of women in extension activities under ATMA.

Ghana can be seen as the most advanced of the three countries in terms of institutionalizing attention to gender in the public agricultural extension system. Its Women in Agricultural Development (WIAD) directorate is one of seven directorates at the national level. There is also one designated senior officer in charge of WIAD in each district agricultural office. The perception bias regarding women's role in agriculture was less pronounced than in the other two study countries. Ghana also had the highest share of female extension agents of the three countries, and female extension agents proved more effective in reaching female farmers. Despite these efforts, women's access to extension in Ghana was lower than it was in the other countries.

Ethiopia mainstreams gender through the "gender machinery" in the public administration. Access of women to extension services is nevertheless weaker than it is for men, as proportionally many fewer women attend community meetings organized by extension agents and substantially fewer women visit demonstration homes and plots. The study finds strong evidence for a cultural

perception that “women don’t farm,” a perception that persists even though women engage in a wide range of agricultural activities.

The Long Route of Accountability

The long route of accountability plays a limited role in agricultural extension. The reasons differ across the three countries.

Agricultural extension remains a deconcentrated rather than a devolved service in India and Ghana. In India, agricultural extension agents are located at the block level. Their line of accountability remains within the Department of Agriculture. Unlike *gram panchayat* (village council) members, block panchayat (council) members are involved in extension, but their role seems largely confined selecting beneficiaries of subsidized input programs, such as subsidized tractors. In Ghana, the district assembly has little authority over the agricultural extension system—or any agricultural programs. Agriculture has been decentralized to the district level, but it remains a deconcentrated rather than a decentralized service. The district directors of the district agricultural offices have more authority and discretion than they did before decentralization, but the lines of accountability for both staff and funds remain within the Ministry of Food and Agriculture. The district assembly members are more accessible to rural people, but they lack the authority to influence agricultural extension.

In Ethiopia, the short route of accountability is more accessible for rural households, at least in terms of physical proximity. In view of the top-down approach to agricultural extension, the challenge remains of making agricultural extension more responsive to the needs of farmers, including female farmers.

Drinking Water

Access to drinking water is high in India, moderate in Ghana, and very low in Ethiopia. In Karnataka, 88 percent of households surveyed use safe drinking water sources, and 97 percent have a water source within 1 kilometer of their home. In Ghana, 60 percent of households have access to safe drinking water (access rates differ slightly across zones). The average time needed to get to the water source and fetch water is less than half an hour. In Ethiopia, just 32 percent of surveyed households use safe drinking water sources, and the average time to fetch water from the most frequently used sources is approximately two hours.

Households identified drinking water as their top concern in Ghana and Ethiopia, yet they reported high satisfaction rates and only rarely complained. In India, 90 percent of respondents report being satisfied with the drinking water provision. In Ghana, the reported satisfaction rates for drinking water were also high, even though access was much lower. Surprisingly, households

also indicated high satisfaction rates with unsafe water sources, such as streams and rivers. Likewise, reported satisfaction rates were high in Ethiopia, despite low access to safe drinking water. The share of households that took any action, such as contacting political representatives or public officials to complain, was low in all three countries.

Several reasons may explain the inconsistency between the problem ratings on the one hand and the satisfaction ratings and low inclination to complain on the other. First, awareness about the health advantages of using safe drinking water sources seems to be limited. Second, respondents may feel uncomfortable giving answers that might be seen as critical to the government. Third, households may not take action because they may feel that it would have little effect and, therefore, it is not worth the (opportunity) costs involved.

Community-based organizations have been promoted as the main strategy for improving access to drinking water—a strategy that faces different challenges in the three countries. More than agricultural extension, drinking water lends itself to management by local government councils rather than specific community-based organizations, because every citizen needs access to safe drinking water. Yet it has been a major strategy in all three countries to promote community-based organizations. The surveys reveal that these groups are not inclusive and that households prefer to approach their elected representatives directly rather than through user group functionaries.

COUNTRY-SPECIFIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A set of policy recommendations was derived for each country. Each set addresses the country-specific challenges identified in this study.

India

This section first presents recommended strategies for India's general decentralization policy. It then offers recommendations for agricultural extension and drinking water provision.

General Decentralization Policy

The following strategies can be used to address the challenges of decentralization identified by the study:

1. *Pay attention to elite capture when designing programs to be implemented by gram panchayats.* A formula-bound allocation of fiscal grants to the gram panchayats was successfully implemented, but the allocation of funds to the villages within the gram panchayats turned out to be subject to severe targeting failures. Villages represented by female gram panchayat members from scheduled castes received significantly fewer resources than others.

This problem could be addressed by applying a formula for distributing grants among villages. Possible mechanisms to implement such a formula include using the block officials and gram panchayat secretary to oversee implementation, creating awareness about the problem in the training of gram panchayat members, and increasing the transparency of the intervillage distribution of funds through more stringent reporting in *gram sabha* (village assembly) or *jamabandhi* (social audit) meetings.

2. *Increase administrative support at the gram panchayat level.* Evidence from the case studies indicates that the gram panchayat secretaries are overburdened with the increasing number of programs that have been decentralized to the gram panchayat level. Hiring additional staff (as already foreseen by the government of Karnataka) is essential to address this problem. Doing so provides a unique opportunity to improve the gender balance of this important type of front-line staff. Female gram panchayat members may be more comfortable interacting with female administrative staff.

3. *Create better conditions for women to attend gram sabha meetings.* To increase women's participation in gram sabha meetings, meetings need to be held at times that are more convenient for women to attend. Information about the meetings and their agenda should also be improved.

Agricultural Extension

The following approaches appear promising in addressing the problems identified by the study:

1. *Address the staff shortage problem.* The number of agricultural extension agents can be increased in various ways; hiring more staff under the civil service system may not always be the preferred option. Hiring staff on a contract basis for specific programs is a more flexible approach, one that is currently pursued by the government of Karnataka. Other options include contracting NGOs that work in the agricultural sector, contracting private sector companies that can provide extension services, and establishing public-private partnerships. Before hiring more agricultural extension staff, states should conduct a thorough analysis of the human resources in terms of numbers, qualification, and skill mix required for improving agricultural extension.

2. *Provide better services to female farmers.* Addressing the staff shortage problem also provides opportunities to provide better services to female farmers. In view of the positive experience in other countries (Ghana in particular), the strategy to hire female extension agents to better serve female farmers deserves special attention. The standing committees on agriculture and industry in the district panchayats could also play a proactive role in mobilizing public awareness for the inclusion of gender

issues in plans and policies of decentralized bodies and government departments.

3. *Address the management challenges within the public sector.* The management challenges identified by the study deserve attention, particularly political interference and the low prevalence of merit-based promotion. Because both problems are deeply entrenched in the general public administration, they cannot be resolved in isolation within the agricultural departments. The hiring of new staff outside the civil service system offers new opportunities for merit-based promotion and other incentive systems, such as merit-based wage compensation. The problem of political interference could be reduced by strengthening the role of agricultural extension staff in improving the knowledge and skill base of the farming population rather than by using extension agents mainly for implementing subsidized input programs. It is also worthwhile exploring the extent to which a right-to-information approach could be used to reduce political pressure and elite capture.

4. *Reestablish the function of agricultural extension as a bridge between agricultural research, farmers, and markets.* The linkages between agricultural research and extension can be strengthened in various ways. If participatory planning approaches for the introduction of new technologies, commodities, and farming practices are implemented (as piloted by ATMA), extension agents may have stronger incentives to contact agricultural researchers to meet farmers' needs. The establishment of governing structures that involve both agricultural researchers and extension agents, as foreseen under ATMA, can also improve the bridging function of agricultural extension.

5. *Form functioning FBOs.* Extension agents are not only limited in numbers, but they also lack the skills required to form and supervise groups. Furthermore, they tend to work with better-off farmers and male farmers. If the strategy of forming farmers' interest groups is to be pursued, appropriate investments have to be made in hiring qualified facilitators for group formation and training group representatives. Special attention needs to be paid to making farmers' interest groups inclusive in terms of gender and caste, something that has proved to be a challenge in the past. Although the best strategy to improve rural service provision will always depend on the specific situation, it may be promising to link agricultural service provision to existing groups. Women's self-help groups may be an option, especially for livestock-related services. However, one needs to take care not to overload these groups with too many functions. Federations of community-based organizations and agricultural producer companies are other promising options. As group-based approaches place demands on farmers' time, however, alternatives should be considered. The provision of extension services through Internet kiosks and cell phones deserves attention; further analysis is needed to assess the gender responsiveness of these approaches.

Drinking Water Supply

Karnataka already has good access to safe drinking water. The following strategies can be used to address the remaining problems identified by the study:

1. *Strengthen the accountability and inclusiveness of Water and Sanitation Committees.* This project did not conduct an impact evaluation of the committees. The study findings indicate two potential challenges regarding them, however: accountability and inclusiveness in terms of gender. To ensure the accountability of the Water and Sanitation Committee within the gram panchayat system, the gram panchayat member who represents the village or ward in which the committee is located could be an ex officio member of the committee. The Water and Sanitation Committee could be formally constituted as a subcommittee of the gram panchayat, a strategy that is already being pursued in Karnataka. Committee members may also be required to report in gram sabha or ward sabha meetings to improve accountability.

A quota system could be used to increase the representation of women in leadership positions of the Water and Sanitation Committees. The rule that one-third of members and chairpersons should be women has already been promoted under the Second Karnataka Rural Water and Sanitation project. Special attention should be paid to implementing the quota system because women's representation in leadership positions is currently low, despite affirmative action policies in more than half of the surveyed committees.

2. *Focus more attention on drainage.* The low satisfaction rates with drainage suggest that policy should shift in this direction, given the importance of drainage for sanitation. Strategies to achieve this goal may include increased allocation of funding for sanitation, including drainage and awareness creation among panchayat council members and front-line professionals.

3. *Pay attention to gender issues.* It appears useful to analyze the content of the training programs junior engineers receive, assess areas in which a focus on gender is appropriate, and adjust training programs and material accordingly. Moreover, in view of the small share of female junior engineers, efforts could be made to increase this share when hiring new staff.

Ghana

This section first presents recommended strategies for Ghana's general decentralization policy. It then offers recommendations for agricultural extension and drinking water provision.

General Decentralization Policy

Ghana's decentralization policy was successful in bringing government closer to the people; the district assembly member is a major link between rural citizens and the government. Yet district assembly members describe themselves as a "glorified beggars" because they have to beg the administration and donors to get projects done. The following strategies could be used to address these challenges:

1. *Empower district assembly members.* Increasing the share of discretionary district-level resources that are not earmarked or tied to specific programs would enhance the role district assembly members play with respect to the administration. To facilitate closer interaction with the district administration, it would be useful to provide assembly members with dedicated office space at the district assembly and to increase their travel allowances so that they can interact with the administration on a regular basis; better remuneration for the work they do could also be considered. Providing more training to the district assembly members with the aim of improving their capacity to deal effectively with the district administration could strengthen their role, too.

2. *Increase the share of female district assembly members.* Cross-country evidence suggests that a quota or reservation system would be the most effective way of increasing the share of female district assembly members. Adopting such a policy requires a sovereign political decision that only the Ghanaian people and their political representatives can make. Formally recognizing the partisan nature of the local government system might allow the political parties to take more deliberate steps in promoting female candidates. The main strategy that could be used within the current political system is encouraging and supporting female candidates and female district assembly members. Possible ways of doing so include establishing mentors and special funds for female district assembly candidates and members, training male and female district assembly members on gender mainstreaming, and providing special training for female members. Such efforts are already being pursued by the Institute of Local Government Studies, but unlike in India, the institute has no budget for this purpose; funding for such activities has to be raised on a case-by-case basis. Increasing gender equity in political representation can be considered a goal in its own right. It is not necessarily a sufficient strategy to achieve better outcomes for women, however. As the case of India shows, female political representatives may even be disadvantaged in achieving better outcomes for women, depending on local power structures and program design. Hence additional efforts are necessary to reach better outcomes for women.

3. *Strengthen the district gender focal points.* Piloted by the District Capacity Building Project (DISCAP), gender focal points have been promoted at the district level. The focal points need to have a working environment that is suitable for their task, which includes relieving them of other obligations. Providing systematic training to the focal points and strengthening their

relationships with the district assembly members may also help increase their effectiveness.

4. *Strengthen area councils and unit committees.* The study indicates that these bodies of representatives at the subdistrict level may already play a larger role than is commonly assumed. Allowing them to play a more important role in planning, monitoring, and evaluating development activities while collaborating with the district assembly members could strengthen the long route of accountability.

Agricultural Extension

The study indicates that access to agricultural extension is low, despite an extension agent-to-farmer ratio that is comparatively high. The following strategies may be considered to address these challenges:

1. *Improve the management of agricultural extension.* To improve the focus on agricultural productivity and other outcome-related targets, it will be useful to make such targets explicitly part of the extension agents' agenda. The Ministry of Food and Agriculture could introduce awards for communities and districts that are most successful in increasing agricultural productivity at the community or district level rather than just rewarding individual farmers. Research and extension linkage committees (RELCs) at the district level are supposed to create linkages between research and extension, yet this strategy does not seem to be sufficient. Increasing farmers' demand for new knowledge—by strengthening participatory extension planning and technology development approaches, for example—may be a useful strategy for creating more incentives for extension agents to channel this demand to the research system. In view of the low percentage of farmers who try new technologies, it also seems useful to devise incentive systems that reward extension agents for the number of male and female farmers who adopt new technologies. It will be useful to critically review past efforts to reform the Ministry of Food and Agriculture and to try reform approaches such as Appreciative Inquiry, which use the best values of an organization as a starting point of reform and rely on internal change agents rather than considering the organization only as a problem that has been resolved (usually by restructuring using external consultants).

2. *Increase the access of female farmers to agricultural extension.* The following strategies could be explored:

- Identify and address the factors that prevent female household members from attending extension-related community meetings, perhaps by organizing such meetings at times and locations that make them more accessible for female household heads. Explore the extent to which the WIAD units have already tried to address these problems, and identify the implementation problems WIAD officers may have

faced in this respect.

- Increase the share of female extension agents, who were found to be more effective than male extension agents in reaching female farmers.
- Create incentives for reaching female farmers by, for example, rewarding such outreach in performance reviews.

3. *Prepare extension agents for Local Government Service.* One of the planned changes to strengthen the local government system is the introduction of a Local Government Service, a separate category of public officials besides the civil service that will probably include agricultural extension. It would be useful to proactively use this opportunity for increased accountability and to pilot test approaches by which extension agents, district assembly members, and district assembly staff can work together effectively under this new system.

4. *Reconsider the role of FBOs.* FBOs have been promoted as a major strategy to deliver agricultural extension services more effectively. Several strategies could be pursued to address the challenges with this strategy that the study identified:

- Encourage FBOs to engage in activities that will make them sustainable, such as joint agricultural marketing, agroprocessing, joint purchasing of agricultural inputs, and joint use of agricultural machinery. The experience of projects that already tried this strategy needs to be reviewed.
- Analyze the problems women face in joining FBOs. Promote the formation of FBOs made up only of women (an intervention that is already in operation).
- Consider alternative strategies to improve access to agricultural extension. Such approaches may involve the use of cell phones. Using the radio more extensively for agricultural extension also seems to be a promising approach, although this tool is not suited for providing farm-specific advice.

Drinking Water Supply

The formation of water and sanitation committees (WATSANs) has been a central element in the strategies used by the government and donors to improve access to drinking water in rural areas. The study indicates that this approach faces some challenges, in particular, low coverage. A variety of strategies could improve drinking water supply:

1. *Strengthen the role of the WATSANs in the local accountability system.* Although the WATSANs are in charge of water and sanitation, rural citizens are more likely to contact their district assembly member or their unit committee member rather than a WATSAN member if they experience problems with drinking water supply. This is not necessarily a problem, as it may indicate that the short route and the long route of accountability are used

in a synergetic way. However, it may also indicate a lack of trust in the capacity of the WATSANs to resolve problems. Hence, it appears useful to consider how accountability can be created within these organizations and with respect to the population they serve. Making them subcommittees of the unit committees may be one approach, as the unit committees are elected.

2. *Strengthen unit committees as an alternative strategy.* As drinking water supply is a service needed by the entire population rather than specific groups, unit committees may be considered as an alternative organization that can perform the tasks of the WATSANs. Unit committees could also provide other rural services. As an alternative to specialized user organizations, unit committees could, for services that everyone needs, be turned into multipurpose committees that also play a formal role in the local government system.

Ethiopia

This section first presents recommended strategies for Ethiopia's general decentralization policy. It then offers recommendations for agricultural extension and drinking water provision.

General Decentralization Policy

The government is engaged in ongoing efforts to strengthen the local government bodies that are most important to the majority of decentralized public services. Assistance to the decentralization process and, in particular, to public service provision at the local level, could take into account the following strategies:

1. *Strengthen the organizations tasked with building the capacity of the relevant local agencies.* Regional governments operate various programs to strengthen the key public sector bodies at the local level. Among these are regional training institutes that take on the responsibility of providing training to district cabinet members. Creation of such organizations is an important step toward institutionalizing district government training and scaling back reliance on fragmented ad hoc training done through consultants and far away in the capital city. Such organizations can be valuable to provide support to such region-level training institutes that strengthen the capacity of key players and decision makers at the local level, such as the district cabinets.

2. *Pay more attention to gender dimensions in the delivery of public services.* This study highlights the development impact of implementing policies on public service provision in a way that enhances the productive contribution of women as well as men in rural areas. The study's findings may be useful in introducing gender dimensions into the training modules used by the

regional training institutions targeting local governments.

3. *Better understand intraparty processes that affect service delivery.* Processes and mechanisms within the ruling party may be important drivers of policy design and policy implementation in agricultural extension and water supply. Very little is known about these processes. Further research efforts could go a long way in helping to understand the driving forces, incentives, and accountability systems that influence how public services for men and women are delivered. This understanding would clarify the opportunities and constraints that exist for interventions seeking to improve agricultural extension and drinking water supply.

4. *Take the political reality into consideration when deciding how to target support.* This study reveals that members of the local council play a limited role in influencing decisions regarding which and how services are delivered to residents. In contrast, executive bodies are a much more influential local player. Hence, resources committed to training and capacity building of local councils may not achieve the desired results. Understanding political realities such as this one can help donors target support.

Agricultural Extension

Agricultural extension is a high government priority, but coverage of extension services across regions varies widely, and extension agents have limited discretion to adapt technology packages to the context of individual communities. The gender gap in access to extension can also be improved. Some approaches to addressing these issues could include the following:

1. *Give more discretion to extension agents.* To increase technology adoption by more farmers, it seems useful to give extensions agents—together with farmers—more space to experiment with technology and input packages other than those they are currently required to promote. Microlevel adaptation of existing packages could make new inputs and practices more credible to farmers. This is particularly important with regard to extension agents' work with women.

2. *Expand extension coverage where it is low, including to pastoral areas.* Extension coverage varies widely across sites, with as few as 2 percent and as many as 54 percent of respondents having access to extension agents. Reducing these stark differences in access seems justified.

3. *Bridge the gender gap in access to extension services.* The study identifies some promising ways to reduce the gender gap. One is the engagement of women's associations to serve as a bridge between extension workers and women farmers. External assistance may include better and more detailed documentation on how and through which mechanisms women's associations are

successful in bringing extension advice to their members. Lessons learned could be taken into account in expanding and scaling up this approach.

Drinking Water Supply

Several strategies could address the problems identified in the study:

1. *Increase access to safe drinking water.* Increasing the very low access to safe drinking water would address citizens' priorities and improve productivity—by reducing the amount of time women spend fetching water (time they could spend engaging in agricultural activities) and reducing health problems associated with unclean water. External support may help address the problem.

2. *Provide training to water committees on community relations.* Training to water committees concentrates on technical topics. It could be expanded to cover community relations. One of the important reasons for the nonfunctioning and nonuse of drinking water facilities in rural areas is the poor governance of facilities by water committees, particularly their lack of success in mobilizing community resources to maintain facilities. Training for managing community relations, raising awareness for the need of users to ensure that facilities get maintained after initial construction, and similar “soft” skills are much needed.

3. *Ensure that water maintenance systems are in place.* Service providers responsible for constructing water facilities should plan carefully for maintaining the facilities after construction.

4. *Consider local knowledge when selecting water sites.* Local governments and NGOs should draw on both geological expertise and the local knowledge of the community to minimize mistakes in site selection.

5. *Expand local government efforts to change cultural norms around water.* In some areas, the local government has brought attention to the usually female-borne burden of fetching water, displaying posters appealing to men to take on some of the burden. Efforts such as these to change cultural norms could be considered more widely and assessed for their ability to effect changes in behavior. Other local policies that take a more formal nature, such as mandating that water committee chairs be women, could also be considered, taking into consideration the strong variation in the cultural acceptability of such policies.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The accountability linkages for rural service provision vary widely across countries,

depending on the political system and the approach to decentralization in service provision. Understanding these linkages is essential for identifying entry points to make rural service provision more responsive to gender needs. Many important questions require further research, experimentation, and learning. Which mechanisms in the local governance system create political incentives in obtaining better outcomes for the rural population in general and rural women in particular? How do these mechanisms differ across political systems? Which mechanisms work within a (de facto) one-party system? Which mechanisms work in multiparty systems that are subject to political competition but plagued with clientelism and elite capture? Future research—including research using the data collected under this project—will have to address these questions.

The political reforms of the past decade have created new opportunities for improving the provision of agricultural and rural services to those who have benefited least from them in the past: the rural poor and rural women. The author team hopes that this report will help rural communities and their organizations, governments, NGOs, and development partners grasp these opportunities.