

**CONVERSATION: INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO MAXIMIZE THE POTENTIAL OF  
WOMEN AND GIRLS IN AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

**October 13, 2011 - 10:30 a.m.**

**Catherine Bertini- 2003 World Food Prize Laureate (Moderator)**

Without the attention being paid to the people who actually labor in agriculture, we will never get as far along as we need to get. And since in many countries throughout Africa and elsewhere in the world, you will see women working. We have to pay attention to their issues, their needs, their concerns and how we can help them be even more productive.

The gender differentiations are important, and they are usually overlooked. And they're important for policy, they're important for actual operating, and they're important for any of us who want to actually make a difference and make an impact.

**Ritu Sharma- Co-founder and President, Women Thrive Worldwide**

I want to talk about some unusual inputs to women's agricultural success. I think we've heard and we talk a lot about seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, water, land, soil conservation. We talk about lots of physical inputs, which are critically important.

I think there is one critically valuable input that is not tangible but is probably one of the most important inputs to ensure women's success in agriculture. And that is giving them voice - voice to advocate on their own behalf wherever they encounter a barrier, voice to combat any discrimination that they may face, whether that be in the realm of credit or even negotiating within the household and the ability to take part in an agricultural training session.

I want to give one example of this that I think really illustrates the importance of this quite well.

Over the last four years or so we've been working with women's farmer-based associations and cooperatives in several countries in West Africa. And one of the most vital things that they have been able to do with this sense of advocacy training and coaching and support is to find areas where there was either institutionalized or just informal discrimination against women.

For example, in one of the villages where I've spent some time in Burkina Faso in the southern part of the country, women are able to legally own land. However, at the district municipal office there is a fee, not necessarily an institutional fee, but there is an extra fee for women to register their land if they'd like to have their name on a title jointly or separately. That fee is the equivalent of four months of income for women.

So without addressing that blockage, you can invest a lot in those women farmers and find that you still may not succeed. So we can talk more about this in a little while, but I do feel that advocacy and helping give women voice to remove whatever barriers they find in their way absolutely has to be one of the innovations in agriculture.

**Matilda Auma Ouma- Deputy District Agricultural Officer, Ministry of Agriculture, Kenya**

Empowering women is very important when it comes to agricultural growth and development. I would like to give an example of a technology and innovation that has improved the lives of the Kenyan woman.

This is a single technology that is called Push-Pull. Push-Pull is a platform technology developed by ICIPE, that is, International Center of Insect Physiology and Ecology, in partnership with Kenya Agricultural Research Institute and the Ministry of Agriculture where I belong.

The technology addresses constraints to agricultural production. One of them is addressing the parasitic weed which is a biotic constant to cereal production, which is staple food in Kenya, particularly in the lowlands around Lake Victoria.

I would like to say that women in Kenya, particularly in the lowlands, have benefited so much, and they have been empowered, due to this technology, which has reduced the striga and resulted in the reduction of stem borers and improvement of soil fertility.

The improved yields means good nutrition to the family and also a surplus for sale to get some income, and that is both financial income.

And the woman, because they do a lot of weeding on the farm, this technology reduces the labor for the woman. Instead of weeding constantly, they no longer weed, and now they have extra time to engage in other productive activities. And this is a noble technology that has empowered the women in the Kenyan agricultural sector.

Sam Dryden, Director of Agricultural Development, The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

The issue of women in farming is actually even a local issue. Anyone that grew up on a family farm knows how important women are in that role. Anyone knows when a major decision gets made, it's a family issue.

But in Africa and Asia it's a deeper issue, and we have, as I said, a number of programs that try to address the issue, ranging from advocacy in the warehouse programs to education to trying to have programs that design equipment that are more woman-friendly for that scale of farming.

It's part of every grant that we make. We actually have a screening criteria that we go through with our grants to look at the gender balance issue.

But they called out what they thought was an even bigger issue, which they call psychosocial factors. And this is an issue which has to do with what Ritu was talking about of a voice. But it's an issue of self-image and self-realization. And for those of you who that have traveled, I mean, you see sometimes when you're in these places, I mean, just the look in the eye, which is whether they feel that they can be recognized for the work they do.

And I think that's where we have a lot of work to do. I think that we need to innovate a lot in that area. I mean, we look at it as part of a community, because that's where they have to get some of that self-realization. But I think that that's one of the biggest challenges we as a foundation have, and I think it's one of the biggest challenges development has in terms of getting real impact.

### **Catherine Bertini**

Thank you very much. Matilda, maybe I can ask you a question about how the women who are in agriculture in Kenya best have their voices heard? Because so many women are working, but yet so few of them have the opportunity to really be sure that policymakers hear what they have to say. Do you have some special innovations that work in Kenya?

### **Matilda Ouma**

Well, in Kenya, as I said, most of our labor force is provided by the women. We do try to encourage women to form groups. Actually our extension approach uses the women groups and farmer groups. And we try to sensitize them.

And when they are sensitized about the technologies, about certain information which they require, then through such groups, they may lobby to various government organizations or government structures that would listen to them.

For example, the technology that I've talked about - they form associations. They have Push-Pull Farmers Association, and through such associations they are able to be linked up to the right structures and organizations where they can air their views, their partners in development, like development agencies and the NGOs that can address various needs that the women have.

### **Catherine Bertini**

And when you find that communities are successful with the Push-Pull technology, how do you expand that to other communities? How do you educate women in other places to learn that new approach?

### **Matilda Ouma**

We try to upscale this technology into other regions that have similar constraints to agricultural production. So we do this through education tours. We organize field days with other farmers from other regions with similar problems. They come and share with the women farmers who have been empowered through Push-Pull.

### **Catherine Bertini**

Thank you. Sam, there are a lot of different technologies, a lot of new seeds being developed – and you're a seed person from your career. How do you combine the issues of innovation with seed and innovations with women farmers, not only in terms of acceptability but also to begin with when you're developing the seeds whether or not those are going to be useful, acceptable to people who grow and to people who cook and ultimately to people who consume?

### **Sam Dryden**

Well, I think it's a really important question, and it goes to the heart of how products are developed. I mean, we start with what we call participatory breeding programs, and so we try to get as close to the farmer as possible to understand the needs. And for us, whether it's in Africa or in Asia, you know, it's not Western farming, it's their farming and they grow a diversity of crops. As Howard Buffett would say, they're growing for risk aversion as opposed to profit maximization.

And so we work on a diversity of crops, and we work on the crops they find are most important. So while we do work on the major commodities of rice and corn and wheat, we also work on a lot of legumes for nutrition and for soil health. We work a lot on the roots and tubers because those are important crops for them.

And in the cereals we work a lot on the crops that are hearty and are relevant to them, like sorghum and pearl millets and so forth; we think those are important crops.

So it's about learning and listening.

**Catherine Bertini**

And listening to people – I mean, how do you ensure that you’re listening to the cooks, for instance?

**Sam Dryden**

We have the challenge of being the largest foundation in the world but based in Seattle. And so how do we relate to the farmer that’s on a plot of land that’s about the size of two football fields? And so there’s a lot of distance in between there.

So our grantees are the really important people that can help us translate both our agenda and the farmer’s agenda. We have a lot of really good program officers that go and listen a lot, so we work with partners like the CG System, but we also work with local organizations, NGOs and community organizations to hear, to listen. Listening is really important.

**Catherine Bertini**

Thank you. Ritu, since you started this work full time when you created your organization in 1998, I think, what’s changed in terms of women in agriculture and their opportunities, and what do we still need to work on?

**Ritu Sharma**

I think back in 1998 we were even saying then that women in Africa were the majority of farmers, they were growing most of the food that families eat on the continent. I think that we’ve come a long way since then, and we’re thrilled to see how women have been mainstreamed into much of the discourse on agriculture. I think what we are anxious to begin to see in the field is the results of that integration.

We spend a lot of our time now working on the right metrics. If the objective is to target women, small-scale farmers in Africa or Asia, how do you measure at the end of the day, at the end of the line, that you have actually created a positive impact for those women?

And sometimes these metrics, increasing a woman's income from a dollar to a dollar twenty-five a day, may mask more fundamental issues in that income is not necessarily shared equally in the household. So she may be actually earning more than that but is losing some of that income to men in the household.

She may be earning more, but she may actually have fewer assets. She may own less land. She may be earning more because she's a wage laborer in an agribusiness now instead of having her own asset of a farm.

So what gets measured gets done, and it's really important that we are continuing to provide a critical eye on measuring the actual outcomes for small-scale women farmers. I would like to see the metrics and the outcomes really follow the philosophy.

### **Catherine Bertini**

In just a minute I think we're going to start calling on the audience, so if people want to queue up, feel free.

I want to add a couple thoughts about innovation that have come out of the project in which I have just been involved, called "Girls Grow - a Vital Force in Rural Economies," which is a report published by the Chicago Council of Global Affairs that we launched on Friday in London and will have a session about at 3:15 today.

But there are several innovations, especially for girls, that we proposed in that paper, and I just want to share a few.

One is, for instance, since girls are the people who normally are fetching the water and the firewood, could we not move toward a programming principle that when we build schools, we build them near water sources, or we dig for water at the schools wherever possible, so when a girl goes to school, she can bring home water. It will cut down on one trip a day at least and perhaps be an incentive to help get to school.

I think it was Calestous Juma earlier this week who suggested that there should be more vocational, specifically agricultural, training in secondary schools. Well, we need to get more girls in secondary school. We think also that that kind of training could be useful to help them be kind of nontraditional extension agents, even reaching out to the girls and women who are working in the fields in their own communities to bring them some of the advice that they've learned themselves.

We think girls could be trained to do this in the health sector as well. And furthermore, we think with some small support from governments and from different donors, that girls could actually be helping making co-ops to sew their own school uniforms, making small co-ops to make sanitary napkins, and doing other small businesses to support themselves and to support more girls in secondary school.

The reason why that's important, of course, is that an educated farmer is more productive than a non-educated farmer, and there's a lot of data that show, although there's never enough data about women and girls and desegregated data between men and women and also with age desegregation. But we think that with it being clear that women follow other women farmers, that farmers with an education are more productive than other farmers. All of that cycles together to mean more education is going to mean more productive farmers.