

Rural Development goes Feminist

Peer exchange & learning event



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A sector-wide approach to Feminist Development Policy

Category: Gender mainstreaming within the company

Submitted by: Gender Focal Persons G500 and Co-Speakers of Sector Network Rural Development Africa's Working Group on Gender-Transformative Approaches in Rural Development (SNRD GTA-RD)

The challenge: Gender and the Agri-Food Sector

Gender dimensions are interwoven in every aspect of the agri-food sector. In most cultures, women play a crucial role in agricultural production and processing, while also assuming responsibility for feeding their families. At the same time, they are often undermined and underrepresented in decision making processes from household to cooperative to policy level, face barriers in accessing resources such as land or finance, and need to navigate restrictive gender stereotypes, to only name a few.

The who: GIZ's Agri-Food sector

As GIZ's division for Rural Development and Agriculture, **G500 is made up of global and sectoral projects working in the wider agri-food sector**. All project gender focal persons meet once a month to exchange on ongoing processes, work on joint annual activities and discuss recent developments, questions and challenges on gender in the agri-food sector.

In 2020, a **working group on Gender-Transformative Approaches in Rural Development (GTA-RD)** was created in the Sector Network Rural Development (SNRD) Africa. The group is working towards strengthening capacities, fostering peer learning and building a conducive environment for gender-transformative change in the sector. Shortly after, a similar working group was created in SNRD Asia.

GIZ agri-food projects in G500 and abroad have collected plenty of experience on gender mainstreaming and many great approaches have been piloted, yet also challenges encountered. Those challenges can rarely be addressed in an isolated manner – **to truly cultivate change, we need to build coalitions**, learn from each other and work together. Hence, in order to build on synergies and share learnings, there have always been efforts for close collaboration between the SNRD working group and G500 gender group.

The need: Harvesting experiences and growing together

Virtual exchange has a natural limit when it comes to building networks, fostering peer exchange and co-creating visions of change. After years of strictly virtual meetings due to COVID; gender focal persons in G500 felt a strong need for physical exchange. Many had only taken up their role during COVID times, and some had never met in person. A similar sentiment was shared in the SNRD GTA-RD working group, which had been created during the early COVID days and therefore also never met in person. Hence, **the idea of a joined workshop was born in early 2022** - without knowing that this would turn out to be a full-blown conference.

Since the idea coincided with the announcement of BMZ's Feminist Development Policy (FDP), it was an obvious choice to focus the workshop on it. The FDP had created a strong momentum for gender-related activities, but also raised lots of **questions about what implementing feminist approaches would look like, specifically in the agri-food sector**. How did the "three R" translate to our sector? How was the policy received in partner countries? How would we deal with tensions inherent to the policy? How could intersectional approaches and postcolonial considerations look like in practice?

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The Conference

By October 2022, what had started as idea for a simple workshop had become a **2,5 day conference with over 70 participants from 18 countries**. The participants included gender focal persons from sector and global projects in G500, representatives from all countries with a major rural development portfolio in Africa, three colleagues representing SNRD Asia's GTA working group, and FMB. As such, the event was the **first ever event bringing together a representative group of GIZ's knowledge brokers and gender champions in the agri-food sector**.



Despite its internal character, the event benefited from **external expert inputs and impulses**. It was co-designed and facilitated by the internationally renowned *Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP)*. An inspiring **keynote on intersectional perspectives in the agri-food sector** was given by Dr. Nozomi Kawarazuka, gender expert from the International Potato Center (CIP), CGIAR, Vietnam. Her captivating insights reverberated throughout the entire conference and beyond, having become a frequent reference in presentations and activities on gender within the sector: Participants not only gathered a deeper **understanding of intersectionality in the sector context**, but also learned about some hands-on **project examples** which facilitate the translation of the concept into our everyday work. A **presentation by BMZ on its Feminist Development Policy** offered participants a first-hand insight into the policy's objectives, which they could further carry into their respective country and project contexts. And an inspirational input and engagement by Njeri Kimoto, Global Inclusivity Lead at Soliaridad got participants discussing and diving deeper into the **meaning of feminism** in different contexts and its implications for our work. Building on these questions and thoughts, participants got into **working groups** to map challenges and entry points in applying such approaches and then envisioned a way of working towards a just future.

For a more detailed account of the conference itself, please have a look at the **article** available on [IDA News](#) and the **knowledge product** "[Towards Feminist Rural Development Cooperation](#)", which is available in French and English. The latter summarizes the various inputs, discussions and presentations as well as guiding questions and prompts to implement Feminist Development Cooperation which were collected by the participants in working groups.

Overcoming barriers: Challenges and success factors in realizing the conference

Planning an international conference from scratch, in COVID times and within an unprecedented setting could only prove to be challenging: There was no pre-allocated **budget**, no **time** resources, no **project staff** such as finance or office or event managers, and lots of questions. Working as informal network **outside project structures** sometimes made certain decisions and involvement of hierarchies challenging. Some people of the initial organizing team were not able to continue their support due to project commitments, which meant more workload for others. Yet surprisingly, the biggest challenges which almost brought everything to a halt was **finding a feasible and affordable conference venue** within COVID restrictions and GIZ rules – and then getting funds to cover the expensive auditorium!

However, challenging circumstances can provide opportunities for **innovative pathways and creative solutions**: The budget was scraped together from the SNRD working group, the G500 gender group's gender award money (thank you, gender award 2022!), and a few supportive projects in G500. We were lucky to piggy-back on one project's activities with CFFP, as they generously added the conference moderation to their contract and made it possible for us to work with one of the most knowledgeable civil society actors in the field of Feminist Foreign Policy.

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The main success factors hinged on people, though:

- 1) Everything from concept and agenda, participant management (including invitations, visa and hotel contingents), conference logistics, speaker research, and documentation, was lifted solely by the **outstanding commitment of a highly motivated organizing team**, we couldn't thank enough, and who were **backed by a supportive hierarchy** in both G500 and SNRD. They took it upon themselves to organize this conference outside of a project mandate, on top of their everyday workload, and in a completely new and often challenging setting.
- 2) A dedicated **effort to have a representative group of participants**, which included directly inviting all major rural development clusters to nominate representatives for their country and particularly welcoming nominations of national staff – the diverse participants group was a major factor towards the success of the conference!
- 3) Scouting **speakers from the Global South** with competencies in the sector and on feminism, intersectionality and gender-transformative change. **Representation matters**, and this was yet again confirmed by feedback from participants for some of who it was the first time seeing someone representing their own culture giving the keynote at an international conference / event.

The outcome: Growing together to cultivate change in GIZ's agri-food sector!

Transformative change cannot be achieved in an isolated manner, but rather requires collective approaches. In that sense, it is important to note that the conference was not a once-off event: Rather, it proved to be a **catalyst for a strong network, continuous skill sharing and future collaboration in GIZ's agri-food sector across the globe.**

For some colleagues, it was the first opportunity to exchange directly with colleagues from other countries and projects working in the same sector on the same challenges. This experience of community and collaboration, working towards the same goals, was described as an empowering, inspiring and motivating experience. Participants went home feeling encouraged to keep working as **ambassadors for gender-transformative change within GIZ and towards a more inclusive agri-food sector.** They took a deeper understanding, new skills and concrete ideas with them and translated them into their home projects and countries. Colleagues working in head office benefited from the opportunity to better understand **country-specific perspectives and challenges** with regards to the Feminist Development Cooperation. Colleagues working in partner countries got first-hand exposure to the new policy and the wider gender network at GIZ, and they were able to link up and connect with colleagues in both head office and other countries. **Good practices** from some countries were later adopted by others, and colleagues now have a much stronger **peer learning network** they know and can rely on in their everyday gender work.

This testimony by Mwanza Mungela, Gender Focal Person in Zambia, speaks to that:

"I was able to gain greater understanding of the Feminist Development Policy (FDP) and as a result spearheaded the roll out of sensitizations within the GIZ Zambia project portfolio. The sensitization targeted gender focal points representing 7 programs. As a result, 5 projects have discussed the FDP in their teams: FANSER, AgFin, SAFE, SGR and D4D while the AgriFood Cluster developed FDP implementation guidelines."

And this network and sector-wide approach persists: Peer learning continues not only through the SNRD working group, its very active MS Teams Room, a series of expert inputs, skill sharing sessions and more. There is close strategic collaboration and a joint annual planning of both SNRD GTA-RD and G500. During the SNRD Africa conference 2023, many participants shared how they had translated ideas and learnings from the conference into their everyday work and built on connections made in 2022. And ideas for a follow-up event already exist...

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Lasting impact: Feedback from conference participants

"It was extremely inspiring and motivating as well. I really feel like we can change the whole global dynamic all together!"

"... wir haben den bisherigen Workshop mitschneiden können (super Event!) und viele gute Impulse für die zukünftige Arbeit unseres SV bekommen!"

"danke nochmal für die tolle Konferenz. Ich bin sehr inspiriert (persönlich und beruflich) aus der Konferenz gegangen. Zudem hat es jede Menge Spaß gemacht mit den Kolleginnen und Kollegen zusammenzuarbeiten und sich auszutauschen!"

"Amazing keynote speakers"

"Representation matters – the speakers were selected well"

"Extremely well organized event – where do we go from here?"

