

## Integrating women in IPM programme in Vietnam



Since the initiation of the IPM training programme in Vietnam in 1992, women have participated at various levels as farmers, trainers and managers. During the initial period of the implementation of IPM programme, female participants accounted for 19% of all participants. More specifically, one out of five participants in a Farmer Field School (FFS) was a woman whilst representation was even higher in the Training of Trainers (TOTs) programme. However, these figures are not necessarily high given that women represent approximately 60% of the Vietnamese agricultural labour force. Contrary to general belief that women usually perform 'light' agricultural work whilst men undertake the 'heavier' jobs, women in reality are involved in both types of activities and possess comprehensive knowledge on their field as much as men. Nonetheless, the disproportionate participation of male farmers in the IPM programmes remains prevalent. This is perpetuated through the selection criteria applied by the village leadership and the cooperative management in determining the admission into the FFS. These criteria primarily comprise the completion of lower secondary school, farming experience and the ability to communicate knowledge to others.



The National IPM programme on behalf of FAO has involved the Center of Women and Family Studies (CWFS) in the TOTs to provide training and information on gender issues. The CWFS conducted the study on 'Women and IPM in Vietnam' with the aim of understanding the role of gender in IPM activities. According to the study, it is maintained that the 'lack of time' is the greatest constraint in the participation of women in IPM training. Women are required to divide their time between tasks in the home and agriculture, whilst men tend to be solely involved in the latter. In addition, although men usually have the discretion to decide on their participation in training activities, women often must seek their husband's or family's approval first.

With regards to access to knowledge, despite the fact that women actively work in many stages of the agricultural production process, they are not accorded adequate attention in the field of agricultural training. This is largely due to the widespread bias that training is associated with 'technical' knowledge and technology which are assumed to be a male domain. As a result, women learn about agriculture including IPM from their neighbours, husbands, parents, the radio or the newspapers and to a small extent from extension staff. Certainly, women receive fragmented information and are not aware of the activities and benefits of the Farmer Field Schools. Nonetheless, on the positive side, the existing female trainers are influencing the ways that local leaders perceive women's capabilities. More importantly, the self-confidence of women farmers is bolstered as they view female trainers as their role models. In addition, they find it easier to communicate and discuss openly with trainers who are also women. The degree to which women have hitherto participated in FFS is largely contingent of the initiatives and approach of individual staff and trainers.

As a result of the recommendations derived from the CWFS study, the Field Guide on gender was developed <http://www.communityipm.org/docs/gender.pdf>. Nevertheless, not everyone involved in the IPM programme were comfortable with the topic of gender when it was firstly introduced. Often trainers themselves are not convinced that such equality of representation is important. Education and advocacy via exercises and training on gender awareness, gender division of labour and gender activity planning have thus been pursued at the FFS and TOTs. It is recognized that the involvement of women in the programme should be promoted. The steadily increasing participation of women in IPM programmes is a result of the constant efforts from the IPM national programme to address related gender issues. Currently, gender is accepted as an integral part of planning for field schools whilst awareness sessions are integrated into the curriculum at TOTs and some field schools. The trainers and farmers are employing gender disaggregated data collection tools in the planning process and follow up activities of the FFS. Moreover, gender inequality is markedly redressed by assessing and resetting the selection criteria that have so far hindered the admittance of women. Furthermore, there is growing involvement of the Women's Union, especially at the local level, whilst there are increasing efforts in encouraging local leaders to facilitate women's participation.



It is acknowledged that a gender quota for field school training is not an adequate long-term solution. A more sustainable measure is to raise gender awareness among social organizations, government agencies, extension and other agricultural departments, the local community and its institutions - and amongst women themselves. Ultimately, IPM should not be understood solely as a technical initiative, but rather as a holistic development approach on how to care for one's health, fields and community.