

## Spanish Presidency of the European Union: 'Science against Poverty' Conference La Granja, 8-9 April 2010

### Background

The aim of this conference was to give visibility and raise awareness of the value of scientific research and innovation in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. The Spanish Presidency will use the Conference conclusions as the basis for its proposals to EU research ministers—who will meet May 26, 2010. *Conference findings should translate into funds for programs committed 'to a more ethical science'.*

The Spanish Presidency of the EU aims to drive the social dimension of science in Europe and elsewhere. In particular, it strives to support science willing to address the following:

- Universal dissemination of scientific knowledge with initiatives specifically targeting populations and countries that have greater difficulties in accessing this knowledge;
- A science that incorporates the social impact and a cooperative approach to development In its design, planning and assessment procedures;
- A science concerned with the transfer of technology to the most underprivileged regions of the world.

Key address: Dr. Louise Sperling, Principal Scientist, International Center for Tropical Agriculture was invited by the Presidency to give a presentation on Agricultural Research and Development (R &D) from a gender perspective. A summary of that presentation appears below. Of particular note are the concrete recommendations made to EU for catalyzing more gender-responsive R+D in agriculture .

### **Moving to Break the Gender Barrier in Agricultural Research and Development**

Despite over thirty years of gender advocacy programs in Agricultural Research and Development (GAD, WID, WAD and other promotional thrusts)<sup>1</sup> , the macro-level statistics on women's position in agriculture look grim. In Africa, for example, women own < 1% of the land, receive only 7% of the agricultural extension services and receive <10% of the credit which goes to small-scale farmers . Though it is common *and accepted* knowledge that women are the backbone of the agricultural sector, particularly in Africa and Asia (performing 60-75% of the farming labor ), rural women remain relatively removed from major production and commercial opportunities. The question is posed: Do we not know how to design and conduct effective and equitable agricultural R+D?

Two concrete field cases of successful agricultural innovation are elaborated in which women, as well as men and children, sustained food security, health and economic benefits. Focusing on climbing bean and seed technology marketing examples, the cases are analyzed in some detail, highlighting key features which have made them cost-effective and equitable-- features which are 'repeatable'. So, in brief, the answer is 'yes' or a 'partial yes'. We have identified key elements for gender-responsive agricultural success, but the driving factors are only partly technically-determined (see below).

The second major question is then posed: What does it take to catalyze change toward impact-oriented gender responsive agricultural science? A four point plan is proposed by which representative bodies such as the European Union can start to break the formidable gender barriers and move toward more effective agricultural R&D work.

**Proposed Actions:**

1. Set clear, initial targets for gender-responsive (or gender-neutral ) R+D—for **all** programs funded in the agricultural sector. (**no exceptions**: even plant molecular characterization has gender implications);
2. Develop agricultural technologies with stakeholder (including gendered) input steering technology design. (**Clear gender-responsive design features should be highlighted**);
3. Build gender-sensitive variables into program milestones and Monitoring and Evaluation (M+E)
  - a. Is the proposed technology responding to women’s needs/priorities?;
  - b. Does the technology encompass gender-specific design features?;
  - c. Are women getting access to the technology?;
  - d. Are women accruing real benefits?  
**(get solid evidence)**
4. Make hard decisions: yes/no --on funding

**promote**- scale up programs that are gender-responsive (neutral);

**stop** programs that are disadvantageous to women (no matter how seemingly productive or lucrative).

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<sup>1</sup> Acronyms: GAD= gender and development; WID= women in development; WAD= women and development