Agriculture in developing countries provides some of the world’s most marginalised and vulnerable communities not only with their main source of food, but a means to create livelihoods and generate income. These communities, which are generally made up of small-scale subsistence farmers, now face added pressures brought about by climate change and a shifting global economy. The need for agricultural growth is more pressing than ever. Recent data from the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO, 2010-11) shows that 43% of the agricultural workforce in developing countries is made up of women. This ranges from approximately 20% in Latin America to approximately 50% in Asia and Africa. However, despite carrying out a significant amount of activities related to agriculture, including crop production and livestock rearing as well as being engaged as wage labourers and in small-scale income generating activities, rural women rarely have their voices heard, and their productive potential remains low (World Bank et al. 2008).

Glasgow Caledonian University experts are researching methods of encouraging governments to extend agricultural support - known as extension - to poor and marginalised female farmers.

Dr Tahseen Jafry, based in Glasgow Caledonian University’s Sustainable Urban Environments Research Group within the Institute for Sustainable Engineering and Technology Research, is a senior lecturer at Glasgow Caledonian University. Qualified as both an engineer and a social scientist, she has accumulated extensive research and development experience on natural resource management, gender and social equity and...
equality in agricultural development (from mechanisation to policy development) and most recently in the development of gender sensitive agricultural extension systems. She is currently working on gender and social issues associated with climate change adaptation and mitigation in the agricultural sector.

Dr Jafry argues that agricultural extension programmes rarely identify women as an integral part of their target audience. She claims the success of agricultural innovation rests with access, availability and support, and that a gender focused extension system is essential. In new research, Dr Jafry is undertaking an assessment of extension methods to reach rural women, sub-contracted by the International Institute of Agriculture at Michigan State University with funding from USAID.

This research is an assessment of a range of different types of agricultural extension approaches that are currently being used to reach rural women in developing countries. This assessment, spanning India, Bangladesh, Kenya and Malawi, will provide new knowledge and understanding of the approaches that are working, those that are not and those that are not working as well as they might. This research will also provide reasoning and explanations for the success and failure of these approaches and to determine what the best approaches are in reaching rural women in different cultural contexts.

Dr Jafry is also conducting a scoping study on the integration of gender and social equity in R4D on WHEAT-Based Systems in South Asia, funded by The International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), part of the Global Agricultural Research Partnership.

This research project will build on the efforts of CIMMYT to improve food security throughout the whole of South Asia. In particular, this work will inform and underpin new and innovative research to boost agricultural productivity. The aim of this integrated research project will be to investigate how gender and social equity issues around agricultural research are currently being addressed and will provide a determination of viable options and approaches for future research programming. The research is being conducted in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal and will be compiled as country specific portfolios but will also contain cross country synthesis and analysis.

Dr Jafry’s expertise has been recognised internationally. GCU played a leading role in organising the second international Climate Change and Social Issues conference, held in Kuala Lumpur in 2012. The senior lecturer recently returned from New Delhi where she gave a presentation into her on-going research at the Global Conference on Women in Agriculture, which was attended by Indian President Pratibha Devisingh Patil. Dr Jafry has also co-edited a special gender-focused edition of The Journal of Agricultural Education and Extension. She is a member of the Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services.

Her paper ‘Reducing Women’s Drudgery in the Context of Climate Change Through Gender Sensitive Agricultural Extension Support’ explores ways in which women can access new and improved tools and better support and service networks. World leaders have identified that better supporting women’s role in agriculture will boost overall food production. It is a key issue amongst the larger debates surrounding climate change and ensuring food security as the world population continues to grow.

Dr Jafry is also working in collaboration with the Mary Robinson Foundation for Climate Justice. With her team of researchers she has led the development of a repository on climate justice. This repository, which is a global first, is a database which contains approximately 1,100 peer-reviewed and published journal articles on climate justice and related topics. The repository will provide a unique learning resource of climate justice as a new way of thinking about how to deal with the challenges of climate change and sustainable development.

Dr Jafry said: “There is an urgent need to identify sustainable strategies and solutions that addresses women’s role in achieving food security in changing climatic conditions. Though women participate in all activities related to agriculture they are usually the first to be marginalised and we need to look at mechanisms for changing that.”

At Glasgow Caledonian University, we work with industry and public sector partners to ensure our expertise responds to the need for real-world innovation. GCU’s strategic business development and knowledge transfer teams work with academic experts in our Schools and Research Institutes to support businesses with a problem-solving approach.

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