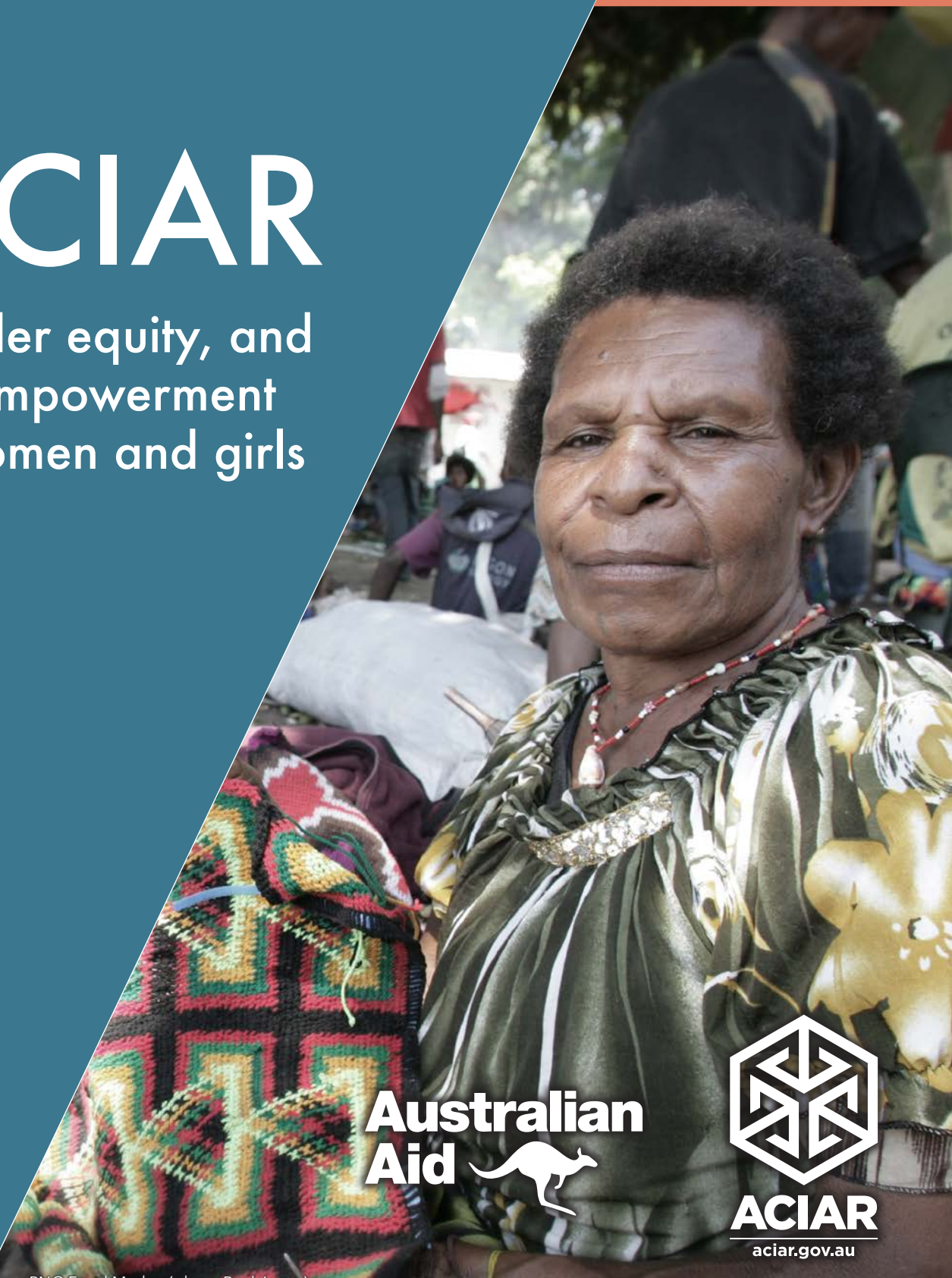




Australian Government
Australian Centre for
International Agricultural Research

ACIAR

Gender equity, and
the empowerment
of women and girls



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ACIAR is working with women and girls to increase their capability and the sustainability, productivity and profitability of agricultural systems

Introduction

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that 80% of all Australian aid addresses and promotes gender equality¹. Gender equality is not only a matter of justice, it is also of great economic importance to the global community. On average women contribute 43% of agricultural labour in developing countries, yet their access to resources is disproportionately low when compared to their male counterparts, especially in rural areas.²

Gender mainstreaming is a strategy, recognized globally, for achieving gender equality.³ It involves ensuring all perspectives and roles are considered in all activities, with the goal of achieving gender equality as an outcome.

Care must be taken when designing projects and programs for international research and development. Empowering women in their families and communities must be balanced against

burdening women with additional work without re-allocating roles and responsibilities within families. Activities must be culturally appropriate to ensure men are also engaged in the process.

Families are healthier, lead more productive lives and have higher levels of education, nutrition and income when women are empowered, thus, breaking the cycle of poverty that is perpetuated from generation to generation.⁴

An increase in access to these resources by women, to the same level as that of men, could increase yields by 20-30 percent. This could raise the total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.4-4 percent, which could in turn reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12-17 percent. Women invest more of their income (derived from labour) in their families than do men. Agricultural research suggests that if women had the same access to productive resources as men, farm productivity would increase with yield increases of 20-30 per cent.⁵



Productivity and profitability

Gender equity, and the empowerment of women and girls, is the means by which gender equality can be achieved. ACIAR is committed to gender equity in the design, delivery and impact of all its activities in order to bring sustained change to both women and to men.⁶ ACIAR's commitment mirrors the Australian Government's aid policy focus on gender equality and women's empowerment.

ACIAR is working in North-western Vietnam through a long term collaboration between Australia and Vietnam, working with the Vietnamese Women's Union, in addressing food security and rural household incomes. In one district alone, the project is helping over 2,000 women, particularly from ethnic minorities and poor smallholder farming families, to increase vegetable production by up to 30 per cent, and sell their vegetables to profitable markets. This would be an additional 8,200 tonnes of high value vegetables with a value of USD 3.1 million each year.⁷

In Afghanistan, part of ACIAR's work to rehabilitate the Mazar catchment, has provided women with a potential source of income. Five hundred and forty women (from about 160 women's groups) received training in nursery techniques for local pistachio and produced more than 80,000 seedlings that were transplanted into the catchment by the community

Three women farmers' groups in Papua New Guinea were provided with financial literacy training and linked to the National Development Bank's microcredit scheme. Access to credit enabled women farmers to: hire labour, purchase inputs—seeds, fertilisers, small farm equipment, and use public transport to go to the market (rather than carrying goods on their back). Thereby improving their productivity and income, while reducing their workload. Participating women claimed that their ability to generate income and contribute to children's education and social obligations earned them respect from the family and community.⁸

Sustainability

In the Solomon Islands, ACIAR is empowering women by employing a dedicated women's activities coordinator to involve women in forestry activities at the community level. Activities include workshops and women-only field days, aimed at increasing the understanding and participation of local women. The project aims to maximise the timber that can be produced from small diameter and poor form trees; to develop a system for value adding to processed timber through air and solar drying. It will also identify the social and environmental impacts of adopting a system of processing at a local level and the effect on the sustained long-term community economic and social well-being.⁹



Farmer with beans (photo: Sally Ingleton)

Capability

Women farmers are important decision makers in relation to the use of inputs into horticulture, and the kind of crops to be grown. An ACIAR supported study, conducted in the East India Plateau, has identified design principles that can foster women's empowerment and mainstreaming. It focused on understanding women's present status, perceptions of self, and how the engagement process impacts on them.¹⁰

In the Lao PDR, a household survey of over 3,600 households in 18 districts in Nam Ngum watershed identified household's access to basic livelihood assets (e.g. financial, physical, natural, social, human) and the nutritional wellbeing of household members, especially women of reproductive age and children under five years old. The data will make a substantial contribution to the statistical base-line available for future research in the area. This project is studying the cumulative impacts of resource-based development including hydropower, mining and plantations.¹¹

Commodity and social scientists are working together to improve livelihoods by engaging women and girls in culturally appropriate work in Pakistan. Working in focal villages has enabled research scientists to better understand the cultural context and the gendered nature of work in situ. Disaggregation of data in a baseline survey has allowed for a gendered approach to interventions.

Awareness of clan and ethnic divisions in a village has enabled a more nuanced approach to encouraging women's collaboration on possible

work-based activities that will bring economic benefit to households and villages.

One of the greatest successes of the project has been the way in which women and girl's lives have been transformed through the confidence and skills that they have developed in Australia Pakistan Agriculture Sector Linkages Program II, enabling them to participate more fully in the family farming business. The impact on men's lives, with women participating more in the decision making, has also been positive.

The project has had substantial capacity building impacts amongst researchers in their own discipline (i.e., social researchers), researchers in other disciplines (i.e., the commodity based teams) and the farming communities in which these teams operate.¹²

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