

Gender and the Seeds of Life Program

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CSPG	Community Seed Production Group
MAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MSc.	Master of Science
MTS	Mid-Term Survey
NGO	Non Government Organization
NSSRV	National Seed System for Released Varieties
OFDT	On Farm Demonstration Trial
PDD	Program Design Document
SoL 2	Seeds of Life – Phase 2
SoL 3	Seeds of Life – Phase 3

Quick facts about SoL's gender mainstreaming

- *MAF has appointed a full time gender coordinator to SoL.*
- *SoL has taken the lead role in organizing the MAF International Women's Day event for two of the last three years.*
- *Women make up 83% of promotions to national positions among the SoL technical staff.*
- *30% of SoL CSPG members are women when only 14% of women from the general population report being a member of a farmer's group.*
- *60% of SoL supported overseas MSc. students in 2014 are women.*
- *A national survey found that access to SoL varieties is not affected by the gender of the head of household.*
- *Women hold 18% of the leadership positions in SoL CSPGs.*

Introduction

This report outlines relevant Seeds of Life (SoL) activities designed to address gender constraints and strategy elements, with a particular focus on women. The report was prepared in August, 2014.

SoL has included gender activities in its program since constraints to women's participation in agriculture were first identified in the SoL 2 Program Design Document in 2008 (SoL, 2008) for inclusion in the program. From 2008 program implementation included direct action to improve a) Women's access to institutional staffing, b) transport for female staff, c) participation of women in mixed activities and meetings, d) illiteracy and language, e) workloads for women and f) the establishment of suitable baseline data. Considerable progress was made towards involving women in the program as presented in the report "Involving women in Seeds of Life" (SoL, 2009).

Gender constraints were re-examined in 2009 during the preparation of the third phase of SoL and identified in the Draft Gender Strategy component of SoL 3 in the Program Design Document (PDD) (SoL, 2010) to include:

- Women's workloads
- Women's participation
- Women's literacy
- Women's land rights
- Women's nutrition

The PDD stresses that SoL 3 is to look beyond simply addressing women's participation and gender balance to a cross-component gender strategy that addresses gender-related impediments and gender inequality in a more strategic way. It outlines a strategy focus on:

- Gender sensitization and/or awareness raising for MAF senior staff, farmers, and women's groups/organizations, around issues related to seed production
- Systematic use of gender/ sex disaggregated M&E and reporting
- Establishment of a wide range of partnerships to promote gender equality, including with MAF's Gender Unit, women's

groups/organizations, and mass media. Efforts to promote gender equality have also been constrained by a lack of gender-specific resources including staff with gender expertise.

Gender strategy development and implementation

The SoL 3 gender strategy drafted during preparation of the PDD in 2010 was finalized in 2011 (SoL, 2011) with the goal of mainstreaming gender across all program components. The main objective of the strategy is: “to promote a full and equal participation, access and benefit of women and men from all activities, processes and outcomes of the SoL 3 program, by integrating gender equality issues into design, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the program, thereby contribute to food security in Timor-Leste”. This strategy focuses on the points outlined in the PDD and provides a policy base for gender training, data collection, and activities. The strategy outlines the current situation and issues regarding gender in the Timorese agricultural system, identifies risks, and provides specific outputs and activities for each component to ensure that these issues are addressed. Based on this strategy, an Annual Gender Workplan is developed each year to plan and outline gender related activities.

Progress with implementation of the strategy was reviewed in 2013 and updated after the program had been socialized (SoL, 2013).

SoL has hosted gender workshops for program and MAF staff which were attended by 417 people nationwide. Of these, 138 (19% women) participated in workshops during October and November, 2013. These workshops were attended by senior MAF staff from the national MAF office and each district office, as well as all SoL program staff. The workshops focused on gender sensitivity and practical methods for mainstreaming gender across MAF and program activities. Twenty one participants have also received specialized gender focal point and training of trainer instruction. The MAF has appointed a national gender coordinator to SoL who, along with other senior staff, regularly participates in gender working group meetings and events.

SoL has taken the lead role in organizing the MAF International Women’s Day activities for two of the last three years (to July, 2014). This event is organized as a day of celebration of women, with focus on inspiring change in women’s health, food, nutrition and wellbeing. Activities included workshops, facilitated discussions, special guest speakers, cooking demonstrations, health and safety information, nutrition training, etc. The 2014 event was organized in collaboration with SEPI, TLPDP, ChildFund, CARE International and various other NGOs. More than 200+ guests came and it was the only large-scale event in Timor-Leste to celebrate International Women’s Day. As part of the 2014 event, SoL commissioned a gender video to document the successes of women engaged with the program. The video was premiered on the day, and will be shown at other venues in the coming months.

Institutional staffing and development

Women hold 8 of 55 technical staff positions and make up 33% of the advisor team. Women employed in technical positions are promoted at a much higher rate than their male colleagues, and make up a large portion of the staff selected to study overseas. SoL has long supported MAF employees to study towards MSc degrees (either through direct financial support or assistance in securing a scholarship) and of the five MAF-SoL staff currently studying in Australia and Indonesia, three are women. Among technical staff, women make up 83% (5 out of 6) of staff promoted to national positions during SoL 3.

Table 1 outlines the gender disaggregated data on training attendees since the inception of SoL 3. Women make up 21% of the overall attendees at SoL training since 2011. All MAF-SoL staff have equal access to training in their fields, and 31% of MAF-SoL trainings have been delivered by women.

Table 1. SoL 3 training course data disaggregated by gender 2011-2014.

	2011		2012		2013		2014		TOTAL
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	% women
Admin & Management			5	9	58	133	24	101	26
Agronomy		20	2	4	45	337	1	11	11
Communication	6	50	47	226	8	22	2	7	17
Computer Application	8	5			4	42			20
Data Collection						5		10	0
English	69	196	49	136	34	163	22	101	23
Gender	24	17	57	142	27	150	81	67	33
Information Technology (IT)				1	6	5			50
Mathematics	7	67	21	77	22	55	5	34	19
Seed Production	29	211	67	353	130	615	83	411	16
Social Science		1			7	28			19
Soils				3	9	32			20
Statistics	60	98	34	106	23	79	5	30	28
Technology Transfer (Extension)						13	1	9	4
Grand Total	203	665	282	1057	373	1679	224	781	21

Participation in mixed activities and meetings

In Timor-Leste's community roles, men are normally assigned as community leaders and play the dominant role in decision making, administration and management of the socio-cultural, economic and political life of communities. Women in many cases participate in formal activities, such as attending district meetings, however they are normally passive participants.

Contrary to what would be expected in this patriarchal environment, women make up a significant portion of the leadership among SoL's CSPGs. A 2013 survey



Figure 1. SoL personnel working with farmers

of 343 CSPGs across 9 districts found that on average, 55% of groups have a woman in one of the top three leadership positions. Women make up 26% of treasurers, 23% of secretaries, and 7% of group chiefs, a total of 18% of the leadership positions in CSPGs nationwide. This clearly shows that SoL CSPGs are an environment in which women assume leadership positions and take an active participatory role in the management of the groups. Table 2 shows the number of women in group leadership positions for each district.

Table 2. Number of women in key positions of the CSPGs in 2012-2013

Key positions held by women	Liquica	Aileu	Viqueque	Ainaro	Baucau	Manufahi	Ermera	Manatuto	Oecusse	No. of women holding key positions	% of key positions held by women
Chief	5	5	1	2	0	3	0	0	7	23	7
Secretary	10	10	7	12	4	3	8	2	23	79	23
Treasurer	20	9	1	8	5	6	12	5	22	88	26
# of women in one of the 3 key positions	35	24	9	22	9	12	20	7	52	190	
Total Groups Surveyed	40	40	40	40	40	40	27	27	49	343	

Women also play an active role in research activities. In the 2011/12 SoL OFDTs, for example, women made up 32% of participating household heads and 35% of farmer field day participants. The percentage of women attending field days in 2013/14 remained the same, but SoL researchers organizing the events strive to increase women's participation by organizing transport, scheduling the event at suitable times, and making sure that all community members are invited. OFDTs are based in farmer's homes or gardens, eliminating the need for travel to participate in the research.

Illiteracy and language

Women in Timor-Leste have higher illiteracy rates than men and therefore are less likely to speak or understand the national language of Tetum. This makes them especially vulnerable to not receiving agricultural assistance. The field staff display a flexible approach to working across languages and switch between Tetum and local languages to involve farmers at farmer field days and in their extension work. Seeds of Life field staff communicate with farmers daily in over 10 local languages across the nation.

Farmer field days at OFDT sites and on research stations use visual techniques to convey information to farmers including graphs, illustrations, and practical demonstrations. Many SoL publications such as the *"Tékniku Kuda Batar Ne'ebe Diak"* maize extension pamphlet rely heavily on illustrations and pictograms and use minimal text to communicate their message. SoL also uses a range of multimedia materials such as radio programs, community theater performances, and videos to ensure that information is available to the widest possible audience. The SoL baseline survey found that men and women were equally likely to have heard about the SoL program through MAF staff and/or extension workers, NGOs/organizations, media, relatives, and neighbors.

Workloads

Men are traditionally considered as the heads of household in Timor-Leste. In terms of productive roles, both women and men are involved in subsistence and non-subsistence farming systems. Activities that are predominantly performed by women include seed selection, planting, harvesting and post-harvest processing (food storage, processing and preparation). Also, women are mainly responsible for reproductive

roles related to child rearing and care and maintenance of the household, such as cooking, washing and cleaning, and fetching water and firewood. There is therefore a risk of increasing workloads for women through the introduction of high-yielding crops. Higher yields bring greater food security but also increase the labor needed for harvesting, processing, etc. Experiments conducted during SoL 2 document that *Sele* and *Nakroma* actually decrease the workload of pounding and cooking compared to local maize or rice by 20 and 5 minutes respectively. Throughout SoL 3, farmer field days have continued to assess the pounding and cooking time/effort of all tested varieties to ensure that adopters of these varieties will not be disadvantaged in these areas. To address the issue of postharvest labor among CSPGs, SoL provided maize shellers to each group in order to lessen the burden of this activity. This has a twofold benefit to women in the groups in that it reduces the overall time and labor required for shelling and because the introduction of a mechanical implement makes the job more acceptable for men to participate in.

The higher yields of improved varieties can also reduce the total food preparation labour required by a family. During times of food shortages, East Timorese families often turn to foraging for wild foods to supplement their food needs. Women and girls carry out the labour intensive tasks of repeated boiling of wild beans to remove bitterness and poison and drying and pounding of wild tubers and sago palm (for example, wild beans can take up to 3 hours boiling in order to remove poisons). These tasks are not only onerous in themselves but also require a great deal of firewood that must be gathered. One of the social impacts of increased production may be reduced reliance on wild tubers, beans, and sago which require labour intensive preparation.

Land rights

Lack of control over land and limited access to technical information potentially marginalizes women's involvement in agricultural and seed systems. Establishing community seed production groups is one means of addressing this issue that has been tried successfully by both SoL II and CARE, resulting in substantial impact for the women involved. Participants claim that they have more food and in some cases cash; increased sense of self-confidence and solidarity; increased skills related to seed production; and improved opportunity to exercise leadership skills and demonstrate to society that they can also be leaders. Groups consulted expressed strong support for the activity despite the increased workload that has resulted in some cases. Table 3 outlines the progress made by SoL in setting up CSPGs across the nation.



Figure 2. Farmer selecting seed

Table 3. Gender disaggregated data for CSPGs 2013-2014

District	Sub-District	Suco	Sucos with groups	# Groups	Total Members	Men	Women	% Women	Gender Target 30%
Aileu	4	31	30	99	1488	950	538	36	
Ainaro	4	21	21	86	1226	937	289	24	
Baucau	6	59	42	121	1447	1046	391	27	
Bobonaro	6	50	33	109	1252	753	499	40	
Covalima	7	30	30	60	852	743	109	13	
Dili	6	31	7	21	365	214	151	41	
Ermera	5	52	28	67	897	601	296	33	
Liquica	3	23	15	68	853	534	319	37	
Lautem	5	34	34	73	853	623	230	27	
Manatuto	6	29	28	63	1009	796	213	21	
Manufahi	4	29	29	99	1345	1001	344	26	
Oecussi	4	18	18	102	1350	726	624	46	
Viqueque	5	35	34	118	1478	1114	364	25	
	65	442	349	1086	14415	10038	4367	30	

During the 2013-2014 cropping season over 1,000 CSPGs were established across all 13 districts, covering nearly every rural suco nationwide (Table 3). These groups place seed production expertise, technical training, and group institutional support directly in the communities. The goal for SoL CSPGs to have women make up at least 30% of the members has been achieved on a national scale. In six districts this target has been met or exceeded and in only one district is women's participation in the groups more than 10% away from the goal. This is a much higher rate of inclusion than in other farmers groups outside the SoL system. The SoL Baseline survey found that only 14% of female respondents from the general population reported being a member of a farmer's group. Table 3 shows the gender breakdown of group members nationally and for each district.

Another way SoL provides increased land tenure security to women is by providing economic opportunities to farming women. For the 2012-13 growing season, SoL signed seed production contracts with 29 female heads of household (22% of the total contracts awarded) providing extensive training and a rare economic opportunity. These contract seed growers produced high quality planting materials under contract at a guaranteed purchase price. Access to the cash economy is a challenge for all farming families and becoming a SoL contract grower provides much needed income to participating households.

M&E activities and data

Gender disaggregated data is collected for all SoL surveys and as part of the program's continuing M&E activities. The SoL MTS, for example, found that there was no statistically significant difference in adoption rate of improved varieties between male and female headed households. Many of the statistics quoted throughout this report were calculated from data collected during M&E activities.

SoL has made a substantial contribution to the understanding of gender roles in Timorese agriculture. The SoL Baseline survey published in October 2012, reached 1,800 households and provides a valuable insight into gender roles in Timorese agriculture and how men and women perceive and access SoL benefits. Some select findings from the Baseline survey relating to gender include:

- Of the farmers selecting the variety to be planted, 52% were men and 48% women. Selection of maize seed was similarly divided by gender (45% of women were responsible for selecting seed).
- There was no statistically significant difference between the genders when

questioned about knowledge of farmer's groups or market traders selling seed in the area.

- In 10 out of the 13 districts, women considered their households to be more food insecure than men.

Studies have also been conducted by non-SoL researchers that have provided interesting data on how gender affects agricultural practices and access to new technologies. Jensen et. al. (2014) found that there is no correlation between gender of the head of household and adoption of improved varieties in Timor-Leste. This is a great success of the SoL program, as much effort has been put into making promoting varieties to all stakeholders.

References

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