



Arezza | www.arezza.net | skype: arezza1 | twitter: @arezza1 | info@arezza.net

Violence Against Women is an Agriculture and Economic Issue

by Mara Russell in [Women Thrive](#)



Gender-based violence (GBV) transcends borders, social status, wealth ranking, socio-cultural background, religion, level of education, and age. It exists in every society and in every country in the world. Many of us working in international development consider GBV to be solely a health issue. Unfortunately, this is a dangerous assumption.

In Zambia, for instance, violence tends to spike after the harvest when households have more cash and husbands and wives often fight about how to spend earnings. In my own experience working in Zambia, some women could not attend agricultural trainings because their husbands suspected they were having extra-marital affairs. Also, I talked with women in Haiti who were afraid to go into businesses that required travel – such as trading or input provision – because they were afraid of being attacked by men while on the road. All of these instances of abuse demonstrate that women who take on new roles in the agricultural or private sector may risk reprisals from husbands or male relatives for challenging gender norms.

Many development practitioners are simply unaware that violence and abuse are inhibiting women from climbing the economic ladder out of poverty. While economic opportunities may reduce the likelihood of violence in some cases, they may exacerbate the problem in others. When planning agriculture and economic growth projects that seek to increase yields and incomes, sometimes practitioners overlook the fact that many women will not be able to take advantage of these opportunities because they face the threat of violence. Yet, these are fundamental principles of “Do No Harm” that must be taken into account if we want to ensure that women are given an opportunity to improve their livelihoods.

So, what do we do about it?

Today, some practitioners assume that “gender integration” is as simple as involving more women in agriculture and economic growth projects. But, rather than applying the same activities and methods that we use for men, we need to consider different approaches for women. If we fail to do so, sometimes projects have negative consequences on communities, and in some cases, they can actually contribute to more instances of GBV.

We need to ask ourselves how gender-based violence affects the lives of women in a particular country or culture. We also need to ask the women we partner with on the ground whether they have experienced abuse, and if so, under what circumstances. And, how has violence affected both

their lives and livelihoods?

Conducting gender assessments are also critical to understanding the gender constraints that impact women in the agriculture and livelihoods context. In doing so, practitioners must take into account both existing and potential “flash points” for violence.

Donors and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are devoting much needed attention to conducting initial gender analyses as part of agricultural programs, but we need more action at the policy level. Ministries of Agriculture should conduct their own gender-specific analyses to identify these constraints, then follow-up by developing policies, strategies and implementation plans to address them. Part of our work can involve working with policymakers to ensure this happens.

While it may not be possible to completely stamp out GBV, we can reduce its prevalence throughout agriculture and economic growth activities by:

- Building support among traditional, religious and political leaders and working with them to convey positive messages around women participating more in livelihood activities without the threat of violence or abuse.
- Working with men to build their understanding of the benefits of women engaging in agriculture and livelihood activities. Engage men as role models to lead conversations with other men about ways to overcome the problem of gender-based violence associated with women engaging in agriculture.
- Linking with women’s groups that provide a safe space for women to discuss GBV issues openly.
- Supporting efforts to advocate for legal protection and enforcement of laws that protect women from violence. These laws should apply in the household, on the farm, in markets, in workplaces, in factories, and wherever women seek to take advantage of economic opportunities without fear.

In many parts of the world, GBV often goes unnoticed and is accepted as a reality of life – this is a fundamental constraint that practitioners face. If we turn a blind eye to GBV when implementing agricultural and economic development programs, we unwittingly foster it and may even endanger the very women whose lives we hope to better.

For more information, please see the [United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence Globally](#).

This blog post was written by Mara Russell, Food Security and Livelihoods Practice Manager for [Land O'Lakes International Development](#), as part of our series on Domestic Violence Awareness Month