

Increasing sustainable food production could empower Cambodian women

February 26 2016



A farmer harvests her crop in Siem Reap province, Cambodia. A new Penn Stateled project aims to improve the livelihoods and nutrition of Cambodian women and families by promoting the sustainable production of marketable vegetables. Credit: Rick Bates, Penn State

A team of researchers, led by scientists in Penn State's College of



Agricultural Sciences, will launch a project designed to improve nutrition and empower women in Cambodia by promoting their production and marketing of horticultural crops and rice produced via sustainable intensification practices.

Funding for the \$1 million project, titled Women in Agriculture Network Cambodia: Gender and Ecologically Sensitive Agriculture, was awarded by the Feed the Future Sustainable Intensification Innovation Lab, which is based at Kansas State University. The program is supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development as part of Feed the Future, the U.S. government's global hunger and food security initiative.

Smallholder farmers produce nearly half of the world's food, but they often have notoriously low yields, strong gendered divisions of labor and limited financial resources, according to lead investigator Rick Bates, professor of horticulture at Penn State.

"Small-scale farming systems such as these—prevalent in many developing countries—have been called 'very resilient poverty traps' that are characterized by chronic food and nutrition insecurity," said Bates, whose expertise includes horticulture enterprise development and <u>sustainable food production</u> systems. "Such is the situation in Cambodia, where some regions have 45 percent poverty rates and high concentrations of stunting and malnutrition."





Smallholder farmers, such as these in Cambodia, produce nearly half of the world's food, but they often have notoriously low yields, strong gendered divisions of labor and limited financial resources, said Penn State professor Rick Bates. Credit: Rick Bates, Penn State

To overcome these challenges, the researchers aim to improve the socioeconomic and nutritional status of women and their families by promoting existing and potential sustainable intensification technologies, practices and policies that foster production of nutritious and marketable food while protecting agro-ecological resources.

Sustainable intensification, or SI, is defined as the process of enhancing crop yields on existing agricultural lands while minimizing environmental impact. The concept grew out of the realization that a



growing global population is increasing the demand for food at a time when land, water, energy and other inputs are in short supply.

Bates noted that the project has three major objectives:

- To identify and promote adoption of gender-sensitive SI technologies and practices in rice and horticulture value chains, targeted to improve ecological resilience and the nutritional status and income of poor households.
- To identify and foster the conditions and social networks that will enable women to fully participate in the local, regional and international value chains for horticultural and rice-based foods produced via SI.
- To build capacity in local agricultural institutions, nongovernmental organizations, and international universities and research institutes to develop and promote the adoption of innovations in gender-sensitive and ecologically sensitive SI.

The researchers contend that horticultural and other foods grown by <u>smallholder farmers</u> via SI are produced and distributed through value chains that can be exploited to create new opportunities for women and improve the nutrition of their families.

"Cambodia represents a best-case scenario for promoting SI through the increased involvement of women, who already play a significant and often nearly autonomous role in agriculture in much of the country," Bates said. "Our project stresses the importance of markets and will promote efforts to move Cambodian agriculture toward a market-driven system."

However, explained co-principal investigator Leif Jensen, because markets can work differently for women and men, the researchers will bring a gendered-economy perspective to the project.



"Our value chain analysis will address normative, cultural, economic and political forces and barriers that affect access to and control of resources in the production of horticultural goods via SI in Cambodia," said Jensen, Distinguished Professor of Rural Sociology and Demography at Penn State. "Although the project will focus on four of the country's provinces, we hope our approach will serve as a model for the entire country and region."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

Citation: Increasing sustainable food production could empower Cambodian women (2016, February 26) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <u>https://phys.org/news/2016-02-sustainable-food-production-empower-cambodian.html</u>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.