University of Florida is member of consortium to receive $7 million for empowering women farmers

University of Florida (UF) is part of a consortium led by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) that has been awarded $7 million from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to increase global food security and support effective rural development. The focus of the project is to empower women to increase agricultural productivity thereby contributing to higher household incomes and improved nutrition.

The new project, “Integrating Gender and Nutrition within Agricultural Extension Services” (INGENAES) aims to strengthen gender and nutrition integration within and through agricultural extension and advisory services and ultimately reduce poverty, improve food security, and reduce malnutrition.

“This is an action-oriented program. We will work in select Feed the Future countries to help them improve women-farmers’ access to extension services and trainings. Specifically, we will work with country stakeholders to facilitate women’s access to critical production inputs and help extension services to design and disseminate nutrition programs to both men and women.” said Dr. Sandra Russo, UF/INGENAES principal investigator and director of Program Development unit at the UF International Center (UFIC).

INGENAES is one of the associate awards that have followed the $12 million, USAID-funded, UIUC-led Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services (MEAS) project, where UF plays an important role as a consortium member. MEAS serves to define and disseminate good practice strategies and approaches to establishing efficient, effective, and financially sustainable rural extension and advisory service systems in selected developing countries.

The INGENAES team will be working in at least eight countries that will be selected over the next couple of months. The team consists of UF, UIUC, University of California, Davis and a D.C.-based consultancy firm, Cultural Practice LLC. UF work will be implemented collaboratively by UFIC and IFAS Global.

Dr. Kathleen Colverson, associate director of International Programs in the University of Florida’s College of Agriculture, has been working with the MEAS project since its inception. She explains, “Appropriate technologies and inputs for women farmers differ tremendously by country and context, but it is most important to consider the multiple roles that women hold. They are wives, mothers, food producers, cooks, and more, so it is critical that when you introduce a new technology you are not adding another responsibility to women’s already overburdened lifestyles. Women and children are generally responsible for repetitive household
tasks (such as gathering firewood and carrying water), often without mechanization and electricity, so the question is how can we introduce innovations that will reduce their burden and not add a different burden, such as providing equipment that is too big, heavy, or dangerous.”

INGENAES will draw from the MEAS’ hallmark framework of “Teach, Learn, and Apply,” three components which function not as stand-alone activities but instead fit together to inform, influence, and build on each other.

In many developing countries women receive little to no access to extension services, an important source of information for agricultural production. Women’s contributions to agricultural production and throughout the agricultural value chains are frequently constrained by numerous factors, including lack of land ownership, lack of access to agricultural inputs, less labor availability and additional responsibilities related to child care and domestic work. This project will explore new approaches to reaching not only women, but advancing gender equity in the selected agricultural systems through training and monitoring successful innovations says Dr. Walter Bowen, director of IFAS Global and Co-PI of UF/INGENAES.

With a high-level goal of improving livelihoods, the INGENAES project will be strongly focused on changing behavior at the individual and organizational levels.

Initially concentrating on four countries, the team will apply a multistep programmatic approach for 15 months and will later revise the program as needed for an additional four countries. The specific countries have yet to be selected, but they will be selected from among the existing Feed the Future countries (http://www.feedthefuture.gov).

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The U.S. Agency for International Development administers the U.S. foreign assistance program providing economic and humanitarian assistance in more than 80 countries worldwide.