

## Building women's participation in the wool industry

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**Abstract.** Involving more women in extension events is one of the targets of Australian Wool Innovation's (AWI) strategy for 2013-2015. To address this target a training and support process, aimed at service providers, was developed and delivered. The two-step process involved hands-on training for service providers ('Grow Your Farmer Networks' (GYFN) Workshops) supported by a small grants program (Mini Grants). The GYFN Workshops allowed participants to develop and share skills and ideas to engage more women and was supported post-workshop using Mini Grants to fund implementation of new approaches for engaging women in events and evaluating outcomes. This process proved very successful in increasing service providers' engagement with women and resulted in more women attending events. A model that depicts the ability of an individual to participate in events, and the lessons learnt from the project, showed the participation issue is complex. It was found that the approaches trialed by the project addressed the external barriers to participation. The approaches presented here can also be used to target other groups such as young people to increase their participation.

**Keywords:** Participatory approaches, empowerment, sheep, wool, women, barriers to engagement, Australian Wool Innovation

### Introduction

'Building Women's Capacity in the Wool Industry' was a two-year project that aimed to advance AWI's strategic objective of 'increasing farm productivity by improving sheep producers' resilience, capacity and confidence in running profitable and sustainable businesses'. It was built on the premise that investing in the capacity development of women (and the service providers who work with women) would enable women to actively contribute their knowledge and skills to their farm businesses and the wool industry; thus realising the potential of half the industry's human resource base. It was postulated that this would have benefits for individual wool businesses as well as the industry at large.

AWI's strategic objective of increasing participation by women and young people is shared across rural industries. A recent study by Future Directions International (Marslen 2015) found that women's empowerment and participation in agriculture more broadly was:

...not merely a gender equity issue. The Australian agricultural sector faces challenges from environmental change and a competitive global market. Women make up half of the rural workforce; consequently their lack of influence denies the sector half the potential of its workforce. Australia needs to both empower women and radically change the way that agriculture is portrayed here, to encourage more young women to see agriculture as a viable career path.

Involving more women in agriculture has been an objective for extension since the late 1980's (FAO 1993). Numerous studies undertaken during this time showed the benefits of increasing women's participation on farm and in industry (Kerby et al. 1996). Many recommendations were made about how to achieve increased participation (Marsh & Pannell 2000; A Vision for Change 2000).

As a result, increasing women's participation became a stated aim of government and industry organisations during the 1990's and early 2000's. Strategic policies, initiatives and projects were developed, funded and resourced to actively pursue this aim. These included policy development; strategies for increasing the number of women on boards and advisory groups; profiling and developing the capacity of women through initiatives like the Rural Women's Awards programs; connecting women through women's networks, conferences, leadership and development programs; training of service providers; and the design and delivery of extension programs that encouraged diversity and built capacity across the triple bottom line. The result of this strategic investment resulted in increased recognition of the value of women and an increase in women's participation (see case studies in A Vision for Change, 2000).

Women are key partners in farm businesses and are responsible for 40-50% of the output on Australian family farms. They are involved in both strategic decision-making and critical operational activities. Informed, skilled and engaged women have great potential to make a significant difference in the sector (RIRDC 1998) yet the majority of extension and training is still unconsciously directed at the men in the business, in particular, older men.

The wool industry's contribution to this debate and action resulted in a report in the early 2000's (Fulton and McGowan 2005) highlighting what had been achieved, further initiatives to involve more women and the benefits to the industry of such activity. They concluded the main barriers preventing greater participation in wool industry extension and training activities by women were:

- a perceived lack of relevance of programs
- program design
- activity promotion & marketing
- cost and convenience of participation
- a lack of inclusivity of language
- failure to use women's networks to engage women.

A scoping study undertaken subsequently to the Fulton work (McGowan et al. 2012) revealed a major gap in demographic data collected by wool industry service providers. Service providers were asked about the proportion of female attendees at agricultural training and extension activities. The research revealed that they had little factual data to refer to and their best estimate was that women made up only 5-20% of the participants attending. Nothing was known about their age or role on farm.

The study concluded that encouraging women's participation in wool industry education and training had been largely overlooked in the design, promotion, delivery and evaluation of extension activities. This was due to service providers being unaware of the need to specifically design and market events for women as clients and, that once aware, they were unsure of how to do this. While most service providers said they did not specifically target women for inclusion in their activities, 88% were interested in strategies and techniques they could apply to engage more women farmers and increase women's participation in their extension activities. They recognised that the increased participation of women as partners in farming would bring many benefits to wool businesses and the industry. The AWI service providers said that with a more targeted approach, and in some circumstances more resources, they were confident they could increase rates of women's participation (McGowan et al. 2012).

The industry consultation by McGowan et al. (2012) revealed there was much good will and desire to tackle the issue of increasing women's participation by service providers and State Coordinators of AWI's network projects. The 'Building Women's Capacity in the Wool Industry' project was devised to address some of the issues raised by the McGowan et al. (2012) and Fulton and McGowan (2005) reports by trialling alternative approaches, collecting and evaluating data on participation and communicating findings to the wider industry.

## Methods

'Building Women's Capacity in the Wool Industry' was an action-research (Mills 2000) project. It applied the knowledge about women's participation and extension practice from the Fulton and McGowan (2005) and McGowan et al. (2012) reports to real-life situations in the wool industry. The results of the initial research were applied in five main project areas through activities designed to create positive change, with the 'clients' as active participants in the delivery and evaluation of those activities. The delivery of each project element involved an iterative process of planning, action and review.

This paper reports the outcomes of two of the five project areas and discusses the implications of the approach to not only engaging women but also other minority groups, e.g. young people. The hypothesis was that service providers do not currently target women because they do not have the awareness, resources, skills or support to do so. The Grow Your Farmer Networks (GYFN) Workshops, coupled with a small grants (Mini Grants) program, were developed to provide resources, support and targets to enable service providers to test new approaches to engaging more women in wool industry productivity-focused events.

A model that explored the ability of an individual to participate in extension activities was developed as a result of data collected and analysed via case study interviews and surveys. The model examined the factors influencing participation that are internal to a participant as well as those that are external. It explored the complexity of the issue and which factors were within the ability of an extension provider to control.

A number of women in different roles in the industry were identified as case studies to gain information about their roles, experiences, perspectives and lives in the wool industry. A mixture of phone and face-to-face semi-structured interviews and surveys were conducted with 38 people. Interviews were conducted via phone, one-on-one farm visits and at major industry

events (2014 BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB conference - Bendigo and LambEx 2014 – Adelaide). The aims of the surveys and interviews were to:

- Identify the roles that women play in the farm business and their perceptions of their roles.
- Identify their involvement in the industry as service providers.
- Talk about their experience of being a woman in the wool industry, or on a farm, and any issues regarding their participation in the industry, on or off-farm.

The interview data was presented as series of case studies to capture the stories and experiences of a variety of women in the industry. The themes that emerged from the interviews and surveys were identified and reported and a model developed to represent the factors that impacted on women's ability to participate in the wool industry.

### **1. 'Grow Your Farmer Networks' (GYFN) Train the Trainer program**

GYFN was designed to develop services providers' skills and strategies for engaging women in wool industry events and provide motivation and support to implement new approaches. The program aimed to enable service providers to share their experiences with other like-minded people in a facilitated group process. With support to implement, monitor and review the outcomes, they would be able to engage more women more effectively, and be able to apply the techniques used in future planning and projects.

The initial GYFN was developed in consultation with AWI in 2013. The development of program content was based on the project team's extensive experience in working with women in agriculture, and the research provided by the scoping study into best practice extension techniques, including those to engage women (McGowan et al. 2012). AWI provided input into program design and topics, promotion and participation. The program was devised to both model and present key elements of best practice extension for women. A 'Checklist for Engaging Women' was compiled from sources including BESTWOOL/BESTLAMB group feedback and facilitator research, Grow Your Farmer Networks workshop (Trawool 2013), and findings from Kerby et al (1996). The checklist included tips at different stages of program design, promotion, facilitation and evaluation including Project start up; Engaging Participants; Timing; Event Program; Event/Activity Planning; Cost; Venue; Facilitation Style and On-going Communication.

The workshop program included:

- the role of business and personal values and their influence on work with women farmers
- the benefits of women's participation from research and participants' own experience
- case studies to illustrate differences, strengths and barriers when working with women
- social media engagement strategies
- an outline of AWI programs
- mini Grants program
- a brainstorming session on the opportunities that exist to apply learnings to their practice
- a project development session
- development of participants' own checklist for working with women.

The training ran for approximately 11 hours over one and a half days, and included a networking dinner on the first evening. Presentations by the project team members were supported by a comprehensive workbook containing group and individual exercises, the 'Checklist for Engaging Women', current AWI programs and contact information, background information and further reading. Proven approaches, tools and techniques to engage women were introduced and participants were invited to reflect on, share and discuss their own experiences.

The program also encouraged every participant to develop a project, event or activity that would apply their learning to engaging women in a wool industry focused program or event. A Mini Grants program was presented as a practical means of support to assist with project implementation.

Promotion and delivery of the GYFN programs involved the development of a suite of materials that was refined throughout the program and is available for ongoing use. A contacts database developed through the original scoping study was used as the basis for promoting the program and expanded over the course of the project. The program was promoted through personal contact with potential participants, tapping into local networks wherever possible and using social media.

An evaluation plan was developed to ascertain participant's levels of skill and knowledge in working with women before and after the GYFN program, and to record changes relating to application of GYFN learning following participation. Evaluation included pre- and post-workshop

participant surveys, group feedback at the conclusion of each workshop, and monitoring of participant progress via conference calls and email in the months following the workshop.

## **2. A 'Mini-Grants' support program model**

The Mini Grants Program was devised based on experiential learning theory (Kolb 1984) and developed in consultation with AWI in 2013. Grants were offered to GYFN program participants wanting to engage with more women in the sheep and wool industry to build their networks and make improvements to their sheep and wool enterprises. This ensured potential recipients had the theory and techniques needed to support a positive outcome in engaging women in their project.

Eight grants of \$3,000 each were budgeted into the project. Submissions were accepted following expressions of interest and discussion of project ideas with the project team. Projects were selected on merit in consultation with AWI according to the extent to which they delivered project priorities of increasing women's participation, networking and relationship building, improving industry communications and linking with AWI programs and data collection. As with the GYFN program, extensive supporting materials were developed, produced and reviewed for the promotion and delivery of the Mini Grants programs.

## **Discussion of Results**

### **1. Engaging and training service providers - GYFN workshops**

The GYFN program was delivered in Trawool (Vic) in September 2013 and Albany (WA) in July 2014. Fourteen women and three men participated. All participants were service providers from the agriculture and natural resource management sector, with a range of roles and responsibilities across WA, SA, Victoria and NSW.

The main outcomes achieved by the GYFN workshops were:

- A significant increase in participants' understanding of ways to increase women's participation in wool industry programs and events (84% increase) and the importance of working with personal and business values (80% increase).
- The development of a professional network for service providers who wish to work with women.
- An increase in participants' skills and confidence working with women.
- An increase in participants' understanding of the benefits of working with women and the range of programs available to help them do so.
- An evolving checklist for increasing participation of women at events.

Overall, participants reported that the depth, range and balance of topics covered had deepened their understanding, increased their knowledge and improved their skills in working with women in the industry. All topics were considered of interest and value, although the perceived levels of value of specific topics varied between workshops.

The immediate impacts of attending a GYFN program were broad, ranging from shifts in participants views of the industry to the detailing of changes participants would make to their own activities. Below is a selection of comments made by participants:

...reinforced the necessity for groups to collaborate and expand their networks... Also building professional networks was of great value, and building the profile of women in ag activities is critical...

It definitely highlights to me the internal and external barriers women face to be more engaged in agriculture.

To be more flexible. Understanding people's needs and how this influences their behaviour. Their needs are not my needs necessarily.

Re-focus on the structure, content and delivery of events to cater for a broader cross section of industry.

It made me really think about the things we consider when setting up an event, especially those details that may make an event more appealing for women to attend – timing, venue, availability of childcare or children friendly, etc.

The majority of the 17 GYFN participants (76%) left the workshops intending to develop and implement a plan to include more women, although a lesser percentage (53%) intended to evaluate the outcome of the resulting programs. This highlighted the need to build evaluation into funded programs. The most common immediate action participants intended was to review the timing, design and promotion of their programs and events to enable women to participate, and to collect gender-based data (16 of 17 participants). Seven participants intended to apply

for a Mini Grant to assist them to implement a specific project engaging women. Two intended to instigate systemic change within their organisations to make engaging women a norm.

Some participants applied their learnings immediately following the GYFN workshops. This was demonstrated by their development of projects specifically to engage women in agriculture through the Mini Grants program. Participants also reported that they had applied the learning from the workshop to other programs and projects they were involved with.

In follow-up conversations several months after the workshops, GYFN participants reported successfully using GYFN techniques and approaches within their programs, particularly:

- using the 'Checklist for Engaging Women' to plan and organise events
- setting up group rules at the start of group events
- using photolanguage to discuss values
- including a values session in workshops/events
- charging per business rather than per head for workshops/events
- collecting gender data at events.

GYFN participants had also deliberately disseminated the information, techniques and approaches gained through the program to their team members and colleagues, creating a ripple effect that has changed the delivery of, for example, beef industry programs provided by Rural Directions in SA, and rural leadership programs provided by NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI).

## **2. Supporting Local providers: Mini Grants**

The AWI Building Women's Capacity in the Wool Industry project funded eight Mini Grants projects in 2013/14. All engaged farming women, either in researching their needs or providing a learning experience (or both). All projects focussed on engaging participants in ongoing networks (Table 1).

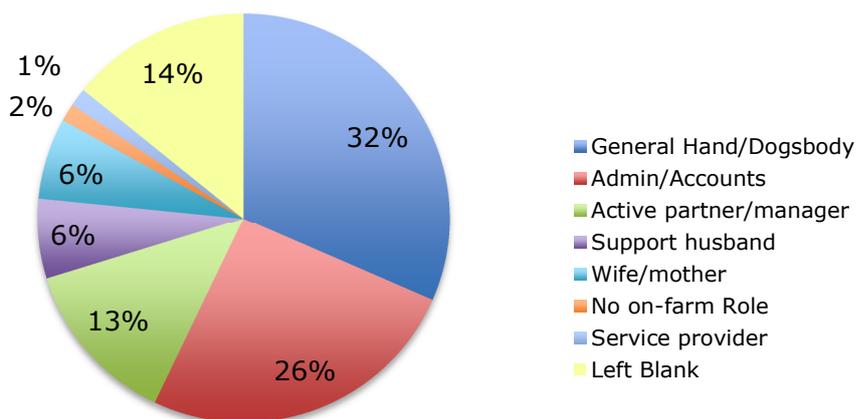
**Table 2. Distribution of AWI Mini Grants**

<b>Project Title</b>	<b>Project Type</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Provider</b>
Women in Wool in SA's Mid North	Focus Group Networking	South Australia	Agricultural service provider
Funding On-farm Improvements for Wool Producers in NE Victoria	Workshop Networking	NE Victoria	Individual
Women, be a bit more Sheepish!	Bus Tour, Networking	NE Victoria	Landcare Network
Wool Webinars for Women	Survey, Webinar Training, Wool Webinars	SW Western Australia	Agricultural service provider
Great Southern Women in Wool	Workshop, Networking	SW Western Australia	Agricultural service provider
Scoping trip to 'Women in Farming Enterprises' Annual Seminar	Bus Tour, Information Day, Networking	SW Western Australia	Individual
Jobs for the Girls	Workshop, Networking	Southern NSW	Individual
Woolpower	Workshop, Networking	Southern NSW	Landcare Network

In all, 274 people participated in Mini Grants-funded events (255 women, 19 men), while 109 participants from five of the eight projects contributed to a dataset requested by the service providers on enrolment and completion of the event. The analysis showed that 43% of the 109 respondents had dependent children at the time they attended the event, indicating the enabling effect of considering childcare and timing events to fit with parenting responsibilities.

Ninety-five per cent of respondents described themselves as having one or more on-farm roles (Figure 1). Many of the younger participants left this section blank. These categories indicate the range of opportunities that exist to significantly improve industry performance, by building women's capacity.

**Figure 5. Participants’ roles in farm business**

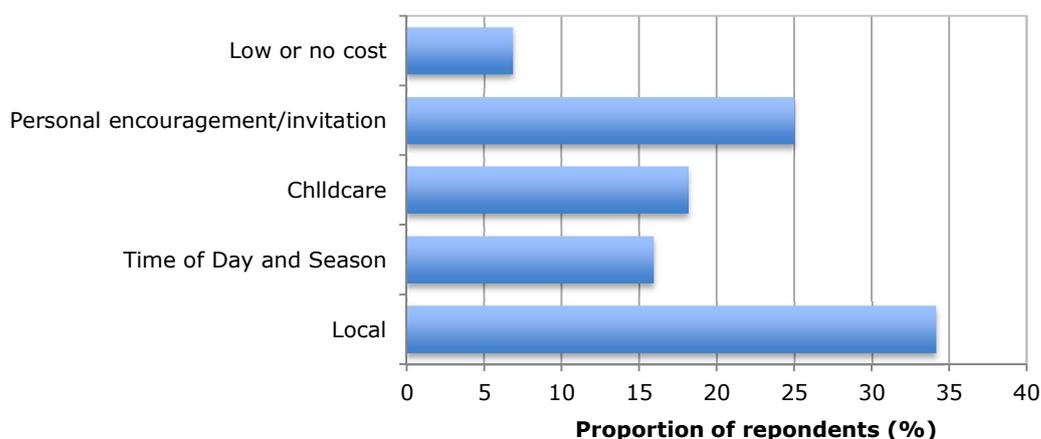


Participants attended the events chiefly seeking specific skills and knowledge to assist with their farm business (30%), because they had an interest in the subject matter (20%) and in order to network with other women (18%). Other motivating factors expressed included enhancing industry connections (11%) and showing support for an event specifically targeting women in the industry (9%). Less commonly expressed motivating factors were listed as seeking to participate more fully in the farm business (4%), because the event was especially for women (4%), passion for the industry and to explore industry options (2% respectively).

In general terms, these responses indicate that a need for women to gain information, skills and knowledge to assist them to participate in their farm businesses provided the major motivation for many to attend (54% of all motivating factors expressed). The fact that the events specifically involved women provided the other major reason for many to attend (31% of all factors).

Participants were also asked to articulate the factors that enabled them to attend the event (see Figure 2). The most common enabling factor was that the event was local, reinforcing the fact that time, travel and associated costs are limiting factors for women to attend industry events (McGowan et al. 2012). Interestingly, the participants also cited personal encouragement or a personal invitation extended to them to attend as an important enabling factor. In other words, despite motivation and interest, these women would not have attended the event without engagement on a personal level. This result also reinforced the messages conveyed by the GYFN program; that engaging women in industry programs requires specific attention not just to need and desire to learn, but to ‘enabling’ them to attend.

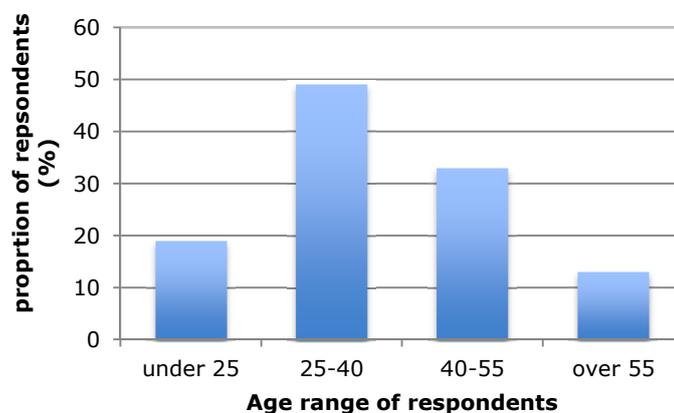
**Figure 6. Factors enabling women to participate in industry training.**



The events included participants from students to older farming women. The majority of participants were in the 25-40 age group (Figure 7). The participation in these events differs significantly from the broader industry figures (not presented here), highlighting again the

effectiveness of the methods put forward in the GYFN program, and the possibilities open to the industry when women are actively targeted and enabled to attend.

**Figure 7. Participant age breakdown**



The Mini Grants participation data indicated the success of the service providers in using GYFN techniques to reach and engage women in industry activities. It also indicated the range of areas in which industry training is needed for women. Common topics of interest expressed by project participants included enterprise management, marketing, financial management and accounting, appropriate technologies, interpersonal communication and family relationships, on-ground skills in livestock husbandry and handling, and pasture health and management. Participants were also seeking industry information about opportunities and upcoming events. Equally, they sought networking opportunities to engage with people in similar situations, and opportunities to discuss and develop solutions for issues affecting their farm families such as children's education, communications, changing roles within the family, and succession planning.

From a service provider perspective, the combination of GYFN program and Mini grants enabled them to deliver projects focussed on women that may not have happened otherwise:

Several women had identified the need for a professional network of women but nobody really knew where to start. This grant allowed for someone with the skills and knowledge of the industry to introduce the women to the WIFE model and organise attending the seminar. With the contacts made with WIFE, we now know the model is established to start a new branch and the task achievable. (Mini Grant recipient).

The Mini grant allowed me to think outside the square, and stretch my event planning skills to consider the value of involving people from my target audience as part of a reference group. While challenging to work in this way initially, the efforts paid off with the engagement we ended up with for the workshop. (Mini Grant recipient).

The Mini Grant meant I could design a program which would give me insights to the training needs or issues women in sheep businesses are experiencing.... It also, potentially, allowed for a new group to start in this area with minimal initial financial input from the participants. This allowed them to assess the value of involvement themselves before making a financial commitment. This I think assisted in engagement, and allowed for the women involved to explore possibilities. (Mini Grant recipient).

Grant recipient reports also highlighted the effectiveness of the combination of GYFN program and Mini grants as a learning model. Implementing their Mini Grant project embedded the GYFN learning, especially for those who were sceptical of the need to pay attention to women's needs specifically:

...women definitely grow and relax in an all-women environment. Especially in a situation that is usually male dominated. It is a much-needed situation and I didn't fully realise this until doing this workshop. It has changed the way I teach women. And I have a greater understanding of the massive issues in our industry in competition and lack of confidence from even the most skilled and successful women. (Mini Grant recipient).

As a research tool for this project, grant recipients' learning has provided valuable insights into strategies for successfully engaging women. As a result, the project team have updated the 'Checklist for Engaging Women'. Examples include:

I have recognised there is a need to help guest speakers to prepare their presentations – if I was running the event again, I would have worked more closely to help presenters distil their information for the audience – professional development advice, presentation guidelines, etc. (Mini Grant recipient).

Have participants travel on a bus, this encouraged conversation between the women prior to the tour and discussion after the tours. (Mini Grant recipient).

Instigating public discussion on the topic to raise community awareness of events, issues and more on how the community can support women. (Mini Grant recipient).

From an industry perspective, the Mini Grant program has been a successful seeding exercise. Recipients have all extended their communications beyond their previous membership as a result, and in some cases the mini grants projects have led directly to the formation of a new group, network or program. Examples include:

- The Holbrook Landcare Network's Women in Agriculture program had over 40 new members join as a result of the Wool Power workshop.
- The Wool Power workshop has inspired participants to undertake further training.
- The Holbrook Landcare Network has secured further funding to support another round of Wool Power &/or Jobs for the Girls content; engaging women and girls in careers/career pathways in the wool industry. These workshops were held in June 2015 and attracted over 50 participants.
- The Jobs for the Girls Network, created from the Jobs for the Girls workshop, has had more than 545 'Likes' since inception (see <https://www.facebook.com/jobsforthegirlswool>).

A Darkan Women in Farming Enterprise group has now formed, with 30 members. They have already organised sponsorship for a 'girls day out' to the soil labs in Perth where they will follow the soil sampling trail from their paddocks, through the labs, to what the results mean in the paddock and how to marry that with fertilisers. They are also working with their local Community Resource Centre (Telecentre) to run a "Being a better boss" professional development workshop in management skills. In summary, the Mini Grants program provided strong evidence of the efficacy of the experiential learning model in embedding change in the practice of service providers. Training the providers, providing the means and opportunity to apply their learning, and requiring reflection and evaluation all create a powerful and positive learning experience. Given the incentive to do so, these service providers now have the tools to ensure the participation of women in their programs.

The Mini Grants projects have further provided valuable data supporting the key elements required to build women's capacity in the industry; targeting women specifically, using proven methods to encourage women to participate, and planning events around the elements necessary to enable women to participate.

### **3. Development of a model of women's participation in extension**

Throughout this project the project team encountered a range of experiences and views from women and men about the issue of 'involving more women in the wool industry'. They ranged from women having no barriers to their involvement and thus who were 'active' in the industry, women who were active on-farm but who experienced barriers so withdrew or did not participate fully in the industry and thus were 'invisible', women who felt marginalised, excluded and unable to participate (the 'excluded') and women who did not identify with the wool industry at all ('disengaged').

All these experiences and views are valid and highlighted the complexity of how the wool industry engages its women. Thirty eight of interviews were undertaken during the project that enabled a theory of women's participation to be developed.

There are many factors that prevented the 'invisible' and 'excluded' women from becoming 'actively' involved in the industry. To explain these barriers, a model was designed to bring together and represent the complexity of the issue of women's participation in the industry. This project found that an individual's ability to participate was dependent on two things being right:

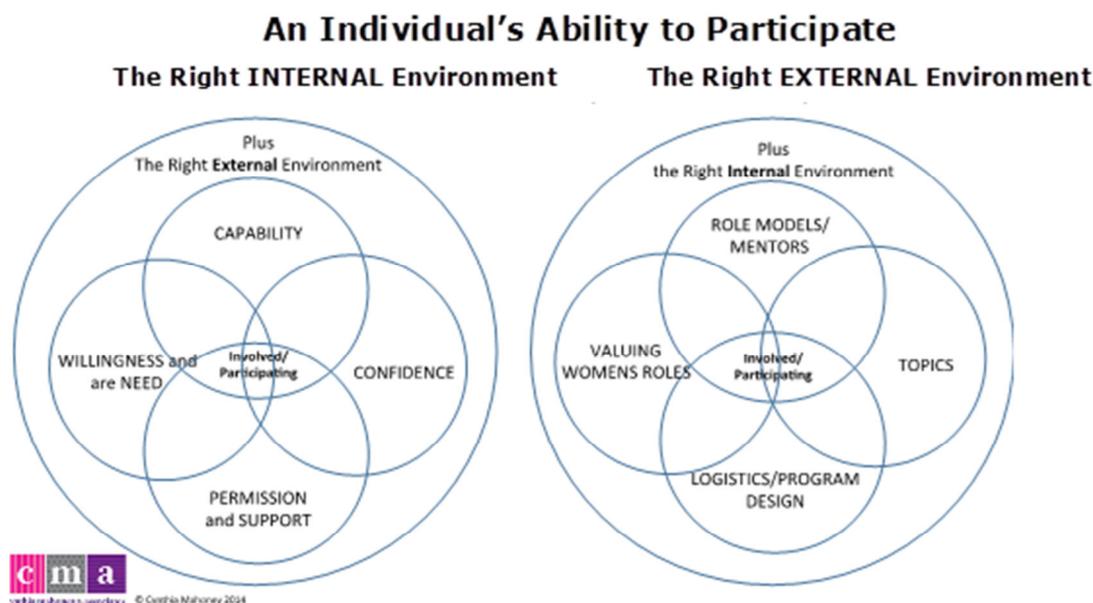
1. The environment external to the individual.
2. The individual's own internal environment.

What stood out is that service providers can get the external environment (e.g. using the tools from GYFN and Mini-Grants) right but if the person themselves is not 'ready' then they will not feel able to participate in industry events. Both the internal and external environments must be right and is summed up by this metaphor:

You could have beautifully prepared ground but if the seed isn't right then it won't grow OR you could have the best seed but if the ground hasn't been prepared properly then the seed still won't grow. The best result is achieved if both are working together.

Some of the key factors that effect women't ability to participate are summarised in Figure 8.

**Figure 8. The factors that impact on women's ability to participate in the wool industry**



The internal environment includes:

1. Confidence to participate Some women feel a lack of personal confidence that inhibits their involvement. This lack of confidence included feeling unable to speak up at events where there were lots of men to even walking in the door when they knew they might be the only woman present, as well as lack of confidence in their own abilities to contribute or understand. The 'invisible' women especially felt they lacked confidence to be involved.
2. A willingness or need to be involved Some women with family commitments were not willing to be involved; sometimes the topics covered were not relevant to the lives of some women; some women did not see themselves as farmers or women in the industry. All these factors prevented them from even identifying with the events or the industry (disengaged). However, there are many women who are very willing to be engaged that have other barriers preventing their involvement.
3. Capability Coupled with confidence, some women did not have the technical skills or considered that they were 'rusty'. Some women are not from a farming background but want to learn but feel their lack of knowledge is a barrier to being involved because they might appear 'stupid' or ask 'dumb questions' and this could reflect on their partner and his family.
4. Permission and support to participate This can be either women giving themselves permission to participate or women needing support to participate from their farming partners or families. Many stories were told about women who felt 'excluded' from the farm and told they cannot or should not be involved by their families (especially daughters-in-law). Some women spoke of feeling unsupported in their farm business (i.e. no-one to cover them if they participated) or community to get involved in the industry.

The external environment includes:

1. Logistics/Program Design and Promotional factors that support diversity This includes child-friendly hours, cost, programs that encourage introverts and extroverts, programs being promoted with a range of values that appeal to different groups of people, e.g. technical and non-technical. These are the factors that most service providers focus on when barriers are mentioned and form a major part of the 'Checklist for Engaging Women' developed as part of the GYFN workshops.
2. Needs/Topics The women interviewed expressed an interest in a wide range of subject areas including succession planning, financial management, record keeping, programs to share experience of life on a farm, as well as the technical areas such as genetics, animal health,

stock handling, pastures. Getting the topic right is critical to involving women as they have many and varied roles to their male partners so topics that interest their partners do not always interest them.

3. Role Model/Mentors Many women spoke of the importance of seeing women in different roles profiled – 'social proof' that their roles are valid and important and that other women like them were involved. Women presenters at workshops and women event organisers also help to role model women's involvement in the industry and provide a women's face at the events that helps to encourage women to attend.
4. Perceptions of others about women's roles and diversity There are many perceptions of why women don't attend events that can impact on their involvement such, as they are not interested. A quote from one service provider was 'The reason women with children don't come to industry events is because they are at home looking after the kids and they are happy about it', which implied that there was no need to look for ways to increase their participation and that this was just the way things were. This service provider did not identify that women not coming to events was even an issue – they thought that the fact some women had child rearing responsibilities was an obvious reason they did not participate but failed to recognise that, in addition to this role, they might also want to contribute more than what they were currently able to or were supported to. Happiness at home raising children did not necessarily mean that women did not want to offer more:

In our mothers' group everyone is wanting to be more involved in the industry. One of my friends studied Ag Science, was doing irrigation on her own farm, now has had a second child and is desperate to get back out but it's difficult because her first priority is looking after the kids. Another friend has attended some seminars before she had kids and would love to do the same with the kids but it is difficult, how you make that meaningful contribution? Women in my area are looking for things they could do, if industry events could be run regionally that would make it easier. Wool producer, early 30's

People who have different viewpoints may not express them for feeling they will be judged and not a source of valid membership of the industry. I have definitely felt like this at times. What is interesting to me is how certain viewpoints are viewed (i.e., those that are different to the "norm" are viewed negatively). Wool producer, early 40's

Implications of this model This model has implications for extension programs and their ability to attract a more diverse range of people. The AWI Strategic Plan states that:

In 2012 there were an estimated 4,375 woolgrowers participating in six state-based networks and Bestprac (pastoral zone). This covers around 16% of all woolgrowers distributed across all Australian production areas.

This data shows that there is a huge opportunity for extension programs to engage with more people in the industry and also to find out more about the people who are not attending (women and men). Some of the factors in the model above can be directly controlled by extension providers, e.g. logistics/program design and promotion, to be more supportive of women – these are well documented and are covered in the GYFN Workshop and supporting materials, including the 'Checklist for Engaging Women'. The Mini Grants program showed that when events are specifically designed to attract women, many of the 'invisible' and some of the 'excluded' women come as many of the external barriers are overcome.

Some factors are not at all in extension providers' direct control such as personal confidence of potential participants. However recognition of internal factors as potential barriers or enablers of participation means that the industry can develop other support mechanisms to build internal capacity of individuals which may then lead to their increased participation in mainstream programs. Leadership and personal development programs that target women and develop personal capability can help.

## Conclusions

This project has shown that there are many approaches the sheep and wool industry can use to involve more women and overcome the internal and external barriers to their involvement. The approaches trialled in this project of providing service providers with skills training in engaging women (GYFN workshops), support to engage women (GYFN participant network) and support and resources for projects that engage women (Mini Grants), have been shown to be effective in overcoming barriers and engaging more women in the wool industry and understanding their roles and value. The approaches used in this project allowed the project to engage with 17 service providers through the GYFN (14 women, three men), 274 women and 19 men farmers through Mini Grants.

However it was also important for designers of extension programs and events to consider the 'internal environment' barriers to participation their potential participants experience. Further

research into, and trialling of, novel approaches that empower and support people to overcome their internal barriers to participation is recommended.

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