KEY GENDER ISSUES

Although the past decade has seen significant economic growth and major advances on gender in the countries of the Common Market of the South (MERCOSUR), inequalities persist between women and men in terms of access to economic and social resources.

Women are more vulnerable to poverty than men as they earn lower salaries and have more limited access to credit and land ownership, as well as fewer opportunities to obtain stable employment. This vulnerability is even greater among indigenous women in Argentina and Paraguay and women Afro-descendants in Brazil. If they do own land, their plots are smaller and their land of inferior quality.

Gender violence is greater in rural areas than in urban areas, and the distances separating rural women from urban centres makes it difficult for them to obtain access to justice, prevention and assistance. In Brazil, more than 55 per cent of rural women have suffered some kind of sexual aggression or abuse during their lifetime.

Economic empowerment

Women have played a key role in reducing poverty in the region as they have entered the labour market in increasing numbers and the orientation of social policies has improved. Between 2000 and 2010 the number of low-income women in the labour force increased by 64 per cent in Paraguay, 27 per cent in Argentina, 18 per cent in Uruguay and 12 per cent in Brazil. Despite their higher participation, women’s share of poverty worsened: whereas in 2002 there were 109 poor women for every 100 poor men, in 2010 there were 118.

Most women in rural parts of Brazil and Paraguay are employed in the agriculture sector (68 per cent and 55 per cent, respectively) and – since they are largely engaged in...
unpaid family farming – the percentage of women with no income of their own is higher in rural than in urban areas, at 44.5 per cent in Paraguay and 29.2 per cent in Brazil. Those with non-agricultural rural employment enjoy a relatively better situation, although they continue to earn less than men – 30 per cent less in Brazil, for instance. The wage gap is wider for indigenous and Afro-descendant women, and Brazil has the largest ethnicity-based wage gap in all of Latin America. In the informal sector, which typically employs many rural women with less schooling, workers earn even less than those employed by enterprises.

**Voice and participation**

Most women who aspire to public office need to resort to affirmative action legislation in their countries if they are to participate in politics. All four countries in the region have such legislation. Argentina was the first to pass it, in 1991, and today there are more female representatives (37 per cent) in the Argentine legislature than in Paraguay, where women account for just 13 per cent, followed by Uruguay with 12 per cent and Brazil with 9 per cent. Women’s representation as local council members is somewhat more promising: 13 per cent in Brazil, 18 per cent in Uruguay and 22 per cent in Paraguay.

Despite a lack of statistics, observations show that women occupying management positions are in the minority in mixed rural organizations. This situation has repercussions in terms of influencing public policy to prioritize gender equality in their agendas.

**Workloads and benefits**

Rural women do productive and reproductive work such as look after children, carry water and chop firewood. Reproductive tasks are not only unpaid, but are frequently not considered work even by women themselves. A woman’s workday averages 14 to 16 hours in the four countries, and the number of hours a week taken up by women’s work – both paid and unpaid – are 55 in Brazil and 79 in Uruguay, compared to 47 and 59, respectively, worked by men in the two countries.
IFAD STORIES FROM THE FIELD

IFAD’s projects have built a gender perspective into family farming in the MERCOSUR countries and have applied more concrete approaches based on lessons learned. Under the Regional Programme of Institutional Strengthening on Gender Equality Policies in Family Farming in MERCOSUR (2008), the Gender Thematic Group of the Specialized Meeting on Family Farming (REAF) has been developing common initiatives on exchange, training, research and disclosure for the region’s four countries oriented towards women’s productive and organizational participation and equal access to land for persons of both sexes.16

Between 2007 and 2013, the Empowerment of Rural Poor Organizations and Harmonization of Investments Project (Paraguay Rural)17 was implemented in Paraguay. Special attention was paid to ensuring that the intervention strategy incorporated gender equity criteria and included the following three aspects: (a) a clear definition of gender policies needed for the project; (b) the inclusion of rights [derechos] to incentivize ownership by the citizenry and their participation in specific project activities; and (c) affirmative action to enable women’s groups to obtain access to project resources.

This strategy was applied through training initiatives by the project implementation unit and components, which had 40 per cent women between staff at headquarters and those in the field. Such initiatives in organizational strengthening, training, technical assistance and business plans were directed to 18,752 people, of whom 7,591 (41 per cent) were women, some of them also indigenous.

The women and men beneficiaries of Paraguay Rural indicated that the project had contributed to changing the relationship between people of both sexes and to recognition that women were capable of generating income, and that in obtaining more work they had more power and more money and were in a better position to decide what to spend it on. They also observed that women continued to face difficulties, either on their own or because men did not grant them equal treatment to make use of their rights on a level playing field.18

Between 2007 and 2012, the Rural Communities Development Project in the Poorest Areas of the State of Bahía (Gente de Valor) was implemented in Brazil with the objective of strengthening the capabilities of rural women and men. The project benefited 4,120 women under concrete initiatives.19 Two strategies were pursued to work towards gender equality and women’s empowerment: including cross-cutting gender considerations in all project initiatives and holding 100 women’s meetings for farmers and their organizations, at the subterritorial level.

Working from an empowerment perspective, the project encouraged women to change their mentality and attitudes to raise their self-esteem, and helped all family members together to prepare a production system. This added value to the economic, social, environmental and cultural role of women farmers within the family economy, food security and ecological sustainability.

The project activities encouraged women to convert the areas surrounding their homes to gardens to grow medicinal plants and vegetables to generate income, as well as food to improve food security for their families.

In addition, the project opened up a debate on gender issues in relation to productive, organizational, political, cultural and environmental activities, as well as creating a new space for human relationships as a strategy to promote sustainable development at the local level.

IFAD’s programmes in Argentina were the first to introduce the gender perspective – in 1991 when the issue was just emerging in the region and the country – in large-scale rural development programmes. Strategies have varied since then: at the outset they focused

**IFAD GENDER POLICY**

**Strategic objective 1:** Promote economic empowerment to enable rural women and men to have equal opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, profitable economic activities.

**Strategic objective 2:** Enable women and men to have equal voice and influence in rural institutions and organizations.
on activities targeted solely to women and then they began to promote mixed participation and equitable distribution of economic benefits between persons of both sexes.

IFAD is currently implementing two programmes in the country: the Inclusive Rural Development Programme (PRODERI) and the National Rural Areas Development Programme (PRODEAR). Both are predicated on the fact that both men and women should participate on an equal basis throughout the programme life cycle – i.e. at the stages of identification and formulation, outreach and dissemination, training and technical assistance, access to credit and evaluation of experience.

Today, integrating women into organizations is a challenge. To promote women’s participation, the programmes make use of training courses at times when men can look after children or take care of household chores, and women’s presence is requested during technical assistance visits to the farm. Training covers subjects such as applying appropriate technologies to reduce the amount of time devoted to family farming and developing negotiating capacities within the home and in public space. By the month of August 2014, the two programmes had imparted training to 2,913 women and provided financing and technical assistance to 5,279 women in the country’s poorest rural areas.

LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES

IFAD’s projects implemented in the MERCOSUR countries enable a number of lessons learned and best practices to be identified around gender equity with potential for replication:

- Women play a key role in food security, child care and productive activities in family farming. Projects that facilitate their active participation have a highly satisfactory direct impact on the family unit as a whole.
- When gender stereotypes are changed and work is distributed equally between men and women, the channels of communication and participation are expanded and opportunities for families to access economic and social resources increase –
improving their living conditions with repercussions on strengthening and sustainability of their organizations.

• If projects apply strategies favouring gender equity as cross-cutting objectives, they will achieve greater impact in terms of results. Strategies must be well formulated, express the needs of the different actors involved and have sufficient resources for implementation. Needed, for instance, are specialized profiles, realistic targets for women’s participation and a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system with clear indicators.

• It is necessary to undertake activities for women, set up women’s organizations and strengthen networking, although all of this in itself is not sufficient to achieve gender equity. Women need economic and social empowerment to take an active part in mixed organizations, and men must be sensitized to the adverse impact of machismo, for instance in family farming.

OUTSTANDING ISSUES AND ONGOING CHALLENGES

Major strides have been made over the past decade in developing strategies to promote gender equity in projects in support of family farming in the MERCOSUR countries. The formulation of new public policies continues to face a number of challenges, however:

• Women’s strategic role in household subsistence must be recognized. Even when women carry out productive activities as much as men, their contributions are undervalued from an economic and social point of view.

• Consideration must be given to the many different situations in which gender inequality may exist, taking into account differences between indigenous, creole and Afro-descendant populations when designing and implementing projects.

• Women must be empowered by giving greater weight to their views and stimulating their participation using training instruments to enable them to access non-traditional areas of family farming – such as commercial management, development of bargaining capacity, positioning in value chains and development of rural services.

• Access to land, wages, production credit and technology must be equalized to narrow the gap between men and women and eradicate the discriminatory view of gender.

• The formulation of projects and public policy should promote the inclusion of financing and training quotas – between 30 per cent and 50 per cent depending on the starting point – to ensure greater participation by women throughout the project life cycle. The aim is to eliminate the idea that women’s contribution is simply assisting the work of the household or an activity that is complementary or of lesser importance.
THE STATISTICS AND WHAT THEY SHOW

Figures from 2012 indicate that the region’s economies have expanded markedly, although other factors need to be considered to get an overview of the status of human development, gender equity and the well-being of those living in the region. In all the MERCOSUR countries, life expectancy for men and women is at least 70 years and life expectancy for women is even higher than for men. Literacy rates for those aged 15 to 24, for both sexes, is close to 100 per cent in countries where figures are available (see Table 1).

Although most of the countries show similar average human development, according to indicators on health, education and income, they continue to face challenges in terms of gender inequality. In some countries there is discrimination against women and girls, and gender inequality is apparent in areas such as reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market (see Table 2).

Maternal mortality ranges from 29 per 1,000 women in Uruguay to 99 per 1,000 women in Paraguay. The data compiled also indicate that there is a much higher percentage of economically active men than women. However, official statistics do not always adequately reflect the informal employment and unpaid tasks that are often done by women. In addition, although progress has been made on making social relations more equal, discriminatory practices continue to limit women’s access to land and bank credit (see Table 3).

Table 1: Key development indicators across the region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>GDP per capita (current US$) 2012</th>
<th>Life expectancy at birth (years) (2011)</th>
<th>Literacy rate, ages 15-24 (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>11 558</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>11 340</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>3 813</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>14 449</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Human development and gender inequity across the region, 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Human Development Index (HDI)* (186 countries)</th>
<th>Gender Inequality Index (GII)** (148 countries)</th>
<th>Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)*** (86 non-OECD countries)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Source: UNDP</td>
<td>Source: UNDP</td>
<td>Source: OECD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0.380</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>0.447</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>0.472</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>0.367</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>0.380</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>0.447</td>
<td>85</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>0.472</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>0.367</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notes: *The HDI is a composite measure of health, education and income, and an alternative to purely economic assessments of national progress (e.g. GDP growth). Source: http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/.

**The GII is a composite measure that reflects inequality in achievements between women and men in reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. The index ranges between “0”, which means women fare equally well, to “1.0”, which indicates that women fare as poorly as possible in all dimensions measured. Source: http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/indicators/68606.html.

***The SIGI was launched by the OECD Development Centre as an innovative measure of the underlying drivers of gender inequality. It captures discriminatory social institutions such as early marriage, discriminatory inheritance practices, violence against women, son preference, restricted access to public space and restricted access to land and credit. Source: http://genderindex.org/ranking.

•2009 data available only. The methodological and conceptual frameworks have been revised since 2009 and this figure cannot be compared to 2012 data.

Table 3: Key indicators on gender across the region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Value</td>
<td>Value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>77</td>
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<td>47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
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<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paraguay</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Notes: *Women’s legal and de facto rights to own and access agricultural land: 0: Women have equal legal rights with men to own and access land; 0.5: Women have the same legal rights to own and access land, but are restricted due to discriminatory practices; 1.0: Women have few or no legal rights to access or own land, or access is severely restricted by discriminatory practices.

**Women’s legal and de facto access to loans and credit: 0: Women have equal rights to access credit and bank loans with men; 0.5: Women have rights to access some kinds of credit (e.g. microcredit), or have equal rights but face discrimination in accessing bank loans and credit; 1.0: Women have few or no rights to access bank loans or credit, or access is severely restricted by discriminatory practices.
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