IFAD Gender Awards 2014
Honouring achievements in gender equality and women’s empowerment

Pakistan, Rwanda, Ecuador, Yemen, Sierra Leone
Asia and the Pacific

Programme for Increasing Sustainable Microfinance (PRISM), Pakistan

Women have accounted for three quarters of the participants in this innovative rural finance programme. PRISM has taken a unique approach to the crucial task of ensuring that poor rural people have access to financial services – cultivating partnerships with commercial banks, which previously had limited involvement in rural microfinance. In the process, the programme has contributed substantially to the transformation of the microfinance sector in Pakistan, reducing its dependence on donor financing.

The programme tailored its activities specifically to address women’s needs. It provided dedicated financial services, including deposit and insurance products, such as weather index-based crop insurance and live-weight livestock insurance. Both farm and non-farm enterprises have boosted their productivity thanks to the expanded access to credit facilitated by the initiative.

In addition, PRISM has supported low-cost schools that have a high proportion of female students and staff. It introduced family loans for the purchase of solar energy appliances that help reduce women’s workload. It has also supported the development of pro-poor value chains in activities that give women some financial independence, such as poultry-raising and embroidery.

“What wonderful news … The recognition of our work which this award confers is most humbling and strengthens our resolve to increase our efforts in empowering women.”

Qazi Azmat Isa, CEO, Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (IFAD implementing partner)

http://operations.ifad.org/web/ifad/operations/country/project/tags/pakistan/1413/project_overview
East and Southern Africa

Kirehe Community-based Watershed Management Project, Rwanda

Community innovation centres are the centrepiece of this project. They help women access information, knowledge and technologies. Due to the specific gender-balance support strategy, women make up more than 40 per cent of participants in all components of the project.

Project activities aimed at poor households play a significant role in easing women’s domestic workloads. This includes the introduction of biogas systems, which provide poor households with energy for cooking and lighting, thus saving women the time and effort they previously spent fetching firewood.

The project has adopted the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) – a household methodology that enables male and female household members to negotiate their needs and interests, and find innovative, gender-equitable solutions in livelihood planning and value chain development.

The project has also empowered women by engaging them in labour-intensive infrastructure work to promote water and soil conservation, and rehabilitate roads. It has strengthened women’s land rights through the joint titling of land between married couples. It has also boosted women’s representation on watershed management decision-making bodies.

“What it’s like to be] a woman and poor in the rural sector, depending on agriculture and your husband’s decisions – sometimes without a good relationship – … is something everyone working in rural development should understand and pay particular attention to.”

Raymond Kamwe, Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist

http://operations.ifad.org/web/ifad/operations/country/project/tags/rwanda/1431/project_overview
This project supports productive enterprises, training, community banks and credit unions, with the aim of promoting the economic integration of rural and urban areas in a strip of land situated between the Amazon, the mountains and the coast of Ecuador. Women make up the majority of participants in the management of credit unions, leadership of community-based organizations and livestock rearing activities.

The project specifically supports initiatives that are relevant to women’s lives and compatible with their other responsibilities. These include activities along the value chains of guinea pig rearing and sugar cane production, in which women play a major role. These initiatives have increased women’s income and their self-esteem. One of the participating indigenous groups, the Waorani Women’s Association, recently won the prestigious Equator Prize for its entrepreneurial activities that include producing organic cocoa and handicrafts.

“Rural women in Ecuador … are fighting hard to improve their lives and those of their families. The Government of Ecuador and IFAD have joined hands … to empower them, providing the support they need to start and run businesses and productive activities that generate income and employment. This well-earned award recognizes the efforts made by all these female groups to have a better life.”

Jesús Quintana, Country Programme Manager for Ecuador

http://operations.ifad.org/web/ifad/operations/country/project/tags/ecuador/1297/project_overview
Near East and North Africa

Al-Dhala Community Resources Management Project, Yemen

The project has fostered self-reliance and promoted community ownership of the development process in a vulnerable governorate of Yemen. It has enabled women to achieve greater recognition at home and in the community. Women have been trained as midwives, credit managers, and extension workers, and in various types of income-generating activities. The project sponsored nine first-ever female veterinarians to graduate from Sana’a University.

Women account for 69 per cent of the members of the self-financed and self-operated community savings and credit funds supported by the project. They have also taken on leadership positions in community-based development associations and have been given the autonomy to formulate their own participatory action plans. They have benefited from training in literacy, health and nutrition. The drudgery of their work has been reduced through the introduction of rainwater harvesting reservoirs, milling machines and biogas units.

The project included a special component aimed at strengthening women’s development capacities, featuring women mobilization teams, gender balance in project staffing, a gender specialist and gender training.

“At the beginning of the project, the targeted rural communities – men and women – were suspicious about the terminology ‘gender’. But later they appreciated it – when they saw that ‘gender’ means involving women in project activities such as planning, life-skills training, health, training in animals, plants and beekeeping, micro-credit, and taking care to reduce the hard and time-consuming work of women.”

Sameera Al-Barek, Community-based Development Association

http://operations.ifad.org/web/ifad/operations/country/project/tags/yemen/1269/project_overview
West and Central Africa

Rehabilitation and Community-based Poverty Reduction Project, Sierra Leone

This project lays the foundations for long-term sustainable development by supporting community-based institutions and building the capacity of local groups. It focuses on the most vulnerable rural households, particularly those headed solely by women, in areas hard hit by the recent civil war.

Women now play an active role in decision-making in community associations and benefit from access to financial services. Women have been trained as technicians for the construction of rainwater harvesting facilities, while young women and men contractors have participated in the rehabilitation of swamp lands. Women’s workloads have been significantly reduced through the introduction of solar dryers for cocoa beans and improved feeder roads.

The project uses the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) to empower rural women and men at the household level, encouraging them to make financial plans together, and to share workloads and benefits. Half of ward committee members in the project area are women.

“This award came at a time when all hopes were lost because of the Ebola outbreak. However, the winning of this award has rekindled our hopes and has given us more reason to work hard since we know that this country can rise again.”

Mohamed Tijan Kella, Programme Coordinator

http://operations.ifad.org/web/ifad/operations/country/project/tags/sierra_leone/1054/project_overview
In each of the five regions where IFAD works, the Gender Award spotlights a programme or project that has taken an innovative approach to addressing gender inequalities and empowering women. This year’s awards celebrate operations in Ecuador, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Yemen.

IFAD’s Policy on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment has three strategic objectives:

- to promote **economic empowerment** for rural women and men
- to enable women and men to have **equal voice and influence**
- to achieve a more **equitable balance in workloads** between women and men.