

# Strategic issues and options for future IFAD work

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## Looking for new directions

GENDER MAINSTREAMING AND  
WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT **WORKSHOP**

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Enabling the rural poor to overcome poverty



## Strategic issues and options for future IFAD work

*This paper has been prepared by the gender team in the Technical Advisory Division as a contribution to the discussion of strategic directions and resource requirements to achieve greater effectiveness in pursuing gender equality and women's empowerment. The aim is to build onto the significant achievements to date, while identifying new pathways to scale up IFAD's contribution to Millennium Development Goal 3 as an essential condition for poverty reduction.*

### IFAD's policy and strategy for gender equality and women's empowerment

Since the early 1990s, gender concerns have been central to IFAD's poverty reduction strategy. In 1992, IFAD's Executive Board approved *Strategies for the Economic Advancement of Poor Rural Women*. In the second half of the 1990s, a strategic link was forged between the empowerment of women and attention to gender issues in rural development and the achievement of household food security, which was then a major objective of IFAD-supported projects.<sup>1</sup> Between 1999 and today, IFAD's regional divisions have implemented grant-funded regional gender programmes for capacity-building, technical assistance, research and support in policy and advocacy. In this context, some regions have developed specific regional gender strategies.

IFAD's strategic framework of 2002-06 recognized the link between poverty reduction on the one hand and women's empowerment and gender equality on the other. It acknowledged that powerlessness was a dimension of poverty and, implicitly, gender inequality as a manifestation of poverty. It also stated that gender issues should be addressed as a cross-cutting concern in all aspects of IFAD's work.

IFAD's Plan of Action "Operationalizing the Strategic Framework: *Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective in IFAD's Operations*" was approved in 2003. It aims primarily at raising attention to gender issues in the project cycle, establishing *Prerequisites of gender-sensitive design* and identifying actions with related performance indicators at different moments of the project cycle. The plan states that gender equality and women's empowerment are important for IFAD both as objectives and as instruments for poverty reduction. It also reiterates IFAD's three-pronged strategy for gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment: (a) expand women's economic empowerment through access to and control over fundamental assets; (b) strengthen women's decision-making role in community affairs and representation in local institutions; and (c) improve the well-being of women and ease women's workloads by facilitating women's access to basic rural services and infrastructures. The plan emphasizes that IFAD subscribes to the principle of gender equality and strives to ensure that conditions are created for men and women to benefit equally from the development interventions it supports. IFAD's approach combines gender mainstreaming (attention to gender specificities and to creating opportunities for both women and men) in all project components and in all activities, as well as women-specific activities to reinforce – through affirmative action – women's capacity to participate on an equal basis in economic activities and public decision-making.

Attention to gender issues was reconfirmed in IFAD's targeting policy, approved in September 2006, which states that "in any given context, IFAD will, together with its partners, identify the target groups through a gender-sensitive poverty and livelihood analysis" and "have a special focus on women within all identified target groups – for reasons of equity, effectiveness and impact – with particular attention to women heads of household, who are often especially disadvantaged".

IFAD's new strategic framework 2007-10, approved in December 2006, reiterates that "for development efforts to be effective, differences in gender roles and responsibilities need to be taken into account". IFAD will focus particularly on women, "because addressing inequalities and strengthening the capacity of rural women to perform their productive roles more effectively has a major impact on poverty reduction and on household food security".

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<sup>1</sup> See "IFAD's Strategies for the Economic Advancement of Poor Rural Women", 1992; "Towards a Strategy for Improving Nutrition through Rural Investment Projects", 1995.

## Achievements and challenges

An independent evaluation of the outcome, impact and effectiveness of IFAD's work on gender mainstreaming has not yet been undertaken. However, a number of reviews have been implemented identifying significant achievements, but also areas where we need to do more and do it differently, also to respond to the evolving development aid context.<sup>2</sup>

### *In the field*

As indicated by the mid-term review of the Gender Plan of Action, attention to gender issues in project design has improved, but there is still significant room for progress. The *Prerequisites of gender-sensitive design* are being used (60% of project appraisal reports are compliant), but the application is uneven across regions. Although principles regarding gender equality and women's empowerment may be stated, operational measures actually to reach and involve women are often not identified. The proportion of women on design teams is generally low, and social scientists or technical experts with gender expertise are not regularly included.

The analytical basis for design remains weak (for gender specifically and for context-specific poverty and livelihoods information in general). Community-based consultations and participatory appraisals with local people during design are often limited. Consultations tend to be conducted at a higher level, for example, at the district level, and with public officials or NGOs in which women are poorly represented. Furthermore, the nature of such consultations (and, in general, the attention to gender during design) may depend on the composition of design teams.

Sometimes, gender strategies seem well articulated in design, but are not implemented as planned. This may be attributed to various factors, including insufficient analysis of gender-differentiated roles and opportunities in a specific context and insufficient involvement and commitment of key stakeholders.

The questionnaire survey on gender in projects has confirmed that awareness and commitment to women's empowerment among project staff are fairly high, although uneven. Gender focal points (or staff in project coordination units with specific responsibilities for gender) do not always exist. As project coordination units have become smaller (in line with IFAD's commitment to improve sustainability and foster national institutions), the inclusion of social science and gender expertise in project management has diminished.

As also indicated by the field survey, the participation of women is greater in some project activities than in others, but remains generally lower than that of men across all components. Women are also significantly less well represented in decision-making bodies related to the projects and less influential in mixed organizations. Many projects have invested successfully in strengthening women's groups, but it is doubtful if these are sustainable and have influence beyond the community level.

Lessons from IFAD-supported projects show that, for women's economic advancement to be significant and sustained, income-generating activities need to be linked to market opportunities. However, it is also essential to accompany support for production and marketing with complementary measures that include awareness and confidence building, information and communication, the sensitization of men and local leaders, general capacity-building (in areas such as literacy, leadership and management skills), organizational support, the reduction of women's workloads to enable women to participate more fully and, occasionally, social welfare measures. Increased emphasis in IFAD's country programmes on these critical action areas could be at risk in view of the fact that borrowing governments are becoming less inclined to incorporate capacity-building and social investments in loan agreements.

Despite a commendable investment in training at the project level (largely through loan funds, but also, particularly in some regions, through the grant-funded regional gender programmes), there is still a strong

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<sup>2</sup> These reviews include a review of gender mainstreaming in IFAD's projects as part of the Project Portfolio Report of 1999; the baseline survey (2003) and subsequent mid-term review of IFAD's Gender Plan of Action (2006); a questionnaire survey directed at IFAD project staff, consultants and cooperating institutions (2006); self-assessments and a document desk review of the regional gender programmes (2005-06).

and unmet demand at the project level for support for capacity-building by beneficiaries and institutional partners. The latter are key for the sustainability of changes brought about by projects.

Gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation, as well as analytical reviews and studies during implementation, are generally weak. It is thus difficult to capture achievements at the project and community levels. Where data exist, they are not always used to inform project planning.

It is often difficult for projects to address the inequitable power relations that underlie gender differences in access to assets and resources. However, when such strategic gender needs are not addressed, project impacts cannot be sustained.

While many gender activities have been financed through the loan programme, the grant-funded regional gender programmes have played an important catalytic function in stimulating activities and leveraging project funds (primarily through the coordinators or gender focal points). The question is how to maintain this momentum when the programmes end.

The impact of projects on the broader social and policy environment often remains limited. While this is a general shortcoming of area-based projects, it has greater implications in the promotion of gender equality, social inclusion and the empowerment of poor rural people, which is often met with resistance.

#### *At headquarters*

Although awareness of the importance of gender issues is fairly widespread in IFAD, this has not translated into consistent and substantive references in policy documents and official statements and consistency in gender-sensitive project design.

There is a recognized need for training on gender issues for country programme managers and consultants, with a focus on thematic areas, in particular those where the integration of gender concerns is weak. To date, there has been no IFAD-wide gender training programme.

Over the years, the presence of additional staff at headquarters whose time and functions are dedicated to gender mainstreaming through the regional gender programmes has been critical to raising attention to gender issues in IFAD operations. However, the grade and contractual status of gender programme coordinators (or regional divisions with gender focal points) have not always allowed these people to exercise real influence within their respective divisions.

Divisional gender focal points do not have dedicated resources to use in support of gender mainstreaming in core divisional work. Supplementary funding, generally provided by donors for specific field-oriented activities, has created a dependency over the years, which in turn, has negatively affected long-term planning and the continuity of gender mainstreaming.

The gender programmes have created some important learning. However, more systematic generation of knowledge on what actually works is limited by the lack of attention to the collection and analysis of experiences, as well as weak project monitoring and evaluation (including the lack of a systematic use of participatory monitoring and evaluation).

#### *The broader development context*

The way gender issues are addressed both in IFAD headquarter and in the field is a reflection of changes that have taken place in the broader development context. It also mirrors findings among other development agencies on the reasons more progress has not been made.

Self-evaluations by other donor agencies show that the implementation of policy commitments have not fulfilled expectations, inter alia, because of a diffusion of responsibilities and the setting of unrealistic targets. In general, progress has been greater in social sectors than in productive sectors, such as agriculture, infrastructure and private sector development. There is agreement that high-level leadership, technical expertise and financial resources are still key to implementing the gender policies of donor agencies.

In most development agencies, gender continues to represent an add-on and a requirement to be complied with rather than a central development concern. Gender mainstreaming has come to be viewed as a technical tool focusing on women's direct needs ("practical gender needs"), a methodology set apart from considerations about culture and inequitable power relations, which may be controversial and difficult to address ("strategic gender needs").

The bilateral donors who were once the most active in their support for gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment have shifted their attention and resources to other areas, such as HIV/AIDS, poverty reduction strategies, policy dialogue and harmonization under the agenda of the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*. It has become more difficult for gender units within multilateral agencies to obtain donor support in terms of both resources and advocacy.

It may be argued that attention to participation and people-centred approaches, notably, sustainable livelihoods, is declining in the general development discourse. Participation has been partly replaced by the concept of community-driven development, which has translated into community development funds, placing more attention on the funding mechanism than on social inclusion and empowerment.

Similarly, attention to household food security as a goal and as an organizing principle for rural poverty reduction programmes seems to have declined (with the attention on Millennium Development Goal 1 focusing mainly on income). Thus, attention to women's roles as providers and managers of household food security has also diminished.

The question arises whether there is a risk of returning to the trickle-down approach, to the expectation that economic growth will lead to poverty reduction (despite the large body of evidence that growth does not automatically lead to poverty reduction)? There is also a discernible risk that overemphasis on market-driven development and value-chain approaches could lead to diminished attention to social exclusion, the reality of rural poverty and the measures needed to enable poor women and men to participate in and benefit fully from development.

The development discourse is currently focusing largely on processes, a trend accentuated by the implementation of the principles of the *Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness*. Subscribing to the harmonization agenda can lead to agreement on a minimum common denominator, excluding issues that are potentially more controversial such as gender equality, the empowerment of poor rural people and social equity and inclusion. Preference for budget support over projects may also cause a loss of focus on social exclusion.

## **Strategic directions**

The strategic directions proposed below refer in part to existing lines of work that need to be pursued and strengthened, such as capacity-building and the normative work to mainstream gender in IFAD's business processes. Other directions concern new areas of focus in coming years, such as enhanced engagement in partnerships and attention to building up ownership and commitment in the context of organizational change.

### **(a) Renew and strengthen IFAD's commitments to gender equality and women's empowerment**

A renewed and stronger commitment is a precondition for progress beyond the current level. IFAD's experience shows that committed individuals, particularly in senior positions, have helped drive change. Male champions have also led by example. Measures to scale up efforts include the buy-in by senior managers who become role models and drive change; making evidence on the links between gender and poverty reduction available in a form that is accessible and amenable to country programme managers and regular consultants and relating this evidence to specific areas of work (agriculture, rural finance, natural resource management, etc.); celebrating successes and efforts to innovate; creating incentives; and promoting peer reviews among similar agencies so as to increase peer pressure. The success of such efforts is, in turn, predicated on regular confirmation and reinforcement for the specificity of IFAD in terms of the focus on poor rural women and men and their livelihoods, on participation and empowerment, and on the

consistent implementation of the IFAD targeting policy. In line with IFAD's strategic framework 2007-10, attention to gender issues should be strategic in six key areas: natural resources, technologies, financial services, markets, rural off-farm employment and enterprise development, and local and national policy and programming processes (see Annex 1). The balance between work and life, the quality of working conditions and gender equality within the organization need to be addressed to align principles with organizational practice.

**(b) Increase IFAD's capacity to address gender issues**

This area of action is a complement to the first. It will include focus on training that is tailored to the needs and time constraints of concerned staff and that focuses on thematic gender issues, not only general concepts. The responsibilities of the gender focal points would need to be assigned to senior staff and be included in individual workplans and performance assessments. IFAD needs to earmark funds within divisional budgets to support gender mainstreaming. Some resources should be specifically allocated to the thematic group on gender, which should not be merely a platform for learning and sharing, but should also be a hub of innovation and change. Efforts should be made to match IFAD's resources (the programme development funds) with supplementary funds of donors. Donors should be approached with a view to establishing a multidonor gender fund (as exists at the Inter-American Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank). There should be a clear distinction between activities supported through IFAD's core resources and supplementary funding, and there should be better general integration between regional gender activities funded through supplementary funds and IFAD's core work on gender.

**(c) Continue work on gender mainstreaming in IFAD's procedures, processes and mentoring instruments and raise accountability**

This represents a necessary, though not sufficient condition for increasing the effectiveness and impact of IFAD's work on gender equality and women's empowerment. The *Framework for Gender Mainstreaming in IFAD's Operations*, currently in preparation, will replace the Gender Plan of Action 2002-06 and describe, in a consolidated framework, the measures involved in IFAD's different business processes to address gender. These include action plan deliverables (such as the guidelines for the country strategic opportunities papers and the guidelines for supervision) and will be revised periodically as these instruments evolve. Efforts should also be continued to ensure that there is accountability in addressing gender in design in line with the *Prerequisites of gender sensitive design* as part of the new quality enhancement and quality assurance systems. Attention to gender should also be appropriately addressed in the corporate results framework and in departmental key performance indicators.

**(d) Improve the effectiveness and impact of IFAD-supported field projects to address gender equality and women's empowerment**

There is a need for improved quality of design in terms of the analytical foundations (as required in the targeting policy), the adoption of participatory approaches involving consultation among poor rural women and men during design, and the design of appropriate gender strategies that are ready to be implemented and monitored. Efforts need to be made to achieve greater gender balance on design teams and to include social scientists or technical experts with gender expertise as consultants in all design missions.

Strategies should emphasize the role of men in supporting women's empowerment. Earmarked funds within the project budget should support gender mainstreaming activities such as gender awareness training and special provisions for women field staff and trainees, such as special accommodation and daycare for children, etc. Grant funds (from IFAD or supplementary funds) may be needed when borrowing Governments are not inclined to finance under the loan agreement essential capacity-building and "social investments" needed to enable women (and specific categories at risk, such as adolescent girls) to take advantage of economic opportunities. More knowledge is needed on how to sustain and expand women's enterprises and their organizations.

Project-level capacity can be improved by ensuring that the project coordination unit includes a staff member with specific responsibilities for gender. In addition, gender should be considered as a cross-cutting responsibility, together with targeting, among all project coordination units. More attention should be paid

to the recruitment of project directors who are sensitive to IFAD's gender and targeting concerns. The work of project management staff should be supported through increased capacity-building that is tailored to specific situations, focused on thematic areas (specifically those where inclusion of women is weakest), using exchange visits and involving a range of stakeholders, from rural people to government partners. There should also be gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation within ongoing activities (such as regional grants) so as to strengthen project monitoring and evaluation.

**(e) Identify and implement innovative approaches and improve learning**

This might involve establishing and strengthening partnerships (supported by IFAD grants and supplementary funds) with centres of excellence on poverty and gender research to improve the quality of analysis in project and programme design and analyse lessons from the field to inform IFAD's country programmes. Improved monitoring and evaluation and project-level knowledge management (with participatory monitoring and evaluation) might represent a way to gather more knowledge on the links between gender and poverty and on effective ways to empower women and promote gender equality. Better understanding needs to be gained on the role of projects in facilitating change, particularly in regard to culturally sensitive issues such as gender equality and women's empowerment. The sharing of experiences across projects and regions would enhance learning.

**(f) Build partnerships and support institutional change in the context of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness**

Because of the increasing emphasis on sector-wide approaches to programming and budget support and the pressure for IFAD to cofinance national programmes (for example, with the World Bank), IFAD needs to ensure that key concerns such as targeting and social inclusion, gender and the empowerment of poor people are taken into account. Field presence officers should be well briefed on such issues, and opportunities for partnerships (through IFAD grants) with organizations advocating for poor rural women should be increased. IFAD needs to enhance the partnership and collaboration with the UNDG group on gender of the United Nations Development Group. Support should also be given to organizations that address key and emerging policy issues related to gender equality, in particular all forms of violence against women and women's rights (land, property) or that are supporting certain groups of vulnerable rural women who deserve special attention (indigenous women, young women). At the same time, IFAD will continue to play its role as advocate for rural women in international forums (the United Nations system, the donor community of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) by building a strategic alliance with selected partners (the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the World Bank) and undertaking high-level contacts with borrower governments especially to encourage governments to implement existing policies in support of rural women's rights and responsibilities.

## Annex 1

### Addressing gender issue in the context of IFAD's strategic objectives and principles of engagement

<b>Strategic objectives, principles of engagement</b>	<b>Entry points and priorities from a gender perspective<sup>3</sup></b>
1 Natural resources, especially secure access to land and water, and improved natural resource management and conservation practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Policy dialogue on equal access to land</li> <li>○ Establish and support women's associations (in water, community forest, etc.)</li> <li>○ Women's indigenous knowledge and roles in protecting biodiversity</li> <li>○ Women pastoralists</li> </ul>
2 Improved agricultural technologies and effective production services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Labour saving technologies</li> <li>○ Training and extension</li> <li>○ Livestock (small ruminants, veterinary services)</li> <li>○ Innovation in agriculture</li> </ul>
3 A broad range of financial services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Social performance, impact of microfinance institutions</li> <li>○ "Credit plus" services for poor women</li> <li>○ Women's equal access to the full range of rural financing</li> </ul>
4 Transparent and competitive markets for agricultural inputs and produce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Strengthen niches for poor women</li> <li>○ Focus on specific produce (e.g., non-timber forest products)</li> <li>○ Strengthen women's roles in value chains</li> </ul>
5 Opportunities for rural off-farm employment and enterprise development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Small and medium enterprises</li> <li>○ Migration</li> <li>○ Skills and vocational training for young women</li> </ul>
6 Local and national policy and programming processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Women's involvement in political and decision-making positions</li> <li>○ Address men's bias in terms of policies and practices</li> <li>○ Focus on the community and municipal levels</li> </ul>
Emerging issues	Violence against women
	Disaster mitigation

<sup>3</sup> To be defined according to project, country programme, regional programme and corporate level; priorities to be set for projects, countries and subregions according to gender needs.