

# Gender perspective

FOCUS ON THE RURAL POOR



**IFAD**

INTERNATIONAL FUND  
FOR AGRICULTURAL  
DEVELOPMENT

## GENDER PERSPECTIVE – FOCUS ON THE RURAL POOR

### AN OVERVIEW OF GENDER ISSUES IN IFAD-ASSISTED PROJECTS

“Within IFAD’s ... focus on poverty targeting, the poverty group deserving more particular attention is poor rural women, who are the most significant suppliers of family labour and efficient managers of household food security.”


IFAD's Lending Policies and Criteria

# Foreword



During the last twenty years, IFAD has learned a great deal about the prevalence and causes of poverty and malnutrition, and has increasingly recognized that taking a gender perspective helps to illuminate the nature of rural poverty. A gender perspective looks at how and why men and women experience poverty differently and become poor through different processes and, in turn, how rural development presents different opportunities and challenges for men and women.

This booklet is the outcome of the review of gender issues in IFAD's ongoing projects presented to the Executive Board in May 2000 as part of the Progress Report on the Project Portfolio. It illustrates some of the opportunities regarding gender that IFAD has explored in the course of its initiatives. Perhaps more importantly, it highlights challenges that have emerged and that must be addressed if there is to be a significant decline in hunger and poverty early in this millennium.



# Why A GENDER PERSPECTIVE?





Gender concerns have come to be a pivotal element of IFAD's poverty-alleviation strategy and agenda, for several reasons:

- Across IFAD-assisted projects, women have proved to be a driving force in achieving project effectiveness and reducing poverty.
- Women are key to addressing the household food security and nutrition goals that are central to IFAD's mandate.
- Women play a major role in agricultural and livestock development. In order to succeed, projects intending to increase agricultural productivity must ensure that the distinct needs, labour constraints, knowledge and decision-making roles of women and of men are analysed and addressed.
- Improvement in the socio-economic status, health and education of women has an immediate and lasting impact on the well-being of the entire family.
- Development initiatives can have adverse consequences for women when gender specificities are not taken into account.
- IFAD is committed to playing a transformative role by promoting equal opportunities for men and women.

Across all geographical regions, women play a focal (although often unrecognized) role in the survival strategies and economy of poor rural households. Increasing the economic resilience of the poor is largely about enabling women to realize their socio-economic potential more fully and improve the quality of their lives. To do so, women need access to assets, services, knowledge and technologies, and must be active in decision-making processes. Greater gender equity means that women are able to express their potential, to the benefit of the entire household and community.

At the same time, evaluations have shown that if gender specificities are not taken into account projects may increase women's workload, thus affecting their caregiving responsibilities and health. Projects may also negatively affect women's control over resources and technologies. Thus gender analysis in design and gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are needed to identify risks and recommend preventive measures. In addition, variations by gender in roles, relations and the control of assets within a region – and within a country – can be significant. Approaches that have succeeded in one place may not be applicable in another. IFAD recognizes that specific mainstreaming strategies need to be developed to suit different project contexts.

# THE evolution OF IFAD'S APPROACH TO GENDER



IFAD policy began with a Women-in-Development (WID) approach, which was devised to address the needs of marginal groups. Some projects were designed specifically for women, or had specific components for women. Generally, but not always, the WID approach resulted in special programmes for women being appended to projects, with a tendency to focus on women's domestic roles and certain stereotypical activities of fairly marginal economic importance.

This policy evolved into the current Gender and Development (GAD) approach, officially adopted by IFAD with the 1992 "Strategy Paper on the Economic Advancement of Rural Women". The GAD approach looks at gender roles and relationships rather than at women only. For IFAD, gender mainstreaming at the project level means ensuring that the specific roles, needs and constraints of men



and women are taken into account at all stages of design and implementation. Rather than designing separate activities for women, it involves adapting each project activity to take gender specificities into account. Currently, the ability of an IFAD project to reach the poor – and women – is one of the key indicators against which achievements of development objectives are judged.

Women are often in a disadvantaged position in terms of access to assets, services, information and formal decision-making status. Given these disadvantages, it is usually necessary to plan specific and differentiated activities to ensure that all members of the community (including the very poor and women) are capable of participating on an equal basis. There is some overlap between the WID and the mainstreaming approaches. In certain situations, designing separate components for women may be the most effective way to involve women or the only feasible way in the short term. There are circumstances in which specific activities for women – for example, literacy courses for women that lead to training programmes for income-generating activities – can contribute significantly to improving women's social and economic status in poor communities. Sixteen out of 17 of IFAD's ongoing projects with women-only components are in countries where socio-cultural norms limit the interaction between men and women. However, the risks of reinforcing the marginalization of women by designing separate activities and components are recognized.

In development projects, gender mainstreaming is designed to provide both men and women with opportunities to access all project resources and services, proportional to the importance of the activity to them and to their livelihoods. Mainstreaming also means recognizing and supporting women's actual roles in rural, community and agricultural development, avoiding gender stereotypes (e.g. men are the primary farmers and women merely contribute labour on the family farm).

Awareness within IFAD of the importance of addressing gender concerns has increased significantly. For IFAD today, improving gender mainstreaming in project design is more a matter of understanding how to do it for different types of activities than of awareness of the need to do so. Projects with a food and nutrition security focus generally give higher priority to the involvement of women. Overall, recent IFAD-assisted projects recognize women's mainstream productive roles and place greater emphasis on the economic and social empowerment of women than on simply meeting their social needs. A number of operational tools and guidelines have been developed to assist in mainstreaming gender concerns in project design.



The IFAD document *Household Food Security and Gender: Memory Checks for Project and Programme Design* was developed, with a contribution from the Government of Italy, as an operational tool to assist project designers and planners in addressing key issues related to gender and household food security. Their use is mandatory for all design teams. The memory checks contain brief Thematic Reminders by sector, a simple checklist to guide collection of relevant socio-economic data at the field level, and a set of 14 key issues to be addressed in project design, review and evaluation.

## FROM DESIGN TO **implementation**

Even where national institutions have policies and a cultural environment that are receptive to gender concerns, the issues are often not well understood and are sometimes even conflictual. Moreover, even well-articulated gender objectives and targets may be dropped unless there is a focus on ensuring that they are implemented. Elements of a project that are considered easily implementable may be selected, while those that are more difficult to implement involve lower disbursement (e.g. group promotion activities), are difficult to measure in terms of tangible results (e.g. participation) or involve target groups that are harder to reach (e.g. women, the poorest) may be dropped. It must be remembered that putting participation into practice, and spending time to reach women, the poor and those in the most remote areas, tends to increase project administrative costs. To favour continuity between design and implementation, references to key gender-related principles and targets are increasingly being included in loan agreements. In addition, the definition of clear, gender-related mechanisms and targets must be included in the project implementation manual. Focused implementation support is also required to ensure that these targets are met.

Gender-sensitive project *designs* do not always translate into gender-sensitive *projects*.

# Agricultural AND livestock PRODUCTION



Women invest a large part of their time, labour and expertise in agricultural and livestock production. Development projects often ignore this fact and sometimes expect women to find additional time to invest in income-generating activities of minor economic relevance and often with few market opportunities.

In many countries, technology development and national extension services tend to neglect the crops that women manage and grow. They also often ignore the fact that, in almost all regions, women have significant responsibilities in the care and management of livestock and the processing of livestock products. Purchasing livestock is often women's preferred use of credit, for both income and security.

A major constraint to achieving gender balance in agricultural development is the lack of women among front-line staff. Projects have sought to overcome this obstacle by hiring women extension staff (for example, in The Sudan) or by giving some extension responsibilities to women's group promoters, generally hired through non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In Ghana, community-selected women extension volunteers have proved effective as an interface between women's groups and government extension services. In other countries, such as Cambodia and Indonesia, women volunteers have been trained as auxiliaries for animal vaccination. Ensuring that government extension services officially recognize women's groups as contact groups is another way of improving extension outreach to women. Targeting village associations for extension in some West African countries has proved less effective, since women are underrepresented in these organizations.

An IFAD/FAO study on “Agricultural Implements Used by Women Farmers in Africa” funded by the Government of Japan points out that, in sub-Saharan Africa, it is men who decide what tools to buy, even though women are the main agricultural labourers. Therefore, labour-saving technology will most likely not be adopted spontaneously without the sensitization of both men and women. This highlights the need to focus on gender, rather than solely on women, in order to include men in project initiatives and promote the sustainability of these activities.



**Women and small-scale irrigation.** The introduction of irrigation can result in significant increases in income. At the same time, the pressure from predominantly male-dominated local elites to control the irrigation system may be overriding. Thus projects with small-scale irrigation components generally identify women as a specific target group and establish the principle that women’s membership in water users’ associations (WUAs) should be ensured. Evaluations have found, however, that the participation of women in WUAs is generally constrained by land-holding-based membership criteria and the notion that only one person per family should register. In some projects, women have contributed to the construction of the schemes, but have been marginalized once the schemes became operational.



The lack of access to productive resources – often upheld by existing laws and social norms – is one of the most serious constraints that women face. In the *Oxbow Lakes Small-Scale Fishermen Project* in Bangladesh, IFAD was able to convince the government to provide the landless with long-term access to water bodies for aquaculture activities. The project soon realized that this shift actually discriminated against women, as men had received the access to and control over the water bodies and the income generated from them. In order to remedy the situation, the project provided women with access to small ponds for fish farming.

**CHALLENGE** In promoting irrigation, safeguards are needed to minimize the following risks:

- women’s labour is increased without corresponding financial benefits;
- production of food crops is reduced in favour of cash crops; and
- women are displaced from the plots they control.

**CHALLENGE** Women’s participation in irrigation schemes needs to be enhanced. In this regard, it is important to define support measures and institutional arrangements to ensure women’s sustained access to irrigated plots.

# RURAL enterprise AND MARKETING SUPPORT .....



The promotion of micro- and small-scale enterprises figures in several IFAD projects. Support in this sector is conceived as an integrated package that combines financial and non-financial services, skills training in management and marketing, credit and organizational assistance. The success of an initiative will depend partly on how well these components are integrated. However, the issue of marketing outlets for women's enterprises cannot be ignored.

In the *Third Rural Infrastructure Development Project* in Bangladesh, employment generation was estimated at 18000 person years, of which at least 70% involved the landless and rural women. The number of women whose income had increased by marketing their products at women's market areas and by direct employment through road maintenance and tree planting was at least 8 000 and 3 000, respectively.

Promoting women's home-based microenterprises is an important first step. Although generally not profitable enough to significantly raise income levels, microenterprises are important in diversifying income sources and reducing vulnerability. They also build confidence in dealing with markets, credit repayment and cash flow. Helping women's microenterprises evolve into more profitable small-scale enterprises is a difficult task, since these operations require significantly higher levels of education, business skills, group organization, time and mobility. Not all microentrepreneurs are able to make the transition. For the poorest women (and the landless), with few other income-generating alternatives, contract work in the building of infrastructure can provide important income-earning opportunities.

In the *Gaza Strip and Jericho Relief and Development Programme*, a model Business Service Centre (BSC) was created in Gaza. The BSC was the first of its kind in Palestine and has a holistic approach: women are given orientation in choosing an enterprise; administrative, financial and training services during its creation; and follow-up with field visits. The centre offers veterinary, agricultural and technical services; provides marketing services to build relationships with local retailers; promotes women's products at festivals, celebrations and workshops; and assists women in product packaging. Financing is available to women to establish small enterprises through a credit scheme, implemented through the project in collaboration with the Arab Bank. The first results of the training and credit scheme have been very positive: more than 350 women have participated in the orientation sessions and specialized training courses. About 230 women entrepreneurs have received loans and started enterprises. To date, credit recovery is very high.

The role of women in marketing is widely recognized and supported by projects. In many regions, women play an important role in traditional trade systems, but their role tends to diminish as the modern market economy expands. The socio-economic assessment for the *Ha Giang Development Project for Ethnic Minorities*, Viet Nam, warns of a risk that the status of indigenous women may decrease with the expanding market economy. Women's marketing opportunities may also be constrained by cultural limitations to women's mobility. To strengthen their ability to take advantage of market opportunities, training is provided in marketing skills and in building up relationships with suppliers and buyers. This is being done in projects in Côte d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Gaza and the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Zambia. Moreover, one quarter of the ongoing projects in the Western and Central Africa region provide marketing support for women.



IFAD's *Upper-East Region Land Conservation and Smallholder Rehabilitation Project* in Ghana has focused on women-headed households (20% of all households in the region), which were among the poorest. Newly irrigated land was allocated first to these households and then to other women farmers. This has been an uphill battle with the existing social norms. A rural credit scheme was also set up to finance crop production and farm-related, small-scale enterprises. Almost 70% of the scheme's beneficiaries were women, who also received technical assistance to increase their income-generating capacity – mainly in processed foods (parboiled rice, curd from *bambara* beans, groundnut oil, *dawada*, etc.). The credit scheme was so successful that the average net income almost doubled for credit beneficiaries, and employment increased by 36%. In addition, the participants are now sending their children to school owing to the newly created income.

**CHALLENGE** In order to address the different levels of education, business skills, group organization, time and mobility of women when trying to promote small-scale enterprises, projects must plan for the needs of different categories of women entrepreneurs.

**CHALLENGE** The specific marketing constraints of women and of men must be analysed and addressed to enable those with more limited resources to market their products more advantageously.



IFAD's project experience confirms that women are reliable borrowers, with a strong sense of commitment to the rural institutions that provide the financial services they require.

For IFAD, microfinance is increasingly about women. Many projects with a financial services component give priority to women because they are good savers, prudent investors and conscientious borrowers. Credit activities have been used as an entry-point for organizing women for broader activities. Project experience indicates that strengthening pre-existing informal financial institutions (e.g. the *tontines* in Guinea and *adashi* in Nigeria) is more effective than setting up new ones. There are also encouraging signs that local financial institutions co-owned by women are potentially sustainable.

When Selina Anyodo was widowed, she had to assume sole responsibility for the care of her seven children. As she had no means of earning a living, Selina began to work in other people's gardens. However, this enabled her to feed her children only once a day; she was still unable to dress them properly or send them to school. Selina was encouraged to join the *Ugandan Women's Efforts to Save Orphans (UWESO) Savings and Credit Scheme*. She was given a small loan to start a business: she bought vegetables from her neighbours to sell in the local market. With the profits, she bought seeds and fertilizers, began growing her own produce and diversified her activities by buying a goat. She now has a steady income and a healthy savings account in the local bank. She is able to feed her children three solid meals a day and has built a bathing area and hygienic drying rack for her dishes. She has a lot of plans – and hope – for the future.

*The UWESO Savings and Credit Scheme began in April 1996 and targets families who care for orphans. Women are a primary focus; on average, the women members care for six children. Recognizing the importance of building a social support system, the approach of the scheme is group solidarity. Clusters of women are trained for at least eight weeks in group dynamics, leadership skills, business management, marketing and savings and credit management. To date, 4 000 loans have been provided to 1 875 people, 87% of whom are women. The scheme is supported by the Belgian Survival Fund under its joint programme with IFAD.*

Group-based lending has enabled some women to overcome the requirement for collateral, although in many regions formal financial institutions still require official land titles. Overall, women have demonstrated their propensity to save and to accumulate funds as a group. The creation of self-help groups (or the strengthening of existing ones) has enabled women's groups to open savings accounts with local banks. In addition, literacy training is sometimes provided to enable women to establish their dossiers with banks (e.g. Burkina Faso, The Gambia and Guinea).

In the *Tamil Nadu Women's Development Project* in India, greater awareness on gender issues has been created among the project staff through formal training and group action. Forty per cent more women's groups were formed than was originally planned, and these groups developed the habit of systematic savings. In addition, orientation courses have been organized for bank staff that cover gender sensitization issues and the project's approach to mobilizing women and improving their access to banks and credit. An evaluation of the project has shown that social empowerment has increased among the groups, and they feel confident. Moreover, they have acquired access to credit and many are now free from moneylenders. The majority of women have control over the income that is generated, giving them economic empowerment.

Projects are increasingly incorporating lessons from past projects in rural finance design. An important lesson is the need for flexibility when meeting women's varied demands for financial services. Project experience has also shown that women's highest priority is often a savings-deposit facility. When it comes to credit, poorer women tend to prefer small, short-cycle loans or low-risk investments with quick returns. Across regions, preferred investments are in livestock and petty trade.

**CHALLENGE** Many formal and semi-formal financial institutions still do not serve poor rural women.

**CHALLENGE** In some areas, women's access to finance remains particularly difficult despite nominal legal equality.

While credit is a problem for all small businesses, the lack of access to credit and financial services is particularly acute for women entrepreneurs. In some countries, banking laws contain discriminatory provisions. Inheritance laws, property rights and matrimonial property rules can also work against women. Undercapitalized from the outset, women's microenterprises tend to start smaller and grow more slowly.

**CHALLENGE** In channelling credit exclusively to women, particular attention must be paid to the potential resentment that can arise on the part of men. (In some cases, loans that women have obtained have been diverted by men, thus curtailing their opportunities for income-generating activities.)

**CHALLENGE** Loans taken by women tend to be small compared with those obtained by men, and the activities in which they invest also remain on a small scale.

**CHALLENGE** Wealthier women can afford to take some risks. They are also able to graduate more easily to larger loans. Poorer women generally prefer capital accumulation through savings rather than credit, which they consider a risk. Furthermore, poorer women have fewer investment opportunities that can be financed with a loan.

# Training AND literacy

SECTOR-SPECIFIC APPROACHES



Efforts to empower women socially and economically have been most effective when supported by skills, management and leadership training, and literacy. Throughout IFAD-assisted projects, women's response to training opportunities often exceeds expectations. Training for income generation has drawn the greatest participation and proved most effective when it is directed at activities that are chosen by women and have adequate market opportunities. Women show less interest in training when it focuses exclusively on their caregiving roles or on activities they consider to be marginal, such as knitting, sewing, carpet-making or handicrafts.

In Latin American countries, 75% of rural women do unpaid household chores, only 9% earn wages from off-farm work and a mere 6% are engaged in some income-generating activity. IFAD's smallholder support project in Uruguay was able to take advantage of a unique situation in that country: illiteracy is only 4% nationwide, and women are better educated than men. Thus they were better able to articulate their aspirations and needs, and numerous training and technical assistance activities were organized. Several rural microenterprises, managed by women, were also launched.

Women's illiteracy is high in most areas of IFAD operations. It is recognized as a major development bottleneck that has implications for the entire household – an evaluation of one project in Nepal demonstrated the high correlation between increased women's literacy and improved child nutrition. It also affects women's ability to benefit from projects. A fairly high percentage of IFAD projects in all regions include adult literacy training, principally targeted at women. For example, 20% of the projects in Africa and 50% of IFAD/Belgian Survival Fund Joint Programme (BSF.JP) projects have literacy components. In Syria, all four ongoing projects contain literacy components for women.

IFAD's efforts to tackle illiteracy among rural women in Niger were recognized when an IFAD-financed literacy training booklet, the first of its kind to be produced in Fula (Fulani), was awarded the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) prize in Seville, Spain.

**CHALLENGE** Literacy components must be truly "functional", and the curriculum must be adapted to specific needs and time constraints of women and of men. In addition, materials need to be produced that are appropriate for neo-literate adults.

**CHALLENGE** Although there is often pressure from official institutions to have participants trained in the official language of the country, efforts must be made to develop materials that are in local languages, particularly when the poor are indigenous peoples or ethnic minorities.

# Water, health AND nutrition .....

SECTOR-SPECIFIC APPROACHES



In many areas in which IFAD operates, chronic disease and malnutrition severely constrain the productivity and income-earning potential of the poor and prevent them from taking advantage of development opportunities. This is particularly true for women who are responsible for the care of sick family members. When needs assessments are conducted among women, it is generally found that water and health-related concerns are ranked as a high priority. Health, sanitation and nutrition components figure in 20% of the ongoing projects.

Evaluations of projects implemented under the IFAD-Belgian Survival Fund Joint Programme show that health-related activities provide a powerful entry-point for reaching women. They create the opportunity to organize informal interest groups, which later evolve into multifunctional groups that undertake economic activities as well.

Provision of a safe water supply is frequently included in the infrastructure or community development fund components. It is seen as the principal means not only to enhance health, but also to ease the daily burden of water collection by women and children. Investments in water supply have proved to be one of the most effective ways of involving women (especially in sub-Saharan Africa, North Africa and the Near East).

In Uganda, the Hoima-Kibale *Integrated Community Development Project*, funded by the Belgian Survival Fund in the context of the joint programme with IFAD, was implemented to bring the traumatized population up to a level at which it could participate in and benefit from development opportunities. The project was focused intensively on women, particularly those components addressing community-based healthcare, income generation and savings and credit. By the end of the project (1998), the following results had been achieved:

- over 600 women's groups and 27 development associations were in operation;
- women's savings and credit groups had a 90% repayment rate (short-term credit had a recovery rate of almost 100%);
- eight healthcare centres had been constructed; and
- over half the population in Hoima and 26% in Kibale had access to safe water (compared to only 6% before the project).

A majority of the population in the two districts remains cash-poor. However, by improving health conditions and strengthening their organizational capacity, the project has established conditions for the rural poor to be integrated into the broader economic growth that Uganda has been enjoying.

**CHALLENGE** Meeting health and social needs is essential in enabling the poor, and in particular women, to improve their productivity and income levels. Coordination with other donors is often a critical factor in ensuring a holistic approach to rural development.

In IFAD-assisted projects, strengthening the ability of the rural poor to organize and pursue their interests is the main instrument for their social empowerment. Women report higher status, respect and decision-making power as a result of their participation in groups or cooperatives. Women's groups are often the most cohesive and best-performing community-level organizations. Participation in groups increases women's participation in overall community development activities.

Groups are the entry-point for almost all IFAD interventions designed for women and men. Project-supported women's groups tend to be informal common-interest groups, often savings and credit groups, but also cooperatives. In some cases, groups may be specifically established to function as



channels for project benefits, principally credit. To promote long-term sustainability, an increasing number of projects places the promotion of women's groups in a broader community development perspective. The aim is not just to interact with groups as conduits for project resources, but to help them evolve into viable, self-sustaining community organizations. Support may also involve assistance – through literacy and management training – to enable these groups to be recognized as formal producers' organizations. Mixed groups of men and women have been found to work in certain countries (e.g. Kenya and Uganda). In most situations, however, women-only groups are the best option. Initially at least, they allow women to gain greater confidence and autonomy. In mixed groups, women tend to have less influence than men. However, confining women's participation to women-only groups can perpetuate women's marginalization. Informal, small and socially homogeneous groups have proved to be the most effective channel for involving women. On the other hand, attempting to reach women through village leadership structures or existing community-based organizations has proved to be less effective due to the unequal influence of men and women within those organizations.

In India, an IFAD-funded project in the North Cachar Hills of Assam has highlighted the importance of participatory management and the inclusion of women in decision-making processes. During a workshop, it became evident that communities have the power to organize and plan their local resources provided they are given the necessary training and opportunities. However, it was also evident that there were strong male biases that limited the participation of women in the management process: although the village elder felt that women were more knowledgeable than men in certain areas, his view was not shared by the majority, who felt that the airing of women's views should be limited to women's discussion groups.

An increasing number of projects includes community development funds to finance (or cofinance) initiatives requested by communities, according to an identified planning process and a set of eligibility criteria. It is urged that projects specify methods to ensure women's participation in planning and establish a principle that not less than a certain percentage of microprojects be initiated by women.

**CHALLENGE** Women's organizations need to be able to expand their influence beyond the community level, for example through intergroup associations and clusters. This is a relatively easier objective to achieve in countries where well-developed networks of women's groups and associations already exist (such as in Rwanda and Uganda).

**CHALLENGE** Women's groups must be able to incorporate poorer women, who have little time and are often reluctant to join groups composed of better-off women. By the same token, younger women may also be poorly represented in groups composed mainly of older women (e.g. Chad).

**CHALLENGE** Despite the growing tendency for project designs to establish procedures that include women in decision-making structures, their active participation in these organizations remains problematic (particularly in projects with irrigation components).



# Reaching women IN DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS



Reaching women in development initiatives requires articulating specific approaches and mechanisms needed to ensure that women, like men, can participate in mainstream project activities. It also means selecting those activities that interest women – self-targeting. IFAD's experience has demonstrated that self-targeting approaches are generally more effective than approaches that set exclusionary criteria favouring women.

The extent to which women are reached depends largely on the sensitivity and experience of the implementing agencies, government services and NGOs. It also depends on the incentives that are provided to work with women, particularly the poorest. The number of NGOs reported to be involved in the implementation of IFAD-supported projects increased from 173 in 1994 to 486 at the end of 1999. This ever-growing collaboration makes the issues of NGO selection criteria, training and performance monitoring increasingly important.

Woman-headed households are an important subgroup in many marginal areas characterized by high out-migration of men. Projects often identify woman-headed households as a target group with special needs. However, within different social contexts, there are many types of female-headed households. Projects sometimes find it more expedient to target female-headed households rather than women as individuals within their families or local institutions. Class differences among women affect their access to resources. Despite efforts to incorporate poorer women, it can be difficult to prevent wealthier women who are connected to the local elites from taking over project benefits. This may be due in part to the difficulty of disseminating information about the project to poorer women; certain categories, such as nomadic women, are particularly difficult to reach.



## GENDER STAFFING AT THE FIELD LEVEL

- There is widespread evidence that hiring women staff members at the field level is probably the single most important factor in determining the ability of a project to reach women.
- Sometimes provisions for recruiting women staff members are contained in the design but are limited to the women-specific components.
- Countries where women staff members are most needed, because social and cultural norms limit extra-familial contact between men and women, are also the most difficult environments in which to recruit women. Challenges include restrictions on overnight stays and difficulties in communicating with men colleagues.
- Projects have occasionally overcome this difficulty by hiring women field staff members – extension workers, counsellors, group promoters or loan officers. Although this may address the short-term need for women staff, it does not address the issue of post-project sustainability.
- There are indications that ensuring more gender-balanced staffing at the field level may be easier when working with NGOs.

## GENDER STAFFING AT THE PROJECT MANAGEMENT LEVEL

- Responsibilities of all project management staff in gender mainstreaming should be clearly spelled out.
- Experience has shown that including a competent social scientist (or a gender adviser) on the project management team can be crucial to ensuring gender-sensitivity of the project during implementation.
- In recognition of the importance of including women in project management, this requirement is sometimes included in the loan agreement. However, in countries where socio-cultural conditions make it difficult to recruit women, the lack of qualified women in management positions creates unfavourable conditions for implementing gender-mainstreamed programmes.

## COMPOSITION AND TERMS OF REFERENCE OF PROJECT DESIGN TEAMS

- To improve gender mainstreaming in design, a gender specialist may not be sufficient. The team leader and all team members need to have a mandate – reflected in their terms of reference – to mainstream gender concerns within their sectors and in the overall project design.
- There are also indications that having women consultants on the team increases the likelihood that rural women will be consulted and that the priorities and constraints of both women and men will be reflected in the design. This may be particularly important in production sectors where women play a major role (e.g. agricultural and livestock production).

## MONITORING, EVALUATION AND SUPERVISION AT THE PROJECT LEVEL

- In the context of a general need for more information on the impact and social processes of projects, gender-disaggregated information is particularly lacking. While some quantitative information is provided (e.g. financial or physical progress), qualitative information (e.g. the impact on women's incomes, increase in women's control over assets) needs to be generated, analysed and incorporated in subsequent planning and implementation.
- Gender-disaggregated data are most useful if monitoring is actually a management tool, and the information is used to carry out gender-sensitive planning. To achieve these goals, project staff need training in M&E with a strong gender perspective.
- The manner in which gender-related information is presented in evaluation reports needs to be consistent, in order to be able to make comparisons across projects.

## GENDER SENSITIZATION AND TRAINING

Development initiatives can be significantly improved through greater awareness on the part of government counterparts, project management and beneficiaries on gender differences and their practical implications. Project staff and implementing organizations need to be trained on how to address these differences in project implementation. There is an emerging consensus among regions that efforts to increase gender awareness must take the local culture into account. Region- and even country-specific strategies must be developed for gender sensitization and training.



The Latin America and the Caribbean Division has emphasized gender sensitization and training in project planning. Four regional workshops have been held in the context of its Programme for Strengthening Gender Aspects in IFAD Projects (PROSGIP). Currently, all projects in the region are expected to carry out gender training for staff and technical service providers as part of the action plans established at the regional workshops. Another outcome of the programme has been the establishment of practical guidelines for headquarters and project staff to strengthen the inclusion of gender issues in their daily work and in project formulation and implementation.

REGIONAL initiatives



While certain gender standards should apply to all projects, strategies need to be developed at the regional, subregional and country levels. Each of IFAD's regional divisions is undertaking its own extensive programme to improve the gender focus of its projects.

The *Eastern and Southern Africa Division* has developed a three-year gender strengthening programme, financed by the Government of Norway. The aim is to equip Project Management Units to address gender concerns during project implementation. Activities include training project staff to analyse the socio-economic relationships within households and communities to take into account the dynamics of these relationships when designing and implementing projects.

The *Western and Central Africa Division*, also with funding from the Government of Norway, has developed a three year village-based participatory gender research-learning-action programme for selected countries in the region. Training and village-level analysis of gender are designed to increase the capacities of villages and project staff to undertake participatory appraisal activities, develop action plans, prepare gender guidelines for project designers and implementers, and follow up their results.

The *Asia and Pacific Division* has articulated a gender strategy that recognizes the need for a variety of approaches, given the profound differences in gender roles and relations between subregions. Workshops will be held with cooperating institutions in order to develop guidelines that respond to these needs. With funding from the Government of Japan, the Asian Institute of Technology is conducting gender assessments and training in four countries and will be establishing gender centres in two.

In the context of its gender programme, PROSGIP, funded by the Government of Japan with a contribution from The Netherlands, the *Latin America and the Caribbean Division* has conducted a number of workshops and field studies to develop gender-mainstreaming tools and manuals. As a follow-up, a technical assistance programme will be implemented to provide support to management teams for new projects, project staff, cooperating institutions and consultants to apply these tools and guidelines.

With a contribution from the Government of The Netherlands, the *Near East and North Africa Division* has developed a proposal for an IFAD-funded grant to finance a three-year programme in areas where gender mainstreaming needs to be enhanced. The programme will involve both project staff and borrower governments and include research and training activities, the creation of guidelines and focused assistance to projects.

A computerized knowledge base on gender and household food security is being developed, with funding from the Government of Japan. The knowledge base will contain IFAD's experience and lessons learned from projects, policy documents and IFAD-initiated studies, and operational tools for gender mainstreaming in the sectors in which IFAD operates. A knowledge network is also being established for use by divisions. This network is expected to enhance IFAD's ability to analyse field experiences and to efficiently incorporate lessons learned into the design and implementation of new projects. Regular updates will enable progress on gender mainstreaming to be tracked.

# MOVING ahead



A number of IFAD projects have made a remarkable difference in the lives of the men and women they have reached. Successes have been particularly notable in microfinance projects, as well as in social empowerment through education, training and strengthening of women's groups to become sustainable community-based organizations. Significant benefits have been derived from complementing economic and social empowerment with investments in water supply, health and literacy. Results have been greatest when women have been reached through an integrated package, including training, credit, organizational support and measures to meet social needs. IFAD's efforts to address gender concerns have been complemented by the essential support of donors such as Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, The Netherlands and Norway.

However, as this document illustrates, there are also many challenges still to be overcome. IFAD recognizes the need to deepen the understanding of men's and women's roles and responsibilities and of the differential impacts of its projects on women and men. It also recognizes the need to ensure increased and more equitable participation of women and men in project planning. IFAD remains committed to enhancing the responsiveness of its projects to gender differences.



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