

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*.