

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.