

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.

