

An empowerment agenda for rural livelihoods



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INTRODUCTION

The May 2013 Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda (HLP)¹ acknowledges that poverty has various dimensions: insufficient income and productive resources to ensure sustainable livelihoods; hunger and malnutrition; ill health; limited or no access to education and other basic services; high morbidity and mortality from illness; inadequate housing; insecurity; and discrimination and exclusion. The report adds that poverty is often characterized by lack of participation in decision-making and in civil, social and cultural life. It recommends that the post-2015 agenda tackle all of these aspects of poverty and ensure that no one is left behind in the development process.

Paying heed to this recommendation requires an empowerment approach to the future agenda. Limiting the empowerment approach primarily to what the public services can do to strengthen individual human capabilities – through, inter alia, health care, education and sanitation – has been one of the main weaknesses of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) framework. Economic and social capabilities did not feature in the old agenda, despite their major role in driving poverty reduction and development. However, progress on a future agenda will be held back unless these and other dimensions of empowerment are addressed, such as the causes of poverty that relate to disempowerment, exclusion and inequality. It should promote policies and investments that enhance the capabilities and livelihoods of people living in poverty, especially those who belong to socially disadvantaged groups or live in hard-to-reach areas, which are often bypassed by growth.

A large percentage of people who are often left behind live in rural areas of developing countries – poor farmers, pastoralists, fishers, foresters, rural women, indigenous peoples, and

1 HLP (2013). *A new global partnership: Eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development*. The report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. www.post2015hlp.org/the-report/

Table 1 Key gender indicators across South Asia

Country	Maternal mortality ratio (modelled estimate, per 100,000 live births) (2010) <i>Source: World Bank</i>	Women's access to land* (2012) <i>Source: OECD</i>	Women's access to bank loans** (2012) <i>Source: OECD</i>	Labour participation rate, ages 15+ (2011)	
				Female (% of females) <i>Source: World Bank</i>	Male (% of males)
Afghanistan	460	0.5	0.5	16	80
Bangladesh	240	0.5	0.5	57	84
Bhutan	180	0.0	0.0	66	77
India	200	0.5	0.5	29	81
Maldives	60	-	-	56	77
Nepal	170	0.5	0.5	80	88
Pakistan	260	0.5	0.5	23	83
Sri Lanka	35	1.0	0.0	35	76

Reproduced from: IFAD (2013). "Gender and rural development brief: South Asia." http://www.ifad.org/gender/pub/gender_sa.pdf

Sources: World Bank database (2008-2012); SIGI, OECD Gender, Institutions and Development Database 2012. Accessed 25-26 June 2013.

Notes: *Women's legal and de facto rights to own and access agricultural land: 0: Women have equal legal rights with men to own and access land; 0.5: Women have the same legal rights to own and access land, but are restricted due to discriminatory practices; 1.0: Women have few or no legal rights to access or own land, or access is severely restricted by discriminatory practices.

**Women's legal and de facto access to loans and credit: 0: Women have equal rights to access credit and bank loans with men; 0.5: Women have rights to access some kinds of credit (e.g. microcredit), or have equal rights but face discrimination in accessing bank loans and credit; 1.0: Women have few or no rights to access bank loans or credit, or access is severely restricted by discriminatory practices.

people with disabilities. This brief thus focuses on the importance of social and economic empowerment of poor rural people for sustainable development and poverty eradication. Although there are numerous definitions of empowerment in the literature, the focus here is particularly on its economic and social aspects. These are defined here as the various inter-related processes through which people, individually and collectively, acquire the ability to access the productive resources they require to increase their earnings, obtain the goods and services they need, and at the same time participate meaningfully in decision-making that affects their livelihoods.² Empowerment thus concerns both accessing assets, and having and using opportunities to increase one's earnings and to participate in shaping collective choices.

KEY CHALLENGES

Many developing countries have achieved considerable progress in reducing poverty over the last 30 years due to high rates of economic growth and broad-based development programmes. However, even where growth has had a great impact on poverty in the aggregate, pockets of poverty have persisted among marginalized groups such as indigenous peoples and those living in marginalized and remote areas, where the incidence of poverty is typically greater than among the rest of society.³ More broadly, the benefits of growth have accrued unequally to different groups depending on location, gender, race, occupation group, disability, and other factors. Depending on context, different social markers underpin various forms of social and economic exclusion that result in unequal access to economic opportunities, forming part and parcel of poverty as a multidimensional phenomenon. Exclusion makes it harder for specific individuals and groups to overcome poverty by denying them access to opportunities and assets, and increasing vulnerability and exposure to risk and insecurity. Indeed, unequal access to opportunities holds back marginalized groups from contributing to inclusive growth and sustainable development, and thus they remain a major untapped resource for their communities and societies.

² See www.ifad.org/events/past/hunger/empower.html

³ IFAD (2011). *Rural Poverty Report 2011*. Rome: International Fund for Agricultural Development.

Some key facts about indigenous peoples

There are more than 370 million self-identified indigenous people in the world, living in at least 70 countries.

- Most of the world's indigenous peoples live in Asia
- Indigenous peoples form about 5,000 distinct groups and occupy about 20 per cent of the earth's territory
- Although indigenous peoples make up less than 6 per cent of the global population, they speak more than 4,000 of the world's 7,000 languages
- One of the root causes of the poverty and marginalization of indigenous peoples is loss of control over their traditional lands, territories and natural resources
- Indigenous peoples have a concept of poverty and development that reflects their own values, needs and priorities; they do not see poverty solely as the lack of income
- A growing number of indigenous peoples live in urban areas, as a result of the degradation of land, dispossession, forced evictions and lack of employment opportunities

Source: IFAD (2012). "Indigenous peoples: valuing, respecting, and supporting diversity."
<http://www.ifad.org/pub/factsheet/ip/e.pdf>

In general, poor rural people face multiple deprivations because of the marginalization of rural areas and rural sectors in policy and public investments, the deterioration of the natural resource base, and poor coverage of services and infrastructure, particularly in remote areas. But different forms of exclusion also exist *within* rural societies, creating formal or informal barriers to access productive resources, markets and services. For instance, rural women generally have more limited and less secure access to or control over a range of productive assets, from agricultural land, technology and equipment, to knowledge and finance. This has a negative impact not only on the women themselves, but also on their households, especially if women-headed, and societies. Indigenous peoples also confront challenges of insecure access and control over productive resources (land, forests) in many parts of the world. For rural women and indigenous peoples, precarious entitlements over productive resources are an important factor of disempowerment with respect to new demands on the natural resource base emerging in connection with rising prices of agricultural commodities, mining, land use conversion and deforestation.

In addition to gender and ethnicity, marginalization within rural societies can also be associated with remote locations, agroecological context, and crop or product specialization. For example, technological progress has bypassed millions of poor people in specific regions (including most of Africa), agroecologies (drylands, uplands) and products (coarse grains, root and tuber crops, small livestock), partly due to the relative neglect of the livelihood concerns of these areas and groups in public and private research and development (R&D) institutions and extension services. Poor infrastructure often combines with these factors to marginalize these groups from thriving markets. Other factors of exclusion besides gender, ethnicity, location, or crop specialization (e.g. on high value vs. staple crops) include illiteracy, limited access to information, weak organizational capabilities, and poor access to financial products and services. Moreover, non-inclusive institutions that poorly represent the voices and concerns of rural citizens, combined with rural citizens' (in particular, rural women's) scant knowledge about their entitlements, and their limited confidence to claim them and to generally participate in public life are also major factors of exclusion. Weak or poorly representative rural people's organizations are often a factor limiting access to opportunities and assets on many fronts – from markets to policy processes.



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ENTRY POINTS AND APPROACHES FOR A POLICY AGENDA

In addition to being a moral imperative, supporting the empowerment of poor rural women and men can unleash enormous productivity potential, making it a smart strategy to boost economic growth and contribute to sustainable poverty reduction. In order to achieve this, economic and social empowerment should go hand in hand – just as social and economic disempowerment reinforce each other. Poor rural people need access to productive assets, inputs, technology and finance. They also need to be socially empowered so that they can enhance their status and bargaining power. This in turn affects their ability to securely access assets, knowledge and opportunities – for example, women who hold recognized land rights are often found to be more active citizens.⁴

There is much evidence for the benefits of boosting poor rural people's economic and social capabilities. In particular, enhancing secure access to land has a positive impact on farmers' investments,⁵ leading to productivity gains. For instance, it has been estimated that tenancy reform in West Bengal State of India has led to significant increases in rice productivity.⁶ Also, enhancing rural women's ability to securely access assets can have especially significant benefits in the aggregate. It is estimated that equalizing access to assets between women and men farmers would increase yields on women's farms by 20 to 30 per cent, raising agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5 to 4 per cent. This could, in turn, reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12 to 17 per cent, or 100 million to 150 million people.⁷ Supporting women's empowerment, notably through education, has been one of the most effective ways of reducing chronic child malnutrition.⁸ Given women's important roles as managers and users of natural resources across the developing world, enhancing their capabilities and entitlements is also a precondition for progress on the environmental agenda.

4 World Bank, FAO, IFAD (2008). *Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook*. Module 4. Washington D.C.: World Bank.

5 According to the HLP report, tenure security was originally included in the MDGs, but a lack of globally comparable data at the time led to its replacement.

6 A. Banerjee et al. (2002). "Empowerment and Efficiency: The Economics of Tenancy Reform". *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 110(2): 239-280.

7 FAO (2011). *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011*. Rome.

8 L. Smith, U. Ramakrishnan, A. Ndiaye, L. Haddad, and R. Martorell (2003). "The importance of women's status for child nutrition in developing countries", *Research Report 131*. Washington, D.C.: IFPRI.

Self-help groups boost women's power across South Asia

IFAD supports women's empowerment through many self-help groups in South Asia. These groups are usually made up of about 10 to 20 mostly poor rural women from the same village who join together to save money and provide group loans to their members. The informal, homogeneous groups are a good way to reach and empower women and offer them the opportunity to have their voices heard. In much of South Asia, women are more comfortable meeting on their own, believing that men will impose their opinions and priorities if they are present. Empowerment results not only from the financial opportunities provided by self-help groups, but also from the collective power of the group, which gives greater social status to members and supports joint action. The groups encourage members to assume a decision-making role in financial matters, which is new to most women. For example, the Production Credit for Rural Women Project in Nepal helped women learn to deal directly with banks and bank staff, which increased their self-reliance and confidence.

Self-help groups often undertake joint planning and action, and assume leadership roles in community issues. Under the Maharashtra Rural Credit Project in western India, women's groups in the village of Garade played an important role in banning the local sale and consumption of costly alcohol and chewing tobacco among village men and young people. The Tejaswini Rural Women's Empowerment Programme – covering six rural districts of Madhya Pradesh – conducted gender sensitization for the husbands of members of self-help groups, discussing topics such as violence against women and the sharing of household responsibilities. In places where self-help groups have federated into apex organizations, they are able to develop their own products and services. These federations are often a training ground for women who aspire to become local leaders and politicians.

Source: IFAD (2013). Gender and rural development brief. South Asia. Rome.

Enhancing access to skills and strengthening grass-roots organizations have also proved effective in reaching the poorest and the marginalized, and promoting their participation and contribution to development processes. In particular, through organization both at the local level and on larger scales, connecting marginalized groups to country-level and regional processes, poor rural people are able to improve their skills, knowledge and self-confidence by benefiting from collective action. Through producers' organizations, even marginalized farmers can in some cases increase their ability to take advantage of economic opportunities, access assets, information, technologies and markets. Through collective action, moreover, marginalized groups can in principle benefit from economies of scale in production and marketing, which can enhance their bargaining power with respect to other market actors. Economic empowerment often leads to increased social status, decision-making power, and the ability to exercise one's citizenship rights and to benefit from public services. However, it is important to address economic and social empowerment together, considering that social exclusion can be also present *within* rural organizations, resulting in marginalization within these organizations of rural women, youth, or the poorest.

Although governments and development institutions set some of the conditions for empowerment processes to take place, by designing policy and legal environments (e.g. for rural women's entitlements over land, the establishment and operation of institutions of poor rural people, or cultural and linguistic recognition of minority groups), poor rural people's empowerment is primarily their own doing. In particular, collective action often starts at the initiative of the rural women and men themselves, and it rests on their active participation. In many cases, this is not a politically neutral process, as the empowerment of marginalized rural groups often entails renegotiation of power relations within societies and markets, especially at a time when market transformations often result in greater concentration of economic power in few hands. In all cases, rural women and men are the key actors in their own empowerment.



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Evidence on successes and failures in promoting empowerment processes has also been collected in the context of the work of development institutions like IFAD. In general, this work shows that the key entry points for promoting poor rural people's social and economic empowerment are, inter alia, access to and management of the natural resources, access to financial services, and inclusive local governance approaches such as community-driven development. Support to organizations of poor rural people is a cross-cutting entry point.

In the area of natural resource management, examples from IFAD experience include the Hills Leasehold Forestry Project in Nepal, which enabled groups of the poorest people, many of them from indigenous communities and women, to access degraded forest areas through long-term leases, with technical and financial assistance to grow fodder crops and raise livestock. This led to income growth and progress in environmental protection and biodiversity conservation, and the emergence of associations of forest user groups and cooperatives. In the Cuchumatanes Highlands Rural Development Project in Guatemala, IFAD supported the strengthening and reform of traditional governance institutions of indigenous communities in natural resource and conflict management, resulting in the stronger role of local communities in decision-making over their natural resource base and more sustainable livelihoods. In India, in the area of access to financial services, the promotion of the inclusive self-help group (SHG) model (also supported by IFAD) has helped enable rural women to manage savings and credit directly, and increased their confidence. SHGs have also provided millions of poor women with the means to initiate microenterprise activities, earn income, improve their social standing, and raise their engagement in community life, gradually evolving into a large-scale movement of women's social and economic empowerment. In the area of local governance, IFAD's experience in the Puno-Cusco *Corredor* in Peru has shown that transferring public resources to rural organizations and giving them control over their allocation and management can

Farmers' organizations in sub-Saharan Africa

The past two decades have witnessed the unprecedented development of farmers' and rural producers' organizations (FOs) throughout Africa. FOs enjoy growing recognition as the representatives of the farming community at the national, regional and international levels. The United Nations declared 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives and 2014 as the International Year of Family Farming. These events acknowledge the invaluable role that FOs play in shaping policies for agriculture and sustainable development, providing services to smallholders, generating employment and social integration, reducing poverty and enhancing food security.

Today, there are tens of thousands of grass-roots FOs across sub-Saharan Africa. Most play a dual role: as producers' groups or cooperatives, they provide services to their members and they represent their members' interests with other stakeholders, including agricultural policymakers, business partners and development projects.

Many grass-roots FOs set up local unions and federations that are joined to national umbrella organizations. These organizations have established four regional networks in Africa: Eastern Africa Farmers Federation (EAFB); Plateforme Sous-Régionale des Organisations Paysannes d'Afrique Centrale (PROPAC); Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (ROPPA); and Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU).

Regional networks are undoubtedly playing an increasing role in regional and continental policy processes that are related to agricultural development and food security, and food security.

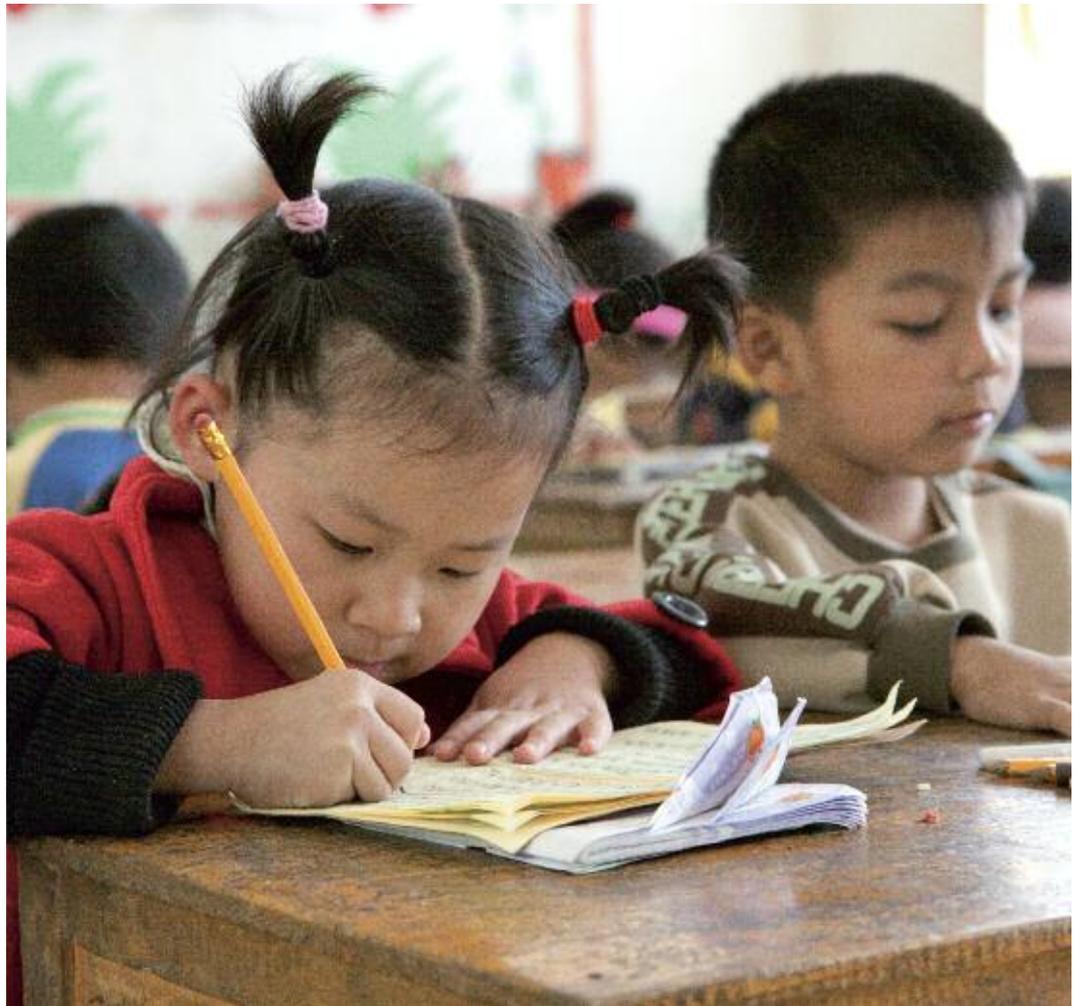
Source: IFAD (2013). Support to Farmers' Organizations in Africa Programme (SFOAP). Pilot phase 2009-2012. Rome.

boost local development, with a positive impact on poverty and food security, and at the same time improve the inclusiveness and transparency of local governance.

It is important to emphasize that this is not just a local agenda, but also an agenda that has relevance at the national level and beyond. For instance, the development of apex organizations of poor rural people can also be critical to consolidate empowerment processes that take place at the local level, by ensuring that enabling conditions for them to be achieved or to last are created beyond the local level. The experience of the network of farmers' organizations ROPPA in West Africa is one example among many of how apex organizations can play an important role even beyond the country level by taking part in policy processes affecting the livelihoods of millions of marginalized rural groups at the regional level. More generally, the issue of scale is of paramount importance for empowerment processes to be effective and for change to take place beyond the lives of specific individuals. Ranging from the experience of farmers' organizations to the case of SHGs and many other types of institutions of the rural poor, a key challenge is often how to scale up micro-level empowerment processes to impact on social and economic relations that affect livelihood opportunities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE POST-2015 DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

The post-2015 development agenda should be designed to encourage governments and other actors to facilitate the economic and social empowerment of the poor rural people, in particular, marginalized rural groups such as women and indigenous peoples. How to achieve this? A good starting point for the architects of the post-2015 agenda is the HLP report, which proposes targets under four different goals that can be expanded to make them relevant for the economic and social empowerment of the rural poor, particularly the most marginalized. These targets are: (i) increase the share of women and men, communities and businesses with secure rights to land, property and other assets (under HLP proposed goal 1, on ending poverty); (ii) ensure equal rights of women to own and inherit property (under goal 2, on



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empowering girls and women and achieving gender equality); (iii) eliminate discrimination against women in political, economic and public life (under goal 2); (iv) strengthen productive capacity by providing universal access to financial services and infrastructure such as transportation and information and communication technologies (under goal 8, on creating jobs, sustainable livelihoods and equitable growth); and (v) increase public participation in political and civic engagement at all levels (under goal 10, on ensuring good governance and effective institutions).

Targets in these areas can have a catalytic effect on the social and economic empowerment of marginalized rural people. In addition to adjusting targets to the realities of marginalized groups in different countries, a critical step is the identification of appropriate indicators to track progress among these groups. In this regard, the development of reliable and disaggregated statistics is central for measuring progress and informing and analysing policies, considering that there are often scant or poor data on marginalized rural groups. Therefore, commitment to “the data revolution”, as dubbed by the HLP report, will be fundamental to develop appropriate targets and indicators, and to monitor progress on post-2015 goals across multiple social levels. This will require significant investment in the strengthening of national statistical capacities. In addition, creating forums and opportunities and building capacity for marginalized rural groups – again, particularly rural women and indigenous peoples – to voice their own concerns and priorities for the post-2015 agenda is of paramount importance. It is also part and parcel of the process of empowerment and the reversal of their marginalization in debates that can have major impact on their livelihoods and future.



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