

Beijing+20: IFAD's work to empower rural women



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Building on the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and other important global conventions and commitments, IFAD has contributed to reducing poverty and improving the lives of rural women, their families and communities in many ways. The IFAD Gender Plan of Action, Framework for Gender Mainstreaming, and Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment have been developed to ensure gender perspectives are more broadly integrated throughout the organization's operations.

The Platform outlines 12 critical areas to be addressed: women and poverty; education and training of women; women and health; violence against women; women and armed conflict; women and the economy; women in power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; human rights of women; women and the media; women and environment; and the girl child.

CHALLENGES

IFAD acknowledges that there are still a number of important issues that continue to be addressed. Some of these are:

- **The vital role that women play in the rural economy and rural employment** needs to be further recognized to improve their social and economic status.
- **Poor rural infrastructure and services** (e.g. water, energy, roads, schools, clinics) impede women's involvement in social, political and economic activities.
- **Inequitable decision-making** at all levels restricts women's opportunities and constrains their livelihood options.

Based on the Beijing consensus, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) adopted Agreed Conclusion 1997/2 on gender mainstreaming. This is the mandate for IFAD and all other UN agencies to mainstream gender in their work.

- **Persistent structural constraints** – such as lack of recognition of women’s land and property rights – prevent rural women and girls from fully enjoying their human rights. These constraints also hinder women’s efforts to improve their lives and those of their families.
- **Gender-based violence and discriminatory norms and practices** inflict damage on rural women and girls and limit their options in life.

IFAD’S ACHIEVEMENTS

The objectives of IFAD’s current Policy on Gender Equality reflect the 12 critical areas outlined in the Platform. Some of these areas incorporated into IFAD-supported activities are summarized below:

Economic empowerment

Economic empowerment encompasses many factors, including earning money, being paid a fair wage and being paid for work (rather than working for free). It also includes having the power to negotiate fair prices for produce. When women are economically empowered, they have the influence, education and information to decide about the use of their income, savings and loans. They also have access to services and resources such as credit institutions.

Over the years, IFAD has increased both its work and its impact on issues that constrain women’s productivity and income-earning potential. Today, about half of the participants in IFAD-supported programmes and projects are women. Women also account for over 80 per cent of the people trained in business and entrepreneurship, and more than 70 per cent of savers and borrowers at IFAD-assisted microfinance institutions.

In 2012, IFAD, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP) and UN Women joined together to launch a five-year joint programme, Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, the Niger and Rwanda. The initiative addresses four outcome areas:

- improved food and nutrition
- increased income
- enhanced leadership and participation in communities and rural institutions
- a voice in shaping laws, policies and programmes.

IFAD has also boosted efforts to help rural women and men connect to value chains offering them opportunities as producers, off-farm entrepreneurs and wage workers. While many rural woman find employment as agricultural labourers, they need skills training and decent work opportunities if they are to fulfil their potential and improve their quality of life.

In the Charland regions of Bangladesh, the IFAD-supported Market Infrastructure Development Project constructed sections in markets for women to ensure their safety and prevent sexual harassment. This has promoted women’s participation in market activities and created opportunities for women traders. It has also increased the mobility of women buyers.

IFAD recognizes that tackling the issues of inequitable workloads and benefit-sharing can improve the lives of rural women and girls and contribute to reducing poverty. Women’s secure access to water and energy are important factors to improve productivity and livelihoods. Many IFAD-funded projects have helped women save time – from 30 minutes up to 5 hours a day – by developing infrastructure that provides piped water in the homestead or allows it to be collected from a nearby spring or well.

To date, 50,000 women and men have participated in household methodologies in Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Uganda. IFAD is leading the drive to scale up these methodologies, which have been incorporated into the design of new projects in Ghana, Lao People's Democratic Republic and Mozambique. Women and men who take part have reported greater resilience to local shocks; more daughters and sons in school, including tertiary education; and increased productivity, incomes and food and nutrition security. For more details, see: <http://www.ifad.org/knotes/household/index.htm>

Human rights and violence against women

IFAD has incorporated different aspects related to the human rights of women into its work. IFAD-assisted projects are also increasingly addressing rural women's security and gender-based violence. IFAD works with the other Rome-based agencies to raise awareness about the lives of rural women and girls. This includes participation in annual events on International Women's Day and the International Day of Rural Women. IFAD is also collaborating with the International Land Coalition to support implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women with regard to promoting rural women's access to land and property.

Voice, power and decision-making

IFAD has increasingly sought to transform inequitable gender relations and discriminatory norms at different levels. Most recently this has involved applying and refining household methodologies. In these highly participatory activities, household members identify their aspirations and the obstacles to achieving them. They then work closely together to take responsibility for the changes they want to make and to improve gender relations within the household. IFAD has also successfully strengthened women's leadership at all levels – from the farm to farmers' associations to global farmers' forums.





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Environment

IFAD has long recognized that women, as primary collectors of fuel and water in most developing countries, are on the front line of climate change impact. Recent IFAD initiatives, such as the Adaptation for Smallholder Agriculture Programme (ASAP), have had a strong focus on the different vulnerabilities of women and men to climate-induced hazards. Another emphasis is women's role as agents of change in creating more resilient communities that manage their natural resources sustainably.

THE ROAD AHEAD

Progress has been made towards gender equality, but much work remains to be done. The 20th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action provides an occasion to renew commitment and political will.

Reducing rural poverty and improving the lives of rural women, girls and their families requires IFAD to continue to invest in rural women. This includes supporting women's equal voice in decision-making at all levels and tackling women's workloads and the inequities in benefit-sharing. Priority action areas for IFAD will include: engaging all family and household members in gender equality; reaching out to young women; empowering indigenous women; working with the private sector; and strengthening food security and nutrition.

IFAD has recently demonstrated its commitment to gender equality by setting itself more challenging targets in the new Results Management Framework for 2016-2018.


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