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La participación de la mujer rural en los proyectos apoyados por el FIDA en América Latina y el Caribe

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THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN IFAD'S DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

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Foreword

IFAD works on the principle that poverty alleviation is not simply a matter of providing social assistance but also a valid economic proposition.

It is therefore a question of channelling scarce resources into segments of the rural population which were formerly considered outside the reach of external financial assistance, in order to raise their incomes and living standards.

When designing projects, IFAD has therefore bolstered its efforts to clearly identify beneficiaries in order to ensure that resources and assistance provided is channelled solely to the poorest communities and families in the rural areas. In many countries, development planning has failed to recognize the contribution made by women to rural development in a comprehensive or systematic way, or the effects of development on women. In order to improve the living standards and raise the incomes of the poorest sections of the rural population, and for efficient project execution, a development approach which systematically includes women must be adopted.

In the light of the experience gained by IFAD, its approach to the role of women in poverty alleviation development projects has become increasingly clearer. IFAD has become increasingly aware that in Latin America and the Caribbean women in the region play a major part in agricultural and livestock production, and particularly among those sections of the rural population which make up the Fund's target group: small farmers with little or no resources. This is partly due to the seasonal or long-term migration of the male population as a result of the shortage or total lack of land.

Thus, when designing projects, IFAD is particularly concerned with the clearest possible identification of the role of women within the peasant economy: their role both within the household and in income-generating activities, especially agricultural and livestock production, and placing particular importance on their function as decision-makers in relation to the production cycle.

The movement of labour away from the small farmer sector to other sectors of the economy, particularly the agro-industrial sector, has increased over the past decade. The participation of women as paid farm-workers has also considerably increased (e.g. Brazil it increased from 8% in 1970 to 33% in 1980). Women wage-labourers in the agro-industrial sector, are normally hired seasonally and, in many countries, their wages are lower than those of men.

In view of the extensive, and growing participation of women in productive aspects of the agricultural sector, it is not only necessary to seek ways of improving the economic viability of small production units - micro-enterprises or small agricultural units - but also to work out and

put into place specific mechanisms which will guarantee a share of the benefits of the project to all rural women, both household heads and those women who, through their family, are in some way connected with the farm production system or the household's income generation system.

In operational terms, we view a production system as a situation in which the producer organizes resource-use in terms of his or her objectives and needs, and which are constrained by external socio-economic and ecological factors. The producer and his/her family, the farm and the means of production to work it, constitute the basic components of such a production system.

Within a production system, the producer decides on a particular manner of using the land, earmarking different resources for different objectives which are then organized into sub-systems. Sub-systems include livestock, vegetable gardening or any one of the crops grown; in other words, a whole set of resources organized in terms of an objective (to produce grain and straw, for example) for which specific inputs are required from the family group or from other sub-systems, such as labour and traction.

An analysis of the situation in the region clearly shows the high level of involvement of women in the household production system: as household heads (34% in El Salvador) or those who are responsible for organizing a sub-system such as the livestock sub-system, in coffee plantations (about 40% of the coffee picking work in Guatemala and Honduras is done by women), etc.. Despite their widespread participation in production, most of the women in the project areas identified by IFAD have never received technical training or assistance before the commencement of a project.

In project design and execution, IFAD seeks to acknowledge the multiple role of rural women. Projects should aim, inter alia, at providing the resources to increase women's productivity and incomes, thus breaking with the traditional approach which has viewed the participation of rural women in projects solely in terms of their reproductive role: activities related to goods and services which are not exchanged on the market but consumed by household or community members. At best, this traditional approach has led to the definition of artisanal activities with little or zero financial return to women and their families.

IFAD also recognizes the importance of seeking mechanisms to improve the reproduction and maintenance activities performed by the members of a household unit: fuel wood and water gathering, preparing food, childcare, education, health-care and household management.

Since projects are among the main means used by governments and international organizations to channel resources into the development process, they are also a means of bringing about change. This raises questions with respect to the conditions that must be met in order to effectively reach the target population and enable them to participate in this process of change.

Our interest here is to highlight the importance to IFAD, throughou the whole project cycle, of reaching peasant women as part of the targe group of all project components and activities: i.e. agricultura extension, training, credit and marketing services, thus this paper shal analyze a number of these conditions. This does not exclude th possibility of allocating resources to specific women-oriented projec components. Sometimes specific activities with women are necessary prio to their inclusion in the activities of mainstream project components, bu this should be the exception rather than the rule.

We shall therefore not deal with other conditions that are necessar for the efficient execution of a development project such as institutiona capacity, human resources, the political, economic and environmenta context, technical assistance, information systems, participation, decentralization, matching funds, the time needed for execution etc..

It is essential to specify the factors which influence th activities, access and control that women exercise over the resources an benefits of a project in order to identify which ones could facilitate or, conversely, hamper the achievement of project benefits by th participating human group. This analysis must enable us to identify thos aspects of a project which need to be adjusted in order to attain th desired results.

Gender issues must be dealt with from the project identificatio phase. With respect to women, this involves defining the project's objectives in terms of women, examining the opportunities for and/o constraints on their participation, and identifying any possible negativ repercussions of the project on women. During execution, it is necessar to consider those aspects which have to do with the interrelationship between the project's organizational structures, operation, logistics, collection of information needed to evaluate the effects of the project o women,etc.

IFAD has financed 53 projects in 23 countries of the region. Durin the first period of IFAD actions (1978/85), projects focussed on th promotion of gender issues through an analysis of the potential impacts o project activities on women.

In the period following 1985, as the Fund became increasingly awar of the need for detailed targeting, more specifically defined gende issues were included in project design. This arose from the realizatio that rural women in project areas might not otherwise benefit from project activities. In the last few years (since 1987) projects have generall included specific project activities designed to benefit women (Bolivi 1990, Costa Rica 1988, El Salvador 1990) or specifically outlined ways o ensuring that women beneficiaries are included within the group o beneficiaries of mainstream project components. Within the latter group, two sub-groups exist: those that consider peasant women at the same leve as peasant men (Peru 1986, Saint Lucia 1983), and those projects tha consider peasant women at the same level as peasant men but recognize th existence of gender differences in terms of household workload, education, management and access to resources (e.g. credit), etc.. In these cases, specific project activities have been included in order to strengthen th participation of women in mainstream project components (Argentina 1988, Brazil 1990, Ecuador 1990, Guatemala 1989).

In the next sections, we shall analyze some of the factors whic must be borne in mind in order to address the specific needs of peasan women by means of the basic components which generally constitute a agricultural development project.

Agricultural and Livestock Extension

On the basis of the above-mentioned undeniable productive role o women, and particularly women linked to the small-scale peasant economy the extension services must be re-oriented by defining appropriat technical messages to improve women's productivity in their agricultura or livestock activities without thereby increasing their daily workload Demonstration parcels are rarely set up on production units run by women with the result that very little is known about the specific problems o these production units in our projects as far as adopting ne technologies, varieties and/or crops is concerned. Generally speaking women and men respond differently to new crops and/or new varietie because they have a different perceptions with respect to the impac these might have on labour requirements, on the availability of time, o storage requirements, and on processing.

Women's participation in looking after animals is either traditional right in certain indigenous communities or a right which i acquired as a result of a division of labour within the productio system. Our experience has shown that many projects designed to improv the rearing of large and small livestock in terms of food and anima health, or which encourage the use of draught animals, gear the extensio services exclusively to male farmers, forgetting, or at best imagining that part of the impact of the extension will also eventually percolate t women.

Training in animal health and small livestock rearing must be give both to men and the women. Women have to be trained in veterinar techniques such as vaccinations and birth techniques. Thus, technologica packages supplied by projects and disseminated through the extension wor must be appropriate to the functions and activities carried out by rura women, ensuring that new production methods will present a gain and not loss to them.

The methodology to be used will be specific to each situation Hence the importance of conducting a base-line survey to evaluate th conditions and the types of women's work, and also the extreme importanc of the extension worker and the way he or she views the role of women i agricultural activity. Agricultural extension services in Latin Americ and the Caribbean are generally staffed by male extension workers according to United Nations statistics, female personnel in extensio services represent fewer than 8.5%. In countries where cultural barrier restrict the access of male extension workers to women producers, this lo proportion of women extension workers makes it even more difficult t bring new technologies to women producers.

The Fund is therefore providing methodologies for training mal extensionists in order to work with women producers, improving the acces of rural women to agricultural extension services, particularly as member of women's groups, and to incorporate female staff into extension teams

particularly in rural communities where the cultural barriers might hamper the work of male extension workers.

Where structural adjustment programmes have reduced the national funding of training and contracting new staff, the Fund is promoting the mobilization of additional resources from other financing sources for the attainment of these objectives.

Credit

In Latin America as well as in other regions, IFAD has noted the difficulty that women encounter in acquiring access to credit for agricultural and non-agricultural production and for the processing and marketing of products. Existing institutional credit channels, for which a real or personal guarantees are normally required, tend to leave out the rural poor, and, particularly women.

Additionally, many project designers and credit managers assume that, although women make a large contribution as farm labourers on the family production unit, it is the male farmer who decides which crops to grow and which inputs to use: it is thus the male household head who is the direct beneficiary of credit and the person responsible for repayment. In many instances this assumption may prove inappropriate, from the evidence of the autonomy that many women have when performing their productive activities freely deciding scales of operation and use of income.

One frequently used justification is that since the women's productive activities are geared mainly towards on-farm consumption, leaving them little time to perform marketable productive activities, they are not suitable recipients of credit or, if they are, they are considered high-risk borrowers and are therefore not given priority. Once again, the problem is the failure to consider the production unit as a production system in which production for domestic consumption constitutes an integral part of the system and in which the proportion of credit destined to secure family subsistence can be repaid with the resources generated by other more remunerative farm and off-farm activities including wage employment.

We should recall that landless or almost landless women who cannot guarantee the subsistence of their family from on-farm production are forced to find other ways of earning the income: labour employment or non-agricultural activities (micro-enterprises, trade). Income from these activities is generally low and projects have to envisage solutions and direct credit towards these productive activities carried out by women: investment credit, and working capital to support production, marketing and domestic consumption.

Channelling credit towards both subsistence and marketing activities requires a full understanding of the relationship between subsistence production and marketable production within the context of the peasant economy. Inputs and services offered by projects have to be carefully identified in order to meet the needs of the women as components of a production system who are continually trying to establish a balance between production for domestic consumption and production for the market.

IFAD's experience has demonstrated the effectiveness of providi credit to the poorest peasants by adopting group methodologies linki groups of producers to the banking sector: group loans, based on gro guarantees, obviate the problem of subsidiary guarantees required by ban and provide an alternative mechanism to individual loans. Although gro loans require institutional support and training for bank staff which wi channel the credit resources of the project, once the administrati procedures are operating properly the credit programmes have a hi possibility of becoming self-sustaining and replicable.

The problem of whether women should be organized through all-women groups or mixed groups will depend on each situation, and on the speci features of the local culture. The women in each project area constitu the best source of information in this respect, and their acti participation in the planning of credit programmes is the best way guaranteeing that the best decisions are taken.

Marketing

In addition to their important share in agricultural productio peasant women also play a major role in marketing systems. Wom generally market certain types of agricultural and livestock products well as the products of their micro-enterprises. These marketing syste are generally informal and their scale in limited due, amongst others, the lack of transport facilities, the lack of time to get to the mark and the refusal of their husbands to allow them to be away from home. these cases, women producers sell to the traditional marketing circuit which they enjoy virtually no negotiating capacity because of the shorta or total lack of working capital, storage and transport facilities. Th results in high unit marketing costs due to the small quantities involve thereby reducing their earning possibilities to the bare minimum.

Additionally, smallholders and small traders, men and women alik have no market information, which further limits their negotiating power.

In the Caribbean women play an extremely important role small-scale marketing, and there are even associations of small trade made up exclusively of women who, in many cases, are also the fa producers. It is therefore extremely important when designing a marketi component and monitoring its execution, to analyze the impact of t component on the small farmer's traditional marketing circuits, seeking improve the benefits accruing from these activities.

Projects tend to expand production or to diversify it, so that above perspective - considering the production unit as a system - it necessary to establish the level of responsibility peasant women have marketing, and their share of total household income.

Rationale for increased women's access

The rationale for improving women's access to project benefits r therefore be summarized as follows:

- the degree of poverty of women-headed households is closely rela to their reduced possibility of gaining access to product

resources because of their gender. Many studies have demonstrated that women's productivity is similar to men's when they have similar resources available, therefore, the social and economic cost of depriving them of resources is very high.

- Women are highly motivated to participate in income-generating activities which they are able to control. The evidence shows that women tend to invest their incomes in food and education, implying that their primary incentive is to improve the nutrition and the well-being of their family, and particularly of their children. The possibility women have of undertaking income-generating activities is extremely limited due to their limited access to resources, their limited access to cash income, and the amount of time they devote to their domestic responsibilities, their labour commitments on the family farm or in the small enterprises controlled by men in the household.

Measures designed to reduce these constraints will not only have direct but also indirect benefits, such as improving their nutritional levels, and also environmental benefits as once they have greater access to land, their interest in investing in land conservation measures will also increase.

Improving nutrition will also reduce infant mortality and morbidity.

Conclusions

This paper has attempted to visualize the economic role of peasant women and their importance within the peasant economy as factors which need to be addressed during project formulation and implementation in order to extend the project benefits to peasant women.

IFAD's mandate and the objectives of projects, which involve a political will and institutional commitment in each country, is to direct resources to the rural poor: the better resources are targeted, minimizing risks, the more efficiently IFAD will be able to carry out its objectives.

There is no doubt that once the premise that peasant economies are based on family labour is accepted, it is necessary to envisage solutions which take this into account when investing resources in improving the productivity of these economies.

These solutions require reconsidering the analyses so far carried out on project feasibility. Generally speaking, feasibility studies design farm models which describe types of crops, inputs, the necessary labour, financing, net benefits, etc., but little or no attention is paid to the changes that the project's activities will make in terms of the time spent by men and women on their work. If a farm model requires a larger share of household labour, it is then essential to ascertain how the greater participation of women in project activities will affect the distribution of time spent on other activities, estimating the potential losses which this shift of labour may have on monetary incomes or on subsistence production or on women's reproductive activities.

On the other hand, if women are expected to contribute as labourers to activities in which they do not see any direct personal benefit to themselves, and where they have very little control over the income they generate, the "incentive" to provide the necessary labour for these activities may well be non-existent.

These issues, which also have great consequences on the sustainability of projects, need to be considered during the design phase. In some cases, where this has not been done, variables pointed out by women in the project area have been introduced, creatively involving the national institutions. IFAD's experience in the Latin America and the Caribbean shows that workshops or round tables at which project staff are able to discuss local and national constraints and possible solutions and/or additional support in order to better identify women activities are extremely useful. Within project areas, this type of formal meetings in which the leaders and representatives of women must be involved, can act as a stimulus to a participatory approach towards defining the strategies which take account of the productive role of women.

Project personnel has to be made aware of the importance of considering the productive role of women. It is advisable to provide training as soon as project execution begins, in order to detect existing difficulties and shortcomings in the project design from the very outset including any latent opposition by project personnel to working with women.

IFAD would also like to recall that the production problems of peasant farms are generally much more complex than those of commercial farms. The subsistence of these producers requires continual decision-making based on a much more complex rationale than that of commercial farms, where decision-making criteria are defined essentially by the level of profitability of available options.

Recognizing the diversity of the technological problems and the complexity and soundness of the internal organization of peasant farms of which, as we have seen, women are a fundamental component, is an important challenge to technicians and professionals who are anxious to make a real contribution towards enhancing the production of the peasant sectors.

Finally, the fact that isolated measures will not bring about any substantial change in the status of women should also be pointed out. This relates to the need of incorporating women's actions into sectorial policies. Peasant women do not see the benefits from actions carried out over a short period of time, such as in the life of a project, as having lasting effects unless these actions are inserted in longer-term wide-ranging sectorial or national programmes with varied institutional support. Thus, IFAD promotes policy dialogues among institutions dealing specifically with the agricultural sector need to be involved as well as institutions dealing with national welfare concerns, the legal statute of women, and the family unit.