

Integrated promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment: economic empowerment, decision-making and workloads



Introduction

The causes of gender discrimination pervade different aspects of our lives – social, economic, political, environmental – affecting gender roles and relations in domestic, productive and public domains and from the local to the international level. Time-bound development projects need to address the cross-cutting and multifaceted nature of gender inequality through multiple entry points.

The promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) in IFAD-supported projects entails mainstreaming gender considerations across project activities and operations and specific interventions to empower women, of all ages. For over a decade, a comprehensive three-pronged approach has underpinned this work focusing efforts on: economic empowerment, decision-making, and equitable workloads.

Initially, the IFAD *Mainstreaming a gender perspective in IFAD's operations: Plan of action 2003 – 2006* aimed to promote GEWE through these three dimensions. They subsequently became guiding principles in IFAD's Framework for gender mainstreaming in IFAD operations (2008). Most recently, IFAD's *Policy on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment* guides projects to address these dimensions through its strategic objectives to:

- promote economic empowerment to enable rural women and men to participate in and benefit from profitable economic activities
- enable women and men to have equal voice and influence in rural institutions and organizations
- achieve a more equitable balance in workloads and in the sharing of economic and social benefits between women and men.

The three-pronged approach is used for many purposes, including to: shape the design of country strategies and projects; review the quality of project design; supervise, monitor and evaluate project implementation and results at project completion; structure knowledge sharing between regional divisions; and, apply for and judge the annual IFAD Gender Awards.

The good practice mainly contributes to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 to end poverty, SDG2 to eliminate hunger and SDG5 to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. It also supports many of the other SDGs owing to its cross-cutting nature.

A man and a woman from the same cooperative work together to catch tilapia. Since the cooperative began working with the PAFA project, fish farming has become a secondary income stream. Agricultural Value Chains Support project, Senegal, 2015. ©IFAD/Christopher Neglia

Project example

From 2010 to 2016, the IFAD-supported Agricultural Value Chains Support Project (PAFA - Projet d'Appui aux Filières Agricoles) aimed to improve the incomes and livelihoods of smallholders through their participation in profitable and diversified value chains. GEWE was mainstreamed to address widespread gender inequality in smallholder farming as well as the predominance of women in rural areas since the outmigration of men in large numbers. The three-pronged approach was taken to good effect, reaching 37,734 households or 377,340 people:

- Women's economic empowerment was promoted in micro-projects to improve market access (62 per cent women) and develop value chains (59 per cent women). Women, and to a lesser extent men, benefited from the provision of agricultural inputs and equipment, improved poultry farming, market gardening integrated with fish farming and the training of family farm advisors. PAFA also facilitated women's secure access to land, with the support of women community leaders. Value chains were selected for their high levels of women's participation and included millet, cowpeas, hibiscus, poultry and rice. Their development involved the production and multiplication of seeds by producer organizations, the dissemination of good practices, the construction and management of storage and packaging warehouses, and the rehabilitation of roads and soil phosphate. A savings-inputs model was developed, contractually binding farmers to deposit a minimum of savings before farmers' organizations provided agricultural inputs.
- Women's voice and influence were strengthened through skills training and the capacity-building of women-only or mixed producer organizations, farmer organizations and market actors. Roughly 20,000 women participated in women-only workshops and leadership and financial management training. Women farmers' organizations were also supported in the management of production and services. Partnerships between grassroots organizations were strengthened, for example to ensure market outlets and remunerative prices for producers. Training facilitated women's participation in value-chain roundtables and their legally registered apex organizations that aim to promote sustainable local value chains.
- Women's drudgery and daily workload were reduced through market gardening interventions with cooperatives, including the provision of agricultural equipment such as drip irrigation kits and solar pumps, as well as post-harvest and processing equipment.

Stakeholders and partners

The target group of IFAD-supported projects is broadly rural women and men, including indigenous peoples, of all ages living in poverty or vulnerable to becoming poor.

The three-pronged approach is used by the:

- IFAD gender team: the gender desk in the Policy and Technical Advisory Division and the decentralized regional gender coordinators.
- IFAD at the country and project levels: gender focal points in IFAD country offices and IFAD-supported project management units, implementing partners and other resource people.
- IFAD contracted experts: gender consultants, involved in country strategy and project design, implementation support, supervision and completion.
- IFAD Independent Office of Evaluation: staff and consultants responsible for evaluating the performance and impact of IFAD-supported country strategies and project loans and grants.

Impact

IFAD-supported projects demonstrate how addressing economic empowerment, decision-making and workloads has improved gender equality between rural men and women. Evidence suggests that when the three dimensions are included in a project, the complex issues affecting gender equality are better addressed, helping to facilitate changes in gender roles and relations. Some practices to promote GEWE may be more effective than others, but it is the combination of practices and their interconnected outcomes that help to bring about change.

Since PAFA, the time savings gained from reduced drudgery in farm work coupled with the social and economic empowerment of women and their organizations have led to notable improvements in the standards of living of women and their families. Women are more able to participate in stronger rural institutions owing to their reduced workload and soft skills training as well as the strengthening of grassroots organizations and their partnerships. They have gained a much stronger voice in public spaces with women now representing 56 per cent of leaders in the apex organizations of value chain roundtables and several leaders of women's groups becoming councilors in their municipalities.

The strong economic empowerment of women and their groups has also improved women's standing at home, on the farm and in the community. Increased and secure access to land and water resources, timely and sustainable access to inputs and improved capacity to farm traditional crops, vegetables and fish have contributed to major yield increases in women-dominated value chains, for example 57 per cent for millet and 75 per cent for cowpea. Surplus produce from fields, markets gardens and poultry farming are sold through the producer organization/market

actor partnerships, increasing and diversifying the source of income women can take home. This has improved their resilience to shocks and ability to pay for school tuition fees, medical expenses, agricultural equipment, upgrades to houses and productive investments. In turn, women have more influence over decision-making at home and on the farm. The wellbeing of women and their families has also improved thanks to reduced indebtedness and increased household solvency.

The three-pronged approach has also contributed to positive impacts on household food security and nutrition as well as employment for young men and women, in market gardening and along the value chains.

Innovation

The three-pronged approach was an innovative development mainstreamed in IFAD-supported operations in 2003, based on 25 years of experience at that time. The value and success of the good practice is recognized through its continued use today.

The three-pronged approach in PAFA supported efforts by women's groups to improve nutritional outcomes through the campaign "local products for local consumption". Some groups adopted the innovation of enriched flour by processing local produce to improve children's nutrition.

Lessons learned

Key success factors in projects that address the three dimensions and have had a strong and positive impact on GEWE include:

- a strong commitment to gender equality in the project management unit, reflected in the allocation of financial and human resources
- a robust gender strategy/action plan for GEWE mainstreaming in project operations and activities, integrated into the project M&E system
- the joint design and implementation of GEWE with poverty targeting to identify and empower marginalised men's and women's active participation during the project and beyond
- a highly participatory, community-based approach to address the multiple causes of poverty and social and economic exclusion
- a conducive policy environment
- engaging with men – husbands, brothers, fathers, traditional leaders – and other family members, such as educated daughters and sons
- overall good implementation of the project, including a gender specialist on joint supervision missions by IFAD and the government.

A limitation of the good practice is that it may address the symptoms rather than the root causes of gender inequality. It is harder to transform traditional gender roles if a project builds on existing power relations, rather than challenging them. On the other hand, impacts on gender roles and relations in households and groups may be missed through traditional project supervision, monitoring and evaluation techniques that do not look beyond the household as a unit.

Sustainability

The sustainability of the good practice has been enabled by its inclusion in formal IFAD GEWE documents: the 2003 Plan of Action, 2008 Framework for mainstreaming and the 2012 Policy. These have also been supported by practical guidelines and training for HQ and in-country staff.

Replicability and/or scaling up

In addition to using the three-pronged approach in IFAD-supported projects, it is also a useful structure to advocate for improved promotion of GEWE during policy engagement. Within IFAD itself, the three-pronged approach is no longer restricted to shaping project design, but also used for many other operational activities, already mentioned above.

The good practices of PAFA are now being scaled up in a new IFAD-supported project (PAFA-Extension). PAFA is also being used by the Ministry of Agriculture in Senegal as a reference for other agricultural development projects.



Woman watering a vegetable patch. The water is drawn from a well using a solar-powered pump. Crop diversification and local marketing of products is another aspect of the cooperative's adapted business plan. PAFA, Senegal, 2015.
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