

## Promoting Women's Leadership in Farmers Organizations



### Background

In most developing countries, women perform a large part of the agricultural work and produce the bulk of the world's food crops. The productivity of women farmers is constrained by the same factors that affect small agricultural producers in general, which are in turn compounded by gender-specific factors. These include: lack of time and limited mobility due to multiple domestic and productive responsibilities; women's more limited access to assets and services (including extension); illiteracy; low participation and limited decision-making in producers' organizations; and socio-cultural factors affecting their mobility and participation in public decision-making. On the other hand, women have a unique base of experience and knowledge that can be used to increase the productivity of smallholder agriculture in the broadest sense. Without a significant investment in improving the livelihoods, assets and decision-making power of rural women, the Millennium Development Goals of reduced poverty and food insecurity are unlikely to be achieved.

Women's role in agriculture remains largely unrecognized in policy and resource allocation. The voices and concerns of rural women are little heard at the national and global level. This is largely the result of their weak presence in leadership positions in rural organizations and, in some cases, the limited ability of the few women leaders at the national level to effectively represent the interests of grass-roots women. Women's groups tend to remain confined to the local level. In mixed organizations, while women may be well represented as members, few occupy leadership positions and, as one moves from local to regional and national levels, the trend becomes even more pronounced. This translates into a dramatic mismatch between rural women's voices and decision-making roles and their enormous contribution to agricultural marketing, production and livelihoods.

The statement made at the 2008 Farmers' Forum at IFAD's Governing Council emphasized the importance of strengthening women's roles in producers' organizations, and proposed a minimum participation quota of 30 per cent for women in farmers' organizations (FOs). After the conclusion of the Farmers' Forum, representatives of farmers' and rural producers' organizations, IFAD staff, members of IFAD's Thematic Group on Gender, and representatives from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) met during IFAD's Governing Council. Their discussions focused on how to promote greater attention to and investment in women producers, as an essential strategy to reduce poverty and food insecurity, and how to strengthen women's leadership in FOs at all levels.

The specific issues dealt with at that meeting included:

- (a) The introduction of quotas as a valid instrument to enable women to reach a critical mass in mixed farmers' organizations. Some proposed that this should be no lower than 50 per cent, while others argued that a lower quota was more realistic. The effectiveness of quotas as a way to achieve real participation and leadership was discussed.
- (b) The importance of maintaining the focus on mixed farmers' organizations, while recognizing that women must have their own space within these confines.
- (c) The major constraints of lack of self-esteem and low levels of education.
- (d) Capacity-building as an important means to promote gender equality for rural women; such capacity-building efforts should reach women at the grass-roots level to avoid control by elite women leaders.
- (e) The need to concentrate on increasing women's negotiation skills, self-esteem and leadership capacities, and put in place supportive measures such as child care facilities during training sessions.
- (f) Involving men in gender-related activities and enlisting men as champions of women's increased leadership roles are important approaches to gain their support.
- (g) Gender-sensitization training, aimed at challenging gender stereotypes and norms and the perpetuation of traditional gender roles should be provided to women and men.

- (h) Sharing knowledge, exchanging experiences and networking among women are critical for women's empowerment.

Following the meeting, it was decided that a special session would be held on promoting women's leadership prior to the Farmers' Forum of 2010. The primary goal was to identify how IFAD can work with FOs to support women's leadership in such organizations, from the grass-roots level upwards, and, in general, to amplify the voice of women farmers at the policy table.

## **Workshop**

### **Objectives**

In the context of the key challenges confronting women in agriculture, the workshop aims to:

- (a) Identify the main obstacles that women face as members of mixed organizations and the difficulties that prevent them from assuming more influential and leadership roles;
- (b) Discuss how IFAD and FOs can work together to promote the role and leadership of women in rural organizations, from the grass-roots upwards;
- (c) Strengthen networking and solidarity among women participants in FAFO.

### **Expected outputs**

- Final recommendations for actions to be submitted to the Farmers' Forum and IFAD for inclusion in the outcome document;
- Proposal for future activities in the context of IFAD/FO collaboration.

### **Organization of the workshop and questions for discussion**

The women's leadership workshop will convene on 12 and 13 February 2010. The purpose of the introductory session is to enable participants to become acquainted and for the organizers to present the workplan for the following day. Formal presentations are not planned. Interpretation (English, French and Spanish) will be available on 13 February. The workshop is intended to be as interactive as possible and focused on concrete actions. In plenary and in working groups, the workshop will concentrate on the following questions:

- (a) What are the priority actions that women farmers need from governments, donors and the private sector to improve their productivity and well-being? (Special reference will be made to the themes to be discussed at the Farmers' Forum on 15-16 February).
- (b) What are the main obstacles women face as members of mixed organizations and what are the difficulties that prevent them from assuming more influential and leadership roles?
- (c) What approaches and activities are needed to strengthen the voice and influence of women in FOs? Specifically, these can be related to the following areas:

#### ***Internal organization and networks***

- **Internal policies**, including quotas: are they needed? Do they work? How to set up, apply and monitor them.
- **Structures**: women in mixed versus women-only FOs; do we need women's chapters within mixed organizations? What are the other ways to facilitate women's roles and leadership in mixed organizations?
- **Networks**: do they exist, both in-country and across countries/regions? Do they bridge different types of women's groups, including those of the grass-roots, professional and policymakers? Do we need to create new networks?

#### ***Capacity development***

- On what: leadership and management; technical; basic (e.g. literacy training), network building; skills for policy dialogue; lobbying, etc.
- How to deliver: specific training; exchange; mentoring, etc.

- How to respond to differentiated needs: grass-roots; second and third-level organizations; local; national.
- How to involve and sensitize men.

### **Support**

- How can different stakeholders help to strengthen women's leadership in FOs? (Central government; local government; sector institutions; private sector; donors; civil society, NGOs, support groups, etc.)
- How can women farmers' voices be strengthened in national consultations?

### **Preparatory Work for Participants:**

Participants attending this event are invited to fill out the bio-data sheet and survey attached in order to provide the organisers with some information in advance of the Event, to be returned by Feb. 9 to [a.lubbock@ifad.org](mailto:a.lubbock@ifad.org).

In addition participants are invited to come to the meeting with (or provide before-hand) background information on the following:

- *sex disaggregated data on members and leaders in their respective organizations,*
- *structure of the FO to address women's issues (for example, is there a College des femmes, a women's committee or unit?),*
- *policies or quotas for women's participation in their organization;*
- *capacity building programmes/activities that have been implemented or planned;*
- *support received from government, donors, NGOs, private sector organizations;*
- *networking with other women leaders and organizations;*
- *innovations that have advanced women's status in FOs.*

Participants will not be given time to present this information formally in the plenary session, so it is not necessary to prepare presentations; they will be sharing the information verbally in group discussions. They may also send in advance other documents they would like to share at the workshop. To the extent possible, IFAD will ensure photocopies are available.

### **EXTRACT FROM THE DELIBERATIONS OF THE GLOBAL MEETING OF THE FARMERS' FORUM, 2008**

*(...) **Support the involvement of women in agriculture and rural development.** We the participants of the Farmers' Forum want to stress the importance of the presence and role of women in terms of both numbers and contributions.*

*Women farmers are rarely recognized as producers in their own distinct economic and social right. They often face difficulties in getting access to training, credit and natural resources, especially land and water.*

*Moreover, women farmers are underrepresented at all levels of farmers' organizations and, thus, they cannot voice their own specific needs. As a result, women farmers are even more impoverished than their male counterparts.*

*Therefore, we ask IFAD to support farmers' organizations to engage their women members in the management and decision-making processes of their organizations, with a minimum quota in leadership positions of 30 per cent. We also ask IFAD to apply a significant quota of women farmers (at least 30 per cent) in all IFAD programmes, events and initiatives.*

*We also recommend that, in the context of the next global meeting of the Farmers' Forum, a preparatory meeting be organized with a group especially set up to focus on the specific issues of women, which will then be brought to the Forum. (...)*

Rome 12-13 February 2010

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### BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Name:
Title:
Preferred working language:
Synopsis of my professional background:
Brief note on my association/organization:
Goals or expectations I have of this workshop:

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### Survey of women's leadership in farmers' organizations (FOs)

Name of organization:			Comment
1. How many members of your FO are women? (%)	yes	no	
2. Is there a quota system?	yes	no	
3. If yes, what percentage is it?			
4. Is there a separate women's unit?	yes	no	
5. Is there an independent women's FO in your country?	yes	no	
6. Is there a policy for women's empowerment or gender equality in the FO?	yes	no	
7. Is there any capacity-building activity to build women's leadership skills?	yes	no	
8. Are there any women-specific capacity-building activities?	yes	no	
9. If so, are these adequately funded?	yes	no	
10. Does the FO receive support from governments, donors, NGOs, or the private sector for women-specific capacity-building?	yes	no	
11. Are women in the FO linked to networks of women leaders?	yes	no	
12. If so, what are these networks?	yes	no	
13. Do women of the FO participate in consultations with policymakers and donors?	yes	no	