

A new framework for development

The root causes of persistent poverty and food insecurity among rural women and the families they support are inter-related:

- lack of access and control of productive resources and services
- over- and underemployment
- inequalities in employment opportunities and remuneration
- exclusion from decision- and policy-making
- an unfavourable legal environment

For FAO, addressing these priority areas is fundamental to enhancing the status of rural women and achieving food security, poverty alleviation and sustainable development.

Women in Development (WID) has been very successful in increasing development workers' awareness of women's distinct priorities, situations and concerns. It has stimulated networking and alliance building among rural women and their advocates. WID emphasizes the substantial roles of rural women and their contributions to food and agricultural production in order to alter development practices and direct scarce economic resources to them.

It became evident, however, that simply targeting women as a group with special needs was not enough. By treating women as special beneficiaries in projects and programmes, women's issues often became mere appendages to mainstream development interventions. It



It is necessary to "make visible" the differences between women and men in terms of their roles and workloads (Ecuador).

GENDER refers not to women or men per se, but to the relations between them, both perceptual and material. Gender is not determined biologically, as a result of sexual characteristics of either women or men, but is constructed socially. It is a central organizing principle of societies and often governs the processes of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution.

GENDER ROLES are the socially ascribed roles of women and men, which vary among different societies and cultures, classes and ages, and during different periods in history. Gender-specific roles and responsibilities are often conditioned by household structure, access to resources, specific impacts of the global economy, and other locally relevant factors such as ecological conditions.

GENDER ANALYSIS seeks answers to fundamental questions such as who does or uses what, how and why. The purpose of gender analysis is not to create a separate body of social knowledge about women, but to rethink current processes—such as natural resource use and management, economic adjustment and transformation, or demographic changes—to better understand the gender factors and realities within them. Armed with this knowledge, it should be possible to avoid the mistakes of the past and tailor interventions to better meet women's and men's specific gender-based constraints, needs and opportunities.

was the overall structural factors in society—the rules and practices of the household, community, market and the state—which sustained women's subordinate position. These needed to be understood and effectively changed.

The Gender and Development (GAD) approach seeks to understand the ways gender constrains or advances efforts to promote sustainable economic growth while ensuring an equitable distribution of its benefits. Emphasis is placed on analyzing the incentives and constraints under which women and men work in order to "make visible" the differences between them in terms of their roles and workloads, the impact of interventions on them, and their ability to gain access to resources and decision-making. It also analyzes the implications of these findings for planning and implementation.

Efficiency, a central component of the approach, provides the tools and methods for more sound interventions. Greater participation is sought from women at all stages of the development process and at all levels. **The use of a participatory approach helps to empower women by raising their consciousness, as well as their voices, about their needs, rights and capabilities.**

In this way, a gender and development approach not only makes the process of gender subordination visible, it also helps to mobilize all actors to work towards social and economic change.

Our perceptions of the meaning of development have changed. In the post-UNCED era, and as a result of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development and Fourth World Conference on Women, FAO's newly established Sustainable Development Department is committed to making sustainable development operational. This implies moving beyond the rhetoric of international debates to actually integrating the human, social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainability into a coherent global vision for sustainable agriculture and rural development.

The advancement of women is central to achieving sustainable development. Women are responsible for natural resource management through their day-to-day productive and reproductive tasks of providing fuel, water and food for household consumption and for sale. However, they are rarely in a position to influence decisions that determine the allocation of resources and, hence, the sustainable use of land, water and woodlands. Women have learned ecologically sustainable methods of agriculture and have acquired extensive knowledge about genetic diversity. If they are denied partnership in development, this wisdom is lost.

Women are often the major suppliers of household subsistence. When their access to productive resources declines, more people suffer from poverty and its related effects, including hunger, malnutrition and illness. Improving women's access to resources and services increases farm productivity, provides a more efficient use of resources, and ultimately yields higher profitability.

Promoting development that is economically efficient, environmentally friendly and equitable requires a complete reorientation of development efforts to enhance women's capacities. FAO seeks to achieve this goal by addressing what women need from development, as outlined in **the strategic objectives for the Plan of Action for Women in Development:**

- Gender-based equity in access to, and control of, productive resources.
- Increased participation in decision- and policy-making processes at all levels.
- A reduction in workloads and enhanced opportunities for remunerated employment and income.

PLAN OF ACTION FOR WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT

THE PURPOSE OF THE PLAN:

- Ensure an evolving and dynamic understanding of the situation of rural women, including their contributions to, and constraints in, agriculture, forestry and fisheries.
- Incorporate gender concerns in all technical areas addressed by FAO.
- Enhance the benefits that rural women derive from their contributions to sustainable agriculture, forestry, fisheries and rural development, as well as strengthen their capacities to contribute to national development in each of these sectors.

TO IMPLEMENT THE PLAN, FAO WILL FOCUS ON FOUR INTER-RELATED AREAS:

- **Increase the availability, accuracy and use of quantitative and qualitative data and information on the gender dimension of agriculture and rural development.**
- **Develop and utilize methodologies, tools and training activities to assist development specialists in FAO and Member Nations in integrating a gender perspective into agricultural and rural development approaches.**
- **Strengthen the skills and capacities of rural women to reduce the burden of their labour and increase their economic gains.**
- **Support the formulation and application of gender-responsive agricultural and rural development policy.**