

# Gender equality and women's empowerment

## Scaling up note



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Burkina Faso – Rural Microenterprise  
Support Project

## Scaling up results on gender equality and women's empowerment

IFAD has achieved significant results in promoting innovative gender mainstreaming and pro-poor approaches and processes in its operations, making this an area of IFAD's comparative advantage. Women's representation in IFAD-supported projects continues to increase and they now account for half of all beneficiaries. Agricultural growth is enhanced if both women and men are enabled to participate fully as economic actors. Thus, addressing gender inequalities and empowering women is vital to meeting the challenge of improving food and nutrition security, and enabling poor rural people to overcome poverty. Evidence demonstrates that in economies where gender equality is greater in terms of both opportunities and benefits, there is higher economic growth and a better quality of life.

IFAD has progressively drawn lessons from experiences in gender mainstreaming in the programme and project cycle. It has found that better functioning projects generally have the following features: a well-articulated gender strategy grounded in sound analysis; adequate human and financial resources to implement the strategy, including gender expertise in the management team; progressive but realistic targets for women's participation in project activities; and gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems.

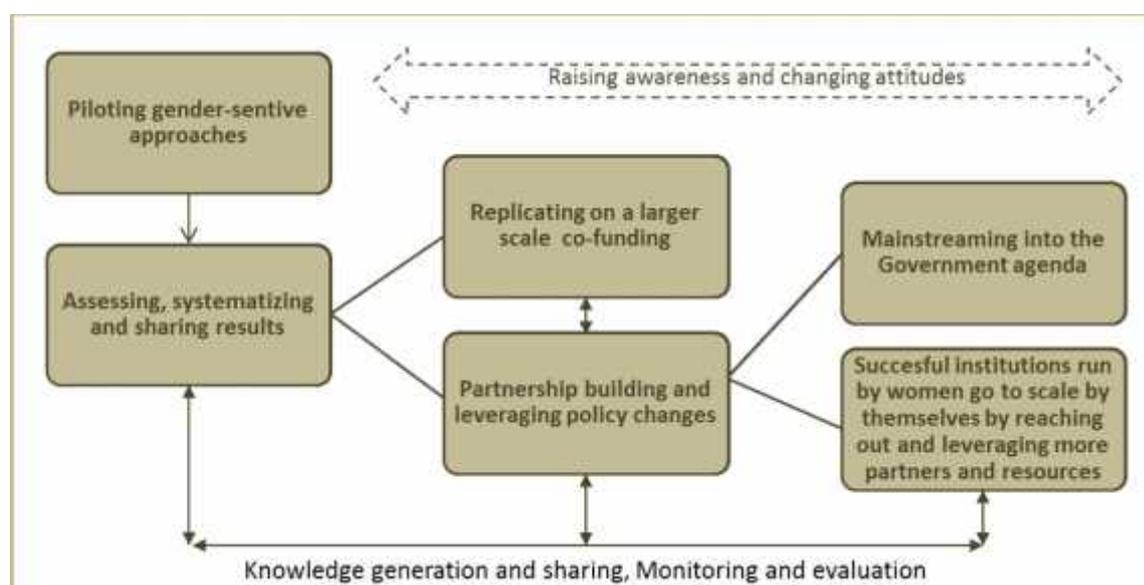
## What is to be scaled up?

IFAD has successfully implemented a variety of innovative approaches to address women's economic empowerment, representation and decision-making, and workload balance. These approaches, which offer important lessons for scaling up, include:

- Participatory, community-based approaches to ensure that the voices of different segments of the rural population – men, women, young people, indigenous people, the poor and the better-off – are equally heard and valued;
- Embedding gender-sensitive approaches in broader development goals and poverty reduction programmes to get greater buy-in from governments and the broader development community;
- Demand-driven approaches for the promotion of pro-poor, gender-sensitive innovations to ensure successful uptake and sustainability;
- Strengthening women's social capital through forming women-only groups and empowering them to access and manage key resources and assets;
- Empowering rural women by transferring to them the decision-making power over the use of funds (such as community development funds) and selection of service providers;
- Promoting participatory infrastructure development to reduce women's workload;
- Reinforcing rural women's self-confidence, knowledge and skills – including technical, leadership and managerial – through gender-sensitive extension and business advisory services, vocational training, functional literacy and adoption of appropriate learning approaches (e.g. peer learning, exchange visits, learning routes);
- Engaging with all family members, thus leveraging the positive complementarities between women and men, young and old, to challenge unequal intra-household relations and labour distribution, and promote equitable sharing of resources, income and workload;
- Fostering women's participation and leadership in farmer and producer organizations and other decision-making bodies through the establishment of quotas and gender-sensitive organizational development;
- Working with government institutions to create an enabling policy, institutional and cultural environment in support of gender equality and women's empowerment;
- Supporting gender-sensitive project design and implementation through the use of appropriate tools, including setting targets and using checklists for gender-focused poverty and livelihoods analysis.

## Scaling up pathways

The process of scaling up innovations that promote gender equality and women's empowerment is a sequence of steps, which starts with a pilot that is taken to scale.



Potential gender-sensitive innovations for scaling up need to be identified at the design stage. The most common approach to scaling up is **horizontal replication**, whereby successful innovations are transferred to other geographical areas, projects and countries, be it through a second project phase, knowledge-sharing among IFAD-supported projects, or buy-in from government and other donors.

A **functional expansion** occurs when new functions and activities are added. It should be noted that such expansion can compromise the poverty and gender-equality focus of projects and approaches, particularly when it involves moving to larger scale or to more profitable sectors and activities. For instance, a study on targeting under the Jharkhand-Chhattisgarh Tribal Development Programme in India found some evidence that, by gaining leadership positions in newly formed committees, the better-off community members were positioning themselves to influence decisions in their favour as the programme was entering the scaling up phase. The role of farmers' organizations and women's leadership in mixed or women's groups is important for successful scaling up. Many self-help groups (SHGs) have matured into financial intermediaries and producer groups. The experience of aggregating SHGs (India) and leasehold forestry groups (Nepal) into larger cooperatives and confederations is notable in this regard. Successful institutions run by women go to scale by themselves through endogenous processes of graduation, engagement with new partners, and leveraging of greater resources. This is probably the most promising pathway for sustainability.

**Vertical scaling up** refers to the more challenging process of moving from local engagement to engagement at the national level, often involving policy, legal and institutional changes. Changing discriminatory practices in institutional, policy and legal frameworks and achieving de facto equality needs much more than short-term efforts. It requires policy engagement and sustained commitment by all concerned, in particular agencies promoting women's rights, such as the national mechanisms for the advancement of women, inter-ministerial commissions, donor platforms, civil society and NGOs. Once functional scaling up has been achieved and women's organizations and institutions have grown in number, size and influence or have taken on more advanced roles (e.g. self-help groups maturing into cooperatives), they will become the most efficient agents of change that directly engage on policy issues with governments, public and private partners, and other actors such as advocacy groups.

## Policy engagement

Policy engagement with governments on women's economic and legal empowerment is key, as gender-sensitive innovations often encounter legal and policy constraints. In El Salvador, for example, IFAD promoted a legal reform to enable women to become members of farmers' and other community-based organizations. Without this change, it would have been impossible to scale up women's participation and leadership in such organizations. In many rural areas, women do not have birth certificates or identity cards, and therefore cannot access microcredit, open bank accounts or set up small and medium enterprises. In India, IFAD supported the inclusion of women's self-help groups in major rural development schemes financed through domestic resources. This support enabled the women to become full-fledged partners and have a voice in local development. Thus, the economic empowerment that women experience in an IFAD-supported operation emboldens them to take their destinies into their own hands and independently engage in policy discussions.

One of the main challenges for IFAD is to build on field-level experience through engagement in strategic policy dialogue with national development stakeholders, ranging from local authorities to central governments and relevant ministries. In addition to the ministries of agriculture, alliances with other sector ministries are critical for promoting institutional changes in the agricultural sector and scaling up of rural women's empowerment. In Mauritania, for instance, a long-term agreement with the Secretary of State for Women's Affairs was instrumental for the successful implementation and scaling up of an innovative education campaign for women. In Uganda, the success of **household mentoring**<sup>1</sup> under the District Livelihoods Support Programme as a mechanism for social inclusion – which involves working with poorer households normally beyond the reach of mainstream activities – has been recognized by the Government of Uganda, which has recently urged IFAD to give greater priority to this approach in the country portfolio.

Partnerships with civil society organizations and involvement in ongoing policy and multistakeholder processes facilitate institutional change. This includes advocacy campaigns (e.g. concerning access to land, or violence against women), support to implementing global commitments on women's rights (e.g. Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women), as well as the celebration of International Women's Day. Staff competencies and skills need to be enhanced in order to ensure effective engagement in policy processes and advocacy at global and country levels.

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<sup>1</sup> This methodology involves all household members in the joint formulation of a plan to achieve household visions. See also <http://ifad-un.blogspot.it/2013/11/household-mentoring-as-tool-for-social.html> and [http://www.ifad.org/gender/learning/household/Household\\_methodologies\\_e.pdf](http://www.ifad.org/gender/learning/household/Household_methodologies_e.pdf).

## Project financing

Loan-funded programmes and projects are the main entry point through which IFAD can introduce innovative approaches, assess impacts and results, and inspire other donor- and government-supported programmes. Grant-financed programmes are ideal for piloting innovative approaches that later can be introduced into larger loan-financed programmes. When designing gender mainstreaming strategies for a project, it is important to capture information on women's livelihoods, gender differences and poverty characteristics by applying participatory assessment methodologies. A good design also pays attention to gender relations and the different ways in which interventions would affect women and men. Analysis should address gender differences in opportunities and constraints within the broader institutional, legal and policy environment. Based on this analysis, the elaboration of forward-looking strategies should seek to transform gender relations at all levels, including at the household, institutional and policy levels.

To ensure attention to social inclusion and gender issues, IFAD's policies on targeting and on gender equality and women's empowerment should be consistently applied during the design, implementation and review of loan- and grant-financed programmes and projects. They constitute an integral part of IFAD's scaling up agenda. In El Salvador, for instance, gender mainstreaming efforts were not seen as an external add-on, but rather as a key component of all institutional processes promoted by IFAD-supported projects from the grass-roots level up to the central government level. In India, political commitment to women's empowerment has also been a flagship of IFAD-supported operations.

Budget allocations for gender-related actions should be secured during the design phase and in the course of project implementation. These should include provisions for: appointment of gender officers or focal points at the project level, innovation and scaling up initiatives; ad hoc studies, including gender-oriented analysis of M&E data; innovative partnerships; and exchanges and training. Increased field office presence could be boosted by the existence of a network of gender focal points at the field level, as well as the provision of direct support by IFAD during implementation and supervision missions. Programmes and projects would then become platforms for promoting partnerships, replication of experiences and policy dialogue. Scaling up will not be successful without firm respect for and attention to the prerequisites for gender-sensitive design and implementation.

The majority of IFAD-supported operations are making solid progress towards mainstreaming gender-sensitive approaches into operations. However, few projects are gender-transformative, and go beyond addressing the symptoms of gender inequality to tackling the underlying social norms, behaviours and social systems in order to produce far-reaching and sustainable changes. Gender-transformative activities should be integrated into project components, whereas gender-transformative mechanisms should be used to identify and implement gender-transformative activities.

For IFAD, gender mainstreaming is rarely a stand-alone activity; it is usually linked to the agricultural sector, farming practices, access to water or land, rural finance or value chain development. Thus, the extent to which gender concerns are mainstreamed into the sustainability agenda always depends on the sustainability of the various entry points associated with the agricultural sector. However, there may be cases (e.g. SHGs) where the gender agenda stands on its own, either because a project is entirely gender focused or geared towards community mobilization. In such cases, gender-related scaling up and sustainability aspects should be addressed based on their own merit.

The best conditions for women's empowerment are created in win-win situations, such as the selected examples in Box 1. This process presents opportunities but also risks, as appropriation by men or elites can occur when women-dominated activities become more profitable. Therefore, changes in the gender balance along the process of functional expansion need to be carefully monitored and accountability mechanisms introduced.

## Knowledge generation and sharing

Participatory and learning-oriented frameworks facilitate the generation of relevant knowledge on innovations. Participatory monitoring has proved to be a useful instrument for this purpose. Peer-to-peer and knowledge-sharing approaches such as learning routes can effectively disseminate knowledge and facilitate adoption of locally driven innovations among poor rural women, communities and projects. For instance, **household mentoring approaches** have been adopted across IFAD's project portfolio in Uganda. When champions emerge from this process, they are much more effective in transferring the methodology to others, as their messages are based on the life changes they have been able to make themselves. Knowledge networks and South-South exchange arrangements involving relevant actors and stakeholders have proved effective in sharing experiences on topics of interest to rural women, including agricultural production,

marketing or advocacy issues. Capacity-building and engagement by IFAD gender consultants and partners involved in project design and implementation have also facilitated the replication of innovations.<sup>2</sup>

The creation of effective and learning-oriented M&E systems, which can reveal gender differences in outcomes, is a first step towards generating empirical, quantifiable and reliable data for the development of knowledge products that can facilitate scaling up efforts. It is essential to make findings easily available to staff and stakeholders through effective, client-tailored and evidence-based knowledge products.

### Box 1: Successful example of scaling up gender-sensitive innovations

**An inclusive business model in Uganda.** The second phase of the Vegetable Oil Development Project (2010-2018) is scaling up an inclusive business partnership with Oil Palm Uganda Limited to further promote small-scale growers of oil palm linked to a nucleus estate. The project has demonstrated how to leverage private-sector investments and promote a mutually beneficial partnership between smallholder farmers (including women) and private-sector investors. Women constitute one of the main project targets, and are increasingly involved as landowners (or wives of landowners) and plantation workers. Increased tenure security, employment and higher incomes are some of the benefits that are accruing to women farmers.<sup>3</sup> A thorough gender analysis and formulation of a gender mainstreaming strategy in design greatly contributed to gender-sensitive scaling up. The project is replicating the household mentoring approach that was piloted in Uganda under the IFAD-funded District Livelihoods Support Programme. Other successful measures include: quotas for women in decision-making entities; promotion of women's membership and leadership in farmers' organizations; functional literacy; and financial support for land registration or purchase.

**Leasehold forestry in Nepal<sup>4</sup>** entailed leasing blocks of degraded forest land on a 40-year renewable basis to groups of poor households, with emphasis on women from the lowest caste and indigenous people. These project beneficiaries were in charge of rehabilitating the land and entitled to use forest products. The acquisition of leasehold land enabled women not only to save a significant amount of their time and energy in collecting fodder and firewood, but also to engage in a variety of income-generating activities. As a direct result of IFAD's project, the approach was adopted as a national policy in 2002. IFAD is currently assisting the Government of Nepal in scaling up the model at the national level.<sup>5</sup> The pro-women aspects of leasehold forestry have become an integral part of the model and have been scaled up across the country. For instance, all community-based social mobilizers across the country are women. Women-only groups are among the most dynamic and some have matured into larger cooperatives and inter-groups, thereby playing an important institutional role in their communities.<sup>6</sup>

**Production of crops by women in Ghana.** The Northern Rural Growth Programme supports the production of crops traditionally grown by women in the target area – particularly shea trees – and the inclusion of women in other male-dominated commodity chains. Two thirds of programme participants are women, up from one quarter in 2009, far exceeding the target level of 30 per cent. The programme has increased women's access to land and other productive resources, and some have been able to triple their incomes through direct linkages to international markets. Women are now represented on district-level value chain committees. The programme has succeeded by using various innovative approaches, including the sensitization of traditional leaders and local district assemblies about women's participation and empowerment.

**Self-help groups in India** are a powerful instrument for the empowerment of the poor and women. They provide members with skills and resources needed to access autonomous sources of income while at the same time offering space for solidarity and collective action. The upgrading of SHGs has enabled their members to gain access to formal credit. When SHGs formed higher level federations, they acquired greater visibility and collective power. IFAD has been a leading agency in systematically supporting the replication and scaling up of SHGs. The SHG approach is a key component of the government's strategy for poverty alleviation and has been included in every annual plan since 2000. IFAD has actively lobbied the Minister for Finance to support SHGs through the government budget.<sup>7</sup> A World Bank project in the North East Region is also promoting the SHG model.

**Gender mainstreaming in El Salvador.** IFAD-supported projects adopted comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategies aimed at ensuring equal participation of men and women in all activities and benefits, reducing workload disparities and initiating gender-sensitive organizational changes at different institutional levels, including within households, farmers' organizations and higher policy levels. Policy dialogue enabled gender-sensitive legal and institutional reforms in the country. The Unit for the Strengthening of and Support to Gender Policies was established in the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, and existing legal obstacles to women's participation in farmers' organizations were removed.<sup>8</sup> Synergies between the unit and the programme for the consolidation of gender strategies in IFAD-funded projects have provided projects with technical support on gender, thereby acting as a help desk, and have also made it possible to systematize and disseminate gender-sensitive innovations across the Latin America and Caribbean Region.

<sup>2</sup> Several Learning Routes on gender have been undertaken by IFAD in partnership with Procasur.

<sup>3</sup> Masaba, C.M., H. Liversage and S. Jonckheere. 2014. *Agricultural Investment, Gender and Land: Lessons from an IFAD-supported Project in Uganda*.

<sup>4</sup> This approach was piloted by IFAD in the 1990s as part of the Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project in Nepal (1993-2003).

<sup>5</sup> Currently being promoted under the Leasehold Forestry and Livestock Programme (2005-2014).

<sup>6</sup> IFAD. 2003. *Kingdom of Nepal Hills Leasehold Forestry and Forage Development Project: Interim Evaluation*. Rome: IFAD

<sup>7</sup> IFAD. 2010. *Independent India Country Programme Evaluation*. Rome: IFAD, Office of Evaluation.

<sup>8</sup> Vargas-Lundius, R. and A. Ypeij. 2007. *Polishing the Stone*. Rome: IFAD.

## Key drivers and spaces for scaling up

The achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment is not a goal or activity in itself, but should be integrated in other project components, in particular agricultural production, rural finance, market access and capacity-building. Scaling up efforts in these sectors should involve spaces and key drivers that facilitate gender equality and women's empowerment, such as: traditional community leaders who are convinced of the importance of women's economic empowerment and the benefit it brings to households and the community as a whole; leaders in agricultural sectors, such as buyers or traders who know that a good quality product depends on successful collaboration between men and women at the household level (e.g. in coffee value chains); or external catalysts like extension workers or public administrators who set specific quotas for women's involvement or implement existing laws (e.g. access to land).

### Cultural space

The transformation of traditional ideologies and attitudes that sustain unequal gender practices and roles is difficult to achieve in the short term and requires innovative, culturally sensitive approaches. In many IFAD-supported projects, substantive efforts have been made in influencing deeply-rooted gender-discriminatory perceptions and norms through continuous sensitization and awareness-raising among women and men in target communities, project staff, service providers and government partners. It is particularly important to sensitize men. The Gender Action Learning System, an innovative community-led methodology developed by Oxfam Novib in Uganda and replicated in IFAD-supported projects in several African countries, shows that efforts that promote gender equality need to address existing gender norms and build a critical mass of supporters within targeted communities.

### Institutional space

Women and men leaders can become powerful multipliers of innovations. At the community level, women leaders often emerge from the development process. They act as role models and are essential for mobilizing support, as well as influencing decision makers. Alliances with male leaders at different institutional levels are also instrumental for promoting effective change in male-dominated institutions.

Once key partners – such as local authorities, sector ministries, women's organizations and service providers – internalize IFAD's participatory, pro-poor and gender-focused approach, the scaling up process becomes more effective. Institutional space and capacity-building at each level is required for this vertical scaling up.

Strengthening women's social capital and upgrading their organizations is also critical; it contributes to creating a more vibrant and politically visible civil society, with a capacity to undertake collective action and interact with a broad range of public and private actors, including local government institutions and market actors. Experience has shown that the growing scale of their own institutions will enable women's organizations to crowd-in other partners, including the private sector, microfinance institutions (MFIs)/banks and microinsurance providers, while at the same time making governments more accountable for the delivery of public services. The Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund, for instance, has set clear guidelines for MFIs to service women, allocate a sufficient number of qualified staff for effective outreach to women, include training and capacity-building initiatives for women borrowers, and address gaps as necessary. In essence, the thrust of the scaling up approach is to build institutions of and for the poor, which can independently propel and self-finance their activities.

### Partnership space

Partnerships at various levels are the engine that drives the scaling up process and include:

- Engagement in inter-agency coordination to gain political, technical and financial support for the scaling up process;
- Involvement of ministries for social and women's affairs and national gender programmes in project implementation in order to create a space for piloting and scaling up pro-poor linkages and innovations;
- Partnerships with private-sector actors to scale up gender-sensitive and inclusive business models, which promote mutually beneficial arrangements;
- Partnerships with civil society, NGOs, farmers' organizations, communities and poor rural people's organizations to enhance sustainability and replication;

- Building networks of committed gender consultants and supporters to facilitate the mainstreaming of gender issues.

## Fiscal space

Budget allocations and specific funding for scaling up initiatives that promote gender equality and women's empowerment are vital. **Gender budgeting** in particular is an important tool to make the allocation of funds visible and direct funding into promoting gender equality at all levels, including in human resources. Gender-specific activities will always need initial budget allocations to support institution-building and social capital, as well as enable access to productive assets. However, the graduation process should lead to self-financing (e.g. mobilization of savings and credit, microinsurance, small and medium-sized enterprises development, private-sector involvement for larger groups), for which adequate support (e.g. skills training, matching grants, cash transfer programmes, business development services and mentoring) needs to be put in place early on.

## Monitoring and evaluation

Gender considerations need to be mainstreamed into the full range of operational procedures, from the preparation of results-based country strategic opportunities programmes (RB-COSOPs) and project design, through implementation, monitoring and final evaluation. During supervision and implementation support missions, increased attention should be given to gender issues. Including gender expertise on supervision missions and addressing issues related to gender equality and women's empowerment in mission reports would further reinforce the evidence base. The Results and Impact Management System indicators on gender equality and women's empowerment, which are rooted in IFAD's strategic objectives of women's economic empowerment, decision-making and work load reduction, can assist in focusing attention on these issues. These key indicators include increase in household assets owned by women, proportion of women in leadership positions and women's participation in decision-making organizations, such as farmers' organizations, water user associations, and savings and microcredit groups. The main gender indicator is "reduction in the level of child malnutrition," which best reflects the level of empowerment of rural women.

To measure the impact and possibly also the outcome at the end of the project in terms of scaling up, some of the indicators for scaling up may need to be process oriented rather than outcome oriented. The indicator would thus determine whether the main scaling up pathways are on track to deliver on their promises (after the project) in terms of going to scale for results and sustainability.

## Key messages

- IFAD's policy on gender equality and women's empowerment and related approaches and tools, in particular the gender and poverty targeting checklists, should be consistently used in design and implementation.
- Grants are key instruments for piloting and scaling up innovations; however, grant/loan linkages need to be strengthened and better exploited.
- Opportunities for policy dialogue, partnership-building and scaling up should be identified upfront at the COSOP and project design stage.
- Gender issues need to be mainstreamed into agricultural sector programmes, as successful integration of gender concerns is a precondition for successful scaling up.
- Strategic partnerships with government programmes targeting women and the poor, such as programmes promoting gender equality and women's rights (i.e. related to land ownership, enterprise, food security) and social transfer programmes (e.g. conditional cash transfers), should be proactively explored and promoted at the COSOP and design stage.
- The focus on gender and poverty-targeting issues in current knowledge-management activities, particularly those involving learning routes and South-South cooperation, should be strengthened.



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