

United Nations

Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)

**“The role of national mechanisms in promoting
gender equality and the empowerment of women:
achievements, gaps and challenges”**

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**Issues and Action Note on
IFAD’s experience working with national mechanisms in support of gender equality**

Prepared by

**International Fund for Agricultural Development
(IFAD)**

Issues and Action Note on IFAD's experience working with national mechanisms in support of gender equality¹

The purpose of this note is to (a) collect IFAD's experiences in working with national mechanisms for promoting gender equality and mainstreaming and (b) elaborate action-oriented recommendations on how to strengthen IFAD's collaboration with these mechanisms, to enhance their role and mandate in view of implementing the Beijing Platform for Action.

(a) IFAD's experiences

Because of its mandate --combating hunger and rural poverty in the most disadvantaged regions of the world-- IFAD mostly operates in partnership with technical line ministries, such as agriculture and rural development. IFAD's work with national mechanisms in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment is thus mainly indirect while it has direct linkages with the Gender Units established at ministry level. The Gender Units located in technical ministries are usually linked to a national institutionalized unit within government, placed at high level, which has overall responsibility for coordinating, facilitating, supporting, and monitoring the mainstreaming process in all ministries and agencies.

IFAD's experiences with gender mechanisms established at ministry level (agriculture in most cases) vary from one region to another and inside the regions. This situation might reflect the different strategic approaches implemented in the different regions to work with rural women and gender issues. As illustrated in the examples presented, IFAD's interventions have focused on strengthening the Gender Units inside the Ministry of Agriculture. In most cases, the support was meant to strengthen the Gender Unit through financial and technical support. Progress achieved shows that this strategy could be replicated in other projects. IFAD's support given to Gender Units have also had beneficial effects by giving them more visibility inside the ministry. Partnerships with Women's National Mechanisms have also been built, particularly in Asia.

The following examples illustrate the support given by IFAD to Gender Units and Women's National Mechanisms.

Support to Gender Units

▪ Direct Support

In El Salvador, the IFAD-supported Reconstruction and Rural Modernisation Programme (PREMODER) is financially supporting the Gender Unit located inside the Ministry of Agriculture (Unidad de Fortalecimiento y Apoyo en Aspectos de Género -UFAG). The Unit is part of the Instituto Salvadoreño para el Desarrollo de la Mujer (ISDEMU), the national mechanism established to mainstream gender in the sectors of education, agriculture, natural resources.

▪ Support for Training

In the Idleb Rural Development Project (Syria), one of the project's objectives is to strengthen the institutional capacity of the Women-in-Development Unit of the Extension Department of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform (MAAR) so that it can play a more effective role in building the capacity of the extension services and staff on gender and gender-related issues.

▪ Technical assistance

In Sudan, the South Kordofan Rural Development Programme (SKRDP) has supported the women's provincial unit of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation (MALI), through technical consultations, training and feasibility studies. The support aims at building the Ministry's capacity in responding to women's needs holistically.

Support to and partnership with Women's National Mechanisms

▪ Training

In India, as part of the IFAD-UNIFEM Gender Mainstreaming Programme in Asia, IFAD works in partnership with the Ministry of Women and Child Development, in particular for conducting workshops

¹ This Note was prepared for the Expert Meeting convened by the Division for the Advancement of Women, on "The role of national mechanisms in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women: achievements, gaps and challenges" (Rome, 29 November- 2 December 2004).

on Gender analysis, and reporting on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

- **Planning**

In Laos, an innovative feature in the Lao Oudomxai Community Initiatives Support Project, was the provision of support for the Lao Women's Union to mainstream gender issues in all project activities.

- **Implementation of IFAD's projects**

In many countries in Asia (Laos, China, Mongolia), IFAD is collaborating with women's organizations previously/currently under the communist party, which are often the *de facto* operational force for the National Women's Machinery. The model will be replicated in Cambodia and Vietnam. The organizations are either involved in implementing women-focused components in IFAD-funded projects or/and in gender mainstreaming activities. For example, the All-China Women's Federation has been active in promoting the marketing of handicrafts in an IFAD-supported project on women's income-generating activities.

In Azerbaijan, an IFAD-financed project targeting rural women in the mountainous areas is implemented in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry for Women's Affairs. This collaboration is taking place at the central level as well as local government and community levels and is enhancing the national machinery's capacity to address gender inequalities through practical measures.

(b) Main lines of action to strengthen IFAD's collaboration with Women's National Mechanisms

Improving knowledge regarding IFAD's strategies used in projects for working with women's national machineries, at central and ministry levels, through an in-depth study analysing IFAD's strategies in its projects and by systematically sharing experiences, best practices and lessons in regional workshops. Investing in working with governmental agencies and political decision-makers, as well as strengthening these mechanisms are particularly important for the sake of sustainability of development interventions and processes.

Enhancing information sharing with national mechanisms and UN agencies. Special efforts should be undertaken to improve information sharing and communication on national mechanisms for the advancement of women. A clearing house providing up-dated information on women's national machineries, their composition, their working groups/committees in the line ministries, including at the regional and local level, would be very useful to promote information sharing and improve collaboration from and among UN agencies, IFAD included, with women's national machineries.

Building technical capacities of the national mechanisms on a variety of gender-related issues, such as engendering budgets, participatory methods for collecting and producing gender-disaggregated data to inform planning and policy processes; gender in poverty analysis; qualitative and quantitative indicators to measure performances with regard to gender mainstreaming; etc. When possible, staff from national mechanisms should be invited to participate in training organised in the framework of IFAD's projects, not necessarily on gender issues.

Building partnerships with gender units and national mechanisms for conducting studies and participating in project design, monitoring and evaluation, together with other partners from the civil society. IFAD's projects can be an opportunity for institutions to recognize the actual role played by these mechanisms while promoting their involvement into the mainstream activities and decision-making processes of their institutions, giving them importance and visibility.

Improving ministries' accountability for gender. To make technical ministries accountable for gender, reporting on gender concerns and progress on gender equality should be systematic in IFAD's project budgeting and reporting to and from ministries, government and cooperating institutions.

Enhancing policy dialogue and advocacy. Providing training and/or technical assistance is not enough. There needs to be a political decision to really involve the national mechanisms and gender units in the application of the gender approach in the planning, implementation, supervision and monitoring of project actions and policies. This has to be stated explicitly and should also be reflected in cooperation agreements and contracts with co-executing agencies. Advocacy with national governments must be initiated and/or continued on the role of women in the development processes and in agriculture, and the importance of taking into account gender concerns in national food and agricultural policies, among others.