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# **INTEGRATION OF GENDER DIMENSION IN NATURAL RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN REGION: ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY FAO REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE NEAR EAST: FAO/RNE**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this document is to provide information on FAO approach and support to mainstreaming a gender-equality perspective in agricultural and rural development programmes in the Near East.

The Gender and Development (GAD) approach has been implemented in programmes and projects formulation for almost a decade, in several countries of the Near East Region, following their adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action on Women in 1995. In fact, during the last decade, progress was made in the use of a more gender-sensitive approach within the region, when Gender Strategies, National Plan of Action, and Poverty Alleviation Programmes were formulated. Women obtained high positions in policy, diplomacy, administrative and scientific domains. Women's Associations were created, and gender machineries are institutionalized at central, as well as decentralized levels, through establishing councils, committees, Gender/Women in Development Units and focal points. However, efforts made by the countries are more visible at macro level, but progress is less visible at grass-root level. Constraints still exist including the fact that the planners and programmes formulators have not the knowledge and skills to implement the concept in their respective field of work, few of them have been trained on gender approach in planning process. Also access of those who live in remote areas to information regarding their rights, laws and legislation, as well as to resources and services is still weak.

## **2. OVERVIEW OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE REGION**

### **2.1. Gender Roles in Agriculture**

Rural women in the Near East contribute to food security at household level and participate actively in agricultural production. As in other regions, women's participation is significant in subsistence food production for household consumption, while most of them hold small-scale plots. They are also employed as laborers in the modern agricultural sector performing diverse operations. Sometimes they manage medium-size farms, such as in Algeria and Egypt where women benefited from newly reclaimed lands.

Gender roles in agriculture vary from one country to another one within the region. The average of women active in agriculture is 30%. However, their real participation is largely underestimated because of the definition for economic activity used in census and national statistics tools. The definition does not include family work in agriculture as an economic activity, because it is not recommended. They do not earn salary. In the reality, if we consider the work that women perform in agriculture, we find up to 90% in certain countries in certain villages or areas.

### **2.2. Gender Roles in Irrigation**

Gender roles in agricultural water management and irrigation depend on several factors. In fact, the roles are connected to the land tenure regimes and agrarian reforms. Generally, women perform irrigation tasks in the small scale units. Participation of women in irrigation is also dependant from their status: those who head households perform all the agricultural tasks along with irrigation. Feminization in the agricultural sector has grown especially between 1990 & 2004, as a result of males' migration. It was noted that the number of female - headed households is increasing (e.g. in

Egypt, they represent almost 22%) – Source of information: Case Study of Mr. Gamal Siam on “Socioeconomic Situations of Female Headed Households in Rural Egypt”

### **2.3. Gender Gaps**

While women are active in the agricultural sector, they do not benefit from all the support and related services. The following gender gaps are observed in the irrigation practices and management:

They do not benefit as they should from training and extension for the improvement of their skills, working conditions and productivity. Compared to urban women, rural women suffer from relative high illiteracy rates and workload of domestic and agricultural tasks that limit their participation in training sessions and extension. Extension staff is still predominantly male, which generally limits communication, for cultural reasons: the number of females graduated in irrigation degree is still weak and few of them hold decision making positions. Female extension agents generally work in offices and often, deal with traditional home economics matters. Rural women access to credit for investment in water and irrigation inputs is still limited. Schemes adapted to the local context, including agricultural banks, co-operatives and social funds for development, are still being experimented. There is no specific extension programme on irrigation targeting women. The new technologies are mainly used by men in medium and large units, while women use traditional practices e.g. few women use drip irrigation system. The new technologies focus on the large scale units while it was demonstrated that, women who work in small scale units, participate for more than 50% to the food production in the world. Access to information at village level on development programmes and projects is limited: an evaluation of the National Programme for Agricultural Development implemented in Algeria (P.N.D.A.), demonstrated that women did not benefit from support for irrigation investment provided by the government, because the information related to the programme did not reach them. Also, despite the existing environmental associations, the number of NGOs dealing with gender in agriculture in general and irrigation in particular is weak.

## **3. FAO ACTIVITIES IN THE REGION**

FAO activities are based on the commitments and recommendations reflected in the Political Declaration adopted at the *World Food Summit: five years later*, on regional priorities and on the FAO Gender and Development Plan of Action 2002-2007. This plan of action presents a framework in which FAO can mainstream gender in all aspects of its work and improve its capacity to assist countries in achieving equitable and sustainable agriculture and rural development. Its main goal is to help rural men and women achieve sustainable development and food security by promoting a gender-sensitive approach in the formulation of rural development policies, programmes and projects.

The main activities undertaken by the Regional Office for the Near East within this policy context are summarized below:

### **3.1. Preparation and Dissemination of Information on Gender in Agriculture and Rural Development**

Data on gender roles linked to the priorities of the region is being collected, to make the contribution of women in agriculture more visible. Information is being collected and research activities are undertaken by national institutions in the field of gender and rural development. The main topics are related to gender and agrarian reforms, access to land including the new reclaimed lands, desertification, natural resources management with emphasis on water, medicinal and aromatic plants, traditional knowledge's assessment and its role in food security and biodiversity

### **3.2. Support to National Capacity Building in Gender Approach**

Gender approach methods and tools are being adapted to the socio-cultural characteristics of the Near East Region, in order to respond to the requests of the countries that need to translate gender concept and strategies into concrete actions to reach rural men and women at grass-root level. FAO develop simple mechanisms as well as operational tools and guidelines based on local context. Technical documents and guides related to gender and agriculture were prepared:

FAO is attempting to have its training materials and other publications available in the languages used in the region. Training material on Socio-Economic and gender analysis programme have been

translated into Arabic and tested in Egypt with the team of the Ministry of Agriculture in charge of women and gender issues. Regional Workshops on gender and rural development programmes in the Near East countries are organized to share lessons learnt from the implementation of gender approach in the National policies and programmes.

### **3.3. Promotion of Gender and Population in Policies, Legislation and Civil Institutions**

The Regional Office for the Near East supports the following activities related to the promotion of gender approach in rural development policies and programmes. Support is provided to Establishing Gender Machineries such as; units, departments, services, Regional and National training of trainers' sessions on Socio-Economic and Gender Analysis (SEAGA) programme are periodically organized. Assistance to member countries through FAO Technical cooperation and projects funded by other agencies to prepare strategies and plan of action for gender mainstreaming in the national development programmes. Such projects were initiated in Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Syria and Jordan as well as projects related to watershed management and waste water re-use in Peri-Urban areas in Yemen.

## **4. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Gender indicators confirm that progress has been made in mainstreaming gender perspective, and the Near East countries are committed in women promotion's strategies and programmes. There is a need of strengthening and sustainability.

The following recommendations are based on the needs expressed by the member countries through the communication methods used by the Gender Unit at the Regional Office for the Near East, including periodical workshops, studies and take into account the priorities and the context of the region:

- First of all, it is important that people dealing with rural and agricultural development policies and programmes have proper understanding of gender concepts and goals. Therefore, the gender terminology used should be adapted to the socio-cultural context of the countries.
- Include gender-sensitive mechanisms and tools at the earliest stage for development planning, monitoring and evaluation so as to ensure that gender mainstreaming is implemented at centralized, as well as decentralized levels.
- The research institutions to include, in their programme, the specificity of female work in agriculture in general, and in irrigation in particular.
- Capacity building in gender analysis approaches, methodologies and tools; and training of trainers, policy makers, planners, statisticians and development agents.
- Develop the participation of the stakeholders involved in the natural resources management process to the identification of the constraints, potentialities and the solutions based on local practices and society organization.
- Include gender dimension in agricultural censuses, surveys, studies, researches, as well as in agricultural training, extension, and statistics curricula.
- Better use of GDD and studies outputs in the planning process.
- Consider the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming activity/function with clearly defined mandates and tasks including advocacy, policy advice, monitoring and evaluation within the key divisions/departments of the ministries in charge of agriculture, water and rural development.
- Increase the number of female development and extension agents working at grass-root level.
- Initiate partnership between governmental institutions and civil society through the creation of rural men's and women's associations at village level.
- Adapt the agricultural training and extension systems to the situations and needs of rural women.
- Valorize rural men's and women's potential including traditional knowledge.
- Strengthen women's access to land through agrarian reforms and new reclaimed lands programmes.
- Develop communication and information strategies to reach men and women living in remote areas.
- Promote the creation of rural women associations.