

## GENDER EQUALITY AT THE HEART OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Gender equality is a matter of social justice. It is of particular importance when it comes to rural development due to the repercussions on food security. In its seminal report of 2011 the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)<sup>1</sup> estimated that if women had the same access to resources as men their total production would increase by 20% to 30%. This would mean a reduction of 12% to 17% in the number of persons suffering from hunger worldwide. The FAO also points out that in general women have access to less land and of poorer quality, limited access to training, seeds, credit, draught animals, or in other words everything favourable to production.

### Empowerment of women

No one disputes today the advantage to be gained from a more balanced distribution of roles between men and women. As the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) notes in a document on climate change in rural areas published in March 2014, "experience has shown that women are central to permanently improving the lives of their families and communities"<sup>2</sup>. This gender balance is all the more crucial in view of the generally recognised key role of smallholdings in the food security of developing countries. It is precisely the area where women are most active.

### Equal opportunities

It is not enough to ensure equality between men and women in development programmes to bring gender discrimination to an end. The latter is valid for all social relations that assign different roles to men and women. These roles vary from one society to the other and evolve within a given society. Taking gender into consideration means offering equal opportunities to both sexes. While this often means initiatives aimed at women, the ultimate goal is to involve men as well in these efforts.

In so far as rural development is concerned the question of gender is crucial, for in Africa the vast majority of people depend on the land for their income. Gender affects education, property rights and the laws of succession. It also influences health, food security, and the hope for a better life. It is for this reason that an integrated approach to gender equality, often referred to as "mainstreaming", is essential. Mainstreaming means that gender awareness must be a standard component in the planning and implementation of all projects.

### Gradual social change

The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) has many years of experience in rural development and has been involved in promoting gender equality for more than two decades. SDC began to develop an approach based on gender in the 1990s and in 2003 pub-

lished a manual in the form of worksheets ("Gender Tool Kit"<sup>3</sup>), which provides a *vade mecum* for mainstreaming gender in all its activities. The SDC's programmes in Africa bear witness to this preoccupation. Implementation however takes time, and therefore patience. The one thing common to most nations is discrimination against women. Being such an intimate part of all societies, the gender question evolves but slowly. Change cannot be decreed, it is a matter of socio-cultural development and providing visible, concrete proof of the advantages of gender equality. This is the challenge facing the rural development programmes supported by SDC.

<sup>1</sup> [www.fao.org/publications/sofa/2010-11/en](http://www.fao.org/publications/sofa/2010-11/en)

<sup>2</sup> [www.ifad.org/climate/resources/advantage/gender.pdf](http://www.ifad.org/climate/resources/advantage/gender.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [www.deza.admin.ch/en/Home/Themes/Gender\\_Equality/General\\_and\\_thematic\\_tools](http://www.deza.admin.ch/en/Home/Themes/Gender_Equality/General_and_thematic_tools)



Peasants sell their produce on the local market near Morogoro (Tanzania).

# THE MAIN CHALLENGES CONCERNING GENDER EQUALITY IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Inequality between men and women affects many areas and leads to a chain of gender-related obstacles all of which challenge rural development. To meet these various challenges the first step is to identify them.

## The land belongs to the men

The access to land and its control are at the heart of gender inequality in rural areas. In most of the countries concerned, women do not inherit. When they settle in their husband's village, they are still seen as being "not from here". Widowed, the land does not pass into their hands. Even when the legal framework reflects a political will in favour of equality, as in Benin "with land law and family law giving women the same inheritance rights as men," resistance to the law's application remains considerable, notes the programme officer of the local Swiss cooperation office, Blandine Agossou Codjia. Furthermore customary law often does not recognize women's rights to use land.

Having little or no personal income or goods that could serve as collateral to obtain credit, women rarely manage to acquire a plot of land. In some cases as in Burundi, where 90% of the population lives off the land, "even when women buy a plot the land title may be issued in the husband's name", notes Annonciata Ndikummasabo, the programme officer of the local Swiss cooperation office, adding "they say that otherwise it creates problems in the home, and this is often true".

Controlling the land, i.e. the land tenure, is an even more delicate matter: not infrequently women and young people, who are very active in agricultural production, find themselves being dispossessed of their land once the main investments (irrigation systems, etc.) have been made, which discourages all initiative.

## Training and technology

Girls often receive less schooling than boys, in particular at the secondary school level when their attendance drops sharply. They are expected to help at home from an early age on. This lack of education and training leads to further



Typical women's market stand in Benin.

shortcomings. As adults they will be less able to enroll for training specifically linked to agriculture and livestock farming and will have less easy access to techniques and products that would help increase their productivity, due to socio-cultural constraints, reduced mobility and a lower level of literacy. For the same reasons they will suffer discrimination when it comes to signing a contract, seeking credit and knowing their rights.

## Market access

Efforts to link producers to the market in the broader sense mainly involve men, who are more likely to have something to sell. Women have small plots of land and limited means, and being less mobile their products stay in the local market. Experience shows that their earnings benefit the household and only rarely contribute to their personal well-being. Production on a more industrial scale, such as raising chickens or growing corn, follows the same scenario. Once a venture becomes profitable the men tend to take over.

## The home first and foremost

As a result of traditions that leave them little freedom of expression, women are often absent from the public debate. But once they have the benefit of a good basic education and their activities gain in appreciation they are quick to

take on responsibilities in society. These advantages boost their confidence and their legitimacy in playing an active role, for example in farmers associations, or even running for political office.

There is however one constraint that influences all others: women are the homemakers, while men are free to become involved in public life. Women's home duties are demanding and very time consuming. Between preparing food, caring for and raising children, fetching water and firewood, growing crops and similar tasks, they put in a long day and have little free time. The girls are expected to help in the home rather than go to school.

## The need for a global vision

A life can be seen as a patchwork quilt. The limits and constraints mentioned above are all linked, influencing and reinforcing each other. So, without programmes that have the reduction of gender-related inequalities at the core of their preoccupations, those most disadvantaged, namely women, are very likely to "pass under the radar" in many rural development projects.

It is for this reason that the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation does everything in its power to ensure that gender is taken into account right from the planning stage of its programmes, with mainstreaming through all stages of implementation, and is included in all evaluations (transversal approach). This stretches from analysis of the legal framework to promoting awareness among local staff and partners in the field, the collection of gender-disaggregated statistical data, and the consultation of all beneficiaries, to mention but key aspects.

Whatever the circumstances, patience and a detailed analysis of gender relations are a must. The question of gender goes right to the heart of the way social systems function. Change is therefore slow, and only long term efforts will bear fruit.

# RURAL DEVELOPMENT: GENDER IN ACTION

The success of a “gender approach” in rural development as in other fields depends on numerous and sensitive factors which are difficult to influence: traditions, legal systems, beliefs, history, environment, etc. But there is one item that depends on the project itself: the readiness to take gender balance into account at each stage and at every level.

## **A legal framework, necessary but not always sufficient**

The ability to act depends greatly on a country’s legal framework and its application. **In Tanzania**, a political framework on gender equality exists even though the required means for its implementation still need to be allocated. In 2010, SDC commissioned an evaluation of the activities it finances in Tanzania. It pointed out that despite many efforts of civil society activists, the Tanzania Poverty Reduction Strategy still offers little gender analysis: gender remains little more than a declaration of intent. Nevertheless, from the point of view of SDC, the mere existence of a political framework, even if applied perfunctorily, provides a useful basis for the development of gender interventions.

**In Mali**, another country in which SDC is active in rural development, the relevant framework is the agricultural orientation act (Loi d’Orientation Agricole) which aims to include “the economic and social promotion of women, young people and men in a rural and peri-urban environment”. Specifically it stipulates elsewhere that “the State favours the installation of young people, women and vulnerable groups as farmers, notably by promoting their access to the means of production and through special technical and financial support mechanisms”. It goes on to say that “the State promotes gender equity in the rural environment, and particularly in farmers’ households” but that “preference is given to women, young people and groups considered vulnerable in the allocation of land plots in the newly developed areas provided by public funds”. The legislation thus provides an almost comprehensive institutional basis for the successful implementation of a gender-based approach.

## **Setting objectives**

While SDC has limited influence on the policy framework favouring gender equality, it has all leeway to define such objectives for its cooperation offices around the world as well as with partners whose programmes receive SDC funding.

**In Tanzania**, the mobilisation of partners to implement gender equality objectives has so far remained a mere principle. The SDC supported Rural Livelihood Development Programme (RLDP) is intended to develop market systems and facilitate its access to poor farmers. The strategy “was aimed at the market, rather than at women” as Ueli Mauderli, head of rural development at the local Swiss cooperation office admits. To correct the situation SDC reinforced the mandate on gender of one of its programme officers who sensitises the partners and checks they integrate it in their work.

If you ask Ueli Mauderli “what helps” to influence the situation he replies without hesitation: “setting quantitative targets”. These must be contained in the project and must be known to the partners. “With the RLDP we set the target of 40% participation by women, and the situation is improving”. In chicken farming for example the ultimate aim is to provide assistance to 12,000 women, compared to the present 8,000. “In the absence of a quantitative target there is no progress. Unfortunately there is no basis for comparison, as the question of gender was not included from the start”.

## **The numbers talk, but don’t say everything**

The SDC gender action plans for East, Southern and West-Africa require the capture of statistical data relevant to the programmes. These data should help to identify any underlying problems such as a low rate of literacy, and to set clear objectives, monitor progress and quantify the results.

**In Benin** for example the “Swiss support for agricultural and pastoral development” evaluation report includes tables of statistics that make it possible

to follow the improvements over a period of four years with regard to land under cultivation or fallow, different crops and livestock, increases in revenue and rates of literacy, etc. Even more important than the quantified data is the disaggregation of data according to gender. This makes it possible to identify efforts that have been particularly favourable to women, ensuring that rural development programmes do not merely duplicate the existing inequalities when the gender question is either ignored or underestimated.

The numbers can also be misleading rather than revealing however. They need to be backed up by considerable local knowledge. Are the women consulted to the same extent as the men? Can they express themselves freely in public? If a meeting is organised, is it as easy for the women to attend as for the men? These are some of the gender related questions raised by the SDC manual in an effort to understand the mechanisms at work in the communities in which the programmes are implemented.

## **Participation ensures support**

In an area as sensitive of gender relations, acceptance by the communities involved plays a major role. This is all the more true in rural areas, where the authority of religious leaders and village chiefs is all the greater. **In Mali**, two programmes designed to better exploit the lowlands made it possible to improve the access of women and young people to land, finance, inputs and training. One of the programmes concerns promotion of the local economy (APEL), and the other spatial planning and the “peaceful development” of agricultural land (AVAL). The use of the term “peaceful” is a fair indication of the extent to which land questions have a potential for conflict. In both programmes the involvement of the local community was crucial for ensuring the support without which no project can succeed.

Once again, despite a favourable legal framework and the fact that women make up almost half of the farming population, they “often have limited access to the means of production”

according to a case study on the APEL and AVAL programmes carried out on behalf of SDC. Their plots of land are small and less fertile, their equipment is often rudimentary and they have less access to inputs and to the necessary support and advice.

Based on these findings quantitative objectives in the form of quotas were established for the APEL and AVAL programmes. Women and young people were to benefit from 20% or even 25% of the developed areas rather than the 10% (i.e. 5,000 hectares) prescribed by law. Such an allocation of land titles could not be realized simply through good will. It required the involvement of the local authorities and communities so as to guarantee land tenure for women's groups. In order to prevent expropriation, the programmes tried to involve the entire local community, women in particular, in a participatory way. This laid the basis for the establishment of a management scheme for the lowlands: identification of the users prior to the land development; establishment of management regulations through community meetings; the creation of a committee representing the community; a user contract between community and the farmers; etc. The participation of women was all the more easily accepted by the men as women have produced rice in the lowlands for generations.

In eastern **Burkina Faso** in 2013, an accord for lowland development in the rural community of Diapangou was successfully concluded, which is favourable to women and gives precedence to them. This was only possible thanks to the cooperation of the municipal authority "because it was something new", according to Habibou Koanda, SDC programme officer. The process did however require many "courtesy visits" to the administrative, religious and traditional leaders, supported by meetings to raise awareness in the community.

In the northern part of **South Africa**, the Mupo Foundation, which is supported by SDC, makes use of its traditional knowledge to achieve three goals at once: by reintroducing millet it promotes a plant with a high nutritional value, helps to maintain the biodiversity and enhances the value of women's work; for it is the women who traditionally have knowledge of this plant and the sacred rites associated with it. This

approach also helps to strengthen the social fabric, as most of the men have gone to work in the city leaving the women to look after the fields.

The cooperation offices also benefit from their own past experiences. A case in point is the INOVAGRO programme **in Mozambique**, which targets poverty among farmers in the north by improving their access to the market. The second phase was launched at the beginning of 2014. "The first phase evolved without a well-developed structure. Now we are making use of all that we have learned so far" explains Pierre Strauss, responsible programme manager in the cooperation office in Maputo. Four observations provided input for the second stage: 85% of the women involved in INOVAGRO are illiterate, they have limited access to agricultural services, they have very little decision making power in the home; and finally they need technologies to ease their workload. The measures proposed include the introduction of two new crops more accessible to women (sesame and groundnuts), the participation of women in farmers' groups to improve their access to credit, and making suppliers more aware of gender equality. The stakes are high, the objective is to raise the number of farmers to have benefited from INOVAGRO from 3,000 to 15,000 in 2017.

### Public and private

Women remain a minority in decision making and managerial functions, such as the management committees of farmer associations, where discrepancies in education and self-confidence are most apparent. The objective of empowering women therefore needs to be clearly stated. **In Benin** SDC supports projects aimed at empowering women in agricultural and pastoral production. The emphasis is on four main areas: increased economic self-reliance, training, research of the socio-cultural environment, and leadership. The community gradually becomes accustomed to seeing women in positions of responsibility, and seeing husbands sharing the decision making... and even household duties.

It is in this way that the notion of gender equality can gain ground in the home, at the very heart of the power relationship. "It is very difficult to have direct access" confirms Fernando Pililão,

SDC programme officer and gender focal point **in Mozambique**, adding "if we promote women's access to credit for example, we must be able to verify that it is not the husband who ultimately takes control".

The SDC gender manual accepts the essentially private nature of the family context, but also sees it as "eminently political". It is here that the first prejudices and inequalities occur which will have a major impact on the health and education of girls and the distribution of roles and responsibilities, as well as being the venue of domestic violence. It is important therefore not to neglect it, even if the resistance to change is great, in some cases even from the women themselves, on the pretext that it threatens social cohesion.

For Blandine Agossou Codjia the experience of **Benin** shows that successful examples are the best way to encourage men to share power. "A woman's increasing income earns her greater respect and therefore power potential. Influencing relations in the home requires increasing men's awareness. This is not easy, but with perseverance it can be achieved. It needs continuous effort".

**In Mali**, views solicited within the community following land development projects showed that men were aware of an improved situation in their home and no longer opposed sharing responsibilities with women. "We are no longer expected to take care of little family expenses. There is now perfect harmony at home" noted one respondent. As for the women they see their status improved, gaining social recognition. "A few years ago it was impossible for the village women to join the men to discuss problems concerning land as we now do" notes the president of one women's cooperative. This new relationship between men and women is undoubtedly one of the best possible indicators of the success of gender mainstreaming policies in rural development.

# THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE COOPERATION OFFICES



**Questions to Fernando Pililão, the person responsible for gender mainstreaming in the Swiss Cooperation Office in Maputo, Mozambique**

**You took part in two evaluations concerning implementation of the gender approach in programmes supported by SDC in East and Southern Africa, in 2011 and 2014. What conclusions have you drawn?**

– Visited projects were lacking a gender analysis in the first phase. In Mozambique, in the second phase of the INOVAGRO programme, our partners were told of the importance of emphasising gender right from the start of a project. Time has now been allotted for this and a person has been appointed to provide supervision on gender issues. It is my hope that the whole project team will be on board.

**You organise training in gender mainstreaming. How do you go about it? Do you use the SDC manual on gender equality as a support? Do you carry out case studies?**

– Case studies no, but we do use the manual and involve others responsible for gender in the East- and Southern Africa Division. The first training course in Mozambique, for example, brought together staff from Tanzania and Rwanda. Sharing experiences brings added value on how to mainstream gender in programmes. One of the core aspects of our training courses is to become more familiar with the social context, the need for change, etc.

**Some examples of good practices?**

– One of the first successes was the rate of participation of women in the area of “water and sanitation”, which is a fundamental aspect of rural development. Today in Mozambique it amounts to 40% in the water committees and 20% in the community development committees. It is often said that it is difficult to achieve gender mainstreaming in the big multi-donor initiatives. And

yet the Swiss cooperation office in Maputo managed to set up a clear gender action plan for donors funding projects in the water sector. The government then asked for the donor gender network’s support in defining a gender strategy for this sector in Mozambique.

**To ensure gender mainstreaming it is necessary to institutionalise it. What does this involve?**

– Gender equality has to be a part of the SDC cooperation strategy, its procedures and instruments. Programmes supported by SDC also need to identify indicators to be able to measure progress and qualitative results by sector. The evaluations, reviews and annual reports of SDC and its partners must show the progress made and the goals achieved in this regard. Generally speaking, with an integrated approach gender becomes the responsibility of the whole team and not just of one person (gender focal point).

## Benefiting from experience

Swiss cooperation offices can make use of a comprehensive gender mainstreaming manual in the form of worksheets, both for internal use and for partners. This serves as a reference tool for all SDC activities. Cooperation offices in East-, Southern- and West-Africa are also expected to adopt certain minimum standards with regard to gender and are subject to peer reviews by other cooperation offices in an effort to promote the gender issue at the institutional level, the only way to ensure that it is taken into account across the board. They also promote “good practices”. Furthermore SDC organises regional workshops on a regular basis, making it possible to exchange experiences and proceed with any adjustments necessary, always bearing in mind that each situation requires an adequate solution.



**Questions to Habibou Koanda the person responsible for gender mainstreaming in the Swiss Cooperation Office in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso**

**How can one get across the notion of “gender mainstreaming” at the institutional level?**

– Even within SDC an effort has to be made to get staff to include this question in their work. We then consider the proposals submitted by local partners. Do they take into account the views of both men and women? Are the different needs of men and women taken into account, and was everyone consulted? We try to go deeper into such questions by means of dialogue with our partners.

**Gender mainstreaming involves the relationships between men and women. Can it be institutionalised?**

– Institutionalisation for us means making the actors aware of adopting a strategy to bring about change. This means there has to be a person responsible for gender in the programme, and tools that take it into account, from planning to evaluation. We can then move forward, making sure that the tools are used, the results analysed and lessons are learned from our experiences.

**How does the main resistance to change manifest itself?**

– It is the very idea of the status of men and women. Women are unthinkable in certain roles. Even with the realisation that it would be useful... there are traditional ways of doing things, in all societies.

**There is often the fear that a change in the status of women will destroy social cohesion...**

– This fear does exist, but only because the question has not been given serious consideration. In the programmes we support, visible changes have come about between men and women, in the

home and in the community as a whole. There were certain actions, women would not dare to do and which now they perform, or which men would not accept and now do accept. They can see that just because women acquire knowledge, and have an income, doesn't mean this will undermine social cohesion. We even have the support of the traditional leaders, who are the guarantors of social cohesion.

### Leave nothing to chance

Gender mainstreaming at the institutional level is one of the priorities of the East, Southern and West-Africa divisions for all programmes, in particular for rural development where it is at times more complex.

The mainstreaming of gender in programmes above all depends on the commitment of those responsible, from the management of the SDC cooperation offices to the partners working directly with the communities concerned. The follow-up of this commitment is based on triennial gender action plans, which are evaluated annually. On the basis of the SDC's gender equality policy, those responsible ensure the appropriate implementation strategies and training. They also make sure that the SDC team and partners have suitable skills and the time necessary allocated for gender mainstreaming. Each cooperation office has its own "gender focal point" devoting at least 20% of their time to this matter. The exchange of good practices between programme officers in different countries has proven particularly fruitful and makes it possible to envisage social transformation in an area where the fear of upsetting the existing order of things is ever present.



Smallholder farmers of the project INOVAGRO in Northern Mozambique.

## FOUR POINTS TO REMEMBER

### Getting to know the context

Knowledge of the legal context and traditional norms in a given country is essential. The legal framework serves as a basis in which to anchor the gender question at the institutional level and bring the requirements of SDC, the practices of partners and the interests of the beneficiaries into line. Knowing the relevant customs and practices helps to realistically determine objectives in terms of social change.

### Collect and analyse gender-disaggregated data prior to planning

Knowledge of the context must be backed up by an initial analysis of gender issues specific to the rural development project. This qualitative approach to social relations, enriched by quantified data which distinguishes between the respective roles and situations of women and men, helps to shed light on the progress and changes that have occurred when analysing the results.

### Community support

The involvement of the beneficiary communities, religious and traditional leaders as well as the local and regional governments for the duration of the programme is essential for enabling positive change in gender relations when it comes to sharing tasks and decisions, notably in relation to land questions.

### Plan activities beyond rural development

Access to a certain amount of economic power boosts women's confidence and leads to greater social and even political power, promoting greater gender equality. Education and citizen participation are other aspects that should not be neglected, since they create the basic conditions for success.

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you can access here short videos illustrating SDC's approach to mainstreaming gender in the projects presented in this Africa Brief:

[www.sdc-gender-development.net/en/Home/Publications/Videos](http://www.sdc-gender-development.net/en/Home/Publications/Videos)

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