

# Farming dynamics

**When strengthening women's rights also helps tackle poverty: successful experiences in the Andean countries**

The obstacles women face

Reducing gender inequality through empowerment

A shared diagnosis leads to concrete initiatives



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*Most often it is women who make sure their families have enough to eat*

**"The countries that suffer most from hunger are also those with the highest levels of gender inequality"<sup>1</sup>.**

**According to the World Food Programme (WFP), 60% of people suffering from chronic hunger are women and girls.<sup>2</sup>**

**It is estimated that if women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20% to 30% or total production by 2.5% to 4%; and reduce the number of undernourished people by 12% to 17% (between 100 and 150 million people). (FAO, 2011).**

1: 2009 Global Hunger Index "The Challenge of Hunger: Focus on financial crisis and gender inequality" IFPRI publication 62.

2: WFP's gender equality policy and strategy.

However, only 10% to 20% of landowners are women (FAO, 2011). In Peru, 2.8 million women farm, but only 140,000 (5%) have a deed to the land. Note also that the proportion of women with access to agricultural credit is 5% to 10% less than men (FAO, 2011). For the FAO, any “proper” agricultural policy must therefore take into account gender differences.

In the light of these observations and analyses, those on the ground, in particular farmers’ organizations, have not been inactive, rather they have developed responses. Two Belgian NGOs, Vredeseilanden and SOS FAIM, were persuaded by the growing concern of their partners to organise a workshop on strategies and challenges for achieving more balanced relationships between men and women in local producer organizations. The Andean partners of these two NGOs met, in November 2011, to exchange information about their respective experiences and initiatives.

tackling inequality between women and men is essential to meeting the challenges of improving food security and enabling the rural poor to get out of poverty

Women represent 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries. However, they have significantly less access than men have to assets and services.

Therefore, women have fewer opportunities than men to take risks and innovate, notably due to lack of access to land, which makes it difficult to negotiate loans. The lack of infrastructure is another burden, since it is usually women who are responsible for collecting firewood and water. Women more often work longer days than men with a combination of household chores and other production related activities.

In addition, there is a disincentive – it is indeed most often men who have control over the production chain despite the significant contribution of women’s work. Men are more in touch with the market and more deeply integrated in the value chains.

This element is reinforced by the fact that few women participate in decision-making in public affairs (national and local). As a result, the needs of this segment of the population are often considered less of a priority.

## The obstacles women face

- ▼ **A lower level of education and less access to training services**, which also leads to less access to resources such as land, credit, i.e. fewer opportunities than men to access productive resources;
- ▼ **The departure of men to other areas** (as a result of climate change) and of young people (in pursuit of a better life) has changed women’s roles and placed a greater burden on their shoulders.

Indeed, if women produce less than men, it is not because they are less efficient but because of the greater difficulty they encounter accessing resources.

Eliminating disparities in access to education, agricultural resources, extension services, financial services and the labour market appear to be the pathways to induce change. Investing in technology and infrastructure which allow women the time to pursue more productive activities is a second imperative in the promotion of gender equality.

## Reducing gender inequality through empowerment

An individual taking charge of his or herself, in another word, their empowerment, can also be explained as the ability to make choices and change power relations.

IFAD, promotes a similar analysis in its policy document on gender equality and women’s empowerment<sup>3</sup>. It argues that tackling inequality between women and men is essential to meeting the challenges of improving food security and enabling the rural poor to get out of poverty. The participation of women and men as full economic actors is seen as a measure of the growth of agriculture.

This empowerment is primarily tied to acquiring the means to enable change, such as knowledge, resources (whether

3: Paper prepared for the 104<sup>th</sup> session of the Executive Board from 12<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> December 2011.

natural, productive, financial, human or other), well-being, identity and also strength through collective action. The three pillars of empowerment are<sup>4</sup>:

☛ **Knowledge:** there is no power without knowledge and conversely, it is through knowledge that power can be taken. This approach was developed in Brazil by Paulo Freire<sup>5</sup>. The right to critical knowledge, to literacy, leads to an awareness of the mechanisms that enable men and women to be actors in decisions;

☛ **Access to and control of resources:** in order to make choices in life, it is necessary that a person not be in permanent survival mode. Empowerment requires access to financial resources, the means of production, but also to services (health, education, water, etc.);

☛ **Self-esteem:** empowerment enables the development of a strong individual and/or group identity. Change can only be possible if each individual within a group develops a certain level of self-esteem.



70% of young people do not want to stay in the community and wish to try their luck in the city

In 2008-2009, a “gender diagnosis” was therefore performed in 7 of the cooperatives: major issues were identified, in particular in the level of education and time allowed for family and production related responsibilities. Thus, 68% of women are illiterate or have only partially completed primary school (as against 15% of men). This lower access to education also has an impact on their self-esteem and the confidence they have to successfully take part in meetings, for example. It also revealed that women are “confined” in social activities such as low-priced restaurants, the “vaso de leche” programme<sup>6</sup> and so forth. Another thing that was also clear from the diagnosis is the existence of violence within the family. It is often denied by women due to a mixture of fear, guilt complex and deeply ingrained machismo. In addition, to denounce the violence to the authorities, a trip must be made to town into unfamiliar surroundings.

The diagnosis also examined the family unit; more than 93% of families have at least 4 children. But more importantly, 70% of young people do not want to stay in the community and wish to try their luck in the city<sup>7</sup>. This view is shared by 73% of parents. Working a plot of land is considered too hard. Parents want their children to be “better than them”. Agricultural work is largely devalued: it is seen as a last resort solution, for lack of an alternative.

Nearly 90% of the members greatly value the social development work in cooperatives, and, yet the municipalities are involved very little in this sector much preferring more visible infrastructure projects. Given the lack of support from the authorities, CAFE PERU, the producers’ organization therefore decided to invest in educating and training leaders: 12 schools are up and running, including at Naranjillo and La Florida.

Both cooperatives from the Selva Central region that are CAFE PERU members signed up to the initiative. Of note, in some cases, is that pressure originated from certifiers or fair trade buyers to create women’s committees or family committees and these are sometimes quite well

## A shared diagnosis leads to concrete initiatives

### In Peru, CAFE CACAO PERU:

The organisation consists of 11 primary cooperatives (coffee and cocoa) from across 5 regions.

There is a clear imbalance between men and women in terms of membership and participation and, therefore, in decision-making and leadership: only 13.7% of members are women. Women play an important role in the coffee and cocoa value chains, without really participating in related decisions.

4: This section is in large part taken from the publication “Les essentiels du Genre, n°10, Genre et empowerment,” Sophie Charlier, Le Monde selon les femmes, 2009.

5: An educator and philosopher and influential theorist of critical pedagogy whose name was given to several institutions

6: Government food programme literally called “glass of milk programme”

7: In particular, Lima, where some 30% of the national population live.



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A strong female presence at a workshop on gender, organized by SOS Faim and Vredeseilanden

established. However, the budgets allocated to them within the cooperatives are very small.

### NARANJILLO:

Since 2009, this cooperative of coffee but also cocoa producers has run a family development committee (CODESFA) that promotes gender policy within the organization. The cooperative has been proactive in various areas:

- ☛ The cooperative's strategic plan includes a gender policy;
- ☛ There is an action plan that incorporates a gender perspective in the production chain;
- ☛ Elements within training that promote the participation of women have been strengthened: leadership schools, training workshops, awareness campaigns, and so on;
- ☛ An effort is made to integrate more women into projects (production related micro projects);
- ☛ Strategic alliances have been established with institutions that address gender issues: local governments, "defensora del pueblo"<sup>8</sup>, and so on;

8: Independent official body promoting human rights in Peru.

- ☛ An effort is made to involve youth and women in a generational renewal strategy. At the leadership schools, at least 30% of participants must be women;

- ☛ Coffee grown by women specifically is produced under the name Esperanza;

But difficulties persist despite these initiatives.

- ☛ There is a type of cultural resistance: it is both machismo, but also self-marginalization by the women themselves, especially due to low self-esteem linked to a lower level education. Women are therefore apprehensive about assuming responsibilities in the organization;

- ☛ In addition, many women have more than three children for whom they are the caretakers, as tradition dictates, making it difficult for them to participate in training sessions and meetings.

### LA FLORIDA:

This cooperative has about 1,200 members, 20% of whom are women. 18 Integral Development Committees (CDI) were set up so as to be close to family farms. And since 1997, Family Development Committees (CODEFAM) have also been set up in the same areas as the CDI. These committees are geared towards women: improving their



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Family farming, in Peru as elsewhere, is rooted in deeply-held cultural traditions

quality of life and food security and generating employment through production related projects.

LA FLORIDA has a number of initiatives designed to give women equal opportunities:

- ✔ Training of women leaders;
- ✔ Training in managing a rural micro-enterprise;
- ✔ Business administration workshops and farm planning;
- ✔ Food security workshops: organic gardening and nutrition;
- ✔ Also a strong awareness drive on health issues (traditionally a female domain): female health advocates, healthy and balanced nutrition, awareness of the need for regular check-ups, and so on;
- ✔ Women's participation in the running of the organization is encouraged: the CODEFAM are seen as a stepping stone for training women, so that they may assume greater institutional responsibilities.

Difficulties are of the same order as at Naranjillo. They are compounded by the fact that, for legal reasons, it

is usually men who hold title to land and therefore, it is they who are full members of the cooperative. In addition, a large percentage of women do not fulfil the criteria laid down by the statutes for those assuming management functions.

In response, LA FLORIDA cooperative has developed an approach whereby the disenfranchised groups are identified within the cooperative (by gender, ethnicity, level of education, level of vulnerability, age, and so on). Special adult policies and education programmes are developed for under-privileged groups.

For women specifically, three aspects are taken into account, as a matter of priority:

- ✔ Supporting women's economic development, their access to productive resources and their control over these through access to rural micro-credit;
- ✔ Strengthening participation in public and political decision-making processes through gender and empowerment training;

women suffer from low self-esteem. Their marginalization is reinforced by significant illiteracy levels

- ▼ Promoting the welfare of the rural population, improving access to basic rural infrastructure and services.

### In the Andean region of Peru, women are also mobilising:

Microcrédito para el Desarrollo (MIDE) is a microfinance institution offering financial and non-financial support in the Cusco region, whose clients are almost exclusively women (between 97% and 98%). The areas it operates in are characterized by fragile ecosystems, often witness to mining conflicts and natural disasters. Local markets are underdeveloped and access is limited. There are little or no social and health services.

In this adverse setting, women suffer from low self-esteem. Their marginalization is reinforced by significant illiteracy levels. The relations of power do not favour them: violence and abandonment are pervasive in families, especially in rural areas. Women's participation in public decision-making is low or non-existent, despite the equal opportunities law (Law No. 28,983).

In spite of these difficulties, rural women display strength, initiative and creativity in resolving their everyday problems. MIDE's strategy is to target both the individual and the collective. Women's economic initiatives are given greater impetus by allowing them to diversify their activities (agriculture, livestock, and commerce). At the same time, their negotiation skills and their knowledge of new markets are honed. Put together, the measures allow work to be generated for women and promote women's independence.

This "individual" strategy approach is complemented by a group approach around various themes: self-esteem, the cohesion of groups with shared goals, organized forms of managing savings and credit within groups. Important advocacy work is also carried out to raise awareness of the role of women at the local level.

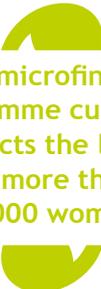
The results of this strategy are revealing: 63% of women decide for themselves how to use their own income. All the women send all their children to school. They participate with increasing independence at public meetings. The microfinance programme currently affects the lives of more than 7,000 women.

### In Bolivia, artisans are joining forces:

As of 1995, many grassroots women's organizations were created in rural communities and low-income neighbourhoods of large cities. Many share the same objective: to generate jobs in order to increase their family's income. There is also a cultural concern, that is, to preserve ancestral knowledge in crafts. Between 2000 and 2005, the various local initiatives began coming together and members organized in order to be better represented and carry some weight at the policy level. One of these umbrella organizations is the OEPAIC<sup>9</sup> network, which represents more than 3,000 members (of whom 85% are women). OEPAIC is one of the organizations which achieved a number of milestones between 2006 and 2010: a recognised legal framework for the craft sector, access to finance for farmers, the creation of an event to promote traditional handicrafts.

In rural areas, Bolivian handicrafts is usually a complementary activity taken up on an alternating basis with agricultural production. This is an important sector but unfortunately there are no reliable statistics available, including on the generation of female employment. Still, it is clear that the sector contributes to making more women economically independent and therefore creates more self-confidence and self-worth.

The handicrafts sector has proven to be a strong driver of women's development, not only through income generation, but also through the promotion of important local communal heritage and the fact that it facilitates the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. All these aspects are further supplemented by a process of reinforcing women's roles, through their increasing participation in decision-making in organizations and their better defence of their rights.



The microfinance programme currently affects the lives of more than 7,000 women

9: Organizacion Economica de Productores de Artesania con Identidad Cultural.

### Organic production in the service of gender equity:

The Association of Organic Producer Organizations of Bolivia (AOPEB) includes 82 organizations that represent 62,000 families across the country. It has been tackling gender issues since 2001 along the following lines:

- ☛ A “gender and development” strategy with an emphasis on relationships between men and women;
- ☛ Traditional values of complementarity, reciprocity and fairness are to be upheld in the spirit of restoring a balanced relationship between men and women;
- ☛ Complementarity between men and women is sought through ongoing dialogue.

AOPEB claims its main achievements are that the role of women in the production process has been recognized and that, as a logical consequence, a decision-making space has been won by women in different organizations. As in other cases, however, the lack of availability of women to participate in the training process is an obstacle.

### In Ecuador, FAPECAFES<sup>10</sup> highlights the long-term benefits of greater female and youth participation:

The association has decided that at least 20% of posts are to be filled by women. Priority support is made available to them, especially for home gardening, in training and so on. This has resulted in increasing levels of participation by women. Previously, meetings were only attended by men. Now, women and young people attend. This is an important development because those who are currently most active will not be around forever. Regardless, it is important within an organization to encourage young people and give women space. This is essential if leadership is to be renewed and a level of purpose maintained. Many producer organizations are confronted by the issue of generational change and greater female participation is part of the answer (as are leadership schools emphasizing the importance of the leader's role).

10: A federation of 7 coffee producer organizations from southern Ecuador; roughly 1650 members.

## Conclusion

The three pillars of gender equity work, which are knowledge, access to and control over resources, and self-esteem have been the basis for various experiments conducted by producer associations and cooperatives. The experiences highlight the fact that access to resources, a prerequisite to achieving a certain degree of independence, is often a necessary step in terms of building knowledge and then self-esteem. But in reality, as one participant from Ecuador stated<sup>11</sup> during the meeting, the first step is education. *“Real change comes through the strengthening of education, so that we ourselves gain the capacity to implement what is in the law, which is theoretically favourable to the status of women. Educate women, and you will transform society.”*

It also appears, in light of the experiences of these associations, that the strategy has a greater chance of success if it is “global” and includes the active participation and motivation of men, as well as the family as a whole.

**This issue of Farming Dynamics was written by Marc MEES, Head of SOS Faim's Partner Support Service based on presentations given by different organizations that participated in the workshop in Lima, on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2011.**

11: Rosa Guaman, representative of the “Coordinadora Estatal de Comercio Justo”.

## SOS Faim and the farmers' organizations

For several years, SOS Faim has supported different farmers' organizations in Africa and Latin America. SOS Faim publishes *Farming Dynamics* which deals with the development challenges faced by agricultural producers' and farmers' organizations.

This publication is available for download in French, English and Spanish on SOS Faim's website: [www.sosfaim.org](http://www.sosfaim.org).

Apart from *Farming Dynamics*, SOS Faim publishes **Zoom microfinance** as with all development tools, we have to analyse the aims, models and implementation conditions of aid to microfinance institutions. It is with this purpose in mind that Sos Faim publishes *Zoom microfinance*.

This publication is also available for download in French, English and Spanish SOS Faim's website: [www.sosfaim.org](http://www.sosfaim.org).

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