

insights



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Republic of the Sudan

COUNTRY STRATEGY AND PROGRAMME EVALUATION

Making a difference in gender equality and empowering women in rural Sudan

In rural areas of Sudan, women contribute greatly to the household's well-being and food security. They perform various tasks, ranging from farming and rearing small livestock to managing many household activities (e.g. preparing food, collecting firewood, fetching water, caring for the children). They generally work longer hours than men. In spite of their responsibilities, normally women have limited decision-making power in the household – as well as within the community, although the degree may vary in different communities and areas. In 2017, Sudan was ranked 139th out of 160 countries on the gender inequality index.¹

In this context, the country strategy and programme evaluation in Sudan found that IFAD's portfolio has registered significant achievements in promoting gender equality and empowering rural women. The achievements encompass all three areas of the strategic objectives of IFAD's policy on gender equality and women's empowerment (2012): (i) promote economic empowerment to enable rural women and

men to have equal opportunities to participate in, and benefit from, profitable economic activities; (ii) enable women and men to have equal voice and influence in rural institutions and organizations; and (iii) achieve a more equitable balance in workloads and in the sharing of economic and social benefits between women and men. Consistent attention to gender issues in all project approaches and activities has been instrumental in this success.

Women's economic empowerment enhances household well-being

The portfolio has integrated various interventions to support women's undertaking of productive activities. They include small home gardens (*jubraka*), nurseries by women's groups, small livestock, and food preservation and processing. In addition, to improve access to finance, five projects covered in the evaluation supported about

3,000 savings and credit groups. Membership in these groups is estimated at 48,000, with close to 95 per cent being women. All these activities, accompanied by relevant trainings (e.g. home economics, adult literacy, social and business skills, vegetable production, animal health and nutrition), have enabled women to play a central role in increasing the economic benefits – and enhancing the well-being – of the entire household. Many of these productive activities, combined with nutrition training, have also contributed to improving household food security and nutrition.

Greater voice and influence by women in households and institutions

Increased participation of women in economic, social and community activities – including roles traditionally performed by men – has helped change the image and position of women. For example, a woman beneficiary in her 50s provided an account of how she challenged social customs to travel and receive training as a paravet, activities normally not performed by women. Her training enabled her to provide basic animal health services and advice, which gradually earned her confidence and respect from the community.

The projects fostered the representation of women in rural institutions, including leadership positions, and in public spheres, such as community/village development committees and other specific interest groups (e.g. water, forestry). In the Butana Integrated Rural Development Project (2006-2019), for example, women made up about one third of the village development committee office bearers. Such a conscious effort to bolster the representation of women, in conjunction with awareness-raising and training on gender issues within the communities, served to enhance women's confidence to be part of the decision-making processes and to increase men's support for the changes. Within the household, beneficiaries confirmed that decisions are now jointly made by husbands and wives.

Reducing women's drudgery and creating more equitable workloads

Drinking-water installations and gas stoves introduced by the projects were crucial in dramatically reducing the time women spent to fetch water and collect firewood for cooking. The time gained enabled women to take up other social and economic activities, including dedicating more time to childcare, participating in community social life, and engaging in income-generating activities. The project-supported trainings also contributed to a more equitable

distribution of workloads between women and men. Discussions with beneficiaries during the evaluation mission consistently indicated that men have been participating more in chores such as working in the farm fields and fetching water.

Contributing to gender transformation in eastern Sudan – one project example

The Gash Sustainable Livelihoods Regeneration Project (2004-2012) was implemented in an area in Kassala with a strong tribal hierarchy and a highly conservative society. The state ministry staff at locality level underlined that the project was the first one in the area to have interventions focusing on women, such as adult literacy, microfinance and *jubraka*. They added that the project successes included facilitating access to microcredit for over 2,000 women for the first time, allowing them to improve their households' livelihoods; this, and other positive results, showcased what could be possible even in such a conservative society – motivating non-beneficiary women and making men realize the benefits to be had.

Approaches for success

The evaluation noted that the results achieved can plausibly be attributed to a number of key approaches adopted. They include: (i) sensitization of traditional leaders about women's participation and empowerment – to gain their understanding and support; (ii) involvement of both men and women from the same households in gender-awareness training; (iii) high level of women's representation in project teams under the state ministries and service providers (e.g. project/state coordination units, extension teams, “young professionals” engaged by projects); and (iv) follow-up and support by the project teams and their determination to achieve results.

Looking ahead

In 2019, a fundamental political change occurred in the country, paving the way to democracy and civilian rule. The active participation and the role of women in the “revolution” was widely reported in the media. In the new political context, IFAD and the Government of Sudan should build on the solid achievements made to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in rural Sudan – also including systematizing and sharing knowledge and lessons for scaling up these achievements. In addition, IFAD and the Government should explore potential areas for further support, in particular policy-related issues affecting rural women that are relevant to project interventions, with a view to making project impacts even broader and more sustainable.

¹ *The index reflects gender-based inequalities in three dimensions: reproductive health (measured by maternal mortality and adolescent birth rates); empowerment (measured by the share of parliamentary seats held by women and attainment in secondary and higher education by each gender); and economic activity (measured by the labour market participation rate for women and men). (United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update – Briefing Note (Sudan) http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/SDN.pdf*

Further information:

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