

# Brief on Gender and Agriculture & Rural Development

Women play a critical role in agriculture throughout the world, producing, processing and providing the food we eat. Rural women are responsible for over half of the world's food production, producing around 70 percent of the food in most developing countries. Yet, despite their contribution to global food security, women farmers are frequently underestimated and overlooked in development strategies. Rural women are the main producers of the world's staple crops - rice, wheat, maize - which provide up to 90 percent of the rural poor's food intake. They are also the holders of vast indigenous knowledge about seeds, genetic diversity, food from forest plants, etc.

By considering farming systems through a gender lens it is possible to identify development approaches that may act against women's interests. For example, women often have a small political presence on community councils; agriculture extension programs may be perceived as male spaces and local agrarian organizations and institutions may be based on male hierarchies. Also, gender analyses have made it clear that men and women often manage, use and control natural and agricultural resources differently. By understanding these differences, and the gendered power relations behind them, agricultural programs and policies achieve greater equity and efficiency.

One program that seeks to incorporate such an issue into its mission is the FAO-sponsored Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (SARD) Initiative. The SARD Initiative (SARD I) is a multi-stakeholder umbrella framework designed to support the transition to people-centered sustainable agriculture and rural development and to strengthen participation in program and policy development. SARD I is expected to result in concrete and measurable improvements in the livelihoods and living conditions of the rural poor over the next 5 years, thus contributing to the implementation of Chapter 14 of Agenda 21 and the achievement of the Millennium Development goals.

Based on the notion that civil society participation is fundamental to sustainable development, and as defined by Agenda 21 of the Rio Earth Summit, SARD I works through the nine major groups of civil society, which include: Indigenous Peoples, Farmers, Workers and Trade Unions, Business and industry, Local Authorities, Scientific and Technological Community, Children and Youth, Women and NGOs.

WOCAN and Women in Europe as a Common Future (WECF) are the focal points for the Major Group Women in SARD, and, as such, are responsible for coordinating the participation of women within the SARD Initiative of FAO to support pilot efforts and build the capacity of rural communities, disadvantaged groups and other stakeholders to improve access to resources; to promote best practices; and to foster fairer conditions of employment in agriculture.

For more information:

- IUCN Fact Sheet on Agriculture:  
[http://generoyambiente.org/admin/admin\\_biblioteca/documentos/Agriculture.pdf](http://generoyambiente.org/admin/admin_biblioteca/documentos/Agriculture.pdf)
- SARD Initiative: <http://www.fao.org/sard/en/init/index.html>
- SARD Major Groups: <http://www.fao.org/sard/en/sard/750/899/index.html>
- International Fund for Agricultural Development: (IFAD): <http://www.ifad.org/gender>
- Women in Europe for a Common Future (WECF): [www.wecf.org](http://www.wecf.org)