



Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture

International Forum

Women in Agriculture

***Women's contribution to agriculture and
food security in the Americas***

October 7, 2010 • IICA Headquarters



About this Forum

INTRODUCTION

Women make a significant contribution to agricultural development in the Americas, with major impacts on food security. According to data compiled by FAO,¹ in developing countries women comprise over 50% of the agricultural economically active population and make a very important, direct contribution to food production worldwide.

In the structure of family agriculture, agricultural chains and rural agribusinesses, women are not only producers, employees and entrepreneurs, but also citizens who play a permanent, active role in the attainment of rural well-being. They engage in a wide range of activities, including the production of crops in backyard systems, the care and management of small animal resources and species, seed improvement, the adding of value to agricultural products in small and large industries, enterprise management and the feeding of workers. Another very important part of women's work involves taking care of the home and the family, thereby helping to maintain the social and economic fabric of communities and rural territories.

¹ García, Frías, Z (2006) *Equidad de género y agricultura, su importancia en una época de globalización económica*, Boletín SD dimensions, Natural Resources Management and Environment Department, FAO, September 2006.

In spite of the contribution described above, women's contribution to national economic and social development has not been sufficiently recognized. Most of the public policies and tools that governments have employed to promote the improvement of women in rural areas have proven to be insufficient. There are still gaps in the information available about the true contribution that women make to national economies, while the value of the unpaid work that women perform in rural households continues to be systematically ignored.

To assist the governments of IICA's member countries to develop public strategies and policies designed to reduce inequity and promote the conditions required for the integrated development of women, it is necessary to analyze and reflect on the current situation of rural women in the member countries. The result of that analysis should be used to generate policies, tools and investments to help overcome key problems that affect the productivity and competitiveness of the economic activities of rural women, such as very limited access to credit, technology and markets, lack of title and the limitations of extension, education and health services. Furthermore, the policies, tools, and investments devised should help to ensure that rural women enjoy greater equality of opportunities for their development as agricultural producers.

The acute crisis in food prices in 2008, exacerbated by the global financial crisis, highlighted the fragility of the agrifood system and sparked a new debate about the need to create a new vision for agriculture. Such a vision cannot be constructed without taking into account the vital role that rural women play in this activity and in the development of rural territories. IICA can contribute to a renewed appreciation of the role of women in agriculture and food security by means of strategic technical cooperation actions that support women's participation in the supply, distribution and consumption of food. The Institute can also help to boost the efforts of many institutional actors and effective public policies, tools and investments designed to improve the conditions in which women will contribute to the agriculture of the future, as well as women's integration into value chains and access to higher-quality employment and income.

One of IICA's institutional principles is to focus its efforts on support for agricultural development and rural well-being. The Institute's technical cooperation actions and tools are geared toward generating and sustaining equitable opportunities for the entire population.

Within the framework of the OAS's declaration of 2010 as the Inter-American Year of Women, and in response to the mandates issued by the summits of the Americas and the resolutions of the Inter-American Board of Agriculture (IABA), IICA recognizes the contributions that women (particularly women rural producers) have made to agriculture and food security, and renews its commitment to improving their situation and their productivity and competitiveness. To that end, the Institute invites and encourages the international community to take part in the forum, "Women in Agriculture: women's contribution to agriculture and food security in the Americas," which will be taking place on October 7, 2010 at the Institute's Headquarters in San Jose, Costa Rica.

OBJECTIVES OF THE FORUM

1. To analyze women's role in agriculture and the contributions they make to the sector - in particular to family agriculture - and identify actions to be implemented to make their participation more effective and to acknowledge their contributions to agriculture and rural well-being.
2. To contribute to the construction of a common cooperation agenda for IICA and its member countries, geared to the promotion of the development of women and rural families, and the improvement of their contribution to the progress of agriculture and food security.
3. To provide a frame of reference as input for IICA's Medium-term Plan (2010-2014), so that the Institute's programs implement actions that bring about effective improvements to women's economic and social participation in agriculture and food security, incorporating principles of equity into all the cooperation tools that the Institute generates.

PARTICIPANTS

Members of IICA's Executive Committee, ministers and lawmakers of IICA's member countries, the diplomatic corps stationed in Costa Rica, women rural leaders and entrepreneurs, specialists of international agencies that support the development of agriculture, the human development of women and gender equity, IICA technical personnel stationed at Headquarters and from all the Offices in the member countries, academics, decision-makers and members of the public interested in the issue of rural women.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES OF THE FORUM

- Recommendations for the implementation of cooperation programs with the public institutional framework to enhance the productivity and competitiveness of the economic activities of women in the agricultural and rural sector, which could be shared with the partner countries.
- Start of a process aimed at drawing up a common agenda for cooperation in support of the economic activities of women linked to the development of agriculture and food security in IICA's member countries.