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***Reducing Vulnerability of the Girl Child  
in Poor Rural Areas***

***Activities of the International Fund for Agricultural  
Development***

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## **Introduction**

Across many areas of the developing world, children live in a situation of vulnerability and are exposed to a combination of systematic discrimination based on age and social status, education and health. The girl-child faces double disadvantages because of gender discrimination at the household and community level. These vulnerabilities are even stronger in rural areas, where poverty, traditions and lack of infrastructure and services prevail.

By nature of its mandate, IFAD addresses extreme rural poverty which is the main factor for raising children's vulnerabilities and conditions detrimental to their well-being. IFAD targets poor and vulnerable households, and has a special focus on the economic empowerment of rural women. The Fund therefore contributes to improving the well-being of children indirectly by increasing and sustaining the incomes of poor rural households. It also gives attention to the situation of children by making chronic child malnutrition one of the anchor indicators of its Results and Impact Monitoring System. Many IFAD-supported projects include adult literacy, specifically directed at women and provide skills and vocational training for young people.

### **Vulnerabilities of adolescent boys and girls in the rural areas**

In rural areas, boys and girls play key roles in family farming and through their economic activities generate incomes that improve rural livelihoods for the poor.

Zimbabwe.<sup>3</sup> When available, formal education and training curricula are heavily geared towards academic accomplishments and formal sector employment in urban centres, rather than rural livelihoods<sup>4</sup>, motivating many adolescent boys and girls to leave school early and meet their household's need for income by migrating to cities.



## **Support to education and training**

Many IFAD-supported projects contain an education component in the form of infrastructure support to build or maintain rural schools, teacher training to up-date teaching methods and curricula, school feeding to improve nutrition or scholarships to enable children from remote areas to attend boarding schools. The quality of local schooling opportunities and monitoring of children's progress may be enhanced, together with investments in educational infrastructure and curricula. The Belgium Survival Fund (BSF) is financing this component in many projects, but also WFP and other donors. One area that IFAD recurrently seeks to strengthen is the access of rural communities to basic formal education. Such interventions indirectly increase schooling and thus reduce the incentive to involve children in labour.

*In India, the Andhra Pradesh Tribal Development programme boosted food security and raised the income of tribal families through podu agriculture which translated amongst others into funds for construction work, teachers' salaries and educational equipment at community schools. The direct involvement of parents in the managing of schools has improved attendance rates in all districts by an average of 20% and improved the gender balance of students, with 40% of new enrolments being young girls. School dropout rates have fallen. Even in cases where resources were extremely scarce, community schools would continue to operate on a voluntary basis, highlighting the strong commitment in the area towards the education of children.<sup>8</sup>*

## **Labour saving technologies**

Children often have to contribute to family labour in the absence of labour saving technologies. Since children often assist their mothers and other adult women in doing their chores such as fetching water or collecting fire wood, a reduction in women's workload benefits the children, in particular the daughters. Labour-saving technologies depend on the socio-cultural context and environment and need to be introduced through community involvement in order to be accepted, used and maintained. Such technologies can include energy-saving stoves to reduce the daily task of firewood collection; promotion of donkeys especially for women and HIV-AIDS orphans to ease the burden of transporting drinking water and other goods; introduction of water harvesting techniques and agricultural practices that are less labour intensive such as lighter and better quality hand tools; the management of soil cover in order to suppress weeds, or introducing crops that are less labour intensive.

*In Morocco, an IFAD supported project in the Tafilalet and Dades RDP has acted as a catalyst for women's integration into development activities through providing community investments in potable water networks and electricity, which have reduced women's workload, particularly water fetching and manual labour. Moreover, the project has raised women's awareness of the role they play, on an equal basis with men, in household and community development.<sup>9</sup>*

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<sup>8</sup> IFAD (2001), Andhra Pradesh Tribal Development Project, Evaluation Report (IFAD, Rome)

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