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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. Children's work in agriculture has positive impacts and needs to be seen in context of different economic and livelihood realities of developing countries. However, the threshold at which children's work becomes hazardous and exploitative is often fluid. Child labour, in particular its worst hazardous forms (including slavery, trafficking, debt bondage and other forms of forced labour, forced recruitment of children for use in armed conflict, prostitution and pornography, and illicit activities),¹ need to be seen in the larger context of development since its reduction depends on improved household incomes, economic empowerment and infrastructure development for education and health.

Rural adolescents account for 55 per cent of the world youth population and tend to be the most disadvantaged in terms of access to training, education and human development facilities, especially when female. Additionally, women of 15 or 16 years of age are up to six times more likely to be infected with HIV/AIDS than young men of the same age, and half of all new infections are occurring amongst youth.² Major population growth amongst others in Sub-Saharan Africa generated a surge in the number of youth currently requiring basic services and causing added pressure on sustainable agriculture, rural development and finite natural resources. In Africa, 71 per cent of young people live in rural areas. Growth rates tend to be highest in countries where rural population exceeds 75 per cent, including Kenya, Tanzania and

¹ ILO (2006), *Global Report - The end of child labour: within reach*. Geneva.

² ILO (2004), *African Union Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government on Employment and Poverty Alleviation in Africa*- Issues Paper compiled by ILO et al, September 8-9, Ouagadougou

Zimbabwe.³ When available, formal education and training curricula are heavily geared towards academic accomplishments and formal sector employment in urban centres, rather than rural livelihoods⁴, motivating many adolescent boys and girls to leave school early and meet their household's need for income by migrating to cities. Not only boys migrate since evidence from Kenya and South Africa suggests that young girls are often forced to leave in search of livelihood, too, while facing considerable threat to personal safety.⁵ In Sub-Saharan Africa, unemployment rates of urban youth are often triple those for adults with the situation being even more challenging for girls, whose lack of secured income may force them into further insecurity, including prostitution.

IFAD's focus and mandate

IFAD's interventions in poor rural areas are not geared in a direct way towards children. IFAD does not implement activities for children *per se*, but children are considered in the context of families and households. Since the Fund concentrates amongst others on enhancing the capacity to earn an income, the target group usually includes adults and at most, youth. Through IFAD supported programmes, many children are positively affected, albeit indirectly, since the improvement of rural livelihoods and community development has an impact on the well-being of children.

These projects target the poor and the poorest in the rural areas, which comprise communities living in remote rural areas with limited access, ethnic minorities and nomadic people. Projects intervene in areas affected by draught and desertification, environmentally fragile zones and in post-conflict situations. The acute poverty in most of its targeted areas represents specific challenges with regard to the status of children and their rights. The livelihoods of poor farmers or pastoralists, for instance, depend on child labour, at least seasonally and schooling is often not available or accessible for all children.

Since child labour is an indicator of poverty, it is included in IFAD's analytical work. Malnutrition as an indicator of poverty is captured through measuring child malnutrition. In its newly developed Results and Impact Management System (RIMS), IFAD uses percentage reduction in the prevalence of child malnutrition as an anchor indicator for measuring impact of the projects and programmes it finances. Studies show that there is an important correlation between income levels and child malnutrition, i.e. households with income below the poverty line usually have acute problems of malnutrition. Nutrition is also a function of food, health and caring practices. Project activities that significantly improve food security reduce the burden of disease or empower women, achieve reduced levels of chronic malnutrition. RIMS uses the nutrition status of children as an anchor indicator of poverty since they are the most vulnerable members of a community, and chronic malnutrition among under-fives is recognized as a powerful measure of sustained deprivation.

³ FAO (2006) *Current Situation and Needs of Rural Youth* (www.fao.org/docrep/x5636e/x5636e01.htm)

⁴ GTZ (2005) *Children and Youth: partners for development* (Eschborn, GTZ)

⁵ FAO (2006), *Current Situation and Needs of Rural Youth* (www.fao.org/docrep/x5636e/x5636e01.htm)

Economic Empowerment

The biggest impact on reducing vulnerabilities and child labour comes from economic empowerment, in particular an increase in the income of women. Frequently, improvements in income as a result of IFAD interventions have an indirect effect on whether children, in particular girls, may attend school instead of being required for farm and household labour and contributing to the economic survival of the family. The projects that IFAD supports strengthen the food security and quality of life of targeted groups by introducing more efficient agricultural and irrigation practices, diversifying rural income opportunities and institutional capacity building of local service providers. The added income that families reap is often invested in the schooling of their children. Since education of girls is considered less a priority than education of boys, additional income has a direct impact on girl's schooling, provided that schools exist and are accessible.

For example, increases in agricultural productivity or diversification of income through off-farm activities often translate into greater availability of funds to send more children to school. School fees, educational equipment and the labour lost are burdens that many economically and otherwise deprived families cannot shoulder. In many societies, the women in a household pay for costs related to the education of children. Once women have gained additional income, their first goal is to pay for school uniforms, books and fees. Women may utilize the added income obtained from Community Development Fund activities, such as vegetable gardening, labour sharing or trading, to provide more of their children the opportunity of formal education.

The Rural Finance and Community Initiatives Project in the Gambia established a Farmer Partnership Fund offering greater access to credit and loans, which boosted local investments in income generating activities⁶. Women kafo members took out loans to build new vegetable gardens. The vast majority reported using the new income reaped out of the sale of produce to pay for school fees and teaching materials. Similarly, in Senegal, the Rural Enterprise Promotion project, which strengthened the adding of value to agricultural produce allowed parents to invest their added income in to the education of their children.⁷

Literacy, numeracy and health awareness programmes for adults can translate into more educated and capable parents, with positive implications for other family members. A high proportion of IFAD-supported projects include adult literacy, specifically directed at women. Programmes targeting women again bring the highest returns since studies have shown that the education of the mother has a direct impact and trickle down effect on the schooling of children, in particular of girls.

⁶ IFAD (2005), Rural Finance and Community Initiatives Project, Interim Evaluation (IFAD, Rome)

⁷ IFAD (2004), Projet de Promotion des Micro-entreprises Rurales Phase I (IFAD, Rome)

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.⁸

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.⁹

⁸ IFAD (2001), Andhra Pradesh Tribal Development Project, Evaluation Report (IFAD, Rome)

⁹ Experience Sharing from the Tafilalet and Dades Rural Development Project in Morocco: Strengthening Women's Role in Agricultural Production (http://www.ifad.org/nena/studies/morocco/ma_356.htm). April 2002.

Vocational and skills training

Many children in rural areas, in particular girls, do not attend primary school, drop out early and have limited access to secondary education. Vocational and skills training is all the more important for young people to provide a basis for improved income once they reach adulthood. In addition, skills training can prevent the further marginalization of vulnerable adolescent girls and boys who are at risk of becoming victim of the worst forms of child labour, including slavery, trafficking and forced recruitment into armed forces. HIV/AIDS orphans are one identified group of vulnerable children and youth in the rural areas and require specific attention.

A joint IFAD/ BSF project in Uganda, implemented mainly by the Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans (UWESO) responded to the national HIV/AIDS crisis and the needs of the high number of ensuing orphans. Amongst others, cluster-based training sessions for caregivers of orphans were organized, on topics such as business skills, improved agricultural practices, HIV/AIDS and health, children's rights and protection and nutrition. UWESO support consisted of 6-12 months of on-the-job training with an experienced artisan, supervision by branch staff and access to credit to start an own business.¹⁰

Conclusions and recommendations

To reduce vulnerabilities of children, in particular of the girl-child and increase protection, the following actions are recommended:

1. Development agencies should integrate concerns about children's rights, protection of the girl child from gender specific discrimination, child labour and other forms of gender specific exploitation of children into the design and implementation of projects and programmes;
2. The incidence of child labour, including in its worst forms, and low school attendance by boys and girls is an indicators of poverty and factor of risk and should be included in all poverty analysis and vulnerability assessments;
3. Households that are at risk of involving children in hazardous work (including slavery, bonded labour, trafficking) should be singled out as a special target, in line with what has been done for households and children affected by HIV/AIDS or foster-families of HIV/AIDS orphans;
4. Greater attention should be given to the improvement of living conditions in particular health and education of girls and boys; school enrolment and attendance of boys and girls should be included in monitoring systems for programme performance and impact assessment of development interventions;
5. Given the importance of skills training and creation of employment on and off farm for adolescents and young people, more collaboration is needed for establishing successful gender-specific training programmes;
6. Efforts should be undertaken to develop and disseminate pro-poor labour-saving technologies that can ease children's labour burden (for example in fetching water), with particular focus on the girl-child.

¹⁰ UWESO (2005) Uganda Women's Effort to Save Orphans 2000- 2005, Programme Completion Evaluation Report (Rome, IFAD/ BSF), iv & 22