

The United Nations International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)

IFAD inputs for the development of a possible international standard on the protection of the rights of older persons to “Social inclusion”

Contribution of older persons to sustainable development

IFAD focuses exclusively on smallholder farmers and rural development and through its operations targets the poorest, the poor and the vulnerable peoples and those who are most likely to have little access to assets and opportunities due to social exclusion and marginalization. It works with those who have the potential to take advantage of improved access to assets and opportunities for agricultural production and rural income-generating activities.

Rural age structures are shifting toward a preponderance of older groups and engendering a concentration of older adults in rural areas, due to young people leaving rural areas and a return of urban migrants who have aged. Agriculture continues to be the most important source of employment for older people in low- and middle-income countries. Data shows that agriculture is particularly important for older women¹. Given the concentration of older people in rural areas and the dominance of smallholder agriculture in the rural economy, it is reasonable to assume that a majority of older people who remain in the labour force are engaged in smallholder agriculture. Beyond active work, it is worth noting that older adults assume key functions in agricultural production, including as plot managers, decision-makers on land use, or landowners². Given that the majority of economically active older people in rural areas derive their primary income from agriculture, it is crucial to ensure that they have equal access to productive resources and support.

IFAD recognises that the economic and social needs of older people need to be taken into consideration. It is therefore committed to reducing poverty among elderly rural populations and creating opportunities through equitable, sustainable and inclusive development. As vulnerabilities intersect along the lines of age, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and disability among others, this informs the design and delivery of IFAD’s interventions to rural populations. For example, genderbased inequalities affect many older women living in rural areas exposing them to social and economic exclusion.

In Ethiopia, the **Pastoral Community Development Project (PCDP)** has focused on improving access to community demand-driven social and economic services for pastoralists and agro-pastoralists. Improvements were made in terms of growth and stability of incomes, in the health, nutrition and education status of the targeted populations and greater awareness and empowerment of decisionmaking in local development initiatives. During the project, the elderly members in the pastoral communities expressed their interest to attend schools, but were not able to do so because they were busy during daytime. Considering this, the project started evening classes for the elderly by powering classrooms through solar energy.

In India, the project **Mitigating Poverty in Western Rajasthan or MPower** targeted households through strengthened capacity, improved livelihoods, sustainable enterprises and natural resource management and increased access to credit and markets. The distribution and adoption of solar lights

¹ HelpAge International (2014). The ageing of rural populations: evidence on older farmers in low and middle-income countries.

² U.S. Census Bureau (2020). International Population Reports, Africa Aging: 2020

in the project communities contributed to visibility or improved lighting and can prevent eye related health issues for older community members.

In Kenya, the **Upper Tana Nairobi Water Fund Project** works with public and private sector partners to establish a Water Fund as a sustainable financing mechanism to support sustainable land management and integrated natural resource management approaches in the Upper Tana catchment. The project has ensured that women, elderly and households headed by persons with disabilities have the privilege to access subsidies on dam liners, drip kits and biogas.

Economic security

In sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and Latin America, agriculture continues to be the most important source of livelihood for the vast majority of economically active older people, and particularly so for older women. However, a simplistic view that labels older farmers as unproductive and unable to adopt new technologies, with negative consequences for future food security, is unhelpful both for capturing the opportunities and addressing the challenges that this trend presents. Given the important role of agriculture for older people's livelihoods, it is crucial that they have equal access to productive resources and training on innovative technologies. Yet older farmers are often excluded from such support, based on unfounded perceptions of them not being able to learn new skills. In addition, the economic role and activity of older people should be viewed in the social context of the household to which they belong, as their livelihood strategies will depend on the composition of the household³.

IFAD interventions are aimed at enhancing the productivity, profitability, resilience, and diversification of poor rural people's economic activities. IFAD will use a variety of tools to ensure that the largest possible number of poor rural people benefit from emerging economic opportunities, and that those who cannot do so immediately are proactively supported in developing the skills and assets to do so in the near future. Non-discrimination, including that based on age is a key principle of IFAD's Social, Environmental and Climate Assessment Procedures. IFAD is committed to inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for elderly people living in rural areas. It seeks to promote the creation of sustainable employment and improved livelihood opportunities for them.

IFAD is one of the leading development agencies innovating with household methodologies. These participatory approaches help to understand what each member in the household (including elderly people) want to be, what they want to do, and how they can achieve their goals using a joint vision and practical strategy. Participants using these methodologies report an increase in agricultural productivity through participatory farm decision-making and shared workloads, and better engagement in value chains by all household members, both male and female as young and old.

Relevant strategic updates adopted by IFAD

In 2023, IFAD updated its [targeting policy](#) anchoring the definition of IFAD's target group at the intersection of multiple drivers of poverty – including age – and focusing not just on the poor but also on those who are at risk of becoming poor, to address underlying drivers of poverty in rural areas. Moreover, the policy also frames targeting within an understanding of value for money by recognizing the high cost of targeting while at the same time building a strong economic case for targeting the poorest and most marginalized. To this end, IFAD adopts a value for money approach in terms of "4Es":

³ HelpAge International (2014). The ageing of rural populations: evidence on older farmers in low and middleincome countries.

economy, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity. Hence, considerations of economy, efficiency and effectiveness must be balanced against equity.

In 2022, IFAD also adopted a strategy on [disability inclusion](#) within which IFAD recognizes that the type and severity of disabilities fall on a large spectrum, as does each individual's combination of skills and education level. Disability also intersects with other forms of exclusion, such as class, gender, age and ethnicity. Children, older people, women, indigenous people, refugees and displaced persons, minorities and people from different race and class may all experience disability differently. Some may suffer multiple disadvantages as a result of their wider social or economic status. This results in varying degrees of social and economic exclusion. It is difficult, and inadvisable, to generalize about persons with disabilities.