



Shumaila Arif (fourth from right) with farmers in the Pakpattan district of Pakistan. Ms Arif made outreach to women dairy farmers a priority as she organised and ran training workshops for field staff that provided innovated extension services to dairy farmers as part of an ACIAR project.

## EMPOWERING WOMEN, CHANGING LIVES

International Women's Day is a global celebration of the economic, political and social achievements of women past, present and future. In this issue of *Partners* magazine we celebrate the key role women play in the agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries, and we recognise the importance of economically empowering women and girls around the world so they may become leaders, influencers and agents of change.

Globally, women comprise on average 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, and more than 50% in parts of Asia and Africa. They are, however, constrained in various ways—women experience lower access to resources, lack of voice in decision-making processes, including in agricultural research, and time poverty caused by working at agricultural and household tasks. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, an increase in women's productive resources to the same level as men's could increase yields by 20–30%. This effort could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4%, which in turn could reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12–17%.

In the past, strategies targeting women and girls globally focused on their disadvantage. Now the preference is to focus more on their potential and their central place in the agriculture sector. We all know women can be powerful agents of change—this is an important consideration when R&D programs are conceived, structured and delivered.

ACIAR's policy views gender equity as central to its activities. ACIAR assesses gender equity issues during project design, implementation and impact assessment to bring sustained change to women and men by influencing policies and laws, increasing access to services and changing attitudes and beliefs about women's and men's roles in our agricultural research projects.

By working to better understand access to—and decision-making power over—productive resources such as land, livestock, agricultural equipment, extension knowledge and credit, ACIAR is better able to guide research on agricultural interventions so that benefits are accessible to women, men, girls and boys.

The objectives of ACIAR's current gender approach include:

- developing new technologies and innovations that are appropriate and responsive to the needs of both men and women, as well as youth and marginalised groups
- analysing the role of gender dynamics in the core areas of our research
- involving men, women and youth in our research processes
- tracking the effects of our interventions on men, women and youth and on household and community gender relations.

This issue of *Partners* magazine highlights some of ACIAR's projects that are implementing this strategy. The stories range far and wide. Included is an agriculture systems management project that is working to build women farmers' learning and

address gender equity issues in remote regions of Papua New Guinea (PNG) through adult education programs. These programs are helping women break down gender barriers and acquire new skills to manage farm productivity and marketing.

In Pakistan's dairy sector, women and children proved instrumental in the adoption of productivity-improving know-how, both as farmers and extension officers.

A horticulture project is helping women in Lao PDR villages produce and jointly market a surplus of organic vegetables, thereby increasing family income while improving consumer health and environmental sustainability. Finally, an inland aquaculture research program in PNG is creating profound social impacts on the lives of women and children in rural communities through vocational training in fish farming.

ACIAR is committed to continuing to develop processes to ensure that at least 80% of all investments, regardless of their objectives, effectively address gender issues in their implementation. Women are indispensable to the agriculture sector and it is vital that they continue to be central to every new ACIAR research for development strategy. ■

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