

# Smallholder farmers in Africa, Asia to benefit from funding boost

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Women cultivate more than half the food that is grown in sub-Saharan Africa, but generally receive less than 10% of the financial credit awarded to smallholder farmers, according to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

A fund of one billion euros distributed by the European Union Food Facility to nearly 30 of the world's poorest nations, however, will grant women involved in small-scale agriculture essential resources to boost their food production, while ensuring long-term sustainable strategies for continued growth and success.

The projects will benefit men, women, and children, but the tenuous nature of women's land ownership lends them focus and priority in some of the initiatives.

"We have refocused strongly on food security, and by doing that we have to talk about the women who are producing the crops...the ones who manage household food security," said Annina Lubbock of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, one of the United Nations organisations that has been granted part of the donation. "We are talking about creating frameworks to recognise the role of small-holder agriculture, where women play an enormous role, as compared to commercial farms. This is key."

Women generate up to 80% of "basic foodstuffs" in the Caribbean, according to IFAD, and are also behind approximately 50% of food farming in Asia.

Their production rate will now likely increase and stabilise, given this heavy onset of funding, which will be distributed through the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), and IFAD. The organisations say they will pump their share of the donations into existing agricultural projects, designed to work toward Millennium Development Goal one of halving poverty and hunger by 2015.

This fund is the single largest contribution that FAO, which has been granted around 200 million euros, has ever received, according to Suzanne Raswant, the organisation's senior planning officer in the emergency operations and rehabilitation division.

The FAO will utilise its money in 25 countries in Asia, Latin America, and Africa, namely for "programs that support the seed production and distribution system," Raswant told MediaGlobal. "There are a lot of projects that could be easily upgraded, developed further so the impact could be greater... Basically it's a lot of training, focused on sustainable impact."

A substantial allocation of funding cannot alone establish stable food production in countries whose gross domestic products rely heavily on agriculture, says Annina Lubbock, IFAD's senior technical advisor for gender and household food security. The nature of the money's implementation is key, as Lubbock stressed the necessity of targeted, environmentally friendly programs for the world's approximately 500 million smallholder farmers.

This group, which accounts for one third of humanity, generally lives on less than US\$2 a day, yielding low productivity rates. Yet according to IFAD, "those farmers can easily double or triple their yields to three or more tons per hectare, if they have access to the seeds, fertilisers, and irrigation and financing to buy them."

It is hoped that these farmers will benefit from guidance on how to maximise their limited resources and means and translate them into sustainable initiatives.

"Many of the things that are straining farmers and preventing them from farming more productively don't have to do with agriculture itself," Lubbock explained to MediaGlobal. "It's not a matter of giving more fertilisers [and] seeds, but it may be a matter of building their skills and strengthening infrastructure."

She continued, "There will be, as there has always been, a heavy focus on sustainable practices, low input agriculture, [and] organic farming, because that is the only thing they can manage."

In Mozambique, for example, the money will yield a rural finance program for reaching poor rural areas and a "scaled-up fisheries program," Lubbock said. In the Philippines, it will go toward building roads, establishing "the rural infrastructure they need in order to enable agricultural production."

Bangladesh, one of WFP's nine targeted countries, will receive 20 million euros for irrigation projects and training in entrepreneurship and income-generating projects, according to Emilia Casella, a WFP public information officer.

A 5.4 million euro boost will rehabilitate Sierra Leone's inland valley swamps and smallholder plantations and market-routed roads.

Aside from the WFP, IFAD, and FAO, governments and non-governmental organisations will also allocate portions of the European Union Food Facility Fund's bulk donation.

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