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UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AGENCY  
AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
WASHINGTON D C 20523

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UN DECADE FOR WOMEN CONFERENCE  
Forward Looking Strategies  
Food and Agriculture  
Position Paper

This Position Paper submitted by the Agency for International Development (AID) is reflective of international sectoral policies and is not to be confused with domestic sectoral policies.

PROBLEM:

The Conference document recognizes the importance of women's contribution to food security and agricultural production, and recommends various measures to ensure that women benefit from agricultural development programs. This is an opportunity for the US to present its position and to cite illustrative aspects of the AID program

RELATIVE IMPORTANCE TO THE UNITED STATES:

This issue is of major importance to the United States because one of AID's development objectives is to help developing countries meet their food needs. Because women farmers grow a substantial proportion of the world's food, development programs must help women agriculturalists increase their productivity. The increasing recognition of the role of women in food production, distribution and nutrition, must be fully reflected in relevant policies.

UNITED STATES POSITION:

The US endorses the document's call for increased attention in development programs to the impact, both beneficial and adverse, on women producers. The US recognizes the contribution of women to agricultural productivity and is committed to helping women increase their efficiency as producers in their traditional roles in the rural economy. At the same time, attention should be given to ensuring that new, productive opportunities are open to women as well as men.

BACKGROUND:

In large parts of the developing world, much of the food and fiber is produced, processed, and marketed by women. Development efforts should be directed toward increasing the efficiency of, and returns to, women's efforts. This includes: training at all levels to enhance the participation of rural women in food production and food security; increasing access to, and participation in, agricultural services; and paying particular attention to technologies which can save time and energy at the household level. These efforts contribute to improving the standard of living in rural communities as well as maintaining or improving women's economic status as individuals.

BUDGETARY IMPLICATIONS:

No need for additional budget. Proposed action programs will be incorporated into existing activities.

STATEMENT:

Large numbers of women are active in agriculture as farmers in their own right--in some parts of Africa, more than 40 percent of the farms are managed by women; in areas of Latin America, over 20 percent of rural women are farmers; and some regions of the Caribbean, women represent 44 percent of the farmers.

AID's agricultural and rural development programs recognize women to be an integral part of, and often the principal actors in, increasing rural productivity. Projects should be designed to enable rural women to have the same access to economic opportunities as men. This includes a role for women in decision-making commensurate with their participation in on-farm and off-farm enterprises.

AID's preferred approach is to build into its project design procedure, explicit and specific consideration of the impact that a project is likely to have on women. This integrated approach allows adverse impacts to be addressed in the design stage. It emphasizes equality of opportunity in rural development for both women and men, but also acknowledges the existence of gender-specific economic roles.

As important producers, processors and marketers of food crops and livestock, women benefit directly from AID agricultural research projects designed to increase crop and animal productivity,

and to reduce post-harvest losses. AID's support of research on high-valued cash crops has the potential of benefitting women, through increased income and employment opportunities. However, research is needed on the possible trade-offs between increased cash crop production and reduced nutritional levels. Research to increase yields on marginal lands may have particular significance for women, whose farms may disproportionately occupy poorer lands. Improved fisheries management and more efficient aquaculture mean sustainable income increases for women, who are often the main processors and marketers of fish.

As fuelwood supplies grow scarcer, the task of gathering sufficient fuelwood for household needs consumes an ever greater number of hours each day -- time usually expended by women and children. AID's projects on fast-growing fuelwood trees seek to help developing countries replenish their fuelwood supplies and halt soil erosion. As a secondary benefit, these efforts will also save incalculable hours of human energy per household.

Farming systems research projects can make a significant contribution to the collection and analysis of gender-specific data. Particularly important is the need to look at the gender implications of the introduction of new technologies. Intra-household resource allocation and decision-making are receiving attention in a number of AID projects. A better understanding of the allocation of resources and responsibilities is essential to predict the consequences of policy decisions and the impact of development projects.

All of AID's projects which support agricultural research and training encourage the participation of qualified LDC women. AID recognizes that skills training for the workforce is essential for ensuring its effectiveness. AID supports in-country and external participant training to prepare women for such responsibilities as scientists, extension agents, and community and government leaders in crop and livestock research projects.

In addition to removing legal and institutional restrictions to increase women's access to credit and income-generation activities, it is necessary to identify and respond to constraints that women face. Women often have less access to formal credit systems because of their lack of collateral. AID is attempting to incorporate innovative features into credit projects (both formal and informal) to ensure greater access by women.

AID's projects seek to strengthen women's roles in both traditional and non-traditional employment areas. Women should be supported not only in traditional craft and cottage industries, but also should have opportunity in, and access to, entrepreneurial roles in the modern industrial sector.

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