

USAID

Agency for International Development
Washington, D.C.

Highlights

Vol. 7, No. 3

Winter 1990

Agency Emphasizes Women in Development

In 1981, Elizabeth Ntuchu started a small business in Cameroon to make knitwear and household items such as bed covers. At first, she worked alone in a stall at an outdoor market. Over the years, she trained numerous employees, expanded her list of clients and moved to new, modern quarters. Today, her company, The Rolling Enterprise, employs 22.

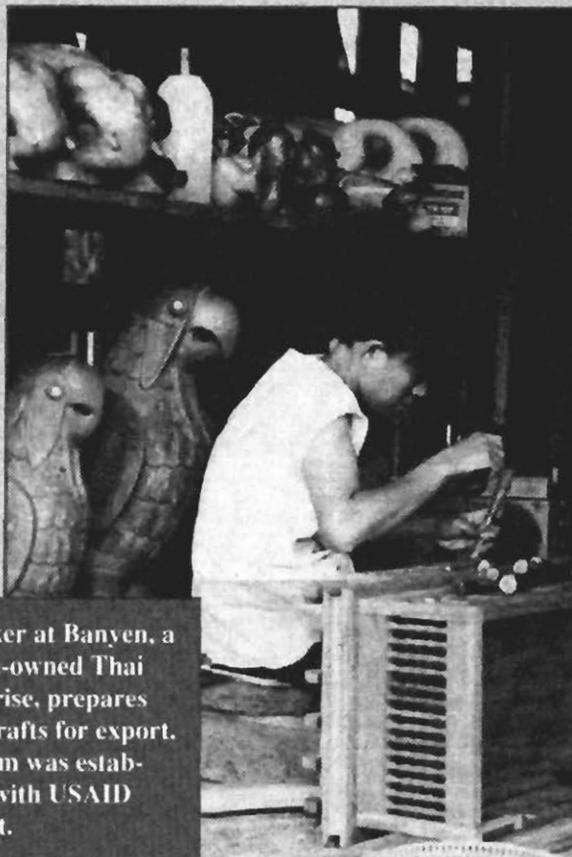
"I had no money," says Ntuchu of her start-up. "My credit union loaned me the money to run the business. That assistance was crucial." The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has helped women in Cameroon such as Ntuchu get their start in business by assisting the growth of the credit union movement in the country since 1975.

Boonlieng Lattisoongnein is a member of the committee responsible for the management of a feed mill in Thailand's Saraburi Province. The mill was set up as part of a USAID-supported project to involve women in agriculture. As a result, Lattisoongnein was able to more than double her number of cows, buy new milking equipment and upgrade pasture land. Today, she is saving more money than she used to earn in a year and using some of her savings to send her fourth child, a girl, to the university. "My daughter is majoring in business so that she can take over my work," she says.

The contribution of women like Elizabeth Ntuchu and Boonlieng Lattisoongnein both to the welfare of families and the wealth of nations is increasingly recognized.

Women are critical to economic development. They are the sole breadwinners of one out of every three households in the developing world. They are farmers—producers of more than half of the world's food.

A worker at Banyen, a woman-owned Thai enterprise, prepares handicrafts for export. The firm was established with USAID support.



They are microentrepreneurs. And they play the primary role in family health, nutrition and education. Yet women have only limited control over income and limited access to credit, land, education and training. They receive only one percent of the world's income and own less than one percent of the world's property.

"We strongly support greater efforts to integrate women into the development process," President Bush told participants at the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. "The key to economic growth is setting individuals free—free to take risks, free to make choices, free to use their initiative and their abilities in the marketplace."

USAID is committed to giving women a better chance to use their initiative and ability to participate fully in their countries' development.

"Our goal is to enhance the role of women in sustainable national economic development and social progress," says USAID Administrator Ronald W. Roskens. "To do this, we are working to integrate women into the overall USAID program."

USAID was among the first donor agencies to recognize the central role of women in economic and social development. The Agency's Office of Women in Development (WID) works to develop the institutional processes to ensure that USAID projects and policies take into account the role of women.

"We simply can't ignore half of the world's population," says WID Office Director Kay Davies. "We recognize the contribution that women make and are working to offer them the tools to do it better."

In a time of increasing fiscal restraint, foreign aid dollars have to be

invested in ways that guarantee results. Investing in women has a particularly high rate of return.

For one thing, women contribute to family welfare. Their income is used to provide food and schooling for their children. Edite Genegani, for example, is a Filipino housewife who works packaging mushrooms in a rural area outside Manila. Working part-time, she earns 200 pesos (\$10) a week, about two-thirds of her husband's full-time salary. "I am saving my money for the education of my children," she says. "The only wealth we poor people can give our children is education."

Growth in women's income leads directly to improvements in family health and education while fertility and infant mortality are reduced. This, in the long run, can mean less dependence on foreign aid dollars.

Women are also good credit risks. They pay back loans. More than 80 percent of 9,000 loans made to rural women in Bangladesh through a USAID-supported small business development project were paid back on time and in full.

Women use credit effectively for social and economic progress. They create jobs. In one USAID-supported textile project in Honduras, women microentrepreneurs generated twice as many jobs as their male counterparts. Women's businesses also grew faster in sales, profits, savings, salaries and fixed assets.

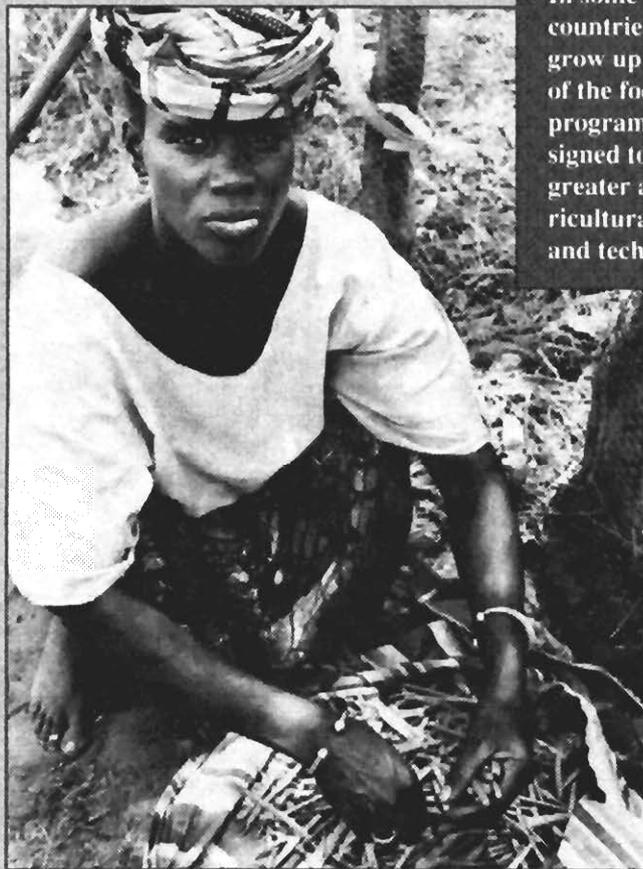
"Employment of women increases the purchasing power of households," says Davies. "Greater purchasing power in developing countries improves living standards and can help build markets for U.S. consumer products and commodities.

"Women in the developing world do not want welfare," she adds. "They want the tools to be creative and productive individuals. They want business skills and training. They want the opportunity to enrich their family's lives and their own. This is what we at USAID help provide."

"We need to pay increasing attention to women if our foreign aid program is going to be as effective as it can be," says Reginald Brown, USAID assistant administrator for program and policy coordination. "Women contribute vital human resources to development, while development programs, if they are to succeed, must benefit the whole society."

Efforts are now under way to ensure that women's roles are taken into consideration in the design of all Agency projects. Emphasis is placed on sectors such as agriculture, private enterprise, education, and environment and natural resources, where gender consideration can be a significant factor in program success.

"We are building a solid data base of qualitative and quantitative gender-related information," explains Davies. USAID is working with the U.S. Bureau of the Census, for



In some African countries, women grow up to 80 percent of the food. Agency programs are designed to give women greater access to agricultural resources and technologies.

example, to update demographic data on women in some 120 countries. Labor force data currently is being updated on gender differences in labor trends in developing countries.

Agriculture

Women comprise more than 40 percent of the world's agricultural workers—a number that is growing as more men in developing countries migrate to cities and towns to seek employment, leaving women behind to work the land.

Women are involved in every type of agricultural activity, putting in long hours as producers, distributors, processors, storers and marketers of food. More than half of the world's food is produced by women. And, in many parts of the world, raising poultry and looking after livestock are tasks often left exclusively to women.

"Over the long run, policy change is one of the most effective ways to strengthen the role of women in agriculture," says Philip Boyle, a technical adviser in the WID Office.

Despite their central role in agriculture, women do not have the same access as men to training, extension services, technology, credit and ownership of land. Various cultural, traditional, legal and policy barriers exist to deny them the same flexibility and productivity enjoyed by male farmers. As a result, women's agricultural productivity is lower than it should be—a fact reflected in the low national agricultural output in many developing countries.

"We need to make sure that the contribution and role of women are integrated into agricultural projects in developing countries," says Rosalie Huisinga Norem, technical adviser for natural resources and the environment in USAID's WID Office.

Providing women with technical knowledge is an important part of this process. A USAID grant, for example, has helped more women enroll at the Agricultural College in Botswana, a country where women participate in more than 50 percent of all crop activities.

Through a cooperative agreement with Tuskegee University, assistance also is provided to Tanzania's Sokoine University to strengthen teaching and research and to integrate into the curriculum courses on women in agriculture.

In Honduras, USAID's Land Use and Productivity Enhancement Project focuses on teaching hillside-farming women how to increase their grain production. Small plots of land are being cultivated with commercial crops such as sesame seeds, which can double family income and help decrease malnutrition levels. In a one-year period, female-headed households, which comprised 16 percent of the participating rural family beneficiaries in the project, saw a 30-percent increase in their grain production.

The Private Sector

USAID projects also are helping women in the private sector. Banyen Aksomsri used to bicycle regularly into Chiang Mai from the Thai-Burmese border to sell handicrafts made in the hills. Now, with her two daughters, she runs Banyen, a small firm she established with support from USAID's Private Sector Revolving Fund. Her company now produces woodcraft for U.S. stores such as Bloomingdale's in New York.

"To get economies running in the Third World, we need to create environments that support women like Banyen Aksomsri," says Ron Grosz, human resource development specialist in USAID's WID Office. "Women dominate the ownership of microenterprises in the developing world. Projects that involve women have been among our most successful."

USAID's Small Enterprise Assistance Project is helping women become entrepreneurs in many parts of the developing world. In the Caribbean, for example, the project enabled a Barbados-based non-governmental organization to start a loan fund to support women-owned businesses. The fund is now doubling each year and has generated employment.

"Women do as well or better than men in loan performance; women also respond better to market initiatives," notes Grosz.

When a major new road opened in southern Cameroon, for example, access to markets improved for the village of Bilik Bindik. Women farmers, already struggling with a heavy work load, were more willing than men to grow additional crops to take advantage of new marketing opportunities. They added an extra 4.6 hours to their 60-hour workweek. Men, by contrast, added an extra hour to their average 32-hour workweek.

USAID participant training programs such as the Entrepreneurs International Program launched in 1986 are benefiting women entrepreneurs. Kenyan Naomi Muniu, managing director of Sherie Kay Ltd.—a firm that markets shoulder bags, briefcases and banana-fiber articles produced by local artisans—was able to develop new approaches to promoting her wares by learning about the U.S. import and marketing system. She generated \$50,000 worth of purchases for her goods in the United States and hired a California-based tent company to provide a tent roof for a Kenyan market.

The participation of women in the labor force has increased not only in microenterprises, but also in the industrial and service sectors.

"Women tend to be found in very low-skill jobs, with little room for advancement, training or salary increase," says Boyle. "Not only are women in the lowest paying jobs, but their wages also have fallen faster in recent years than those for men."

"We need to tap into women's productive potential," adds Grosz. This involves helping female entrepreneurs make the transition

out of low-return, low-potential enterprises into those with greater potential for generating income and contributing to national growth.

The Environment

For women in the developing world, a healthy environment is the foundation for survival. The ability of women to produce food, to generate income and to provide fuel and shelter for their families is closely linked to the well-being of the Earth's natural resources.

"As farmers and providers of household water and fuelwood supplies, women have a direct stake in the conservation and sustainable management of natural resources," says Norem.

Deforestation means women have to spend more hours collecting wood for fuel. As less wood is available, treks to forage for fuel become longer and more time-consuming. Women often must walk more than five miles and spend five-to-eight hours every four-to-seven days collecting wood for fuel. This task, along with fetching water, can consume 400-500 calories a day. In many parts of the developing world, bringing water from far away can consume up to six hours a day.

When such time constraints are eased, women often turn to economically productive activities. In Thailand, for example, a project that provided potable water to villages in the northeastern part of the country enabled women to channel time spent hauling water into productive activities such as weaving and gardening. This generated income and raised the household subsistence level.

"Women are particularly effective advocates for the protection of natural resources. They are in constant contact with the natural resource base," says Norem. "Integrating women into projects aimed at sustainable natural resource management is not only common sense, it can make such projects more effective."

A series of workshops focused on women and natural resources has been developed through collaborative efforts of USAID's Office of Women in Development and the Forestry Support Project. As a result, consortia of non-governmental organizations have been established in four African countries to

Facts About Women in the Developing World

- Women comprise an estimated 32 percent of the measured labor force in developing countries, the majority in microenterprise activities.
- Roughly one-third of all households in the developing world are headed by women. In the cities of Latin America and the rural areas of some African countries, the percentage is closer to one-half. Households headed by women are poorer than those headed by men.
- Poor women seldom stop working. They work longer hours than men. In parts of East Africa, women work up to 16 hours a day doing household chores, preparing food and growing 60-80 percent of the family's food, in addition to caring for children, the elderly or the ill and disabled.
- If women's unpaid work in the household were given economic value, it would add an estimated one-third—or four trillion dollars—to the world's annual economic product.
- Discrimination against girls is widespread. Eight out of nine cultures that express a preference want more sons than daughters. Researchers found that in Bangladesh, for example, boys under 5 years old were given 16 percent more food than girls that age and that girls were more likely to be malnourished in times of famine. In India, a study showed that boys are given more fatty and milky foods than girls. As a result, girls are four times more likely than boys to be suffering from acute malnutrition, but more than 40 times less likely to be taken to a hospital.

develop guidelines and review proposals for USAID-funded projects. The Mali consortium recently held a workshop on women in agroforestry. Similar plans are under way in Madagascar. Workshops also are planned for Latin America.

Education

"When women and girls receive an education, benefits are multiplied many times over," says WID Deputy Director Chloe O'Gara.

The better educated the mother, the less likely the child is to die in infancy. Studies from developing countries show that four-to-six years of education is associated with a 20-percent drop in infant deaths. The children of better educated mothers are better nourished, healthier and more likely to succeed in school. An educated woman is more productive at home and in the workplace and better positioned to get further education.

Educated women are more receptive to family planning and tend to have later marriages and fewer children. A study of four Latin American countries discovered that education was responsible for 40-60 percent of the last decade's fertility decline.

Education also empowers women to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens. But female education is at a lower level than that for males in most developing nations. In 14 of the developing countries where literacy data is available, only one in five adult females can read. And in some of the poorest countries only 5 percent of women are literate. Only one out of two women in Asia is literate and only one out of three in sub-Saharan Africa.

"Despite the benefits of an education, there are real constraints to access to schools for women and girls," says O'Gara.

Women head nearly one-half of the households in Latin American cities.



There are economic reasons why. Education costs money. Sending daughters to school means loss of work by daughters at home or in the marketplace. And there are cultural factors—education is not always an accepted social norm for females.

USAID education projects emphasize the need to reduce the still-lagging gender gap in education and literacy. These projects serve as a springboard into the job market for women. In Egypt, a vocational training project creates jobs in non-traditional areas of employment for women such as welding and radio and television repair. In 1987, 75 women graduated from the program, and more than 45 percent are now employed.

Dialogue with national leaders in developing countries helps focus attention on the need to increase

educational opportunities for girls. In Guatemala, for example, USAID will help convene a national conference for public- and private-sector policy-makers. The focus will be on the growing body of evidence worldwide on the link between primary education for girls and a country's social and economic development.

"Women are a major resource in the economic and social well-being of their countries," says Davies. "Efforts to integrate women more fully into the development process are indispensable if development programs are to achieve their intended goals and objectives."

USAID, in addressing the gender issue and in assuring that women in developing countries benefit fully from and are participants in the U.S. foreign aid program, is helping build a foundation for sustainable development.

**U.S. Agency for International Development
Office of External Affairs
Washington, D.C. 20523-0056**

Third-Class Bulk Rt
Postage and Fees Paid
USAID
Permit No. G-107

Penalty for Private Use \$300
Official Business

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER