



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION

PRESS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release
August 12, 2008**

For more information, please contact:

IFPRI: Vaishali Dassani; v.dassani@cgiar.org; + 91 9810020635

AKF: Ruchira Gujral; ruchira.gujral@akdn.org; + 91 9810327202

Additional materials available here:

<http://www.ifpri.org/events/conferences/2008/20080812.asp>

South Asian Women Farmers Reap Few Benefits, Despite their Significant Contributions to Agriculture

Conference Highlights Challenges, Strategies facing Women in Agriculture in Region

New Delhi—While women comprise nearly 40 percent of South Asia’s agricultural workforce, their low social status limits them from fully reaping the benefits of their efforts.

Overcoming this challenge is the focus of the two-day conference, “Women in Agriculture in South Asia,” starting here today. More than 120 development practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and private sector representatives will discuss the constraints facing South Asian women involved in agriculture and identify strategies to enhance their status and benefits.

The conference is co-organized by the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and supported by the European Commission.

South Asian women involved in agriculture often face limited access to and control of resources such as land, water, credit, and training and extension services, all of which undermine their ability to earn income, provide food, and ensure adequate nutrition for themselves and their children.

- more -

“Development policies have paid too little attention to how gender roles affect agricultural productivity and rural economic growth,” said Joachim von Braun, IFPRI Director General. “Without a specific focus on gender, the policies and programs on technology and market access, and for rural services, are prone to reinforce, and even exacerbate, social and economic inequalities between women and men.”

The conference will focus on three areas affecting South Asian women involved in agriculture: (1) access to productive resources and services; (2) access to markets and market opportunities; and (3) access to food and the corresponding impact on nutrition.

While South Asian women primarily provide the labor necessary for agricultural work and related activities, they have little voice when it comes to making decisions over the use and management of assets. Since most agriculture development programs and policies are linked to ownership, women are generally denied access to assets since they often do not own land.

Women involved in agriculture in South Asia also face obstacles in accessing markets and lack appropriate knowledge and information about them. One of the constraints women face is cultural, particularly social norms, which values female seclusion and prevents them from marketing their products directly.

“This conference will help identify strategies to improve women’s access to markets and business development services as well as ways to connect women to emerging opportunities through agricultural diversification,” said Tinni Sawhney, Senior Programme Officer-Rural Development, Aga Khan Foundation India.

Additionally, the low status of women in the region can undermine their ability to provide food, generate income and ensure adequate nutrition for themselves and their children. As primary caretakers of children, women are generally responsible for their health and nutrition.

“Despite South Asia’s strong economic record, it has some of the highest levels of undernutrition in the world,” said Purnima Menon, IFPRI Research Fellow. “A key reason for this is the weak status of women in the region.”

Studies have shown that women with higher status have better nutrition, are better cared for and provide higher quality care for their children.

“If South Asian women involved in agriculture are to succeed, future efforts must focus on increasing their empowerment and their control of critical resources,” said Christopher Gibbs, CEO, Aga Khan Foundation India.

###

The Aga Khan Foundation, an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network, is a non-denominational, international development agency established in 1967 by His Highness the Aga Khan in Geneva, Switzerland, with a mission to develop and promote creative solutions to problems that impede social development by forming intellectual and financial partnerships with organisations sharing its vision and objectives. The Foundation seeks sustainable solutions to long-term problems of poverty through an integrated, community based, participatory approach that reinforces civil society and respects local culture. Today in India, programmes of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) span the states of Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir and address a broad spectrum of development issues in the social, economic, and cultural spheres. www.akdn.org

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) seeks sustainable solutions for ending hunger and poverty. IFPRI is one of 15 centers supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, an alliance of 64 governments, private foundations, and international and regional organizations. www.ifpri.org