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## Du grain à moudre Genre, développement rural et alimentation

Graduate Institute Publications

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# Preface

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DOI: 10.4000/books.iheid.6743  
Publisher: Graduate Institute Publications  
Place of publication: Genève  
Year of publication: 2011  
Published on OpenEdition Books: April 16, 2017  
Series: Genre et développement. Rencontres  
Electronic EAN: 9782940503834



<http://books.openedition.org>

### Electronic reference

PRÜGL, Elisabeth. *Preface In: Du grain à moudre: Genre, développement rural et alimentation* [online].  
Genève: Graduate Institute Publications, 2011 (generated 06 octobre 2023). Available on the Internet:  
<<http://books.openedition.org/iheid/6743>>. ISBN: 9782940503834. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.iheid.6743>.

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## **Preface**

**Elisabeth Prügl**

Agriculture is an important source of employment for women around the world. In most countries, women are as likely to work in agriculture as men; and in many countries, they exceed men in the agricultural labor force. According to the FAO (2011), women comprise 43 % of the agricultural labor force in developing countries, ranging from a low of 20 % in Latin America to 50 % in Eastern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

While farming is thus a central source of livelihood for women, less than 6 % of foreign aid for agriculture goes to them, as indicated by Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women at the 2011 World Economic Forum (UN Women 2011). Gender also receives virtually no attention in the intense negotiations on agriculture of the Doha Round. This is particularly astonishing, given that an understanding of the unequal impact of development on women originated with an analysis of women in agriculture – and Ester Boserup's seminal book in particular. As she demonstrated, applying gender-neutral policies to conditions saturated with gender yields highly unequal outcomes. Yet, when it comes to agriculture, international policies seem almost immune to feminist interventions.

While the continuing neglect of women in international agricultural policies is disturbing, women farmers have made considerable gains on key issues. Perhaps most important is an issue now often taken for granted, i.e. the recognition of women farmers as farmers. Characterisations of women farmers as housewives or as non-working still circulate amply, but they no longer go unchallenged. Women farmers around the world are now struggling to change laws so they

correspond to their status as economically active – from gaining equal access to land and credit, to equal treatment in cooperatives and farming associations.

Feminist researchers have long played a role in making visible to policy-makers the work of women farmers, their unequal treatment, and their potential for helping alleviate world hunger. The conference at the Graduate Institute in October 2010 was part of this effort – documenting the impact of new developments in agriculture on women farmers and recording the realities of their lives. The conference included academics from different regions of the world, in addition to social movements representatives and practitioners (gender experts) in international organisations, generating a vibrant exchange and proliferating fresh insights.

This collection of papers reflects the lively discussions at the conference. It builds on almost ten years of work by the Graduate Institute's Pôle genre et développement to strengthen the links between social science research and the elaboration of development policies. The international conferences on gender and development issues, organised since 1995 at the Institute, with the financial support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, provide a space for reflection on the relationship between academic theories, development practices, and problems on the ground. The conference proceedings – like the ones published here – are an important summary of the ideas generated, advancing topical debates and functioning as a reservoir of knowledge not only for an audience outside of the Institute, but also for our own students and faculty. It contributes in this way to the transversal inclusion of a gender perspective in teaching and research activities at the Institute, which is part of the Pôle genre et développement's mission.

The authors of this collection are to be congratulated for their high quality contributions. The papers presented here provide new perspectives on the situation of women farmers around the world, and will hopefully become part of a wave of renewed awareness around the importance of agriculture for generating sustainable and equitable development, and of the central role of women farmers in achieving such an outcome.

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