



## Women are all winners in Andean competitions

Since 2005, IFAD projects in the Andean region have been holding national and regional competitions that provide recognition and economic support to small-scale businesses run by women's associations. They also encourage women to share their ideas in public. This way everybody wins: the groups that are awarded prizes, and the other participants, who learn new and better ways to solve problems.

Forty-eight-year-old Dulce Maria Torres, the daughter of shepherds, grew up in the mountains of Gavidia, in the Venezuelan state of Merida. She raises sheep and runs a weavers' association that uses local wool and sells to shops in the tourist region of the Venezuelan Andes.

In September 2007, the association, called Mujeres Tejedoras de Gavidia, or Women Weavers of Gavidia, won first prize in the handicraft category of an IFAD-sponsored women's national competition. In November, Torres travelled to Bolivia to represent Venezuela at the regional women's contest in La Paz.

"My mother was a good weaver and I learned weaving with her," says Torres. "Now I am teaching my skills to other women in the

community and we are doing some research on the story of weaving in our region."

Torres is one of thousands of women in the Andean region who, by participating in IFAD-sponsored competitions, are learning that their skills have value in their families and in their communities. And for many women, the awards have helped them gain recognition from their husbands.

### Increasing potential for learning

The first national 'Women Against Poverty' competition, held in September 2005 in La Paz, Bolivia, was aimed specifically at small-scale business women in rural areas. Nearly 80 women's associations submitted entries, and 12 of them were selected to compete. Second and third editions were organized in 2006 and 2007, respectively, with increasing participation. The contests have been held in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela.

The objective of the competitions is to provide recognition and economic support to small-scale businesses run by women's associations. They also call the attention of public and private institutions to the problems poor rural women face in getting access to markets and new technologies.

Photo: Winners all: Mari Luz Gamboa, Justina Morales, Cahuo Boya and Kompa Omeme, all took cash prizes for the first regional women's competition in La Paz, Bolivia in November 2007

Overleaf: Amalia Calamani de Quispe

Associations compete in two categories: agro-production and handicrafts. All groups that are selected receive a prize – US\$1,000 for first prize and about US\$300 for the runners-up. The submissions are evaluated on the basis of five comprehensive development criteria: financial, physical, social, human and natural capital.

Starting in 2008, the women's regional competitions will include much more than money awards, says Lissette Canavesi, IFAD field presence officer in Bolivia and coordinator of these women-focused contests.

"We want to enhance the potential for learning and networking," she says. "We are preparing training sessions and will invite representatives of fair trade organizations and organic markets so that the participants can find new opportunities for their products."

### More than beautiful crafts

The competitions encourage people to share their ideas in public. This way everybody wins: the groups that are awarded prizes, because they receive compensation in cash and public recognition; and the other participants, who learn new and better ways to solve problems.

"The contests have been highly successful in empowering poor rural women and promoting economic and social development," says Roberto Haudry de Soucy, IFAD's country programme manager for the Andean subregion. "For the women involved, 'success' means overcoming difficulties, making progress, redistributing earnings equally and helping each other. These things are every bit as important to them as crafting beautiful products."

And for women like Torres, there is another even more powerful lesson that she has learned and that she passes on to competition participants.

"Before I thought of myself only as a housewife," she says. "Now I have my cooperative, I teach and I receive recognition for my work. I have dreamed of this award for a long time. It took me time to be awarded but I tried hard and I got it. This is my message to the other participants: never give up hope."

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### Alpaquita Andina receives world award on rural creativity

Amalia Calamani de Quispe, 37, is the sales manager of Alpaquita Andina, a successful business that sells wool and charqui, which is dried alpaca and llama meat.

Alpaquita Andina was the winner of the second national contest held in Bolivia in 2006, and in 2007 the business won the World Prize for Women's Creativity in Rural Life, awarded annually by the Women's World Summit Foundation.

"We started the business to earn some extra money to send our children to school," says Calamani, a mother of six.

Alpaca and llama meat, which is rich in protein and low in fat and cholesterol, has always been a traditional food in Bolivia. When dried, it can be kept and transported easily or even used as an exchange commodity. During the 1970s, this kind of meat was considered second rate and only indigenous peoples ate it. Thanks to the efforts of producers like Amalia Calamani de Quispe, dried charqui has finally been revalued and its consumption is now growing in urban areas.

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### LINKS

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## Building a poverty-free world

IFAD was created 30 years ago to tackle rural poverty, a key consequence of the droughts and famines of the early 1970s. Since 1978, IFAD has invested more than US\$10 billion in low-interest loans and grants that have helped over 300 million very poor rural women and men increase their incomes and provide for their families.

IFAD is an international financial institution and a specialized United Nations agency. It is a global partnership of OECD, OPEC and other developing countries. Today, IFAD supports more than 200 programmes and projects in 84 developing countries.



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