

Cultivating a Different Future for Rural Women in Argentina

Posted by Joan Russow

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This article is published ahead of the International Day of Rural Women, celebrated October 15



Olga Campos (left), her grandson Jhonny and her sister-in-law Limbania Limache, on the three-hectare leased plot of land where they plant organic vegetables in El Pato, 44 km south of Buenos Aires. In cold, hot or wet weather they work every day in the vegetable garden. Credit: Guido Ignacio Fontán/IPS

EL PATO, Argentina, Oct 13 2016 (IPS) - Her seven children have grown up, but she now takes care of a young grandson while working in her organic vegetable garden in El Pato, south of the city of Buenos Aires. Olga Campos wants for them what she wasn't able to achieve: an education to forge a different future.

I am 40 years old and I am just now going to school,.. something that I never thought I would do. As I was not able to go to school, to me as a mother the most important thing was that my kids got to go," Campos told IPS in this town of 7,000 people in the municipality of Berazategui, (44 km from the capital of Argentina.)

Her three-year-old grandson Jhonny, one of her five grandchildren, plays picking chives (*Allium*

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schoenoprasum) – a task that was not fun and games for his grandmother.

“Rural women do not have the same access as men to land tenure, credit, or training. Public policies are often designed by and for rural men, and women are left in the background.” -- Cecilia Jobe

“I would get up and take (my kids) to school, then I would work in the fields for a while,” said Campos. “At 11 AM I would pick them up at school, before making lunch that would be ready by 12:30, and at 1 PM I would go back to work. Now my children help me out but then I was alone because my husband had left me. It was tough raising my children on my own, but between the vegetable garden and work cleaning people’s homes, I managed to do it.

“It is tiring work, because in summer when it is really hot you have to work anyway; when it rains you have to work anyway; when it is cold you have to work anyway,” she said.

Campos grows crops on a leased three-hectare plot of land, together with her sister-in-law Limbania Limache.

In the city “people have transportation options. But here we have to walk or bike, even when it rains,” said Limache, a 30-year-old mother of two children, one of whom is disabled.

“It is hard when it rains because the roads are impossible. The kids sometimes don’t want to go to school because they end up all muddy, and as they are older they feel ashamed,” she said.

According to the United Nations [Food and Agriculture Organisation](#) (FAO), rural women, whose [International Day](#) is celebrated Saturday Oct. 15, represent one fourth of the world’s population but produce more than half the

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global food supply, while facing economic, social and gender inequality.

This is true in Argentina as in the rest of Latin America and the Caribbean.

“Rural women do not have the same access as men to land tenure, credit, or training. Public policies are often designed by and for rural men, and women are left in the background,” Cecilia Jobe, in charge of gender issues in the FAO office in Argentina, told IPS.

“What kills us are the land leases. And on top of that we have to pay for ploughing since tractors are very expensive to rent. I would love to acquire my own land. We are asking for the possibility of paying for our own land, not for them to give it to us,” said Campos.

Obtaining loans is also hard. “They give you the runaround till you finally just get fed up,” said Limache, whose husband also farms, on a different plot of land.



Graciela Rincón, a poultry producer, prepares the eggs to be sold on her farm in El Pato, 44 km south of Buenos Aires. Credit: Guido Ignacio Fontán/IPS

According to the 2010 census in Argentina, of the country's 40,117,096 people, 20,593,330 were women, of whom 651,597 worked in rural villages or towns and 1,070,510 in scattered rural settlements, for a total of 1,722,107 rural women.

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“Rural women also produce most of the family’s food, which ensures a varied diet, minimises losses, and provides marketable products. Women also spend their incomes on food and children’s needs,” said Patricio Quinos, under-secretary of [family agriculture programmes](#) in Argentina’s Agribusiness Ministry.

The official told IPS: “Studies by FAO have shown that a child’s chances of survival increase by 20 per cent when the mother controls the household budget.”

“Women, therefore, play a decisive role in food security, dietary diversity and children’s health,” said Quino, whose department will open a “gender office” to deal with the specific needs of women.

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FAO’s campaign in Argentina, [“Rural Women, Drivers of Development”](#), seeks to engage the different branches of government to make public policies and laws with a gender perspective.

“Rural women are still invisible. The hardships that urban women face are exacerbated in the rural sphere. We are talking about unpaid reproductive and productive work,” said Jobe.

The concept of “rural women” includes those who live in the countryside and those who live in villages or towns but are involved in agricultural production.

It is not a “homogeneous” group, Quinos said.

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“We understand that economically underprivileged rural women have the greatest difficulties with regard to the gaps produced by gender inequality. In many senses, they are made invisible as productive, economic and social subjects,” he said.

Graciela Rincón and her husband moved from the municipal seat, Berazategui, to set up a small poultry farm to produce eggs in El Pato.

Her job, she told IPS, is “from Monday to Monday, because the chickens need the water pump to be turned on every two hours, so they can drink water; you need to check if any cable is disconnected or watch out that the dogs don’t get in and cause a disaster, which has already happened to us.”

Access to health care is also difficult. “There is a hospital in Berazategui that is quite far away, or else there is a small first aid clinic that is closer, but sometimes the only doctor there is a pediatrician, and I’m a grown woman,” said Rincón.

For her part, Limache said “I would like my children to study and work in something else, because the countryside is hard.”

According to FAO, if the rights of rural women were guaranteed, between 20 and 30 per cent more food would be produced, meaning 150 million less hungry people worldwide.

Aware of that, agricultural engineer María Lara Tapia advises her neighbors in El Pato on organic vegetable production, which is in growing urban demand, and on its commercial distribution.

“I show them that there are different options. What happens sometimes in family agriculture is that producers do not leave the rural areas to see other alternatives, so they are subject to a truck that comes from the market, imposes a price and takes away the goods,” she told IPS.

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To increase their incomes she teaches them for example how to make their own seedlings, adding “another link” to the “value chain”.

“Being a woman in the rural environment is hard. I think that it is a very conservative sector,” Tapia said, for whom it was not easy either to advise male farmers.

The situation for rural women is worse, she says.

“They are not seen to be working, but ‘helping’. The husband, father or brother tells them: ‘come help in the field’, when really they are working just like they are,” she stressed.

Limache said: “We are as much a part of the work as they are. We do the same work and on top of that, all the housekeeping. We are part of this.”