

Gender equity in agriculture and rural development

A quick guide to gender mainstreaming
in FAO's new strategic framework



Mainstreaming gender equity has become a strategic objective of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. To achieve FAO's vision of a world free of hunger and malnutrition, its new strategic framework places gender equity alongside such "traditional" key concerns as raising levels of nutrition and the sustainable intensification of crop production. The framework mainstreams gender equity in all of FAO's programmes.

This quick guide outlines the gender dimensions of each strategic objective, and FAO action to achieve gender equity in agriculture and rural development.

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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Why gender

Gender refers not to *male and female*, but to *masculine and feminine* – that is, to qualities or characteristics that society ascribes to each sex

Rural women make up the majority of the world's poor. They have the world's lowest levels of schooling and the highest rates of illiteracy. In all developing regions, female-headed rural households are among the poorest of the poor.

Numerous studies underscore the social costs of rural women's lack of education and assets, linking it directly to high rates of undernutrition, infant mortality and – in some countries – HIV/AIDS infection. There are also high economic costs: wasted human capital and low labour productivity that stifle rural development and progress in agriculture, and ultimately threaten food security – both for women and men.

Gender roles are those behaviours that society considers appropriate for males and for females

In traditional rural societies, commercial agricultural production is mainly a male responsibility. Men prepare land, irrigate crops, and harvest and transport produce to market. They own and trade large animals such as cattle, and are responsible for cutting, hauling and selling timber from forests. Capturing fish in coastal and deep-sea waters is almost always a male domain.

Rural women have primary responsibility for maintaining the household. They raise children, grow and prepare food, manage family poultry, and collect fuel wood and water. But women and girls also play an important,

largely unpaid, role in generating family income, by providing labour for planting, weeding, harvesting and threshing crops, and processing produce for sale.

Women may also earn a small income for themselves by selling vegetables from home gardens, or forest products. They spend that income mainly on meeting family food needs and child education. Although women make substantial contributions to household well-being and agricultural production, men largely control the sale of crops and animals and use of the income. The failure to value their work reduces women to virtual non-entities in economic transactions, the allocation of household resources, and wider community decision-making.

With the increasing commercialization of agriculture, the dominant position of men is changing gender roles – in men's favour. For example, as urban demand for vegetables increases, men are taking over women's traditional gardens to establish commercial enterprises. The expropriation of women's activities reduces their production of food for the household, their income and their social standing. Another growing trend is outmigration of poor rural men in search of employment, which leaves women with sole responsibility for food and cash crop production, as well as raising children.

Gender equality is a state in which all people enjoy equal rights, opportunities and rewards, regardless of whether they were born female or male

Rural women suffer systematic discrimination in the access to resources needed for socio-economic development. Credit, extension, input and seed supply services usually address the needs of male household heads. Rural women are rarely consulted in development projects that may increase men's production and income, but add to their own workloads. When work burdens increase, girls are removed from school more often than boys, to help with farming and household tasks.

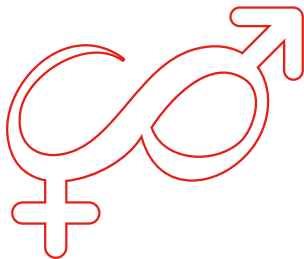
In many countries, a husband's family may take land and livestock from a woman on her husband's death, leaving her destitute. Female farm labourers' wages are lower than men's, while low-paid tasks in agro-processing are routinely "feminized". Discrimination can descend into gender-based violence, especially during emergencies when women are isolated and vulnerable. Another form of violence is women's lack of rights to "safe sex", a major factor in the spread of HIV/AIDS in some countries.

Gender equity means fairness and impartiality in the treatment of women and men, according to their respective needs

FAO has placed gender equity in access to resources, goods, services and decision-making among its key strategic objectives in agriculture and rural development for the next 10 years. By creating social relations in which neither of the sexes suffers discrimination, gender equity aims at improving gender relations and gender roles, and achieving gender equality.

The essence of equity is not identical treatment – treatment may be equal or different, but should always be considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities. Since male predominance in the family, public policy and institutions – not only in rural areas, but worldwide – has long obscured women's interests and concerns, a key strategy for gender equity lies in women's empowerment. Development must encompass rural women's long-term needs and aspirations, their decision-making power, and their access to and control of critical resources such as land and their own labour.

That is why gender has become central to FAO's new strategic framework. This quick guide outlines the gender dimensions of each of the Organization's strategic objectives, and FAO action to achieve gender equity in agriculture and rural development.



GENDER EQUITY

Gender inequality exacerbates food insecurity, malnutrition and poverty. Strategies for agriculture and rural development do not always benefit rural populations, particularly women, but sometimes even amplify existing disparities.

That trend is likely to worsen in the face of today's unprecedented challenges, including climate change, international migration, transboundary infectious diseases and the global economic downturn. Unless gender is addressed comprehensively, the global community will not achieve the targets set by the 1996 World Food Summit, and the UN Millennium Development Goals.

Many countries have embraced development policies and programmes that are more gender and socially inclusive. But critical gaps remain: cultural biases and lack of political will have led to uneven adoption and implementation of internationally agreed policies and conventions on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Data needed to understand gender differences in access to productive resources remain scarce, and the capacity of many developing countries to integrate gender issues in development programmes is still weak. Even where progress has been made, the capacity to implement policies and evaluate impact is often inadequate. FAO's gender strategy seeks to close those gaps and raise the level of gender equality in rural areas.

FAO's targets 2008-2013

- **UN policies and joint programmes.** Support gender mainstreaming in agriculture and rural development within the "One UN" initiative; identify needs, gaps and entry points for FAO technical support, and contribute to common approaches to gender within the United Nations system.
- **Policies for agriculture and rural development.** Assist governments in integrating gender into development policies and programmes through the analysis of disparities that affect people's access to resources and of issues that threaten gender equity and rural livelihoods.
- **Capacity building.** Expand support to training in gender mainstreaming (using tools pioneered by FAO's Socio-Economic and Gender Analysis programme), and to the collection, analysis and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data and statistics used in policy-making.
- **FAO skills, resources and technical programmes.** Upgrade the gender analysis skills of FAO staff, allocate specific budgets to meet gender targets, and support the Organization-wide network of gender focal points to promote gender mainstreaming in all FAO's technical programmes.

CROPS

Women make major contributions to crop production. They provide up to 90% of the labour used in rice cultivation in Southeast Asia. In sub-Saharan Africa, they produce up to 80% of basic foodstuffs for both the household and sale. In home gardens, rural women grow vegetables that are important to household nutrition. Women's roles in crop production are expanding: the outmigration of young men from rural areas in some regions has led to permanent changes in women's responsibilities and tasks.

Yet women have the least access to the means for increasing output and yields, and for moving from subsistence farming to higher-value, market-oriented production. Less than 10% of women farmers in India, Nepal and Thailand own land. Only 15% of the world's agricultural extension agents are women. A study of farm credit schemes in Africa found that women's share of loans was just 10%. Statistics on women's yields, technology adoption rates and use of inputs are rarely reported.

The lack of women's participation in commercial crop production is often not a preference, but the result of limited access to inputs and markets. One study calculated that agricultural productivity in sub-Saharan Africa could rise 20% if women had equal access to land, seed and fertilizer. Women's adoption of new crop production technologies is also strongly affected by who controls and ultimately owns the crop: men often move into "women's" crop production when it becomes more profitable.

FAO's targets 2008-2013

- **Horticulture best practices.** Sharpen the gender focus of training in best practices for horticultural and other sustainable crop intensification and diversification initiatives in rural and in urban/peri-urban areas.
- **Integrated pest management.** In national IPM programmes and policies, focus on vulnerable groups, including women, in developing methods for the conservation and enhancement of ecosystem services.
- **Crop diversity.** Incorporate issues of concern to both men and women in efforts to develop policies and strategies for plant genetic resources.
- **Bioenergy crops.** Investigate the implications of new bioenergy crops for food security, the use of labour and time by men and women, and the division of income from crop production or employment.

LIVESTOCK

Males and females of all ages participate in small-scale animal production. Men usually own and manage large animals, such as cattle and buffalo, while women are almost always responsible for poultry and small ruminants, such as goats. In fact, their livestock is often one of the few sources of income over which women have complete control.

Although all household members are involved in livestock production, gender discrimination denies women access to resources, rights and services. Secure land tenure, for example, is crucial to productivity increases. In most rural societies, however, women can only access land through their male relatives. Insecurity of title often extends to the animals themselves. In Namibia, it is still common (despite legislation to prevent it) for a husband's family to take livestock from a woman at her husband's death.

Male livestock keepers also have far better access to training and technology. Extension programmes are usually oriented towards men's livestock, and extensionists lack the incentive and communication skills needed to work with often illiterate women.

The negative impact of gender discrimination on productivity is more obvious in the livestock sector than in most other areas of agriculture. But the potential benefits of gender equality have made the sector a privileged entry point for gender mainstreaming.

Low-cost investments in poultry and small animal production – which is easily managed and has a quick rate of growth and return – can provide women with new income generating activities. Because poor rural women spend most of their income on buying food and paying school fees, that can do more to improve family welfare than expanding men's cattle herds.

FAO's targets 2008-2013

- **Policies and programmes.** Develop gender-sensitive tools and approaches that enable livestock experts to mainstream gender issues in the planning and implementation of livestock policies and programmes.
- **Gender “hot spots”.** Analyse gender-related “hot spots” in dairy, poultry, confined and grazing production systems.
- **Gender checklists.** Prepare and use checklists to ensure that gender issues are incorporated and addressed in livestock sector studies.

FISHERIES

Capturing fish in coastal and deep-sea waters is almost always a male domain, and carries with it high occupational health and safety risks. Women's most prominent role is in post-harvest, processing and marketing. In West Africa, as much as 80% of seafood is marketed by women. In fish processing factories surveyed in India, 60% of workers were young women. In Vietnam, females make up 80% of the aquaculture workforce.

But much of women's contribution to fisheries is "invisible". Gender discrimination stems from the low value attached to women's work and is perpetuated in their limited access to credit, processing technology, storage facilities and training. Without training and storage technology, many women traders are unable to keep fish fresh, and suffer considerable post-harvest losses. In West Africa, studies found that the poorest fishmongers in the processing and sales chain had access to only low quality fish and no access at all to market information – or ice.

Programmes for the mechanization of small-scale fisheries production risk displacing women from traditional sources of livelihoods. In India, the motorization of fishing vessels in one area led to bigger catches and the replacement of women fishmongers by male merchants.

Gender discrimination follows women into the industrial processing sector. Women from fishing communities in India who became wage earners in the seafood export industry were found to be paid less than men, and were away from their homes for longer periods, making it more difficult for them to fulfill their domestic roles.

FAO's targets 2008-2013

- **Women's empowerment.** Use women's empowerment as an indicator in assessing the contribution of small-scale aquaculture to sustainable rural development.
- **Aquaculture training.** Incorporate gender concerns in information and other tools for aquaculture development, and increase women's participation in training in management, seed production and entrepreneurship.
- **Fisheries research and management.** Improve the ratio of men and women trained or participating in capacity building in fisheries research and management.
- **Global conference.** Include gender as a thematic area in FAO's Global Conference on Aquaculture 2010.

FORESTS

Research suggests that trees and forests are more important to rural women's livelihoods than to those of men. In Madagascar poor women in one community earned 37% of their income from forest products, compared to 22% earned by men. In Andhra Pradesh, 77% of women's income in some areas was derived from forests.

For both men and women, access to forest resources is becoming complex, as rights based in negotiable customary law give way, increasingly, to government action to protect threatened forest habitats by restricting human encroachment.

Restrictions on access affect men and women in different ways. Forests can be crucial to farming women's survival strategies. In sub-Saharan Africa, responsibility for caring for household members afflicted by HIV/AIDS falls mainly on women, leaving less time for agricultural production. As a result, they are becoming more reliant on forest foods and income from fuel wood. During conflicts and natural disasters, displaced rural people also become more reliant on forest products and services.

Given their responsibility for meeting household food and fuel needs, depletion of forest resources increases burdens on women especially. A study in Malawi found deforestation was forcing elderly women to walk more than 10 km a day to collect fuel wood. Women spend on average 800 hours a year in Zambia and 300 hours a year in Tanzania on the same task. In East Africa, fuel wood scarcity has led to a reduction in the number of meals cooked in poor households.

FAO's targets 2008-2013

- **Sector studies.** Include gender issues in socio-economic analysis and forest sector outlook studies, and encourage countries to provide sex-disaggregated data.
- **Income generation.** Promote methodologies for men and women to generate income from forests and trees in order to reduce poverty and to manage natural resources on a sustainable basis.
- **Stakeholder participation.** Develop and implement approaches that increase the participation of male and female stakeholders in forest-related processes and activities.
- **Forest tenure systems.** Promote equitable forest tenure systems through policies and laws that improve access to, and use and management of, forest resources for the benefit of men and women.
- **Forest institutions.** Collect gender-disaggregated data on employment in public-funded forest research centres and graduation from forestry educational institutions.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Women manage natural resources daily in their roles as farmers and household providers. Despite their reliance on natural resources, women have less access to and control over them than men. Usually it is men who put land, water, plants and animals to commercial use, which is often more valued than women's domestic uses.

Gender inequality is most evident in access to land. Custom prohibits women from owning land in many countries. Frequently women have only use rights, mediated by men, and those rights are highly precarious. Landless rural women often depend on common property resources for fuel wood, fodder and food. In many countries, overuse of those resources poses a serious threat to rural livelihoods and food security.

Without secure land rights, farmers have limited access to credit – and little incentive – to invest in improved management and conservation practices. Women and men are more likely to make environmentally sound land management decisions when they have secure ownership and know they can benefit. Women farmers have limited access to irrigation networks or, when they do, to irrigation management decisions: membership of water users' associations is often linked to land ownership. Women's limited water entitlements force them to use subsistence agricultural practices that may lead to soil erosion, a major source of instability in watersheds.

To protect their natural resources, rural women and men must be empowered to participate in decisions that affect their needs and vulnerabilities. Addressing the gender dimensions of natural resources management will help policy makers formulate more effective interventions for their conservation and sustainable use.

FAO's targets 2008-2013

- **Land issues and gender.** Develop training modules on gender and land rights, and use gender analysis as an integral part of land use planning.
- **State of world land and water resources.** In reporting on the state of world land and water resources, address differences in women's and men's access, control and ownership.
- **Water management projects.** Collect and disseminate sex-disaggregated data on agriculture water management and include gender analysis in water management projects.
- **Plant genetic resources.** In reporting on implementation of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources, address women's access and share of benefits.
- **Land cover and GIS.** Develop geographic information systems that integrate gender-related environmental and socio-economic data.

EMPLOYMENT AND LIVELIHOODS

As agriculture shifts from subsistence to commercial production, the future of small-scale producers in developing countries depends on their being able to diversify into new income generating activities, including off-farm employment. Gender roles reduce rural women's participation in labour markets and confine them to lower paid and more precarious employment in agriculture.

Women farmers face systematic discrimination in access to the resources and services needed to improve their productivity, such as credit, secure land title and education. Gender bias in North Africa and the Near East limits women's use of machinery, such as tractors, which affects the productivity of farms run by women.

Women farmers in some countries have established profitable businesses supplying international markets with organic or fair trade produce. But studies show that women can lose income and control as a product moves from the farm to the market.

When off-farm employment is available, women continue to suffer gender discrimination. In India, the average wage of female farm workers is 30% lower than that of men. Low-paid tasks in agro-processing are generally "feminized", while men are more likely to have jobs that require training and earn higher wages.

Rural wage employment can help women escape from poverty by increasing their income and strengthening their household bargaining power. However, there can be significant trade-offs. In Ecuador, young women's employment in the cut-flower export industry has brought them economic benefits, but reduced the amount of time they have for communal work and child care.

FAO's targets 2008-2013

- **Agro-industries and rural infrastructure.** Address gender issues in policy guidance for agro-industrial development, and produce technical guidelines of best practices in infrastructure design that recognizes gender needs.
- **Conditions and wages.** Promote equitable employment conditions for men and women in agro-industries, measured by ratio of men's to women's wages.
- **Fisheries policy and enterprise development.** Include gender issues in guidance to governments on fisheries and aquaculture policy, and increase men's and women's incomes through enterprise development.
- **Gender equity in value chains.** Produce business development training materials that address the different needs of rural men and women, and promote gender sensitive activities that link both male and female farmers to value-chains.

FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

Women play a decisive role in food security, dietary diversity and children's health. While men grow mainly field crops, women are usually responsible for growing and preparing most of the food consumed in the home and raising small livestock, which provides protein.

Rural women also carry out most home food processing, which ensures a diverse diet, minimizes losses and provides marketable products. Women are more likely to spend their incomes on food and children's needs – research has shown that a child's chances of survival increase by 20% when the mother controls the household budget.

But gender inequalities in control of livelihood assets limit women's food production. In Ghana, studies found that insecure access to land led women farmers to practise shorter fallow periods than men, which reduced their yields, income and the availability of food for the household. In sub-Saharan Africa, diseases such as HIV/AIDS force women to assume greater caretaking roles, leaving them less time to grow and prepare food.

Women's access to education is also a determining factor in levels of nutrition and child health. Studies from Africa show that children of mothers who have spent five years in primary education are 40% more likely to live beyond the age of five.

The physiological needs of pregnant and lactating women also make them more susceptible to malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. Twice as many women suffer from malnutrition as men, and girls are twice as likely to die from malnutrition as boys. Maternal health is crucial for child survival – an undernourished mother is more likely to deliver an infant with low birth weight, significantly increasing its risk of dying.

* This description incorporates FAO's strategic objective on improved quality and safety of food

FAO's targets 2008-2013

- **Nutrition policy.** Promote sector policies and programmes for nutritional improvement at national and community-levels that recognize gender-defined needs, opportunities and constraints.
- **Nutrition education.** Develop gender-sensitive nutrition education initiatives, training programmes and materials that target men, women, girls and boys.
- **Food quality and safety.** To reduce disease outbreaks caused by home-prepared food, develop awareness and educational materials on household handling of food.
- **Street foods.** Improve the quality and safety of street foods through training for men and women vendors in basic hygiene.
- **Gender-specific data.** Promote assessments of nutrient requirements, dietary intakes and nutritional status that analyse gender, age and development stage.

EMERGENCIES

In emergency situations, rural communities are frequently traumatized and agricultural systems devastated, leading to disruption of food production, livelihoods, health care and law enforcement. All rural people suffer during emergencies, but men and women are affected in different ways.

Women and children may be more exposed to risk of malnutrition because they have limited access to resources such as land, animals and savings. With fewer survival options, female-headed households especially may be forced to submit to “survival sex,” which increases their exposure to HIV and other diseases. Men and boys have particular vulnerabilities – for example, when they are targets for recruitment into armed conflicts or when boys are unable to feed themselves due to lack of cooking skills.

Post-disaster, women remain more vulnerable than men. Along with reduced access to resources, they must cope with increased responsibility for caring for members of the household. Following a devastating hurricane in Honduras, the increase in women’s domestic workload made it impossible for many to return to work. Women’s nutrition and health may also suffer as workload increases.

If rural women normally have limited access to land, their rights may be even further reduced following a natural disaster. With many title holders dead and boundaries erased, poor and marginalized women and men often have no alternative but to remain in refugee camps, and have little say in programmes for land redistribution.

FAO’s targets 2008-2013

- **Early warning.** Address gender-related concerns in FAO special alerts on food supply difficulties and crop prospects, and mainstream gender into regional food security assessments.
- **Identifying vulnerable households.** Use socio-economic and gender analysis to identify food insecure and vulnerable (e.g. female-headed, orphan-headed and elderly-headed) households as participants in emergency projects.
- **Needs and livelihoods.** Address women’s and men’s different needs and household livelihoods in needs assessment and livelihood assessment guidelines.
- **Gender-based violence.** Specifically address the vulnerabilities of men, women, boys and girls (e.g. gender-based violence), in projects aimed at mitigating the vulnerability of populations displaced by emergencies.

INVESTMENT

Analysis of gender relations in the division of labour, access to resources, and control of crops and income from their sale is essential for sustainable investment programmes. Gender analysis of time allocations in agriculture may reveal that lack of proper soil management is due to outmigration of male household members, which leaves women with more agricultural work and no time for soil conservation. Weeding, harvesting and threshing crops are often “women’s tasks” – a programme to increase cash crop production can have negative impacts on women already overburdened with domestic work, and fail to reach its objectives.

Understanding women’s workloads can suggest other areas for investment. In northern Pakistan, surveys found that almost a third of rural women’s time was spent collecting fuel wood and water. In response, the government launched a programme to provide rural households with piped water and kerosene, allowing women to increase their earnings from livestock and horticulture.

The success of agricultural investments often depends on equitable access to services. Credit components of projects may establish a separate line of credit for women’s groups or earmark loans for women’s crops and or activities, such as agro-processing. Adjusting extension messages to focus on activities that women control can facilitate their contact with male extensionists.

One final, important lesson: include men. Programmes designed to reach both men and women are more effective. Getting men’s support is critical to the success of gender-responsive projects.

FAO’s targets 2008-2013

- **FAO/World Bank Cooperative Programme.** Address gender considerations in all sector and subsector studies conducted for the World Bank, and in project appraisals and evaluation of Bank-financed projects.
- **IFAD projects and studies.** Include a gender focus in all poverty-eradication projects and studies prepared on behalf of IFAD.
- **Financing institutions.** Address gender dimensions in all relevant documents prepared for international, bilateral, regional and sub-regional development financing institutions
- **Social analysis.** Mainstream gender considerations in guidelines for social analysis in the preparation of agricultural investment projects.



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