

Gender and Rural Employment Policy Briefs

Women contribute significantly to agriculture and the rural economy in developing countries, however, compared to men, they have less access to productive resources and employment opportunities. FAO's The State of Food and Agriculture (SOFA) on *Women in Agriculture: closing the gender gap for development* (2011) shows that reducing gender inequalities in access to resources, services and employment would increase developing country agricultural output by 2.5 to 4 percent, which globally could reduce the number of hungry people by 100-150 million. This series of *Gender and Rural Employment Policy Briefs* complements these findings by addressing a range of issues faced by rural women in their work environment. Intended for various public and private stakeholders, the briefs were inspired by insights from the 2009 FAO-IFAD-ILO Workshop on *Gaps, trends and current research in gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: differentiated pathways out of poverty*.¹

POLICY BRIEF 1

Gender-equitable rural work to reduce poverty and boost economic growth

This brief, which introduces the Decent Work Agenda, provides an overarching framework for this series of briefs. The Decent Work Agenda is an integrated approach to promote rights at work, decent and productive employment and income, social protection for all, and social dialogue, with gender equality as a cross-cutting priority. Thus, decent work is not only central to reducing poverty but also to ensuring that work is undertaken in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. The brief analyses decent work deficits facing rural women, highlighting their predominance in low productivity and low income jobs, lack of basic work rights and social protection, and insufficient voice and representation. It calls for gender-sensitive policies to boost rural employment and incomes, extend social protection to rural populations, improve rural working conditions and rights, and strengthen social dialogue.

POLICY BRIEF 2

Investing in skills for socio-economic empowerment of rural women

This brief argues that learning about improved production technologies and methods, new products and markets, and business and life skills can make a big difference to improving productivity and livelihoods. Women's training needs often differ from men's due to their domestic and care work as well as gender-differentiated agricultural labour or supervisory roles. The brief analyses some of the social, cultural and economic factors that can limit rural girls' and women's access to education and training, trapping them in lower status, poorly paid work with limited development perspectives. The menu of policy options proposes practical ways to stimulate female participation in education and technical training to enhance opportunities for better quality employment.

¹ For the workshop papers and publications, see www.fao-ilo.org.





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Woman poultry entrepreneur in Egypt.

POLICY BRIEF 3

Rural women's entrepreneurship is "good business"!

This brief emphasizes the fact that rural women are increasingly running their own enterprises, although these are largely in informal, micro-size, low productivity, low-return activities that are traditionally female (producing/processing agricultural products for local markets, handicrafts, and petty trading). The brief points out causes such as discriminatory laws, regulations and social norms, women's limited access to education, training and information and to financial and business services, and the largely informal, small-scale nature of their enterprises that constrains their ability to engage in economies of scale and more profitable domestic and export markets. The policy recommendations call for a better enabling environment for women's entrepreneurship and measures to improve their entrepreneurial skills and to develop gender-sensitive financial and business services.

POLICY BRIEF 4

Agricultural value chain development: Threat or opportunity for women's employment?

Agricultural markets are rapidly globalizing and modern value chains, often controlled by multinational or national firms and supermarkets, are capturing a growing share of the agri-food systems in developing regions. Although such value chains are changing

the gendered structure of employment and better educated women often compete effectively with men for quality jobs, gender stereotypes that keep poor, uneducated women in lower paid, less skilled and more insecure work still persist. The brief discusses reasons for these gender inequalities and proposes a set of policy options to promote agricultural value chains with a focus on the poor and gender equality, encourage good practices, and foster women's participation in producer and worker organizations and decision-making processes.

POLICY BRIEF 5

Women in infrastructure works: Boosting gender equality and rural development!

Rural women pay a high price for the lack of infrastructure, in time spent accessing water for domestic or agricultural uses, processing and marketing agricultural or non-farm products, collecting firewood and reaching health services for themselves and their families. This 'time poverty' limits their ability to engage in other productive or income-earning activities. The brief analyzes constraints to women's employment in rural public works and community infrastructure programmes. Policy recommendations call for greater attention to gender throughout the design and implementation processes, including consulting women on the choice of works and payment modalities that help them control their earnings, providing child care facilities, and ensuring women's involvement in the management of new assets.

POLICY BRIEF 6

Making migration work for women and men in rural labour markets

Recognizing that the rural poor often migrate to urban or other rural areas, or abroad, to escape poverty,

and that half of the international migrants are women, the brief explores the benefits and costs of migration to the migrants and their families and communities, depending on the migrants' profile and gender, and labour market specificities. It shows how migration can change gender-based power relations in rural households and communities, lead to gender-differentiated impacts on agricultural labour markets and, through migrants' remittances and new skills, improve livelihoods and stimulate agricultural and rural development. It proposes policy options such as gender-sensitive measures to address the *push* factors of rural out-migration, advisory and legal services to protect migrants, help them find decent work and maximize benefits from remittances, and assistance and incentives for returnees.

POLICY BRIEF 7

Breaking the rural poverty cycle: Getting girls and boys out of work and into school

Worldwide 215 million children are child labourers, and 60% of child labourers aged 5-17 work in agriculture - on farms and plantations, on fishing boats, or herding livestock. Without education, these children are likely to be the poor of tomorrow. The fundamental cause is pervasive rural poverty, parental illiteracy and low wages that do not provide adequate incomes for adults. The problems are compounded by limited access to quality education in rural areas and traditional attitudes that often impede girls' schooling; labour roles that vary by gender, social norms and children's life-cycles; and exposure to agro-chemicals, water-borne diseases and work-related injuries. Gender-sensitive policies are proposed to reduce rural poverty, improve adults' incomes, and get children out of work and into school.

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