

THE STATE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

2010–11

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Closing the gender gap
for development

- How much do women contribute to agriculture and rural economies?
- Why do female farming households produce less than men?
- What is the gender gap in agriculture – including land, livestock, education, financial services, extension, technology and rural employment?
- How much does it cost society in lost agricultural output and food security?
- Do agro-processing and contract farming offer opportunities for women?
- Can agricultural policies and programmes close the gender gap?

World food and agriculture in review

Statistical annex of sex-disaggregated data



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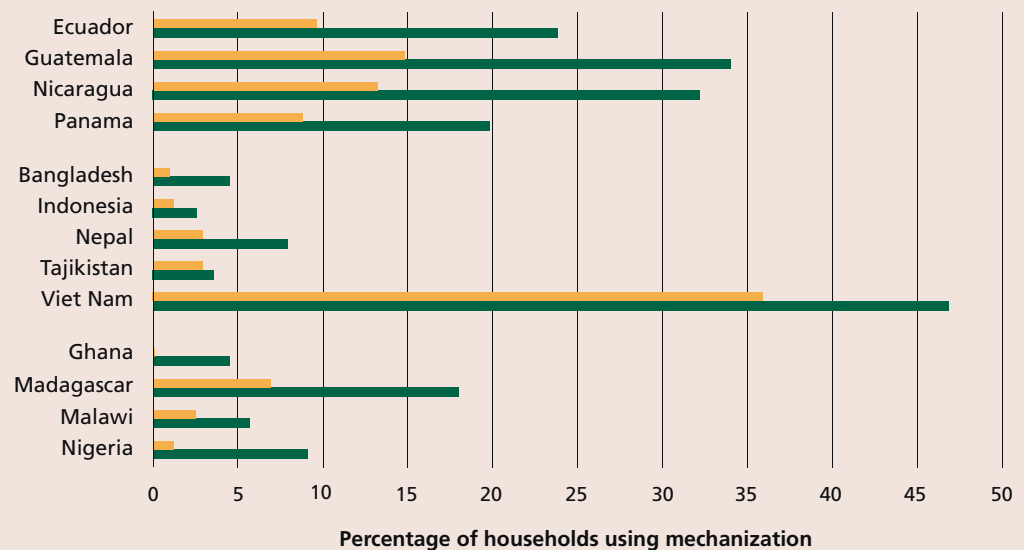
The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11 makes the “business case” for addressing gender issues in agriculture and rural employment. The agriculture sector is underperforming in many developing countries, in part because women do not have equal access to the resources and opportunities they need to be more productive. The gender gap imposes real costs on society in terms of lost agricultural output, food security and economic growth. Promoting gender equality is not only good for women; it is also good for agricultural development.

Women make essential contributions to the rural economy of all developing country regions as farmers, labourers and entrepreneurs. Their roles are diverse and changing rapidly, so generalizations should be made carefully. Yet one fact is strikingly consistent across countries and contexts: women have less access than men to agricultural assets, inputs and services and to rural employment opportunities.

This report documents the different roles played by women in rural areas of developing countries and provides solid empirical evidence on the gender gaps they face in agriculture and rural employment. Compared with their male counterparts, women:

- operate smaller farms, on average only half to two-thirds as large;
- keep fewer livestock, typically of smaller breeds, and earn less from the livestock they do own;
- have a greater overall workload that includes a heavy burden of low-productivity activities like fetching water and firewood;
- have less education and less access to agricultural information and extension services;
- use less credit and other financial services;
- are much less likely to purchase inputs such as fertilizers, improved seeds and mechanical equipment;
- if employed, are more likely to be in part-time, seasonal and low-paying jobs; and
- receive lower wages for the same work, even when they have the same experience and qualifications.

Mechanical equipment use by female- and male-headed households



Female-headed households

Male-headed households

The State of Food and Agriculture 2010–11 presents empirical estimates of the potential gains that could be achieved by closing the gender gap in agriculture and rural employment. The report critically evaluates experiences from many countries with gender and development policies. It offers proven measures to promote gender equality and empower women. It shows how agricultural policies and programmes aimed at closing the gender gap can also generate significant gains for the agriculture sector, food security and society as a whole.

Key messages of the report

- **Women comprise, on average, 43 percent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries.** This average share ranges from 20 percent in Latin America to 50 percent in Eastern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Their contribution to agricultural work varies even more widely depending on the specific crop and activity.
- **Women in agriculture and rural areas have less access than men to productive resources and opportunities.** The gender gap is found for many assets, inputs and services and it imposes costs on the agriculture sector, the broader economy and society as well as on women themselves.
- **Female farmers produce less than male farmers, but not because they are less-efficient farmers** – extensive empirical evidence shows that the productivity gap between male and female farmers is caused by differences in input use.
- **Closing the gender gap in agriculture would generate significant gains for the agriculture sector and for society.** If women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20–30 percent. This could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5–4 percent.
- **Production gains of this magnitude could reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12–17 percent.** The potential gains would vary by region depending on how many women are currently engaged in agriculture, how much production or land they control, and how wide a gender gap they face.

- **These potential productivity gains are just the first round of social benefits that would come from closing the gender gap.** When women control additional income, they spend more of it than men do on food, health, clothing and education for their children. This has positive implications for immediate well-being as well as long-run human capital formation and economic growth.
- **Policy interventions can help close the gender gap in agriculture and rural labour markets.** Priority areas for reform include:
 - eliminating discrimination against women in access to agricultural resources, education, extension and financial services, and labour markets;
 - investing in labour-saving and productivity-enhancing technologies and infrastructure to free women’s time for more productive activities; and
 - facilitating the participation of women in flexible, efficient and fair rural labour markets.

World and regional review: facts and figures

The State of Food and Agriculture 2010–11 contains an overview of the current global agricultural situation, including an analysis of international and domestic food price volatility.

Statistical annex

A statistical annex provides sex-disaggregated statistics for all countries for which they are available on key socio-economic indicators related to food and agriculture for a range of key agricultural indicators.





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Women make significant contributions to the rural economy in all developing country regions. Their roles differ across regions, yet they consistently have less access than men to the resources and opportunities they need to be more productive. Increasing women's access to land, livestock, education, financial services, extension, technology and rural employment would boost their productivity and generate gains in terms of agricultural production, food security, economic growth and social welfare. Closing the gender gap in agricultural inputs alone could lift 100–150 million people out of hunger. No blueprint exists for closing the gender gap, but some basic principles are universal: governments, the international community and civil society should work together to eliminate discrimination under the law, to promote equal access to resources and opportunities, to ensure that agricultural policies and programmes are gender-aware, and to make women's voices heard as equal partners for sustainable development. Achieving gender equality and empowering women in agriculture is not only the right thing to do. It is also crucial for agricultural development and food security.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The State of Food and Agriculture, FAO's major annual flagship publication, aims at bringing to a wider audience balanced science-based assessments of important issues in the field of food and agriculture. Each edition of the report contains a comprehensive, yet easily accessible, overview of a selected topic of major relevance for rural and agricultural development and for global food security. This is supplemented by a synthetic overview of the current global agricultural situation.

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