



Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations

# Transforming political will into concrete action for rural women's empowerment and food security

*The support of FAO to the formulation of gender-sensitive food security and nutrition policies*

## INTRODUCTION

Gender disparities are one of the underlying causes of hunger and malnutrition. They have a negative impact on food security, nutrition and the enjoyment of the right to food. Eliminating gender inequalities by ensuring that women have the same access to productive resources, services and opportunities that men have is therefore key to reducing food insecurity and ending hunger. Advancing women's rights requires strong political commitment by governments – commitment that should manifest in policy responses that address gender inequalities in agriculture and the rural sector, and the specific challenges rural women face.

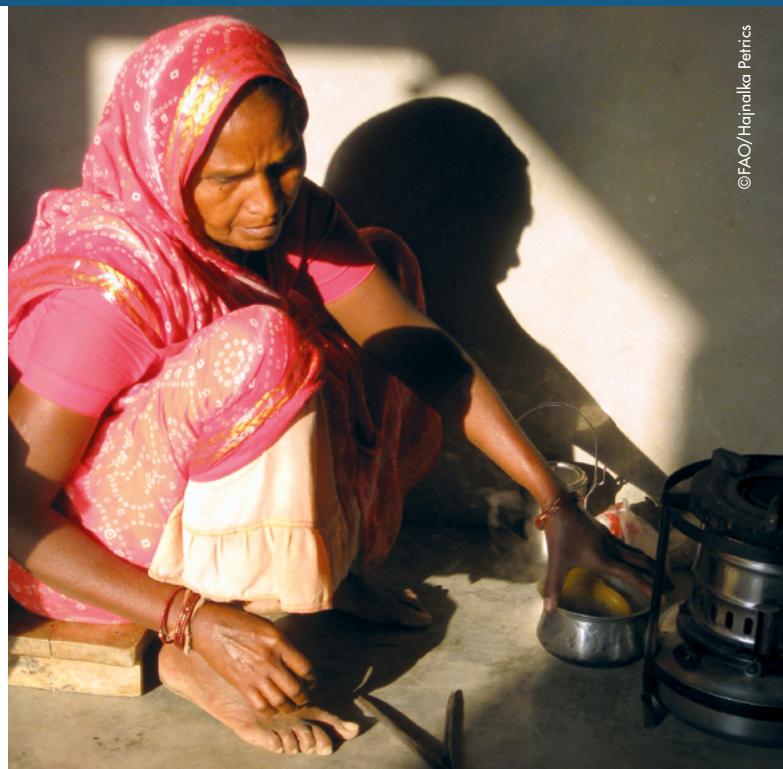
### BOX 1

#### Gender equality and women's empowerment: a key to food security and nutrition

Despite their crucial contributions in agriculture, rural enterprises and rural economies, and the key role they play in family food security and nutrition, rural women continue to experience persistent gender inequalities and discrimination – particularly in their access to productive resources, services and economic opportunities. These prevent them from becoming competitive economic players, capable of creating better lives for themselves and their families and contributing fully to food security and hunger eradication.

Investing in rural women and promoting their rights is thus an important channel for progressive change. Gender equality and women's empowerment are key to obtaining better food security and nutrition outcomes at national levels. All forms of discrimination against women and girls thus need to be eliminated to ensure that they can contribute effectively to agricultural production and the improvement of rural livelihoods on an equal basis with men.

FAO is working with member countries to fulfil their political commitments to improve the status of rural women by facilitating the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)<sup>1</sup> – the only international human rights instrument that explicitly promotes rural women's rights (box 2).



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### BOX 2

#### What is CEDAW?

CEDAW, adopted in 1979 by the General Assembly of the United Nations, defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination and achieve equality between women and men. It is the only international human rights treaty that addresses rural women directly and exclusively through its Article 14. CEDAW can be a useful framework for identifying areas of major concern for rural women and for guiding decision-makers in formulating gender-aware policies and programmes.

States\* that have ratified the Convention commit themselves to plan and undertake a series of measures to combat discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development. States have the obligation to take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles they play in the economic survival of their families.

\*189 states as of 20 June 2016. For more information on the status of ratification, visit [http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CEDAW/OHCHR\\_Map\\_CEDAW.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CEDAW/OHCHR_Map_CEDAW.pdf).



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2 CEDAW Article 14<sup>2</sup> is particularly relevant for the work of FAO. Besides articulating the responsibility to respect, protect and fulfil women's basic human rights (e.g. education, housing, sanitation and health care), it specifically calls on States to respect and enforce the rights of rural women as they relate to their productive capacity. These include the right to access agricultural extension services, economic opportunities, productive assets, improved technologies, financial services, and the right to participate individually or collectively in agriculture and rural development planning.

The full implementation of CEDAW can enhance the rights, potential, and opportunities of rural women. This can also facilitate the implementation of other fundamental economic, cultural and social rights, including the right to adequate food, education and health.

## ACHIEVING FOOD SECURITY GOALS IN AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: GENDER EQUALITY AND FOOD SECURITY IN THE FAO STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

FAO recognizes that equality between women and men in sustainable agricultural and rural development is crucial to achieving its mandate to eliminate hunger and malnutrition and to reduce poverty. Therefore, under its Strategic Programme to "help eliminate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition" FAO supports the formulation of gender-equitable food security policies, legal frameworks, investment plans and programmes and does so through facilitating the implementation of CEDAW, in particular its Article 14. Related activities contribute to enhancing national capacities and policy dialogue and raising the level of political commitment for developing these policy frameworks and programmes in the context of national food security and nutrition.

## THE ROLE OF FAO IN FACILITATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 14 OF CEDAW

One way in which FAO helps to put Article 14<sup>3</sup> into practice is through support for the implementation of the CEDAW Committee's<sup>4</sup> recommendations.

On receipt of the CEDAW Committee's concluding observations on the State Party reports, governments are required to comply with these recommendations and incorporate them into sectoral policies and development plans and strategies that fall under their respective mandates<sup>5</sup> (see Box 3 on How CEDAW works).

### BOX 3 How CEDAW works

The implementation of CEDAW is monitored through a reporting mechanism. Countries that have ratified CEDAW (States Parties) are obliged to submit regular reports to the CEDAW Committee on the implementation of the Convention at the national level, which must provide details about their progress in eliminating discrimination against women.

The Committee reviews each of the State Party reports submitted, together with the alternative reports prepared by the UNCT and NGOs. After the review, the Committee issues Concluding Observations for each of the State Party reports it has discussed. These observations highlight opportunities and challenges regarding the implementation of CEDAW, main areas of concern, and recommendations for the State Party. The State Party must implement these recommendations and detail measures taken to address the concerns in its next periodic report.

By using the CEDAW Committee's recommendations, FAO works with governments to facilitate the integration of gender equality and women's empowerment issues into national food security and nutrition policies, programmes legislation and investment strategies. FAO can also incorporate the recommendations in the country programme it elaborates in consultation with the government (within the Country Programming Framework). This ensures that FAO programmes are aligned with national development priorities in the area of gender equality and the empowerment of women.



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As part of its support, FAO also advocates for follow-up to the recommendations of the CEDAW Committee working with other UN agencies through the UN Country Team (UNCT) and in particular the UN Gender Theme Group (where one exists), and with other national partners including civil society organizations and academia. This can occur, for example, through the formulation and implementation of a UN Joint Programme (UNJP) aiming to improve the status of rural women in line with selected recommendations.

A second way FAO supports the CEDAW implementation is through systematic and substantive contributions to the country-specific CEDAW Reports prepared by UN Country Teams. Article 22 of the Convention provides for UN specialized agencies to contribute to the work of the CEDAW Committee by providing country-

#### BOX 4

#### FAO supports the implementation of CEDAW in Guatemala

In September 2013, the Government of Guatemala requested that FAO provide technical assistance to the country's Special Cabinet for Women (*Gabinete Específico de la Mujer*) – in particular, the cabinet's work on implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). As part of its technical assistance, FAO (in collaboration with other UN agencies) supported the development of the Policy for Gender Equality and its Strategic Framework (2014–2023) of the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Food, in the context of national food security, nutrition and rural development. The Policy, which was ratified in June 2015, takes into consideration the CEDAW Committee's latest concluding observations to the Government of Guatemala. FAO activities included technical advice, advocacy work and awareness raising on the role of gender equality in resolving issues related to food security and nutrition.

In order to ensure coordination and participation of all relevant stakeholders in the process, FAO promoted partnerships between the government and civil society organizations, including the establishment of a multistakeholder working group on rural development with a special focus on rural women and indigenous people. The working group supports policy-making and facilitates the coordination and participation of the various institutions at central and decentralized levels.

The new Policy and its related mechanisms are crucial in guaranteeing the equitable participation of women and men in rural development processes and their access to productive resources, services and improved capacities. It also constitutes a key milestone in the direct implementation of CEDAW.

specific information on issues falling within the scope of their mandate. These reports form the basis for the Committee's assessment of the country's efforts in eliminating discrimination against women, and are therefore instrumental in defining the Committee's recommendations to the government.



3

FAO produces country gender assessments of the agriculture and rural sector to provide objective and up-to-date information on the situation of rural women. These include assessments of rural women's needs, difficulties and priorities; the level of achievement made at the country level in fulfilling the rights of women and promoting opportunities for them; as well as remaining gaps and challenges. The FAO Policy on Gender Equality,<sup>6</sup> endorsed by Member States, specifically requires the realization of such country gender assessments for evidence-based technical support and policy-making.

The results of the country gender assessments provide a unique opportunity to inform country reports and the CEDAW Committee's concluding observations. Besides representing an important source for planning adequate national policy responses, the concluding observations can also inform the UN country programming priorities on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.



All this can help governments to meet their commitments to internationally agreed-upon development goals on gender equality and women's empowerment,<sup>7</sup> and consequently to further national food security and nutrition objectives.

Through the country-level activities, FAO aims to:

1. Increase awareness among Member States of CEDAW as a framework to advance rural women's rights.
2. Advance high-level political will and commitment to implement Article 14 of CEDAW; and
3. Support the capacity development of governments to formulate evidence-based, gender-equitable food security and nutrition policies, investment plans and legislative frameworks.

## BOX 5

### CEDAW Article 14

1. States Parties shall take into account the particular problems faced by rural women and the significant roles which rural women play in the economic survival of their families, including their work in the non-monetized sectors of the economy, and shall take all appropriate measures to ensure the application of the provisions of the present Convention to women in rural areas.
2. States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, that they participate in and benefit from rural development and, in particular, shall ensure to such women the right:
  - a. To participate in the elaboration and implementation of development planning at all levels;
  - b. To have access to adequate health care facilities, including information, counselling and services in family planning;
  - c. To benefit directly from social security programmes;
  - d. To obtain all types of training and education, formal and non-formal, including that relating to functional literacy, as well as, inter alia, the benefit of all community and extension services, in order to increase their technical proficiency;
  - e. To organize self-help groups and cooperatives in order to obtain equal access to economic opportunities through employment or self-employment;
  - f. To participate in all community activities;
  - g. To have access to agricultural credit and loans, marketing facilities, appropriate technology, and equal treatment in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes;
  - h. To enjoy adequate living conditions, particularly in relation to housing, sanitation, electricity and water supply, transport and communications.

## Endnotes

1 For more information on CEDAW, visit <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>.

2 When reporting and implementing Article 14, it is important to recognize its interconnections with other articles that directly support it. These are: Article 11 on employment, Article 13b on financial credit, and Articles 15 and 16 on property rights. The CEDAW General Recommendation 34 on the rights of rural women (adopted in March 2016) provides additional guidance to governments on how to apply the Convention's provisions. General Recommendation 34 is available at [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/GC/34&Lang=en](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/GC/34&Lang=en).

3 Detailed descriptions of the related activities can be found in the FAO 2013 publication *CEDAW – A tool for gender-sensitive agriculture and rural development policy and programme formulation*, available at <http://www.fao.org/docrep/017/i3153e/i3153e.pdf>.

4 For more information on the CEDAW Committee, visit <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CEDAW/Pages/Introduction.aspx>.

5 Also the Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition by the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) recommends that states, international and regional organizations, and all other appropriate stakeholders observe the recommendations in the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and

the Beijing Platform for Action (CFS, October 2013). To read the Framework see: [http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/cfs/Docs1213/gsf/GSF\\_Version\\_2\\_EN.pdf](http://www.fao.org/fileadmin/templates/cfs/Docs1213/gsf/GSF_Version_2_EN.pdf).

For further information on the work of CFS related to women's empowerment visit: <http://www.fao.org/cfs/cfs-home/activities/gender/en/>

6 For more information on the FAO Policy on Gender Equality, visit <http://www.fao.org/docrep/017/i3205e/i3205e.pdf>.

7 For example, the Beijing Platform for Action, the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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## More information

Visit our website:  
[www.fao.org/gender](http://www.fao.org/gender)

Invest in a hunger-free world by facilitating the implementation of Article 14 of CEDAW to support the formulation of gender-sensitive food security and nutrition policies



The FAO Strategic Programme to  
**HELP ELIMINATE HUNGER,  
FOOD INSECURITY AND MALNUTRITION**

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