WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE
Closing the gender gap for development
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Foreword

This edition of *The State of Food and Agriculture* addresses *Women in agriculture: closing the gender gap for development*. The agriculture sector is underperforming in many developing countries, and one of the key reasons is that women do not have equal access to the resources and opportunities they need to be more productive. This report clearly confirms that the Millennium Development Goals on gender equality (MDG 3) and poverty and food security (MDG 1) are mutually reinforcing. We must promote gender equality and empower women in agriculture to win, sustainably, the fight against hunger and extreme poverty. I firmly believe that achieving MDG 3 can help us achieve MDG 1.

Women make crucial contributions in agriculture and rural enterprises in all developing country regions, as farmers, workers and entrepreneurs. Their roles vary across regions but, everywhere, women face gender-specific constraints that reduce their productivity and limit their contributions to agricultural production, economic growth and the well-being of their families, communities and countries.

Women face a serious gender gap in access to productive resources. Women control less land than men and the land they control is often of poorer quality and their tenure is insecure. Women own fewer of the working animals needed in farming. They also frequently do not control the income from the typically small animals they manage. Women farmers are less likely than men to use modern inputs such as improved seeds, fertilizers, pest control measures and mechanical tools. They also use less credit and often do not control the credit they obtain. Finally, women have less education and less access to extension services, which make it more difficult to gain access to and use some of the other resources, such as land, credit and fertilizer. These factors also prevent women from adopting new technologies as readily as men do. The constraints women face are often interrelated and need to be addressed holistically.

The obstacles that confront women farmers mean that they achieve lower yields than their male counterparts. Yet women are as good at farming as men. Solid empirical evidence shows that if women farmers used the same level of resources as men on the land they farm, they would achieve the same yield levels. The yield gap between men and women averages around 20–30 percent, and most research finds that the gap is due to differences in resource use. Bringing yields on the land farmed by women up to the levels achieved by men would increase agricultural output in developing countries between 2.5 and 4 percent. Increasing production by this amount could reduce the number of undernourished people in the world in the order of 12–17 percent. According to FAO’s latest estimates, 925 million people are currently undernourished. Closing the gender gap in agricultural yields could bring that number down by as much as 100–150 million people.

These direct improvements in agricultural output and food security are just one part of the significant gains that could be achieved by ensuring that women have equal access to resources and opportunities. Closing the gender gap in agriculture would put more resources in the hands of women and strengthen their voice within the household – a proven strategy for enhancing the food security, nutrition, education and health of children. And better fed, healthier children learn better and become more productive citizens. The benefits would span generations and pay large dividends in the future.

The gender gap is manifest in other ways. Gender relations are social phenomena and it is impossible to separate women’s economic spheres from their household activities. Preparing food and collecting firewood and water are time-consuming and binding constraints that must be addressed if women are to be able to spend their time in more rewarding and more productive ways. Interventions must consider women within their family and community contexts. Making rural labour markets function better,
providing labour-saving technologies and public goods and services, would enable women to contribute more effectively to, and benefit more fully from, the economic opportunities offered by agricultural growth.

There exists no blueprint for closing the gender gap in agriculture, as a wide range of inputs, assets, services and markets are involved and the related constraints are interlinked. But with appropriate policies based on accurate information and analysis, progress can be made and the benefits would be significant. The basic principles are clear. We must eliminate all forms of discrimination against women under the law, ensure that access to resources is more equal and that agricultural policies and programmes are gender-aware, and make women’s voices heard in decision-making at all levels. Women must be seen as equal partners in sustainable development. Achieving gender equality and empowering women is not only the right thing to do; it is also crucial for agricultural development and food security.

Jacques Diouf
FAO DIRECTOR-GENERAL
Acknowledgements

The State of Food and Agriculture 2010–11 was prepared by members of the Economic and Social Development Department of FAO under the overall leadership of Hafez Ghanem, Assistant Director-General, and Kostas Stamoulis, Director of the Agricultural Development Economics Division (ESA). Additional guidance was provided by Marcela Villarreal, Director, and Eve Crowley, Principal Adviser, of the Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division (ESW); Pietro Gennari, Director, Statistics Division (ESS); David Hallam, Director, Trade and Markets Division (EST); and Keith Wiebe, Principal Officer, ESA.

The research and writing team for Part I was led by Terri Raney, André Croppenstedt and Gustavo Anríquez and included Sarah Lowder, Ira Matuschke and Jakob Skoet (ESA). Additional inputs were provided by Luisa Cruz, Ana Paula de la O Campos, Stefano Gerosa, Yasmeen Khwaja, Faith Nilsson and Panagiotis Karfakis (ESA); Francesca Dalla Valle, Soline de Villard, Caroline Dookie, John Curry, Zoraïda García, Denis Herbel, Regina Laub, Maria Lee, Yianna Lambrou, Marta Osorio, Hajnalka Petrics, Gabriel Rugalema, Libor Stloukal, Sophie Treinen and Peter Wobst (ESW); Magdalena Blum (FAO Office of Knowledge Exchange, Research and Extension); Holger Matthey (EST); Anni McLeod and Frauke Kramer (FAO Animal Production and Health Division); Helga Josupeit, Rebecca Metzner and Stefania Vannuccini (FAO Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy and Economic Division); Robert Mayo (ESS) and Diana Tempelman (FAO Regional Office for Africa). Ines Smyth (Oxfam), Cathy Farnworth (on behalf of IFAD), Elisenda Estruch (ESW) and Julian Thomas and Frank Mischler (ESA) provided valuable comments. We are also grateful to Amy Heyman who read, commented and edited the first draft of the report. The report was prepared in close collaboration with Agnes Quisumbing and Ruth Meinzen-Dick of IFPRI and Cheryl Doss of Yale University. Background papers, partially funded by ESW, were prepared by Cheryl Doss; Julia Behrman, Andrew Dillon, Ruth Vargas Hill, Ephraim Nkonya, Amber Peterman, Esteban J. Quiñones and Agnes Quisumbing, (IFPRI); Christopher Coles, Priya Deshingkar, Rebecca Holmes, Nicola Jones, Jonathan Mitchell and Marcella Vigneri (ODI); Diana Fletschner (Rural Development Institute) and Lisa Kenney (University of Washington); Christine Okali (University of East Anglia); Jan Lundius (independent consultant); and Holger Seebens (KfW Entwicklungsbank). Additional background papers were prepared by the following FAO staff members: Gustavo Anríquez, Yasmeen Khwaja, Lucia Palombi (FAO Emergency Operations and Rehabilitation Division) and Paola Termine (ESW). The report also drew on papers prepared for the FAO-IFAD-ILO Workshop on Gender and Rural Employment and synthesized by Soline de Villard and Jennie Dey de Pryck. The report benefited from two expert consultations, partially funded by the World Bank. In addition to many of those mentioned above, external participants included Isatou Jallow (WFP), Johannes Jütting (OECD), Patricia Biermayr-Jenzano (CIAT), Markus Goldstein and Eija Pehu (World Bank), Maria Hartl and Annina Lubbock (IFAD), Jemima Njuki (ILRI), Thelma Paris (IRRI), Patrick Webb (Tufts University), and Manfred Zeller (University of Hohenheim). Hela Kochbati (Afard), Robert Mazur (Iowa State University) and others made valuable contributions to the Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition (FSN Forum) on Women in Agriculture, organized by Max Blanck and Renata Mirulla (ESA). We are grateful for many useful comments received at a mini-symposium organized at the International Association of Agricultural Economists Triennial Conference.

In addition, the final draft report was reviewed by Patrick Webb (Tufts University), Diana Fletschner (Rural Development Institute), Thomas P. Thompson (IFDC), Maria Hartl (IFAD), Carmen Diana Deere (UCLA), Susana Lastarria-Corbiel (University of Wisconsin), Jo Swinnen (University of Leuven), Patricia Biermayr-Jenzano, Joanne Sandler and colleagues (UNIFEM), Barbara
Stocking (Oxfam GB), Paul Munro-Faure and Paul Mathieu (FAO Climate, Energy and Tenure Division), Ruth Meinzen-Dick (IFPRI), Agnes Quisumbing (IFPRI), and Cheryl Doss (Yale University). The writing team is most grateful to the workshop participants and other internal and external reviewers of various drafts of the manuscript.

Part II of the report was jointly authored by Sarah Lowder (ESA) and Holger Matthey and Merritt Cluff (EST), under the guidance of Jakob Skoet. Additional inputs were provided by Joshua Dewbre and Kisan Gunjal (EST).

Part III of the report was prepared by Sarah Lowder, with assistance from Brian Carisma and Stefano Gerosa, under the guidance of Terri Raney. Helpful comments were provided by Naman Keita, Seevalingum Ramasawmy, Mukesh Srivastava, and Franco Stefanelli (ESS); Diana Tempelman; Maria Adelaide D’Arcangelo, Zoraida Garcia and Clara Park (ESW), and Barbara Burlingame and Marie-Claude Dop (FAO Nutrition and Consumer Protection Division).

The publication was greatly enhanced by Michelle Kendrick (ESA) who provided English editorial and project management support. Liliana Maldonado and Paola di Santo (ESA) provided excellent administrative support throughout the process. Translations and printing services were provided by the Meeting Programming and Documentation Service of the FAO Corporate Services, Human Resources and Finance Department. Graphic, layout and proofing services were provided by Flora Dicarlo and Visiontime.
### Abbreviations and acronyms

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<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CED</td>
<td>chronic energy deficiency</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIAT</td>
<td>International Centre for Tropical Agriculture</td>
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<tr>
<td>FFS</td>
<td>Farmer field school</td>
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<tr>
<td>FPI</td>
<td>Food Price Index (FAO)</td>
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<td>ICTs</td>
<td>information and communication technologies</td>
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<td>IFAD</td>
<td>International Fund for Agricultural Development</td>
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<td>IFDC</td>
<td>International Fertilizer Development Center</td>
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<td>IFPRI</td>
<td>International Food Policy Research Institute</td>
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<td>ILRI</td>
<td>International Livestock Research Institute</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>LSMS</td>
<td>Living Standards Measurement Study</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millennium Development Goal</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGOs</td>
<td>non-governmental organizations</td>
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<tr>
<td>NREGA</td>
<td>National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (India)</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODI</td>
<td>Overseas Development Institute (United Kingdom)</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>RIGA</td>
<td>Rural Income Generating Activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIGI</td>
<td>Social Institutions and Gender Inequality</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCLA</td>
<td>University of California, Los Angeles (United States of America)</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNIFEM</td>
<td>United Nations Development Fund for Women</td>
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