



Food and Agriculture  
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# GENDER NEWS Asia Pacific

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@Mayling Flores Rojas

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## FAO Regional Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2019 for Asia and the Pacific

The Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (RAP) has now in place its Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2019. Building on the corporate Policy on Gender Equality (2012) and the spirit of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, the Strategy provides new focus to gender-related work in the region and identifies main delivery mechanisms for the next three years.

Published at the beginning of January, the Strategy was developed through a long consultative process with inputs from regional, country office and headquarters colleagues and endorsed by Kundhavi Kandiresan, Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for Asia and the Pacific.

Despite their crucial contributions to agriculture and rural livelihoods, rural women in the region systematically face gender-related constraints and inequalities that hamper their role as

agents of change towards sustainable agricultural and rural development. The Strategy aims to strengthen efforts to unleash rural women's full potential and advance gender equality through FAO's programme and initiatives in the region.

Gender priorities are thus identified in the context of emerging regional trends and challenges such as rapidly changing agri-food systems, the effects of climate change, extreme weather events and environmental degradation, and demographic shifts shaping and being shaped by migration, feminization of agriculture and ageing of the rural population.

The Strategy recognizes regional priorities and priority programmes as catalytic to and potential vehicles for gender equality. Addressing hunger and malnutrition, sustainable intensification of aquaculture and

### FAO Regional Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2019 for Asia and the Pacific

FAO Regional Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2019 for the region and its four focus areas.

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fisheries and inclusive value chains cannot be achieved without women's contribution. Likewise, integrating a gender perspective into RAP's two major multi-disciplinary priority programmes, namely Climate Change and One Health, is key to enhancing their potential to increase reach and have significant impact on the lives of women and men.

## Focus areas for regional gender work

The Strategy identifies four focus areas for gender equality and women's empowerment based on the regional priorities, FAO's comparative advantage and ongoing gender-related work in the region. Under each focus area, particular attention will be paid to ensure that effective monitoring and reporting of progress and results are done.

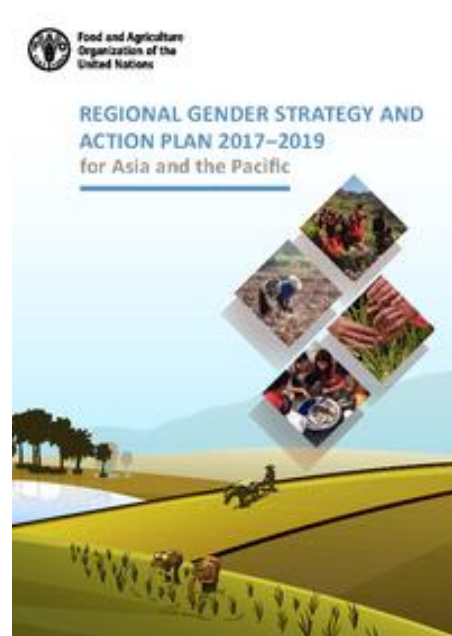
**Focus Area 1** aims at developing improved understanding of gender dynamics in changing agri-food systems to learn about the individuals who will be benefitting from these changings and those at risk of being left behind.

**Focus Area 2** sets to increase the benefits that women and men receive from programmes in key productive systems, including rice farming, fisheries and aquaculture. The latter, for example, requires evidence and analysis of the impact of gender roles, inequalities and relations on the production, distribution and marketing of fish products, the gender division of labour, and entry points for women and men throughout the value chain.

**Focus Area 3** promotes the advancement of gender equality in food and nutrition security policies and programming through awareness raising and systematic inclusion of gender equality,

particularly in nutrition-sensitive agriculture, food loss and waste, nutrition-sensitive social protection and attention to women's work burden.

**Focus Area 4** aims at improving protection from and resilience to disasters and climate change risks for women and men. The promotion and adoption of gender-responsive climate-smart agricultural practices and technologies is one example of areas of work that holds potential to address gender concerns in climate change programmes and strengthen women's resilience.



## Improving gender intervention effectiveness

In addition to the four focus areas, efforts will go into further developing FAO's institutional capacity for mainstreaming gender, including in strategic planning at the country level and gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation. In terms of mainstreaming, work will continue in different technical areas.

In forestry, for example, FAO will build on knowledge developed

through a regional assessment and eight country assessments on mainstreaming gender in forestry policies in Asia and the Pacific. In the field of land tenure and natural resource governance, FAO will deepen its efforts to promote equality in women's access to land and participation in natural resource governance, including through the promotion of the Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forestry and the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication.

In terms of gender in strategic planning, country gender assessments will be conducted, as mandated in the Gender Equality Policy, as a key programmatic tool to promote gender-responsive programming in the field. At the moment assessments are already ongoing and are at different stages of finalization in Myanmar, Cambodia and Papua New Guinea.

The pdf version of the strategy is available online [here](#).

The eBook version of the Strategy is available online on the FAO eBooks page [here](#).

Source: FAO. 2017. Regional Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2017–2019 for Asia and the Pacific. Bangkok.

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## Success story of a strong process of women's empowerment in Nepal



©FAO/Vidhu Kayastha  
Sabitri B.K., 45 year-old Dalit woman from Jaisidada demonstrating her success.

"We are no more dependent on our husbands to meet daily household expenses, rather we are in position to provide pocket money to them" says Sabitri B.K. (pictured above) who is a Dalit woman (so-called lower caste in Hindu culture). Highlighting positive aspects of the Jaisidada Women's Community Farmers Group, she says that Dalit women are playing an active role in the Group. Sabitri is a remarkably example of a strong process of women's empowerment in the Dalit community.

The Women's Community Group was established as part of a year-long FAO telefood project entitled "Community based off-season vegetable production" in Syangja, Nepal, successfully completed in July 2016. The project supported smallholder farmers in producing safe and quality products, especially off-season (autumn, winter and spring) vegetables such as cauliflower, cabbage, radish, peas, beans, broccoli and carrot. It also improved maize seed production in the summer season with attention to minimizing the use of harmful chemical, protect the agro-ecosystem and environment.

Year-round vegetable cultivation applying integrated pest management (IPM) technology was introduced in the

Jaisidada Women's Community Group consisting of one member from each of the 32 village households. Spread over an area of ten hectares, the project permitted to achieve fresh healthy vegetables production and improve maize seed production for the community's members.

After receiving the training, the Women's Community Farmers Group adopted composting and IPM technology, rain water harvesting and collection in small plastic ponds and construction of plastic tunnels for off-season vegetable production.

Birendra Bahadur Hamal, agro-expert and former Syangja District Agriculture Development Officer explained that "farmers have learned to prepare and use home-made organic liquid pesticides popularly known as "Jholmal" which they apply in their farm. As a result, the use frequency of chemical pesticides has been reduced".

The Jaisidada Women's Community Farmers Group is now using fertilizers like compost and farm yard manure which is prepared basically using cow dung and urine, waste straw and other dairy wastes. Farmers became aware of hazards caused by mishandling and mismanagement of chemicals for human-beings, domestic animals and the environment.

The telefood project has supported the farmers' group to construct 40 plastic tunnels and 32 plastic ponds so that at least each household has one plastic tunnel and one plastic pond. Farmers are also now equipped with an electronic weighing machine and electric maize peeling machine/maize thresher. Furthermore, a community building with rooms for meeting and storage of seeds, fertilizers and agro-products was constructed with support from the project.

In addition to the off-season vegetables previously mentioned, the Women's Community Farmers Group is also cultivating summer vegetables in plastic tunnels like leafy vegetable and tomatoes, and outside such as cucumber, (sponge, snake, bitter and bottle) gourd, chili, eggplant, okra, and pumpkin.

The Jaisidada Women's Community Farmers Group produced about 57 600 kg of winter vegetables. After selling 62 percent of their production (about 35.8 metric ton), they earned NPR 1 432 000, equivalent to USD 13 638 (approximately USD 422 per household). The rest of the production of winter vegetables was used for domestic consumption.



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Vegetable farming tunnels in Jaisidada.

According to Kalpana Poudel, a 38-year-old female farmer, the members of the Women's Group also produced 39 metric ton of summer vegetables worth approximately the same amount of money as the winter vegetables (NPR 1 506 560 equivalent to USD 14 080 and USD 422 per household). They also earned NPR 712 620, equivalent to USD 6 660 (USD 208 per household) from the production of 10 metric ton of improved maize seed sale.

With collective efforts for marketing through the Agriculture Cooperative

Society, the members of the Jaisidada Women's Community Farmers Group are receiving a daily income from selling their healthy vegetable products in the market. The empowered women of Jaisidada are also providing technical support to 29 other women's group of Aarukharka VDC to adapt the community-based off-season vegetable farming in their respective villages.

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#### AROUND THE REGION

### Asia-Pacific Policy Dialogue on women's economic empowerment

ESCAP and UN Women jointly convened the Asia-Pacific Policy Dialogue on "Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work" together with the UN Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, which also includes FAO. The meeting took place in Bangkok, on 23-24 February 2017 and served as a regional policy dialogue for the 61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

This two-day meeting brought together various experts and practitioners from the region including governmental officials from 16 Asia-Pacific countries, academia, civil society, private sector and international and UN organizations, including FAO. Under the overall objective of identifying and

examining how current and future trends in the changing world of work will impact on women's economic empowerment, participants exchanged knowledge and good practices, and developed policy and action-oriented recommendations.

The topic of the policy dialogue – women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work – aligns with the priority theme of the 61<sup>st</sup> session of the CSW (13-24 March 2017, New York). As such, the outcomes and recommendations of the policy dialogue are intended to feed into preparations for the 61<sup>st</sup> session of the CSW with a view to strengthening the regional perspective and prepare countries from the region for the CWS meeting.



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Panel discussion on "Technological change and its impact on women's economic empowerment".

Among other topics, the policy dialogue discussed emerging issues related to demographics, care and climate change which affect women's paid and unpaid work. Panelists pointed out that resistance to change in ideologies around women's roles hamper rapid changing opportunities for women. In addition, investing in care, due to the existing unequal distribution of care responsibilities between women and men, is seen as a critical pre-requisite for achieving women's political, economic and social rights and empowerment. Unpaid work, including care work, is a way to

absorb changes resulting from the changing climate. Meantime, climate change increases multiple forms of unpaid labour predominantly carried out by women such as water collection and, therefore, disproportionately affects women.

The meeting also discussed the role and impact on technological change on women's economic empowerment. This topic offered the opportunity to share FAO's view and current work on the contribution of labour-saving technologies to empowering rural women during a panel discussion followed by group work and plenary reflections.

Labour-saving technologies and practices can offer valuable solutions to reduce women's work burden characterized by high drudgery, and multiple and repetitive unpaid and often unrecognized and unreported tasks. The implementation of simple gender-sensitive labour-saving technologies and practices in some countries has resulted in increasing labour productivity, decreasing production costs and freeing time in order to undertake other sources of income-generating activities and for leisure and care.

For more information on rural women's work burden and FAO's work on gender-sensitive labour technologies, please access a short FAO factsheet on "addressing women's work burden" (FAO) [here](#).

The FAO publication on "Running out of time: The reduction of women's work burden in agricultural production" is also available [here](#) for consultation and download.

## Hope flows in Atlavas, Aklan (Philippines)



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FAO, NCC and local government staff traverse this difficult path to the village, the same path that villagers, primarily women and girls, negotiate several times a day to fetch water.

Nestled atop a mountain in the remote Municipality of Altavas, in the Province of Aklan, Philippines, is Gando Falls, one of the most important resources for nearly 4 000 residents of barangays Lupo and Catmon.

The area is relatively isolated and is accessible only to those who are willing to take an hour-long trek up a steep and winding trail – the same path that villagers, primarily women and girls, traverse several times a day to fetch water.

This arduous journey is about to end very soon as water from the spring will flow directly to their homes and schools, and irrigate their rain-fed farmlands, their main sources of food and livelihood.

Thanks to a partnership between the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), FAO and the Department of Health's National Nutrition Council (NNC), the construction of a water impounding system is now underway as part of a project on Early Warning

System for Food and Nutrition Security (EWS-FNS).

### Poor water access affects the most vulnerable

Collecting water for household consumption is not an easy task for the women of Altavas. On regular days, they walk and climb to the spring at the bottom of the waterfall where they would fill their buckets with water for cleaning and washing. Drinking water is sourced from an open-pit well in the same vicinity. In the summer, the spring and well run dry, forcing them to negotiate the perilous mountain trail to reach the main source, but this, too, dries up on extremely hot days.

"At the height of the El Niño, my neighbours and I were competing for water. There were times when I had to fetch water in the middle of the night or very early in the morning, when there are not so many people trying to get water," narrates 64-year-old Luzvilla Buliag.

This situation is not unique to Altavas. In many developing countries, women and girls bear the responsibility of fetching water. A recent report by a high level panel of experts on food security and nutrition highlighted its adverse impacts on their health and nutritional status. This also affects how much time they spend on educational activities and fulfilling other perceived gender-specific roles such as child care.

### Health, food security and livelihood impacts

In addition to the poor water access, water quality has also been affecting the health of people in Altavas.

"I have a grandchild who is two months old. We buy bottled water for him but my granddaughter who is already six years old drinks water from the well just like the rest of us. Sometimes we get sick. At my age, I still get diarrhoea," Luzvilla said.

Agriculture-based livelihoods and food supply in the area were also badly hit by El Niño. Relying only on rainfall to water their vegetables, banana and rice, farmers experienced a two-month delay in planting.

Water scarcity affects 40 percent of the global population, while preventable water and sanitation-related diarrhoeal diseases take the lives of approximately 2 million people each year. Such diseases are also among the major causes of death in children under five.



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For more than 35 years now, Luzvilla Buliag, 64, has been collecting water for her family's consumption.

"The lack of adequate infrastructure and management to support water and sanitation efforts could result in larger health, economic and environmental impacts that would undermine any progress in building prosperity and a sustainable future," explains FAO Representative in the Philippines José Luis Fernández. "Ensuring that everyone, especially the vulnerable and marginalized gain access to water is a requisite to achieving the entire range of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030."

## Water impounding system

The long wait is almost over for the residents of Altavas. By December 2016, they will be completing the construction of their very own water impounding system, using tools and materials from FAO and UNICEF.

The reservoir is designed to collect water from the rain, as well as from Gando Falls. It will be equipped with pipes that connect to more than 300 households in barangays Lupo and Catmon.

Aside from providing water for drinking and other domestic needs, the water impounding system will also be used to irrigate farms. It will also provide water access to two public elementary schools, which will benefit more than 150 children aged 12 and below.

For the women, having water distributed directly to their homes means less time away from their children and opportunities for more productive endeavours.

"Finally, I will be spared from having to walk long distances just to get water," Luzvilla declares. "It would be nice to have water by just turning on the tap."



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Residents of Barangay, Lupo and Catmon are working together to construct a water impounding system, using the tools and materials provided by FAO in partnership with NNC and with funding support from UNICEF.

The water impounding project is part of FAO's larger effort to improve food and nutrition security in Western Visayas.

According to FAO's EWS-FNS Project Team Leader Maria Cecilia Pastores, "one of the major components of the project is to support interventions to mitigate food security and nutritional status risks. It is important that the community recognizes its risks, knows what needs to be done to alleviate these, and actively participates in providing solutions."

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### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### International Women's Day 2017

To celebrate the 2017 International Women's Day (IWD 2017), FAO, IFAD and WFP hosted an event in FAO Headquarters under the theme "Step It Up Together with Rural Women to End Hunger and Poverty".

In line with the UN-wide theme ("Women in the Changing World of Work: Planet 50:50 by 2030"), the event gave a particular emphasis to women's work and employment as key components to end food and nutrition insecurity and eliminate rural poverty.

Forward-looking solutions and current examples of the work of the Rome-based Agencies in support of gender rural were also highlighted during the celebration.



Rural women comprise between 40 and 50 of the agricultural labour force in East and Southeast Asia and close to 30 percent in South Asia. Agriculture represents the primary provider of employment for women in the region.

Through their engagement and contribution in agriculture and rural areas, women play a key role in ensuring household and community food security and agricultural development.

Despite contributing for up to half of the agricultural labour force in some parts of Asia, women's labour often remains unpaid, invisible and underestimated.

Decent work is crucial as a vehicle for rural women's economic empowerment, social advancement and political participation. Equitable access to decent work in rural areas enables women to become effective economic actors and agents of change towards sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction.

# FAO-RECOFTC training workshop on promoting gender equality in natural resource management



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*Small focus group discussion with male and female members from the Baan Hun Dam Community Forest in Suphanburi province, Thailand.*

The degradation of and increasing demands for natural resources in the Asia-Pacific region poses challenges requiring significant changes in policies, institutions and practices. Thus, understanding and addressing the gender-specific relations to natural resources use and management is a requirement for effective programming and policies.

It is within this context that FAO and the Center for People and Forest (RECOFTC) co-organized a training workshop on “Promoting gender equality in natural resource management: from policy to action”. This training took place in Bangkok, 23-26 January, following a two-year collaboration between FAO and RECOFTC centred on addressing policy and capacity gaps in mainstreaming gender in natural resource management in Asia and the Pacific.

A total of 15 participants from 7 countries participated in the four-day training. Participants included projects’ managers, trainers, government officials, and resource decision-makers among which seven FAO staff from both country offices

the regional office for Asia and the Pacific.

Based on the recently developed FAO-RECOFTC training manual on “Mainstreaming gender into forestry interventions in Asia and the Pacific”, the training highlighted the importance of gender in natural resource management and introduced theoretical as well as practical gender mainstreaming tools such as the Gender Analysis Framework.

Throughout the training, strategies, tools and approaches that are crucial to formulate and implement gender-sensitive projects and programmes were identified and discussed together with the participants.

Sharing experiences, best practices and practical knowledge on gender mainstreaming, and developing action plan for the application of gender-sensitive resource management among participants, were also fully integrated into the training’s objectives and agenda thus facilitating the learning process and adding value to the overall training.

## Field visit to Baan Hun Dam Community Forest

On the third day of the training, the participants went on a field visit to Baan Hun Dam Community Forest (Suphanburi Province, Thailand) to meet with a Thai Karen community living in a mountainous forested area covered by trees. The forest area where the community lives is part of the western forest complex which is the largest in Thailand.

The field visit offered the opportunity for the participants to meet with community members and collect

data and information about men and women’s day-to-day tasks and assigned roles in the community and their sources of livelihoods.

In the afternoon of the field visit day, local external stakeholders such as official development practitioners from Dan Chang District and Suphanburi Province, and institutions such as the National Park came to the village to participate in a plenary discussion with the participants and members of the community.



@RECOFTC

*Group photo with the Community’s members, local development stakeholders and institutions, and the training’s participants.*

At the end of the field visit, training participants presented their results to the other participants and trainers based on the Gender Analysis Framework.

This field learning reflection exercise was used as a way to validate their results, and identify and discuss the Community’s existing gender-related issues, challenges and opportunities.

## Panel discussion on gender mainstreaming

A panel discussion on “Revisiting gender mainstreaming as the strategy to achieve gender equality” was held on the last day of the

training. The panel discussion brought together five gender experts and practitioners from different institutions/organizations (such as FAO, the Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management (WOCAN), and the Asian Institute of Technology) from the region.



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Panel discussion during the training working on "Revisiting gender mainstreaming as the strategy to achieve gender equality".

The purpose of the panel discussion was for the panelists to present their institutions/organizations gender mainstreaming strategy to achieve gender equality. It was also an opportunity for the participants to learn more about the panelists' ongoing activities and ask them specific questions on gender equality and mainstreaming.

Through their interventions, the panelists reaffirmed that gender mainstreaming is a means towards gender equality, not an end in itself. The panelists also stressed out the specific need for women-specific targeted interventions to empower women. This is particularly relevant in order to ensure that women have their own voice and representation in the decision-making processes at all levels.

The training manual jointly developed by FAO and RECOFTC is available online [here](#).

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#### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### RAP GFP Webinar Series: Focus on the Regional Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2017–2019 for Asia-Pacific

RAP is holding a series of webinars targeted at GFPs in country offices.

The fourth webinar, to be held end of March, will focus on the **Regional Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2017–2019 for Asia and the Pacific**.

The session will zoom into the recently finalized Regional Gender Strategy and Action Plan for the next three years. The session will also be practically oriented aiming to discuss with the GFPs their country gender action plan for 2017 and identify ways in which they can contribute to gender equality in line with the new regional Strategy.

The recording of the third webinar on the **Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), its article 14 on rural women, and the CEDAW General Recommendation 34 on the rights of rural women** can be accessed for viewing at:

<http://fao.adobeconnect.com/p42tv6uf894/>

All staff members are welcome to join.

Further information regarding the upcoming webinar will be available soon.



#### PHOTO FROM THE REGION



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Women living in wetlands in Lao PDR play a crucial role in ensuring a sustainable use of the wetlands.

Wetlands are fragile eco-systems that play an important role to buffer rural people livelihoods against climate change impacts. In Lao PDR, FAO is involved in the Climate Change Adaptation in Wetlands Areas (CAWA) project in order to reduce the vulnerability to climate change of local communities and the wetlands upon which they depend.

## GENDER NEWS

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