



Food and Agriculture  
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# GENDER NEWS Asia Pacific

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## Gender-based discrimination and food and nutrition security

Discrimination against women and girls is still pervasive. As shown by the OECD Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI)<sup>1</sup>, it affects the majority of countries in the Asia-Pacific region. In particular, South Asian countries show strong homogeneity with medium to high discrimination against women and girls in social institutions. For example, countries in South Asia display some of the highest levels of discrimination in family codes and son bias.

High discrimination in such countries is underwritten by discriminatory customary laws, social norms and practices; inappropriate legal

protections against gender discrimination in social institutions; limited women's physical integrity; high levels of acceptance of domestic violence; medium to high levels of devaluation of daughters; and limited access to public space and resources for women, among others.<sup>2</sup>

### Violence against women and gender-based violence

Violence against women and girls represents the most extreme form of discrimination and manifestation of gender inequality in the personal sphere. In Asia and the Pacific,

### Gender-based discrimination and food and nutrition security

Violence against women and girls hold serious negative consequences for development and food and nutrition security.

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<sup>1</sup> The SIGI is a composite index that scores countries based on five sub-indices, namely discriminatory family code, restricted physical integrity, son bias, restricted resources and assets, and restricted civil liberties.

<sup>2</sup> OECD. 2014. Social Institutions and Gender Index Synthesis Report. Available [here](#).

national survey data show that up to two-thirds of women have experienced physical or sexual violence by intimate partners in their lifetime in certain countries.<sup>3</sup> While the extent of different forms of violence against women varies across countries in the region, it occurs in every society and affects women of all statuses and backgrounds.



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*Livelihoods restoration and enhancement of disaster-affected communities' resilience in Sagaing region, Myanmar*

Violence against women (VAW) often results from deeply-rooted patriarchal attitudes and related social norms perpetuating unequal power relations between men and women and pervasive discrimination against women at all levels (individual, community, and societal). VAW represents one of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations worldwide according to the UN.

VAW and other forms of gender-based violence and discrimination carry a high development cost. According to OECD,<sup>4</sup> higher levels of discrimination in social institutions translate into poor development performance. Research also shows that high rates of VAW is intertwined with outbreaks of conflicts that affect

the food and nutritional status of large numbers of people.

## Food security and gender-based violence

Gender-based violence is a life-threatening issue that tends to be exacerbated by food insecurity, poverty, and conflicts. Concomitantly, it has a devastating impact on agricultural productivity, and food security and nutrition by negatively affecting both the physical and emotional health, resilience, and productive capacity/ability of victims, their families and communities' members, to work and participate in community life. In turn, such impacts lead to increased poverty, thus self-reinforcing cycle of poverty and violence among affected families and communities.

Despite the evidence on the devastating impacts of gender-based violence on food and nutrition security and development, actions for women's inclusion, leadership and protection remain inadequate.

## FAO's work towards eliminating gender-based violence

In such contexts, FAO is committed to protecting supporting and restoring the human rights and livelihoods of women and men. Raising awareness and building capacity of staff and counterparts to address VAW and gender-based violence within FAO's work is also part of the solution. In line with this approach, FAO has recently released a publication on gender-based violence in food security and

agricultural interventions that aims at introducing the relevance and practical know-how of addressing gender-based violence in agriculture and rural development.

### GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence consists of any harmful act that is perpetrated against a person's will and based on socially ascribed (i.e. gender) differences that assign specific roles, responsibilities, and expectations to men and women.

The main types of GBV most relevant to FAO's work include:

- denial of rightful access to or control over productive and financial resources, and livelihood opportunities
- physical abuse and sexual violence
- withholding access to money and/or food
- harmful traditional practices such as son preference at household, community and state levels.

For more information on FAO's publication on food security and gender-based violence, please click [here](#).

The interview with Daniel Gustafson, FAO's Deputy Director General, on gender-based violence and food security and nutrition, is accessible [here](#).

### FOR INFORMATION

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<sup>3</sup> UNFPA. 2017. Violence against women – Regional snapshot (2017.) Available [here](#).

<sup>4</sup> OECD. 2014. Social Institutions and Gender Index Synthesis Report.

## Women as agents of change toward sustainable agriculture, health and nutrition in India

“We (women farmers) are part of the trainings organized by FAO and feel well equipped to take decisions along with men in matters of farming and even sale of our produce” says Nirmala Devi from Barapanki district after attending a Farmer Water School (FWS) training.

In order to respond to the challenge of improving agricultural productivity and water-use efficiency, FAO is providing technical assistance to the Uttar Pradesh Department of Agriculture under the Uttar Pradesh Water Sector Restructuring Project-II. This project aims at strengthening the institutional and policy framework for integrated water resources management in the state of Uttar Pradesh.

One of the key activities undertaken by the project is to build capacity of farmers through FWS, a unique method piloted and scaled-up by FAO to improve farming practices related to areas such as water management, soil nutrients, and pests, which enables farmers to make informed decisions at crucial stages during the crop production cycle.

While the main focus is to improve sustainable agricultural practices, mainstreaming gender and reducing gender inequalities in the agriculture sector have been integral aspects of FAO’s projects and programmes in India and hold great promise for FAO’s mandate of reducing hunger and poverty.

Shyam Khadka, FAO Representative in India, is of the opinion that FWS is a suitable methodology for changing



Women participating in crop stages training.

farming practices in the current context of India through empowering farmers to find solutions that are the most suitable in local contexts and sustainable in the longer run; and it helps to change the existing gender dynamics by involving women in decision-making. The FWS also supports women’s empowerment because women are becoming equal partners in agricultural and post-production services, thereby increasing overall agricultural productivity and farmers’ incomes.

“Earlier women did not attend similar trainings and meetings to voice their opinion in public forums. Today, with persistence from extension workers and master trainers, these women not only attend meetings but also understand the processes and participate in discussions about crop production and pest and weed management” says Sudhakar Yerrakonda, National Master Trainer.

The FWS have been such a success in terms of women’s empowerment that the project is now considering an exclusive FWS for women, which will further enable women to talk openly and discuss issues pertaining to sustainable agriculture and natural resource management.

This year, FAO will support the implementation of 1,160 FWS (440 primary and 720 secondary FWS). Considering this, there would be a total of 6,720 women FWS participants. Female Master Trainers and facilitators in Lalitpur and Pratnagrah districts will help facilitating meetings and discussions at the village level (minor and culaba level). These women will be trained to take on leadership roles in the upcoming exclusive FWS for women, among others.

**Women’s role in health and nutrition security**

Besides agricultural practices, women also play a crucial role in ensuring good health and nutrition of the family, which makes them central in development interventions that focus on health and nutrition.

Despite India's noteworthy improvement in the area of food and nutrition security in the last few decades, the levels of undernutrition remain unacceptably high in India. As per the Global Nutrition Report (2016), India ranks 114th out of 132 countries on stunting of children under five years of age, 120th out of 130 countries on wasting of children under five years of age, and 170th out of 185 countries on prevalence of anaemia. The problem of malnutrition and undernutrition is compounded by the rising trend of obesity among India's population.



*Dhameshree Mohanty, Community Service Provider.*

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Based on agricultural advances, new fast-growing varieties of staples, especially wheat and rice, ensured India's food self-sufficiency. However, the following decades witnessed a steady decline in diversity of the food basket, especially of traditional grains such as bajra and millet which have high nutritional value.

A pilot to improve the health and nutrition behaviours among tribal

populations in the state of Odisha has been initiated to reintroduce traditional grains and diversify food baskets to include pulses, fruits and vegetables. The aim is also to identify locally relevant, feasible and impactful nutrition-sensitive agriculture practices for improving the nutritional knowledge and agricultural practices among the target groups.

FAO is partnering with Digital Green which uses innovative digital solutions and community engagement in the areas of agriculture, livelihood, health, and nutrition, to improve the lives of rural communities. Within such partnership, extension workers are travelling to villages to train local communities through short videos.

In FAO's project areas, female extension workers are involved in the production and dissemination of information on better farming techniques and nutrition practices through short video clips. Women are also encouraged to act in these videos so that the impact is higher. Dhameshree Mohanty, a Community Service Provider working with a primitive tribal group in Deogarh, district of Odisha, says that she feels empowered and at the same time responsible because of her influence on the community's members. "I try to impart as much information as I can to the members of the community, so that they can adopt healthy habits and improve their nutrition and sanitation".

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#### UPCOMING REGIONAL EVENT

### Asia-Pacific High-Level Preparatory Meeting for the sixty-second session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW62)

CSW62 will take place at the United Nations (UN) Headquarters in New York from 12 to 23 March 2018 and gather representatives from Member States, UN entities and civil society organizations (CSO). This year CSW will consider "Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls" as its priority theme.

In order to assist the Commission in its deliberations, ESCAP, UN Women and FAO, in collaboration with other members of the UN Regional Coordination Mechanism's Thematic Working Group on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women will organize the Asia-Pacific Regional High-Level Meeting for CSW62 on 23 February 2018 in Bangkok.

The Asia-Pacific High-Level Meeting for CSW62 will bring together Ministers and high-level officials from Ministry of Agriculture/Rural Development and National Women's Machineries, women and farmer CSOs, and the UN from the region to explore the theme and identify key actions that are needed to empower rural women and girls in Asia and the Pacific. This will inform a joint regional statement to be taken to New York.



# Living in Hills: Indigenous women in Chittagong Hill Tracts

Chittagong Hill Tracts, also known as CHT, is the region in south-east Bangladesh bordering north-east India and Myanmar. It comprises three hill districts, namely, Rangamati, Khagrachari and Bandarban, and is the ancestral land of fourteen indigenous groups including Chakma, Tripura, Bawm, Kheyang, and many others. Indigenous peoples' lives in CHT is intrinsically linked with nature, culture and tradition.



*Fruit sampling distribution in Bandarban district.*

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## Role of Indigenous women in agriculture

Indigenous people's livelihoods are dependent upon agriculture, including forestry and traditional economic activities like shifting cultivation, hunting and bamboo collection. Women's contribution to livelihood activities is enormous. They actively participate in daily family activities along with domestic activities and play a key role in preserving indigenous peoples' culture and tradition through their knowledge and management skills.

In particular, women play a significant role in shifting cultivation, locally known as *Jum* cultivation, the main source of income and livelihood

in the area. Indigenous women are extensively involved in the whole process including deciding the suitable crops to cultivate, sowing seeds, protecting crops from wild animals and birds, harvesting, etc.

Indigenous women living around the Kaptai Lake are also involved in fishing since the formation of the lake more than 50 years ago. Along with fishing, women spend a significant amount of time looking after and taking care of animals such as cattle, goat, hens, and ducks being reared by almost every Indigenous families living in villages in CHT.

Similarly, they are in charge of vegetable gardening and mushroom farming in CHT, two major sources of family income and domestic consumption. Indigenous women also play a crucial role in sustaining traditional economic activities, with weaving being a very prominent one. Handloom products, particularly the traditional attires, are in strong demand outside the hill tracts.

## Gender relations and inequalities in CHT

Most of the indigenous communities living in CHT are patriarchal. Although the Constitution of Bangladesh recognizes equal opportunity for men and women, women suffer from discrimination, exclusion and oppression due to rigid customary practices of inheritance laws among indigenous communities. As a consequence of such discrimination, women do not have the right to inherit land for example.

Although the National Women Development Policy 2011 stresses women's full access to and control

over income, inheritance, credit, land and market, women face gender-based obstacles to access and control such resources due to the prevailing customary laws in CHT. Women's access to local markets to sell *Jum* products or crops is limited despite their key role.

Indigenous women in CHT are considered less capable than men and are confined to the domestic sphere for cooking, cleaning, feeding child, etc. Indigenous girls often have no access to education and health. Girls are told to help their mothers while boys are sent to school. Being perceived as a burden to the family, girls are often compelled to engage in activities outside home and many of them end up in the garment industry.



*Participatory training on homestead vegetable production in Thanchi, Bandarban district.*

## Impact of climate change and globalization on indigenous women

Environmental degradation along with climate change represent impediments to indigenous women's daily activities and intensify their work burden. Climate change also worsens the current situation in CHT where indigenous peoples' access to their ancestral lands and forests is being severely restricted by the establishment of eco-parks and tea

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estates that restrain women's access to natural resources.

As a result of globalization, indigenous women have no longer access to lands, forests, and other vital natural resources for their livelihoods. In turn, thousands of women compelled to migrate to cities such as Dhaka and Chittagong to engage in the garment factories that have proved unsecure for women in general and indigenous women in particular.

Due to both climate change and restricted access to natural resources, indigenous women often face difficulties to provide their families with enough food and/or income in the remote hills of CHT. They have to walk long distances to simply gather and collect their daily family needs such as firewood and drinking water. Walking far down the hills becomes even more challenging and risky for indigenous women during rainy days and in the event of landslide caused by extreme weather.



Farmer Field School session in Bandardan district.

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## FAO's work in CHT

From 2013 to 2014, FAO, in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh and other partners, supported 6,200 food insecure households in remote areas of CHT through the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil

Protection department (ECHO)-funded project "Early Recovery Assistance to Restore Agriculture-based Livelihoods in Critically Food Insecure Areas of the CHT".

The objective of the project was to improve food insecure households' livelihoods through sustainable management of natural resources and technological innovations in agriculture. Through this project, FAO has been successful in promoting food and nutrition security in the remote hilly areas of CHT having given a special focus on indigenous women and children.

In collaboration with various partners, FAO helped rural men and women farmers restore and diversify their livelihoods, and strengthen their resilience to future shocks and stresses. A number of alternative means of food production and income for greater resilience were established such as poultry-keeping, homestead vegetable gardens and fruit orchards with technical support from FAO.

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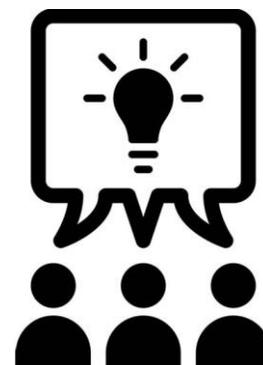
### UPCOMING REPORT

## Asia and Pacific Regional Gender Stock-Taking Exercise 2018

The regional gender stock-taking for Asia and the Pacific undertaken in 2015 will be updated during the first half of 2018 in order to provide an overall updated picture of FAO's gender work during the biennium 2016–2017 and inform future work

related to gender equality and women's empowerment at the regional and country level.

This exercise will be used as a means to assess the regional office and country offices past and on-going work related to the promotion of gender equality in agriculture and rural development.



Main achievements, good practices, challenges, gaps and capacity development needs will be identified to strengthen the benefits women and men received from FAO's interventions and support the effective implementation of the Regional Gender Strategy and Action Plan for Asia and the Pacific 2017–2019.

Along with the review of regional strategies, programmes, and project documents to assess the extent of gender mainstreaming in FAO's work at the regional office, interviews with colleagues at the regional office and national GFPs will be conducted during this exercise to provide in-depth information on gaps and challenges to be addressed.



# Making migration a choice, not a necessity in the Philippines

## - The story of Linda Capilitan

“Many have told me that they want to get out because life is hard here. Most of all, they really want to be able to send their children to college. But for me, as a woman and a mother, I believe I have to stay and so I need to find a way to earn a living here” explains Linda Capilitan, a rice and vegetable farmer in Cotabato province in Mindanao.

Despite other farmers’ desire to leave rural areas in search for better employment opportunities and years of experiencing tremendous challenges that severely disrupted her livelihood, Linda Capilitan still believes that farmers can prosper in their community.



*Linda Capilitan, a farmer from Cotabato Province, tend to her vegetable plot at an FAO-assisted climate-smart farmer field school.*

Worldwide, a growing number of people has been forced to flee their home due to increased conflict and political instability. Hunger, poverty, and an increase in extreme weather events linked to climate change are importantly contributing to the migration challenge.

“The most difficult situation we faced as farmers was the El Niño from 2015 to 2016. It was extremely hard to sustain our crops,” narrates Linda.

“Our community is also prone to armed conflict and disasters. When there is war, we don’t want to risk our

lives going to our farms. We had to stay at an evacuation centre and abandon our farming, which was our only means of earning a living. We only relied on relief goods. It was painful for a mother like me not to be able to provide the needs of my children.”

In the Philippines, third country most vulnerable to natural hazards in the 2016 World Risk Index, about one third of the labour force is employed in agriculture. Creating enabling conditions that will allow rural families to remain productive in their communities and return to their homes when they feel it is safe to do so can help make migration a choice rather than a necessity.

In such context, FAO’s efforts consist of supporting farming and fishing families affected by natural and human-induced disasters to stand back on their feet by providing them with the resources that they need to re-establish their livelihoods.

Increasing rural households’ resilience to future threats by equipping them with skills to adopt climate-smart approaches and establish off-farm livelihoods is also part of the technical assistance provided by FAO in the Philippines.

In addition, FAO helps to improve business skills, access to markets and micro-financing options to expand rural communities’ agriculture-based livelihoods and improve their incomes in order to help many Filipinos break free from the cycle of poverty and food insecurity that force them to leave their homes in search of better employment opportunities.

Linda’s family is among more than 300,000 farming and fishing households living in disaster-stricken areas across the country that have so far received emergency and livelihood rehabilitation assistance from FAO.



*Livelihood recovery support in Cotabato Province, Mindanao.*

Such assistance is particularly critical in the island-region of Mindanao which is projected to be one of the most climate change at-risk regions and has been suffering from decades of conflict.

“At this time, this is where we draw courage and strength from. We were able to send our children to school through the extra income we earned. Because of this, we were able to forget whatever happened to us in the past and we are now focused on moving forward.”

“I wouldn’t say that our family became wealthy, but our lives became better. Now, I am happy where I am”.

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# Women-friendly labour-saving technologies and climate-smart practices from Nepal



*A women beneficiary using a labour-saving technology for harvesting cereal.*

©FAO/Maying Flores Rojas

“The joint programme provided me with technical knowledge as well as agriculture inputs and facilitated access to credits so that I could produce more and sell it in the market” explains Chandra Kala, a woman farmer supported by the Rural Women’s Economic Empowerment (RWEE) programme in Nepal, a UN joint pilot initiative started in 2015 in three districts of Nepal, namely Sindhuli, Sarlahi and Rautahat.

Under the RWEE programme and in partnership with UN Women and WFP, FAO is supporting women’s empowerment through different interventions including the introduction of women-friendly labour-saving technologies and climate-smart practices.

The objective behind giving women access of such technologies and practices is to reduce their drudgery,

free-up their time, increase their productivity, and enhance their adaptive capacity vis-a-vis the effects of climate change.

Agricultural activities performed in rural Nepal are (almost exclusively) gender specific. Women are traditionally largely responsible for planting, weeding, harvesting, drying and processing rice, maize and/or wheat in cereal-based farming systems using only simple manual tools.

Additional activities typically performed by rural women are related to the collection and transport of the fodder from the forest to animal shelters and to small-scale crop irrigation. Instead men are usually in charge of medium and large scale crop irrigation, ploughing, threshing and winnowing.

As a result of male labour migration from rural to urban areas and abroad, rural women are left in charge of most of the agricultural activities, including those traditionally performed by men. As a direct result, women in rural areas suffer from high work burdens leading to low agricultural and labour productivity.



*Women shelling corn with corn sheller during a field visit to RWEE beneficiaries.*

©Gupta Ramananda

Cereal cutters and corn shellers are among the labour-saving technologies that have been introduced to women farmers. These have reduced the time spent by women on cereal harvesting, which previously was performed with a sickle or local knife.



*Women shelling corn with corn sheller during a field visit to RWEE beneficiaries.*

©Gupta Ramananda

This, in turn, resulted in opportunities for women to initiate kitchen gardens for vegetable production, generating a source of income for the first time and diversifying their own and family’s diet. “Thanks to the joint programme, we have harvested three times more vegetables and fruits than last year” says Kalpana Shrestha, the president of the Panchakanya women farmer’s group.

Climate-smart practices such as crop production diversification, training on vegetable nursery bed preparation, soil and seed treatment,

and fertilizer application techniques are examples of the promoted practices through different interventions/projects to adapt to climate change.

The newly introduced labour-saving technologies and climate-smart practices have already allowed women farmers in some rural areas of Nepal to increase agricultural and labour productivity as well as to enhance post-harvest operations, and reduce food losses. This has contributed their socio-economic empowerment and adaptation to climate change.

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#### UPCOMING EVENT

**RAP GFP Webinar Series: Focus on gender in territorial/landscape approach: Why and how?**

RAP is holding a series of webinars targeted at Gender Focal Points (GFP) in country offices.

The next webinar entitled **Girls in ICTs** will be held in March.



The session will explore FAO and ITU e-agriculture work in the Asia-Pacific region, with a particular focus on women and girls. Special emphasis will be given to FAO, ITU and the Thai Ministry of Digital Economy and Society (MDES) joint collaboration in training girls and university students in the use of technology related to

agriculture and agribusiness relevant to the agriculture employment market.

The presentation will last 30 minutes and will be followed by questions and answers.

A calendar invitation will be shortly sent to all GFPs with further details. All staff members are welcome to join.



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#### FROM THE REGION

**The story from the field of Ms. Bouchan: Women's economic empowerment**

As part of the Technical Cooperation Programme on Small-scale Farmer Inclusion in Organic Agriculture Value Chain Development through Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS) in Cambodia and Lao PDR, five stories from the field, one information note, and two videos are soon to be released.

Ms. Bouchan, an organic vegetable farmer from Xieng Khouang province, Lao PDR, is featured in one of the stories from the field and videos where she explains how she contributed to and benefited from the project implemented by FAO together with the Laotian Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry and

international and local development partners.

In addition to building trust of consumers in her farming practices and organic produces, she also shares her point of view and experience about PGS within her story from the field and video in terms of economic and social benefits and women's empowerment.



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*Ms. Bouchan, in the middle, during a discussion with other farmers after a PGS peer-review field visit.*

# GENDER NEWS

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