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# Gender equality

## Key facts

In 2007, women made up about 41 percent of total employment in agriculture globally.

In Africa, women perform 80 percent of the work associated with rural domestic tasks, including collecting water and firewood, preparing and cooking meals, processing and storing food, and making household purchases.

In the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa, women produce up to 80 percent of the basic foodstuff.

In 15 EU countries, women hold 20 percent of agricultural land, compared to the 77 percent held by men and 3 percent by government.

In Africa, women provide nearly 90 percent of the wood for household consumption and 70 percent of wood collected for sale.

In sub-Saharan Africa, women comprise 60 percent of the informal economy, provide about 70 percent of all the agricultural labour and produce about 90 percent of the food.

In India and Thailand, fewer than 10 percent of landowners are women.

In several countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, the number of female-headed households is increasing, largely due to male migration, divorce, illness (especially AIDS) and conflict.

## Ensuring rural women's and men's equal participation in development

FAO recognizes that food security and agricultural development cannot be achieved without the full and equal participation of both women and men in rural areas. They play different but crucial roles in agriculture and rural development, and both contribute towards agricultural and food production.

### FAO's approach to gender equality

In spite of the significant contributions women make to household food security and economic and agricultural development, in many countries women's access to services and resources are not equal to that of their male counterparts. Rural women rarely own the land they farm and are often legally barred from owning property. Without land to serve as collateral, women are not granted the credit they need to buy tools, seeds and fertilizer. Scarce time, little ready cash and poorly adapted meeting schedules

often hinder women's participation and membership in local cooperatives and farmers' organizations or their involvement in agricultural training programmes.

FAO advocates gender equality and promotes the economic and social empowerment of rural women. By actively focusing attention on the discrimination rural women face daily, FAO supports government efforts to ensure that their policies and programmes promote and support women as equal contributors to agriculture and rural development.

### Rural women's invisible role in agriculture

Despite considerable progress in adding a gender dimension to agricultural statistics, the true contribution of women to agricultural economic production and their role in household food security are often underestimated. Rural women's work in the agricultural sector is somewhat invisible because their activities and products are often related to their role as caretakers rather than for the market economy.

FAO's projections through 2010 indicate that of the percentage of economically active women in least developed countries, more than 70 percent work in agriculture.

To increase the effectiveness of agricultural development strategies it is important to recognize the differing roles, needs and priorities of men and women. Such recognition is crucial to understanding the different inequalities they face and to ensuring that these are reflected in agricultural and rural statistics.



Women and men should share the load.

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#### Gender balance in staffing

In line with the United Nations goal to achieve gender balance among all categories of staff, FAO has taken steps to recruit more female professional staff. In 1994, the percentage of women in professional positions at FAO headquarters was 22.9 percent. In 2008, the percentage had increased to 39.4 percent.

FAO recognizes the need for additional measures to attract and retain qualified professional women including for positions at high levels.

## Sex-disaggregated data to increase rural women's visibility

Rural women's productive activities and those related to childcare, food preparation, household maintenance, etc. are often hidden, dispersed and informally or inadequately accounted for in national statistics. A powerful way to combat the persistent invisibility of their work is to generate sex-disaggregated agricultural data. The lack of these data is a serious barrier to formulating, designing and implementing effective policies and programmes that consider both rural

men's and women's needs and priorities in agriculture and rural development strategies.

For more than two decades FAO has been working with member countries to encourage national statistical programmes to incorporate gender and population factors into agricultural censuses and surveys. FAO is producing a statistical toolkit for the production of sex-disaggregated agricultural data, which are based on these experiences.

## FAO's gender programme

For 60 years FAO's gender programme has assisted member countries to address gender issues in agricultural (including fisheries and forestry) policies. A core element of the programme is capacity building. By providing training and training materials/guidelines, technical support and policy and technical advice, the programme broadens the knowledge and skills of staff, partners and member countries on the gender dimensions of food security and poverty.

The programme has:

- trained more than 4 000 development specialists working at the field, institutional and policy levels in more than 100 countries;
- assisted more than 30 countries to develop national action plans for the agricultural and rural development sectors that take into consideration gender issues;
- provided technical support for drafting gender-sensitive guidelines for the World Programme for the Census of Agriculture 2000 and 2010;
- provided technical support to more than 40 countries to develop gender-sensitive agricultural statistics, and assisted more than 10 countries to retable data sets to incorporate gender in their agricultural censuses;
- contributed to building the capacity of development specialists to formulate gender-sensitive policy and to collect and retable sex-disaggregated data;
- developed the Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook in partnership with the World Bank and IFAD; and

- conducted gender-sensitive communication campaigns addressing issues of food security, property rights and HIV and AIDS.

FAO has strengthened its programme to be in line with the United Nations system-wide policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women. It has also adopted measures to improve support to its staff and member countries to integrate the concerns of women and men into development strategies.

FAO's fourth Gender and Development Plan of Action, covering the period 2008–2013, outlines the Organization's gender strategy in the areas of food and nutrition, natural resources, rural economies, labour and livelihoods, and agricultural and rural development policy planning. The plan also takes into consideration the gender aspects of current global concerns and other key issues related to food security such as agro-biodiversity, emergency operations and rehabilitation, changing food prices, climate change and bioenergy, diseases (human, animal and plant) and globalization (trade and changing institutions).

Percentage of women employed in agriculture and engaged in unpaid family work, 2007



Percentage of women in wage employment in sectors other than agriculture, 2006

