

INTERVENTION OF THE BILL AND MELINDA GATES FOUNDATION
CFS Gender OEWG – October 30th 2020

Many thanks to Chair Tiensin for this opportunity to provide input into an important workstream at the CFS, we would also like to take this moment to thank the Bureau & Advisory Group, and the Secretariat for their commitment and ongoing support.

The Gates Foundation is guided by the belief that all lives have equal value. Accelerating progress toward a more equitable world by addressing the barriers that keep women and girls from achieving their potential in their homes, economies and societies is a key part of the foundation's work.

We believe that the CFS, could help bring attention to and motivate action for the challenging work ahead of us. Much of our work at the foundation is driven by a desire to use the best information available to empower our partners to make better decisions.

For women and girls, however, basic information about their lives — the work they do, the challenges they face, even the very fact of their existence — is lacking. The data gap often starts early. Barriers to birth registration and identification can impede women and girls' ability to access basic services like healthcare and can continue to impact their mobility and economic opportunities throughout their lives.

The gap is exacerbated by male-biased surveys that fail to capture women's perspectives, needs and economic value.

For example, in surveying households, when a woman answers that her "primary activity" is a housewife, the surveyor often stops asking her questions. Not only are her contributions to the "care economy" not measured or valued, but we also fail to capture other economic activities that she is likely to be participating in. Most rural women around the world who identify primarily as housewives are also engaged in economic activities outside the home — in farming or enterprise — and by failing to engage them further, those activities are not counted.

As a result, household surveys currently capture 75 percent of men's economic activities but no more than 30 percent of women's. When we don't count women or girls, we render them invisible to program managers and policy makers.

Further, women face many barriers to optimizing their nutrition, and these barriers differ from those they face when participating in production activities. Social norms may dictate who has first access to food, what women and children can eat, and how or when healthcare is accessed. Moreover, intra-household dynamics may enhance or limit whether women's empowerment in agriculture translates into improved nutrition.

Once the totality of women's work is accurately measured and we have a lens on social norms and power relationships, governments can start shaping policy and deploying resources to better support women as caregivers as well as economic producers, increasing their nutrition, productivity, income and well-being.

Earlier this month, in a landmark Nature publication announced at the CFS High Level Event, the Ceres2030 project, shared their finding that only 1 in 10 of the articles they reviewed provided guidance on gender interventions. Their work, which applied machine learning to over 500,000 grey and peer

reviewed publications, is an exhaustive approach for a very straightforward recommendation: improving data on gender is fundamental to better understanding gendered differences. This improved data on gender should guide decision making – all the way from empowering the individual women to what governments and other development partners can best contribute.

The Foundation is collaborating across the agriculture sector to address this missing vital information. For example, in collaboration with other donors, we're investing in developing standardized frameworks and indices like the *Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI)* to understand women's (and men's) opportunities and barriers within the agriculture sector. We are helping scale up the relevant in-country surveys through 50x2030, alongside colleagues at IFAD, FAO, the World Bank, IFPRI and partner governments.

At the CFS, we welcome additional support and interest from member states, civil society and the private sector to deliver on the promise of the sustainable development goals and to face the challenges of the economic shock from the COVID-19 pandemic by counting the voices of the women and girls we serve through improved data and evidence on their needs.