Beijing+25: Arab States confirm commitment to the Beijing Platform for Action

The year 2020 will mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BDPfA), which to date still stands as one of the most progressive framework for the advancement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Progress on the implementation of BDPfA is assessed every five years. In preparation of the third review taking place in 2020 under the motto Generation Equality, Member States and civil society representatives convened in Amman, Jordan, 28 November 2019, to discuss progress and gaps and agree on ways forward. Ahead of the meeting, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), UN Women, the League of Arab States (LAS), and the Arab Women Organization (AWO) supported the Arab States to prepare national reviews. In Amman, governments, civil society organizations, and youth representatives from across the region agreed on key actions to achieve the goals of the Beijing Declaration and Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development and issued the “Arab Declaration on Progress in the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 25 years” to:

- Continue legislative reform to address discrimination against women and girls, including legislative and policy frameworks to address violence against women and girls (VAWG);
- Strengthen implementation of UN Security Council resolutions pertaining to women and girls affected by conflict, and develop national plans and strategies accordingly;
- Address negative social norms and stereotypes concerning the role of women;
- Review social protection policies for greater inclusion;
- Provide essential services to the survivors of VAWG;
- Ensure rural and urban women benefit equally from development programmes;
- Ensure women’s access to leadership positions in the public and private sectors, including as members of the judiciary;
- Develop the work of national women’s machineries and equip them with the necessary tools and resources;
- Develop gender-disaggregated data and data systems for national strategies;
- Continue joint action, regional partnerships and programmes to improve the status of women;
- Continue effective monitoring of progress in the implementation of the Beijing Platform.

The Arab Declaration will feed into the global review taking place at the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW64) in New York, 9-20 March 2020.

During the discussion, several Member States highlighted the special challenges that rural women and girls face, especially in countries affected by conflict and protracted crises.
While rural women are critical agents of change in the fight against poverty, hunger and malnutrition, their potential is not recognized and unlocked. Currently the gender gap imposes high costs on only on the agriculture sector but also on women’s rights and development more broadly. To unlock rural women and girls’ potential, strengthened multi-sectoral action is needed backed by political will and budgets. The Beijing +25 review commits all concerned stakeholders to such action.

The Rome-based agencies are working together to ensure that issues facing rural women and girls remain high on the global agenda during the Beijing +25 review taking place at CSW64 and throughout the Generation Equality campaign and forum.

Boosting gender capacities in RNE

A Regional Capacity Development Workshop for Gender Focal Points of the NENA region is planned to take place in the first quarter of 2020 (dates to be announced shortly). The workshop aims to strengthen FAO’s capacity to design and implement interventions that are responsive to gender equality and human rights based approaches. Ahead of the workshop, an online needs assessment survey and a regional stock-taking exercise have been launched. Colleagues can still access the survey here.

For more information, please contact the RNE Gender Team: Clara.Park@fao.org; Maggie.Refaat@fao.org

A blooming potential in the West Bank: the story of Oula AlMoughrabi

Oula, 30 years old, holds a high school diploma but until recently had never experienced working and earning an income independently. Since the passing of her father, Oula has lived with her mother, and they both relied on Oula’s elder brother who was supporting his wife and children with a limited income. In the summer of 2018 along with other women, Oula joined a 4-month practical training organized by FAO. The training took place under the framework of the FAO’s project “Support economic growth through optimized agricultural value chains in the West Bank” funded by Canada.

After the training, just like all the other women who participated, Oula was employed by Alwadi date palm company working during the season in one of Jericho’s date factories. We visited Oula after one year during her second working season, and what she told us taught us a lot about having small dreams that could be as big as the world.

Oula makes USD 25 per day with her work at the factory. After her first working season Oula started to sense financial independence. She began saving from her daily fees and now has made plans to invest her savings. “Making my own money has changed how I make my decisions and think about the future. I now know that I want to have a small business to support myself one day. And I know that the money and experience I am collecting will enable me to do so,” she told us.

Oula shared her story with pride. Her potential and capabilities are unlimited and it made all the difference for her when she started to recognize this as a fact. “My family has always been kind and generous, but nothing compares to feeling like you are a member that contributes to supporting the family. I was able to help my brother cover our expenses and we were finally able to continue building a better home”.

The story of Oula is one of 250 women, who have also received the same training and started working in different dates packaging factories in the Jordan Valley, West Bank.
An additional 250 women will receive the same trainings in the 2020 season.

**Contributed by:** Hend Younis, Communication and Reporting Assistant, FAO Palestine

**Gender equality at the heart of FAO's work in Lebanon**

What do we mean by “gender”, “gender roles” and “gender gaps”?

What is “gender mainstreaming”? What are the international and national contexts and dimensions of gender inequality? What are the international Human Rights mechanisms and the relevant political commitment for Lebanon?

These are some of the questions raised and discussed by FAO Lebanon staff during a capacity building training on gender equality and women empowerment, held in December 2019. Organized by FAO Lebanon, the training was an opportunity for the majority of program, project, administration and support staff, consisting of 20 men and 19 women, to debate gender concepts and highlight the organization’s work in this context.

Divided into groups, participants talked about gender-specific roles and responsibilities and gender-related differences. They discussed case studies and examples on the challenges related to expected and traditional roles of Lebanese women and men.

“Lebanese women are powerful and can endure 100 times more than men,” said one of the participants when discussing gender roles and gaps. “Technology can build gender equality”, added another participant. Women are nowadays using technology to advance gender equality. They can perform almost any job with technology’s support.

For the participants, Lebanese women are still facing discrimination at various levels in particular in terms of political participation, laws, regulations, public policies and development strategies, despite substantial progress and acquired rights.

In fact, Lebanon ranked 140th globally among 149 countries when it came to gender gap, according to the World Economic Forum’s “Global Gender Gap Report 2018”.

“As FAO staff members, we should constantly work on integrating gender issues in all facets of our work, so that gender mainstreaming can become a standard practice in our work,” said Marie-Louise Hayek, FAO Lebanon Gender focal point.

As a follow up on this training, the program and project staff will also be attending an in-depth training on gender analysis and mainstreaming in early 2020.

**“Gender equality is central to the Organization’s mandate to achieve food security for all by raising levels of nutrition, improving agricultural productivity and natural resource management, and improving the lives of rural populations. FAO can achieve its goals only if it simultaneously works towards gender equality and supports women’s diverse roles in agriculture and rural development.”**

FAO Gender Equality Policy

**Contributed by:** Elite Sfeir, Communication Consultant, and Dany Lichaa, Project Manager; with inputs from Marie-Louise Hayek, Gender Focal Point, and Maurice Saade, FAO Representative, FAO Lebanon

**Restoring wheat production and hope in Syria**

Over the past two years, more than 66,000 rural families have been forced to leave their homes, villages and their abundant agricultural lands in North Hama, Syria, due to devastating military operations which prevented households to farm. The displacement people vulnerable and unable to earn the income needed to cover their daily essentials.

Starting from September 2019, the improvement in the security situation has allowed displaced farmers to return to their homes and land, carrying their hopes of resuming crop production activities. However, the break in production meant that they urgently needed to find good quality seed and agriculture inputs to resume cultivation.

The difficult situation has affected Areej Shabaan, a 28-year-old pregnant woman, and her blind husband, @ FAO/ Marie-Louise Hayek
Mohammed Shahoud, who are trying to produce food and make an income while raising their 2-year-old son and the daughter they are expecting shortly.

“We are glad that we are finally home. Nothing is as more precious as home. I’d come back to my house and land even if it was destroyed, no matter what!” Said Mohammed.

“Despite our gratitude for being home, we could not find good seeds to plant our land. We rely on seeds if we are to produce grain to harvest and sell in the local market, this is our only way to survive,” he added.

According to The Humanitarian Needs Overview 2019 Report for Syria, more than 9 million people in the country are food insecure, or at risk of food insecurity. Appeals for humanitarian assistance to improve the food security and nutrition situation of the most vulnerable people in Syria were met by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) with the generous support of Kuwait – to provide farmers with quality agriculture inputs and training on best agriculture practice.

Despite Mohammed’s disability, Areej and her husband are working together to make their children’s future safer and brighter. Like other farmers, as they planted their wheat seed today, they shared their hopes of harvesting around 200 kgs of wheat per dunum to be able to sell, and begin to restore their livelihoods, after the traumas they have experienced in recent years.

The partnership between FAO and Kuwait helps Syrian farmers and herders recover, and boost their food security and nutrition. Kuwait’s initial contribution of $3 million will benefit more than 17,000 highly vulnerable people and their extended families in Syria. The partnership also has ambitions to fight hunger and malnutrition, and support disaster-stricken communities across the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region and beyond, in countries such as Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan and Nigeria.

Gender at FAO Syria

FAO supports gender equality to ensure that men, women, youth and people with disabilities have equal access to agriculture inputs and livelihood opportunities.

This is key to ensure sustainability of the interventions and for the organization to achieve food security for all by raising levels of nutrition, improving agricultural productivity and natural resource management, and improving the lives of rural populations.

The organization in Syria is aware that women and men often have different rights, roles, access to productive resources, services and decision-making power. They also allocate time differently, and have their own needs and priorities. This why it is essential that these differences are adequately reflected, and gender issues are addressed from the very start and throughout the project cycle.

Contributed by: Salma Hakki, Communication Assistant, FAO Syria

Syrian women food producers learn new skills in Italy

Slow Food and FAO have teamed up to enhance the skills of small-scale women food producers from Syria - with the aim of supporting crisis-affected communities to regain or boost their livelihoods, and reviving the country’s agriculture sector.

In August 2019, seven Syrian women visited farming communities in Piedmont and Liguria regions that produce and promote local, organic and artisan foods marked by
high quality and respect for traditions. The women gained knowledge on all aspects of production, marketing and value chains of a range of products - including dairy, honey, oil, cereals, breads and vegetables - and were able to pass on this knowledge to other women farmers in their communities upon their return. They have been included in the global Slow Food network of local farmers so that they can continue learning and sharing knowledge and experiences.

The Syrian women came from Homs, Hama, Lattakia, Tartous, Aleppo, Sweida and Al Qunatra governorates, and are each engaged in producing one type of local food - one product per each village - from dried figs to honey. They either own a small plot of land (less than half hectare), growing food for their family's consumption and/or are engaged in activities such as making jams, pickles, tomato paste, cheese and other food products to support their families.

"We hope this study tour has helped Syrian women learn both technical and entrepreneurial skills, and gradually turn their products from home-made to artisanal, which also means selling them to wider markets," said Patrizia Epifania, Programme Officer with FAO Syria who accompanied the Syrian women on the tour.

"This initiative is part of FAO's wider efforts to boost the country's agriculture and improve food security for a population that has been through a lot, and is determined to pick up the pieces and get back on their feet," said Mike Robson, FAO Representative in Syria.

Why focus on women farmers in Syria

Eight years of crisis have damaged Syria's agriculture and created an unbalanced labor force. In many cases, women have become sole breadwinners and have turned to agriculture - often the only means to earn an income and support their families. Prior to the conflict, agriculture was a male-dominated field, which means that women are faced now with several challenges. They often lack knowledge of market requirements, have limited farming skills and experience in producing and marketing their foods, and lack access to information about funding and training opportunities.

"We are using primitive equipment that we have had since we were young. We want to grow our business by using modern equipment for packaging as well as moisture and acidity measurements so we can make products that meet global standards. Our figs have high nutritional value, and are 100 percent natural and rain-fed," said mother of five Aaf Jafaar who grows and dries figs - the only fruit available in her village - and is one of the Syrian women on the study tour in Italy.

Aicha Dalati, a beekeeper from Aleppo city who had to flee because of the conflict after losing all her hives, has restarted her life and livelihood in a nearby village and is part of the study tour. She says she is limited to selling her honey locally. "Transportation is a challenge. Also, the fact that I do not get to see a profit immediately as I receive the payments in installments. If I can sell my products properly, my life will be better," said Aicha. "I want to learn from the Italian farmers and see how I can develop my business," she added.

Not to mention that FAO is supporting Syrian rural women producers and their communities to become more self-resilient by enhancing their capacity in food production and entrepreneurial skills. FAO provides them with good quality inputs (such as seeds and fertilizers), training on sustainable agriculture and marketing; sets up irrigation systems; and creates and strengthens women producers’ and water users’ groups, reinforcing women’s roles at a time when they are shouldering a lot of responsibilities.

Contributed by: Adel Sarkozi, Communication Officer, FAO HQ

About Slow Food

Slow Food is a global network of local communities founded in 1989 to prevent the disappearance of local food cultures and traditions and counteract the rise of fast food culture. Since its founding, Slow Food has grown into a global movement involving millions of people in over 160 countries, working to ensure that everyone has access to good, clean and fair food. In Syria, Slow Food set up a Slow Food convivium (local chapter) and ten school gardens and aims to build a wider Slow Food network in the Arab region.
My land is my life: the story of Afaf, a farmer from Lebanon

In the town of Zawtar El Sharkiyeh, in South Lebanon, Afaf Qaddouh, spends most of her time in her land amid fields of Za’atar (oregano), tomatoes, cucumber and melons. Walking next to her silvery-leaved olive trees, Afaf looks happy and satisfied. “I come here not only to work but also to enjoy my time in nature so I can come back home relieved and relaxed”, she said.

Afaf Qaddouh speaks about the challenges of women farmers. Afaf benefitted from a grant through the Green Plan to the FAO-Led project “Promotion of Agricultural Livelihoods and Employment through Investment in Land Reclamation and Water Reservoirs” funded by the Kingdom of Netherlands. The grant allowed her to invest in land reclamation, water reservoir and retaining walls.

In collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture’s Green Plan, this project responds to the reduced livelihood and food security levels resulting from the Syria crisis. It constitutes a humanitarian-development nexus. This means working coherently to address the immediate needs of vulnerable people negatively impacted by the crisis, while ensuring a long-term developmental impact. In this context, the project aims at supporting small-scale Lebanese farmers through investment in agricultural infrastructure, mainly land reclamation and water reservoirs and other complementary works, such as retaining walls and tree seedlings planting, while creating job opportunities for vulnerable Lebanese in host communities and for displaced Syrians. The project develops as well the institutional capacities of the Green Plan.

“I can never thank FAO enough for their prompt support”, added Afaf. As an appreciation to this support, she prepared a banner: “This land reclamation couldn’t be possible without the help of the Green Plan and FAO”.

Afaf highlights the challenges facing women farmers in Lebanon nowadays. Afaf is also an advocate for women empowerment and financial independence. “Being productive is not wrong. What is wrong is to be dependent on someone else”, she adds. Based on her life experience, Afaf believes that sustaining women producers is crucial to the survival of agriculture in Lebanon. “I love my land and I can never sell it. My land is my life.”

Contributed by: Elite Sfeir, Communication Consultant, and Dany Lichaa, Project Manager; with inputs from Marie-Louise Hayek, Gender Focal Point, and Maurice Saade, FAO Representative, FAO Lebanon