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Bosnia and Herzegovina's first Country Gender Assessment will assist in eliminating gender gaps in the agricultural sector

The second issue of our Gender Newsletter begins with a short life story by Vadoma, a Roma woman living in Staro Selo, a rural village in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Vadoma narrated her story to FAO experts who were working in the field to assist with the development of the Country Gender Assessment. It encapsulates many of the issues that rural women face and offers an important insight into areas for future action. *"After I finished secondary school, my parents encouraged me to stay at home until I reached a 'marriageable age'. As there were five children in the family and we hardly had enough food, further education was a luxury. I was encouraged to [learn] 'women's skills' such as cooking, cleaning [and] looking after the children to [gain] a certain 'price' in the 'bride market'. This was considered… the best and most suitable family decision.*

In this issue:

- Bosnia and Herzegovina's first Country Gender Assessment
- FAO Tajikistan's gender stocktaking report
- Gender workshops in North Macedonia and Kazakhstan
- Uzbekistan case study: the development of inclusive agricultural policies

Today I am almost thirty-two and… a single mother with three children. My husband never returned from Europe, where he migrated in search of better wages and I, of course, do not have [a] formal job to at least get some social benefits. Nor can I afford… informal work or [to] start a small business, as the closest kindergarten is several kilometres from home. However, I manage a kitchen plot for a living – these skills are still with me, as I used to do it when I was a child. Sometimes, when there are harder [times], I think about the missed opportunities of gaining further education."

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is one of the most rural countries in Europe (according to the Agency for Statistics of BiH, less than half of the population – only 41 per cent – lives in urban areas): poverty is concentrated in rural areas, and women comprise just over half of the country's poor. Rural women are disproportionately represented among those who are not in formal work or education, and can be considered "time poor" in terms of the burden of unpaid work in households and on family farms. They are more often engaged in manual labour and tasks at the lowest end of value chains, and less involved in sales and marketing that involve greater decision-making and control over income earned from agriculture. Land and property are mainly concentrated in the hands of men, and as of 2019, only 38.3 percent of women were owners or co-owners in land registry records (source: FAO. 2020. Achieving SDG Indicator 5.a.2 in the Western Balkans and Beyond, Partnerships for Gender Equality in Land Ownership and Control). The gender gap in labour force participation is wide, estimated to be 30 percent in favour of men. Inadequate infrastructure in rural areas also has a particular impact on women. Vadoma's story shows how the absence of childcare facilities increases the domestic work burden and prevents her from engaging in income-generating activities. The Government of BiH is establishing measures that are dedicated to improving the lives of rural women. In one example of the success of specific incentives, the proportion of women registered as heads of family farms has increased from 10 percent in 2016 to around 18 percent today.

But as Klelija Balta, the national gender expert in BiH, says, *"… women farmers are only a minority of recipients of incentives provided by the relevant ministries of agriculture, ranging from 10 to 25 percent of all beneficiaries – there is still an acute need to raise awareness of such measures. For example, during a field visit, a woman farmer, an active internet user, had no information about the various incentives to which she was entitled to start a business. When we told her about some of the programmes offered by the Ministry of Agriculture, she was still reluctant to apply. She assumed there were many obstacles to receiving support. It is equally critical to identify women in rural areas who are less empowered and remain in vulnerable situations, like Vadoma, a woman from the Roma community, to ensure that they do not become further marginalized*".

Bosnia and Herzegovina has a well-developed and extensive legal and policy base that supports gender equality work in the country. The "Law on Gender Equality" in Bosnia and Herzegovina sets forth the responsibilities of all public authorities at all levels to apply gender equality standards. However, in practice, gender mainstreaming in public policy is inconsistent between sectors and entities, and the capacity of line ministries to mainstream gender varies by institution. As a consequence, strategies and policies that concern agriculture are gender blind.

A detailed discussion of these issues can be found in the first Country Gender Assessment (CGA) for Bosnia and Herzegovina devoted to agriculture and rural development issues. It was developed by FAO, in collaboration with UN Women and national partners. FAO supports the production of country gender assessments in all member-states, to develop an in-depth knowledge base for better informed, targeted and gender-responsive actions.

FAO's efforts to improve the lives of rural women and vulnerable groups must be evidence-based, and the purpose of a CGA is to identify country-specific gender issues in rural development and food security. Within each CGA, recommendations are proposed which support the relevant ministries, gender and statistics agencies, and local stakeholders to increase the gender sensitivity of policies directed towards rural development and agricultural production. Women like Vadoma represent a critical but untapped resource for the country, and collective efforts should be made to give her a way out of poverty and gender discrimination.

Government stakeholders discussing the results of the Country Gender Assessment in Bosnia and Herzegovina

The FAO Office in Tajikistan has developed a four-year plan to strengthen its work on gender

"*I am aware [of] what gender equality is, [and] informed about the tools… to mainstream gender, but have challenges… applying these in practice*" – this was a very common response in a capacity needs assessment

conducted by the FAO office in Tajikistan among its programme and project staff as part of a "Gender Stocktaking" exercise. Gender stocktaking is one of the fifteen Minimum Standards of the FAO Policy on Gender Equality (which can be found on the FAO global website, under the thematic area of work: "Gender"). The process highlights gaps, good practice and opportunities for action on gender equality at work.

FAO Tajikistan staff at the gender training

FAO Tajikistan is progressing well in meeting some gender equality standards, from ensuring quotas for women in capacity building activities, to offering targeted forms of support to women, such as the provision of improved seeds, fertilizers, pest control tools, drip irrigation kits and demountable greenhouses. One their key advantages is existing partnerships with other UN agencies in the country. Together they engage in joint advocacy initiatives to promote women's rights, on occasions such as International Women's Day (8 March), International Rural Women's Day (15 October) and the 16 Days of activism against gender-based violence campaign (25 November – 10 December).

However, the stocktaking report also revealed particular missed opportunities at the level of policy and programming. The Country Programming Framework (CPF) between the Ministry of Agriculture and FAO 2019–2021 states that gender inequalities in the country are severe, especially in rural areas, and that women's access to decision-making, water users' organizations, credit, information, knowledge, agricultural inputs and land is limited. The National Gender Profile of Agricultural and Rural Livelihoods in Tajikistan (CGA), developed by FAO, demonstrated these significant inequalities and was used to inform the analysis for the Country Programming Framework. However, the CPF does not document the ways in which these needs and concerns can be addressed through concrete actions. Similarly, ongoing and future projects and initiatives by FAO Tajikistan will need to ensure that specific measures are identified and actions taken.

As part of FAO's commitments on gender, the REU gender team conducted a two-day, face-to-face training course on gender equality concepts and gender mainstreaming for programme and project staff in February 2020.

As part of this exercise, staff were provided with the tools to help them respond to the challenges that women face. To sustain improved results, capacity strengthening activities such as these should be conducted on a regular basis.

The gender stocktaking activity also recommends the identification of gender issues in publications, including country studies, analytical papers and reports. Human stories, articles and communication briefs should ensure that women's voices are brought to the fore and share equal representation with men – this approach to gender-sensitive communication also forms part of the UN system-wide plan on gender equality and women's empowerment. With the strong support and commitment of senior management in the FAO Office in Tajikistan, the findings of the report and joint discussions have resulted in a participatory Gender Action Plan 2021–2024. This plan envisages strengthening the capacity of Gender Focal Points, the achievement of gender balance in all initiatives, support for women's decision-making opportunities and bringing attention to women's limited access to and control over resources. By implementing the action plan, the country office should be able to build a bridge between the government authorities, women's associations and community-based organizations to strengthen the voices of rural women.

FAO's Workshop in North Macedonia: "Why gender in integrated community development?"

In North Macedonia, as in other countries in the region, the urgency of inclusive rural and community development policies is particularly evident for women farmers, farmworkers and community members. While providing support to smallholders is becoming an important priority for the Government of North Macedonia, both at the national and community levels, there is also a need to ensure that groups facing poverty, discrimination and vulnerabilities benefit from rural development policies.

Within the project "Support to Integrated Community Development," FAO assists the Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy (MAFWE) and other relevant regional and local institutions to strengthen their capacities to formulate rural development policies and support community development planning. In December 2020, as part of these efforts, MAFWE staff members, the FAO national project team, consultants on community mobilization, gender and civil society, a representative from UN Women, and local community representatives participated in a virtual training workshop. A pre-workshop needs assessment survey conducted by the REU gender team revealed that the participants were interested in learning more about gender analysis tools and performance indicators, and discussing ways of integrating these into rural community development and planning in North Macedonia.

The workshop facilitated the discussion of a range of important issues and ideas.

Anna Jenderedjian, FAO REU gender and social protection specialist and workshop training lead, highlighted the significance of rural women's inclusion in integrated community development: "*In rural areas, women in unpaid agricultural work…are often involved in informal community mobilization, organizing and advocacy. Thus, there is a growing need for recognition of women's contribution to community development and their potential*".

A woman farmer in North Macedonia

Referring to the situation in North Macedonia, Marina Nacka (Ss. Cyril and Methodius University), one of the co-authors of the recent study *Women's decision-making power in agricultural households* and a workshop participant, emphasized that only five percent of women are active members in formal groups or associations. At the same time, women work on average 1.38 hours more per day than men. This research also included an experimental study on measuring empowerment within households and between women and men. The study's findings reinforce the need to include gender equality goals in all future agriculture and rural development policies. Two case studies of gender-responsive community development practices were also shared in the workshop: the EU LEADER approach in the European Union and global experiences of FAO's Dimitra Clubs.

While different, these two initiatives demonstrate how gender issues shape people's lives and are foundational for integrated community development. One example of a "starting point" in the development of gender-responsive practices is meeting certain requirements in local development initiatives, such as the minimum representation of women in local action groups. In addition, the success of the EU LEADER approach and FAO's Dimitra Clubs demonstrates that gender analysis and participatory planning are key components in effective and inclusive integrated community development.

Marie Henriksen, FAO gender intern, also presented the findings from her research on how gender mainstreaming assessment and information tools are used for measuring quality assurance in public administration in Denmark.

While progress on reaching gender equality goals is reported across cross-cutting areas, Marie also noted that this is uneven across different ministries. She said, "*While the intention and ambition to mainstream gender in all policy proposals is there, it does not necessarily translate into practice [in all areas]*."

Neda Gruevska, MAFWE, summarized that rural development policies and community development plans need to include and address women's and men's views, concerns and needs. The workshop concluded with a consensus-building discussion on recommendations for supporting women in agriculture and rural areas. Some of the initial conclusions and recommendations included that:

- North Macedonia has a well-developed legal framework that supports gender mainstreaming and socially inclusive policies, but that women are not actively engaged in decision-making and do not take advantage of the existing policy measures.
- There is a need to assess the gendered impacts of national policies and develop evidence-based policies.
- Affirmative measures are necessary to include women in policymaking at municipality and local levels, and promote women farmers' entrepreneurship.
- Gender budgeting should be introduced at various levels, including municipalities.

Natural resource management specialists from Kazakhstan receive FAO gender training

Researchers from the Institute of Soil Science, Kazakhstan

CACILM 2 – "Integrated natural resources management in drought-prone and salt-affected agricultural production landscapes in Central Asia and Turkey" – is a regional initiative implemented with support from FAO in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Turkey. This initiative, financed by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and contributions from the participating countries, aims to strengthen food security through the enhanced sustainability of rural communities and increased agricultural productivity.

It will introduce innovative agricultural technologies and measures that mitigate the impact of drought and degradation of agricultural land. In Kazakhstan, for example, 66 percent of land is affected by desertification, degradation and drought, and 20 percent of irrigated land is salt-affected and/or waterlogged. The causes are largely attributable to the deterioration of the natural resource base, particularly through inefficient irrigation and unsustainable agricultural and grazing practices.

As Zhanyl Bozayeva, the FAO project manager of CACILM 2 in Kazakhstan explains, "*We work with the government of Kazakhstan and other partners to make sure our end beneficiaries, women and men farmers in the villages, benefit from agricultural activities. Rural women in Kazakhstan have limited access to financial resources, information and decision-making on natural resource management, therefore, the initiative strives to engage them in locally-established farmer field schools, and pay attention to ensuring the equal participation of women in local planning processes. For this purpose, we organized an awareness-raising workshop on gender issues for the stakeholders and partners*".

In late December 2020, 85 project stakeholders, including representatives from national research institutions on livestock, fodder production, soil science and agro-chemistry, extension service providers, independent experts and NGOs participated in the two-day training course on basic concepts of gender and gender equality, and gender mainstreaming in project design, implementation, monitoring and reporting. A pre-training survey demonstrated that participants had a limited understanding of gender concepts, and many expressed the need for this type of capacity building exercise. Some noted that they had never received this kind of training throughout their career.

After the completion of the course, almost all attendees participated in a follow-up survey. They agreed that the training met their expectations and that their new knowledge would be applied in current and future activities. The training was delivered by a group of national, regional and international gender experts with support from the FAO REU gender team. Similar training will be replicated in other CACILM 2 countries in 2021.

Virtual training participants in Kazakhstan

Case study from the region: The Ministry of Agriculture in Uzbekistan plans to develop inclusive agricultural policies with FAO's support

A woman baking bread, Jizzakh, Uzbekistan

In Uzbekistan, agriculture accounts for 17.6 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), and provides employment for at least 25 percent of the labour force (data from 2016, State Committee of Statistics of the Republic of Uzbekistan). Nearly half of the population lives in rural areas and rural settlements are characterized by a high proportion of smallholdings and subsistence farming. Lower levels of social, economic and physical infrastructure and the prevalence of lower-paid seasonal work are also common in rural areas. Rural women tend to be concentrated in informal employment in the agricultural sector: the majority contribute to agriculture as unpaid family members In addition to this, women face greater constraints in accessing, managing and controlling productive resources, such as land, livestock and agricultural equipment. Their access to financial services and markets is also limited.

Public attitudes and perceptions reflect deeply ingrained patriarchal stereotypes, and social practices are often based on discriminatory gender norms.

In September 2019, Uzbekistan adopted the country's first ever gender equality law, "Guarantees of Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men," which requires each sector of the national economy, including agriculture and forestry, to develop a gender mainstreaming strategy and action plan that prioritizes the needs and interests of rural women. To support these reforms, FAO is providing assistance to the Ministry of Agriculture and other entities related to the country's agro-industrial complex, to enhance the capacities of policymakers and practitioners to formulate and implement inclusive and socially just policies and programmes. The inception workshop for the "Support in implementation of inclusive agricultural policies" project took place on 15 January 2021 at the

Ministry of Agriculture, with participation from the Association of Women-Agrarians of Uzbekistan, the State Veterinary Committee, and other interested organizations. Sherzod Umarov, Officer in charge of FAO representation in Uzbekistan says, "*Closing the gender gap in agriculture would generate significant gains for the agricultural sector and for society as a whole. Gender inequalities are reinforced by stereotypes of gender roles that give less visibility to women's crucial contributions to agriculture. This is why investing in rural women represents investing in the critical agents of change for ending poverty and reaching food security for all, thus achieving the Sustainable Development Goals*".

Within the project, more than 250 women and men working in the Ministry of Agriculture, local authorities and other agencies will be trained to gain greater awareness of gender equality concepts, and their links with agriculture and food security, the SDGs and "leaving no one behind" principles. Methodological tools will be developed, the Country Gender Assessment for Uzbekistan updated (the CGA can be found on the FAO website in the "Country gender assessment series" section) and a sectoral strategy and action plan produced. This process will be closely monitored and results reported in our newsletter.

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For comments and suggestions, please contact us at the email provided below.

Upcoming events

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in collaboration with the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) organize an International Forum "Food Policy, Rural Development and Gender Equality in Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia: current trends and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic." The Forum program includes three online sessions focused on specific topics. You can find a registration link to these three webinars at the Higher School of Economics University website

10 March 2021 "Gender responsive agricultural and food systems' policies: status and prospects in Europe and Central Asia region"

12 March 2021 "Rural women, youth and economic opportunities: cases from Europe and Central Asia to accelerate the achievement of the SDGs"

17 March 2021 "Leaving No One Behind: Gender Inclusion in Education and Professional Training for Rural Economy"

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