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THE STATE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE
Closing the gender gap for development



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Foreword

This edition of *The State of Food and Agriculture* addresses *Women in agriculture: closing the gender gap for development*. The agriculture sector is underperforming in many developing countries, and one of the key reasons is that women do not have equal access to the resources and opportunities they need to be more productive. This report clearly confirms that the Millennium Development Goals on gender equality (MDG 3) and poverty and food security (MDG 1) are mutually reinforcing. We must promote gender equality and empower women in agriculture to win, sustainably, the fight against hunger and extreme poverty. I firmly believe that achieving MDG 3 can help us achieve MDG 1.

Women make crucial contributions in agriculture and rural enterprises in all developing country regions, as farmers, workers and entrepreneurs. Their roles vary across regions but, everywhere, women face gender-specific constraints that reduce their productivity and limit their contributions to agricultural production, economic growth and the well-being of their families, communities and countries.

Women face a serious gender gap in access to productive resources. Women control less land than men and the land they control is often of poorer quality and their tenure is insecure. Women own fewer of the working animals needed in farming. They also frequently do not control the income from the typically small animals they manage. Women farmers are less likely than men to use modern inputs such as improved seeds, fertilizers, pest control measures and mechanical tools. They also use less credit and often do not control the credit they obtain. Finally, women have less education and less access to extension services, which make it more difficult to gain access to and use some of the other resources, such as land, credit and fertilizer. These factors also prevent women from adopting new technologies as readily as men do. The constraints women face are often interrelated and need to be addressed holistically.

The obstacles that confront women farmers mean that they achieve lower yields than their male counterparts. Yet women are as good at farming as men. Solid empirical evidence shows that if women farmers used the same level of resources as men on the land they farm, they would achieve the same yield levels. The yield gap between men and women averages around 20–30 percent, and most research finds that the gap is due to differences in resource use. Bringing yields on the land farmed by women up to the levels achieved by men would increase agricultural output in developing countries between 2.5 and 4 percent. Increasing production by this amount could reduce the number of undernourished people in the world in the order of 12–17 percent. According to FAO's latest estimates, 925 million people are currently undernourished. Closing the gender gap in agricultural yields could bring that number down by as much as 100–150 million people.

These direct improvements in agricultural output and food security are just one part of the significant gains that could be achieved by ensuring that women have equal access to resources and opportunities. Closing the gender gap in agriculture would put more resources in the hands of women and strengthen their voice within the household – a proven strategy for enhancing the food security, nutrition, education and health of children. And better fed, healthier children learn better and become more productive citizens. The benefits would span generations and pay large dividends in the future.

The gender gap is manifest in other ways. Gender relations are social phenomena and it is impossible to separate women's economic spheres from their household activities. Preparing food and collecting firewood and water are time-consuming and binding constraints that must be addressed if women are to be able to spend their time in more rewarding and more productive ways. Interventions must consider women within their family and community contexts. Making rural labour markets function better,

providing labour-saving technologies and public goods and services, would enable women to contribute more effectively to, and benefit more fully from, the economic opportunities offered by agricultural growth.

There exists no blueprint for closing the gender gap in agriculture, as a wide range of inputs, assets, services and markets are involved and the related constraints are interlinked. But with appropriate policies based on accurate information and analysis, progress can be made and the benefits

would be significant. The basic principles are clear. We must eliminate all forms of discrimination against women under the law, ensure that access to resources is more equal and that agricultural policies and programmes are gender-aware, and make women's voices heard in decision-making at all levels. Women must be seen as equal partners in sustainable development. Achieving gender equality and empowering women is not only the right thing to do; it is also crucial for agricultural development and food security.



Jacques Diouf
FAO DIRECTOR-GENERAL

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Abbreviations and acronyms

CED	chronic energy deficiency
CIAT	International Centre for Tropical Agriculture
FFS	Farmer field school
FPI	Food Price Index (FAO)
ICTs	information and communication technologies
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFDC	International Fertilizer Development Center
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
ILRI	International Livestock Research Institute
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LSMS	Living Standards Measurement Study
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
NGOs	non-governmental organizations
NREGA	National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (India)
ODI	Overseas Development Institute (United Kingdom)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RIGA	Rural Income Generating Activities
SIGI	Social Institutions and Gender Inequality
UCLA	University of California, Los Angeles (United States of America)
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
WFP	World Food Programme