



FAO's work on gender equality and women's empowerment

The issue

The agriculture sector is underperforming in many developing countries and one of the main reasons is that women do not have equal access to the resources they need to be more productive. To achieve a world free from hunger and malnutrition, it is essential that both women and men are provided with the same opportunities and can benefit equally from development and humanitarian interventions. FAO promotes gender equality¹ as both a fundamental human right and an essential means of achieving its development goals of sustainable rural development and food security and nutrition.

FAO's goal is to achieve equality between women and men in access to resources, services and other means of production and in decision-making, as a way of promoting sustainable agricultural production, food security and rural development. As stated in FAO's [Policy on Gender Equality](#), the Organization works with member countries to achieve:

- equal participation of women and men as decision-makers in rural institutions and in shaping laws, policies and programmes;
- equal access for women and men to productive resources, assets, decent employment opportunities and income;
- equal access for women and men to goods and services for agricultural development and to markets;
- reduction of women's work burden through the provision of improved technologies, services and infrastructure;
- an increased share of total agricultural aid committed to projects that target women and promote gender equality.

The policy is based on a dual strategy: i) systematically addressing gender issues in all facets of FAO's work, so that women and men can benefit equally from FAO interventions (the "gender mainstreaming approach");² and ii) promoting programmes and projects that explicitly target the most vulnerable rural women.

The challenges

Worldwide, women comprise 43 percent of the agricultural labour force and play a crucial role in food production. Women also make critical contributions to the food and nutrition security of their households through their reproductive role, which includes child care and household responsibilities.

Across all regions, rural women and girls still face significant discrimination compared with men and boys. This persistent gender discrimination results from customary and statutory laws as well as socio-cultural and religious beliefs, and limits women's potential as farmers, producers and care takers. "Gender gaps" between the access of women and men to assets, knowledge, services and markets impose high costs on overall agricultural production, households' well-being and society as a whole. Failure to bridge these gaps has huge implications on rural development, food security and poverty reduction.

What is FAO doing to address these challenges?

To implement its Policy on Gender Equality, FAO will work with member countries to formulate, implement and assess policies, strategies and programmes that address the different needs and priorities of women and men. An example of FAO's work on gender-sensitive agriculture and rural development policies is provided in the ESP Brief on Gender and rural poverty under Strategic Objective 3. FAO will also systematically reinforce its internal institutional frameworks and human resource capacities to ensure that staff are better able to address gender equality issues.



A valuable mechanism for implementing FAO's strategy on gender equality is the Gender Focal Points system, a network of officers at Headquarters and decentralized offices who devote a percentage of their time to promoting gender equality in their technical areas of work.

How does this work help achieve FAO's Strategic Objectives?

As it is central to FAO's mandate, the promotion of gender equality is integrated into the new Strategic Framework as a cross-cutting theme to support achievement of the Strategic Objectives (SOs) at two levels: *within each* SO, and *across all* of them. Through an assessment of the SOs' main priorities, relevant activities for promoting gender equality have been identified for each SO, and specific goals (results) and targets have been formulated to monitor FAO's gender-

¹ "Gender equality" means the equal participation of women and men in decision-making, equal ability to exercise their human rights, and equal access to and control over resources. For other definitions of gender equality, please refer to FAO's Gender Web site: <http://www.fao.org/gender/why>

² "Gender mainstreaming" is defined as a "strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes" (UN ECOSOC, 1997).



related work. The team responsible for coordinating this cross-cutting work on gender, currently located in the newly named Social Protection Division (ESP), will collaborate with each SO team on the following areas of work:

- **SO1: Help eliminate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition:** Gender work under this SO focuses on supporting governments and other stakeholders in improving their capacities to mainstream gender equality into policies, strategic coordination mechanisms and information systems related to food security and nutrition (FNS). Activities will include: i) collaboration with the Committee on Food Security to ensure that high-level policy discussion and policy formulation address issues of gender equality and women's empowerment; and ii) capacity development for decision-makers in addressing gender equality in FNS programmes. In collaboration with the Statistics Division, FAO will contribute to enhancing member countries' capacities in evidence-based FSN analysis that draws on sex- disaggregated data.
- **SO2: Make agriculture more productive and sustainable:** As part of its efforts to increase agricultural productivity, FAO's gender work under SO2 will focus on disseminating good practices and governance mechanisms that increase women's access to resources and services while reducing their drudgery. Special attention will also be given to the collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data for monitoring the impacts of interventions on closing the gender gap and addressing social sustainability.
- **SO3: Reduce rural poverty:** FAO's gender work under this SO will focus on strengthening the capacities of governments and partners to address gender and social inequalities as part of rural development and poverty reduction policies and strategies. It will promote women's equal participation in rural institutions and decision-making processes, and support their economic empowerment through decent employment and social protection programmes (see Brief on gender and rural poverty in the context of SO3).
- **SO4: Ensure inclusive and efficient agricultural and food systems:** The promotion of gender equality under this SO focuses on increasing and strengthening rural women's participation in efficient agrifood systems. FAO's work will support the provision of technology, services and resources that enable women to benefit equally from value chain development, including capacity development opportunities and innovative financial services. FAO will also promote the identification of gender-sensitive food loss and waste reduction strategies.
- **SO5: Protect livelihoods from disasters:** Member countries' capacities to develop early warning systems and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes that address the different needs and priorities of women and men will be strengthened. FAO will support the identification of disaster prevention and mitigation

measures, preparedness plans and emergency interventions based on gender-sensitive risks and vulnerability assessments. Specific capacity development initiatives will contribute to strengthening the capacities of rural women and men to cope with crises.

Further reading and material

- *DG bulletin No. 2011/60: FAO's Accountability for and Commitment to Gender Equality Work*
- *A tool for gender-sensitive agriculture and rural development policy and programme formulation - Guidelines for Ministries of Agriculture and FAO*
<http://bit.ly/1gQWDm3>
- *Country programming framework – Integrating Gender Issues*
<http://bit.ly/1hv2Hlg>
- *UN Joint programmes – Integrating gender issues in food security, agriculture and rural development*
<http://bit.ly/1asHiaz>
- *Understanding and integrating gender issues into livestock projects and programmes*
<http://bit.ly/1fCaEaP>
- *Passport to Mainstreaming Gender in Water Programmes*
<http://bit.ly/1j9hgOp>



FAO's work on gender equality and poverty reduction

The issue

Gender has been identified as one of the cross-cutting themes of FAO's Strategic Framework. Gender issues are therefore being addressed as part of all FAO's Strategic Objectives, in line with the [FAO Policy on Gender Equality](#). For more details, see the ESP Brief on FAO's work on gender equality and women's empowerment.

The challenges

In many developing countries, women and girls still face significant discrimination in their access to resources and opportunities. Evidence suggests that improving women's access to agricultural resources, services and inputs could considerably increase the efficiency and productivity of small farms, while increasing rural women's access to decent employment and market opportunities can boost their wages. When their earning power is enhanced, women are able to participate more equally with men in household and community decision-making. This empowerment of women usually translates into improved well-being of children, thereby reducing poverty for future generations and supporting long-term economic growth.

The current pattern of economic growth tends to leave too many people in poverty and to reinforce gender inequalities. Integrating gender issues into poverty reduction strategies requires conducting a critical assessment of gender disparities and gender relations in the specific socio-cultural, institutional and economic context. The integration of gender issues enables the design of more comprehensive rural poverty reduction strategies that dynamize rural economies while lessening gender inequalities, by facilitating pathways out of poverty that benefit women and men equally.

What is FAO doing to address these challenges?

FAO provides policy advice and capacity enhancement services to governments and other stakeholders to ensure that they have: i) a solid understanding of the gender-related causes and consequences of rural poverty; and ii) the capacity to formulate and implement gender-aware policies and programmes for reducing rural poverty. This work involves:

- providing high-quality analysis and developing knowledge products on the gender-related aspects of rural poverty, as a basis for policy formulation;

- strengthening the capacities of FAO member countries to develop and implement policies that take into account gender relations in rural settings and address the different needs and priorities of women and men;
- building FAO's knowledge base on gender-sensitive approaches for reducing poverty and stimulating economic growth in rural areas.
- How does this work help achieve FAO's Strategic Objectives?
- FAO's work to achieve its Strategic Objective 3 on reducing rural poverty focuses on strengthening the ability and commitment of member countries in implementing rural poverty reduction programmes that benefit women, men, girls and boys equitably. To this end, FAO will concentrate on:
 - supporting member countries in conducting gender-sensitive assessments of rural poverty, to identify the gender-related drivers of poverty and the policy areas where intervention is required;
 - analysing gender disparities in rural employment and promoting approaches for advancing rural women's economic empowerment through policies and programmes that promote decent work;
 - generating knowledge on good practices, institutional mechanisms and policy options for strengthening women's leadership in rural organizations;
 - providing policy assistance to ensure equitable access for women and men to rural infrastructure and services, with particular focus on reducing the work burden and increasing the market access of rural women;
 - assisting member countries in implementing social protection programmes that take into account gender disparities at various levels (household, community and overall society) and contribute to the social and economic empowerment of rural women;
 - supporting member countries in integrating gender equality considerations into political commitments and the formulation of policy and investment frameworks.

Examples of ongoing work at the global level:

- The *Gender and Land Rights Database* provides easy (online) access to up-to-date information on gender and land rights. At present the database comprises 80 country profiles.
- *Governing Land for Women and Men*: This technical guide assists governments in applying the principles of gender equality to the governance of land resources.

- *A policy tool for assessing the gender sensitivity of agriculture policies*: FAO is developing this tool to enable member countries to identify how effectively their policies address gender equality, where there are gaps and incoherencies in policy, and which policy areas require priority action.

Examples of ongoing work at the country level:

- In selected countries, FAO is assessing the gender-differentiated implications of land-related agricultural investments, with a focus on rural employment and land access, use and control. To date, research has been conducted in the United Republic of Tanzania, Ghana, Zambia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Sierra Leone and Mozambique.
- FAO collaborates with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) in implementing a joint programme to accelerate the economic empowerment of rural women. This five-year initiative is being piloted in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, the Niger and Rwanda.

Further reading and materials

- *Gender and Land Rights Database* [www] - <http://bit.ly/1aaB7dy>
- *Governing Land for Women and Men*. - <http://bit.ly/1eNRonM>
- *Women's resilience to food price volatility: A policy response* - <http://bit.ly/1cujuRg>
- *Country profiles and policy briefs on gender inequalities in rural employment for Malawi Policy context* - <http://bit.ly/1d8cFIG>
- *Gender inequalities in rural employment in Ghana: Policy and legislation* <http://bit.ly/1ofajJW>
The gender and equity implications of land-related investments on land access and labour and income-generating opportunities: A case study of selected agricultural investments in Northern Tanzania <http://bit.ly/NHITSG>
- *Forests, food security and gender: linkages, disparities and priorities for action*. - <http://bit.ly/1fCqZMI>