



Malnutrition remains a crucial problem in both developed and developing countries; it may be linked to either insufficient food intake (under-nutrition) or unbalanced diets. **Throughout the world, women are the principal guarantors of nutrition, food safety and quality at household and community levels.** They are the ones who often produce, purchase, handle, prepare and serve food for the family and in community institutions.

More and more women entrepreneurs are engaged in cottage food industries in many developing countries. They produce a wide range of local foods which are sold at competitive prices in the market. The street food sector, a rapidly growing business in most developing countries, is increasingly operated by women who rely on this income source for themselves and for their families. Street food activities play an important role in supplying suitable, low cost food to poor segments of the population, and represent an important contribution to food security.

Women, as providers of food, have a fundamental role in assuring improved nutritional status. Development interventions aiming to improve access to food, however, often bypass women. National, regional and international agencies operating in the food sector give little attention to designing programmes that suit women's needs, education, and cultural backgrounds, or their aspirations for improving their economic and social conditions.



Street food activities represent an important contribution to food security (Togo).

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN



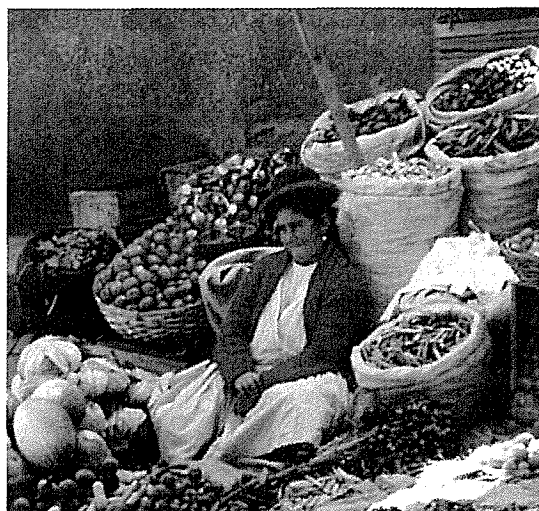
FAO will give special attention to alleviating the constraints faced by women in carrying out their traditional role as food providers, and to promoting healthy food habits and lifestyles. This includes targeting both women and men for nutrition education. At the same time, FAO will work to enhance national capacity to design, implement, monitor and evaluate gender-responsive, community-level interventions to improve household food security and nutrition.

Food and Nutrition

- Develop gender-sensitive training and educational materials for policy-makers and planners to improve household food and nutrition security, especially among women-headed households.
- Provide policy assistance to Member Nations on the development of national food-based strategies to prevent and control micro-nutrient deficiencies among vulnerable groups, including women.

Women in their reproductive years, especially during pregnancy and lactation, have specific nutrient requirements which determine both their own nutritional status and that of their children. In many societies these specific needs are not recognized and both women and children suffer the consequences. In some societies, priority is given to feeding other members of the family first, a discriminatory practice often extended to girls. This compromises their nutritional and health status from an early age.

Women play a pivotal role in securing and preparing food for the family. They have the primary responsibility for the care of children and for the nutrition information in the household. The different rights, responsibilities and decision-making abilities of women and men need to be understood in efforts to improve food security and nutrition. Data on the differences between males and females, in terms of access to food and other resources, must be improved in order to facilitate the assessment and monitoring of progress in the achievement of food security and nutritional goals. **Women need better access to technical information and assistance on improving the quality and safety of products and on strategies to improve the nutritional status** at the household level through, for example, home gardens and livestock rearing.



Women play a pivotal role in securing and preparing food for the family (Bolivia).

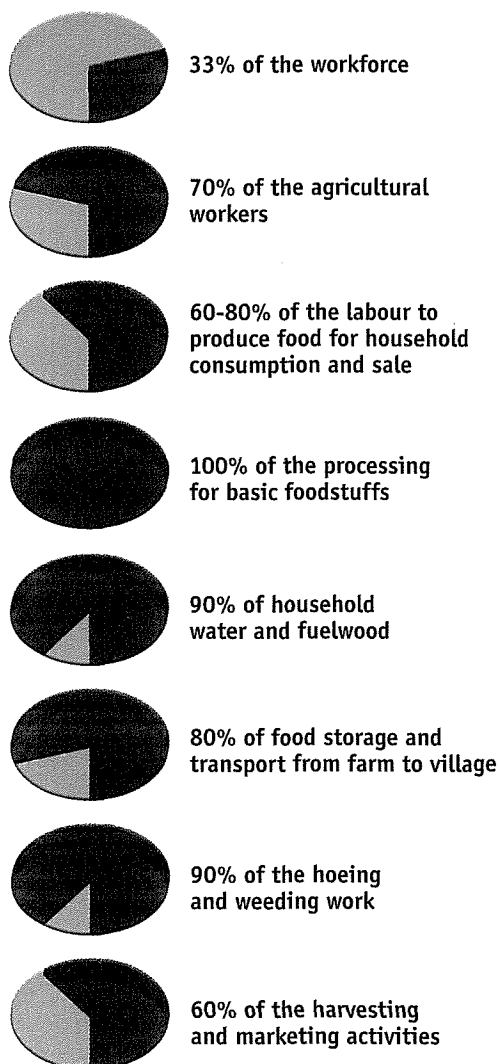
STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN

From Words to Action...

- Collect, analyze and disseminate gender-disaggregated data on food and nutrition to be used in the design of policies, programmes and interventions that improve the nutritional level of all household members.
- Provide training to women entrepreneurs in cottage food industries in order to enhance their capacities and ensure the safety of their products.

WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION TO LABOUR IN AFRICA

In many African countries women provide:



Source: International Fund for Agricultural Development