

# bridging the gap

FAO'S PROGRAMME FOR GENDER EQUALITY  
IN AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT



FOOD AND AGRICULTURE  
ORGANIZATION  
OF THE UNITED NATIONS



# bridging the gap

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*“Women’s empowerment and gender equality  
are fundamental to FAO’s vision of a world  
free of hunger and malnutrition” – Jacques Diouf*

# Foreword

Today, the spectre of hunger has returned to many developing countries. The number of undernourished people has risen above one billion, or one sixth of humanity. The international community faces other daunting challenges, including the global economic downturn, plummeting levels of trade and investment, growing scarcity of natural resources, and the impact of climate change.

We cannot overcome those challenges while age-old, ingrained ideas of gender roles deny women's full participation in decision-making and social and economic development. Rural women make up the majority of the world's poor. Much of their work as household providers and agricultural producers is unpaid, making their contribution virtually invisible. They have far less access than men to land ownership, financial services, training and other means of increasing agricultural production and improving family income, nutrition and health. Women and female-headed households are disproportionately affected by economic recession and higher food prices.

Social and economic inequalities between men and women undermine food security and hold back economic growth and advances in agriculture. That is why FAO's new strategic framework identifies gender equity in access to resources, goods, services and decision-making in rural areas as one of the Organization's key objectives for the next 10 years. Gender equity will be essential to implementing the decisions of the World Summit on Food Security, held in Rome in November 2009.

By mainstreaming gender equity into all of its programmes for agriculture and rural development, FAO aims at strengthening the impact of its support to member countries, and achieving the goals of gender equality, the eradication of hunger and poverty, and food security for all.



Jacques Diouf  
Director-General  
Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations

# Why gender

*Gender roles, gender relations, gender discrimination, gender equality, gender equity, gender analysis, gender balance, gender mainstreaming...*

Over the past decade, all of those terms have been accepted into declarations, plans of action, policies, programmes and projects for agriculture and rural development.

Accepted, but not always fully understood. For some, the stumbling block is the word “gender”, a relatively recent concept in social science. “Gender” refers not to *male* and *female*, but to *masculine* and *feminine* – that is, to qualities or characteristics that society ascribes to each sex. People are born female or male, but learn to be women and men. Perceptions of gender are deeply rooted, vary widely both within and between cultures, and change over time. But in all cultures, gender determines power and resources for females and males.

By any indicator of human development, female power and resources are lowest in rural areas of

the developing world. Rural women make up the majority of the world’s poor. They have the world’s lowest levels of schooling and the highest rates of illiteracy. In all developing regions, female-headed rural households are among the poorest of the poor.

Numerous studies underscore the social costs of rural women’s lack of education and assets, linking it directly to high rates of undernutrition, infant mortality and, in some countries, HIV/AIDS infection. There are also high economic costs: wasted human capital and low labour productivity that stifle rural development and progress in agriculture, and ultimately threaten food security – for both women and men.

That is why gender has become central to FAO’s new strategy for agriculture and rural development, and why understanding the terminology is important.

*Gender roles are those behaviours, tasks and responsibilities that a society considers appropriate for men, women, boys and girls*

In traditional rural societies, commercial agricultural production is mainly a male responsibility. Men prepare land, irrigate crops, and harvest and transport produce to market. They own and trade large animals such as cattle, and are responsible for cutting, hauling and selling timber from forests. In fishing communities, capturing fish in coastal and deep-sea waters is almost always a male domain.

Rural women have primary responsibility for maintaining the household. They raise children, grow and prepare food, manage family poultry, and collect fuel wood and water. But they play an important, largely unpaid, role in generating family income, by providing labour for planting, weeding, harvesting and threshing crops, and processing produce for sale. Women may also earn a small income for themselves by selling vegetables from home gardens, or forest products. They spend that income mainly on meeting family food needs and child education.



## ***Gender relations are the ways in which a society defines rights, responsibilities and the identities of men and women in relation to one another***

Although women make substantial contributions to household well-being and agricultural production, men largely control the sale of crops and animals and use of the income. The failure to value their work reduces women to virtual non-entities in economic transactions, the allocation of household resources, and wider community decision-making.

With the increasing commercialization of agriculture, the dominant position of men is changing gender roles – in men's favour. For example, as urban demand for vegetables increases, men are taking over women's traditional gardens to establish commercial enterprises. The expropriation of women's activities reduces their production of food for the household, their income and their social standing. Another growing trend is out-migration of poor rural men in search of employment, which leaves women with sole responsibility for food and cash crop production, as well as raising children.

## ***Gender discrimination is any exclusion or restriction made on the basis of gender roles and relations that prevents a person from enjoying full human rights***

Rural women suffer systematic discrimination in the access to resources needed for socio-economic development. Credit, extension, input and seed supply services usually address the needs of male household heads. Rural women are rarely consulted in development projects that may increase men's production and income, but add to their own workloads. When work burdens increase, girls are removed from school more often than boys, to help with farming and household tasks.

In many countries, a husband's family may take land and livestock from a woman on her husband's death, leaving her destitute. Female farm labourers' wages are lower than men's, while low-paid tasks in agro-processing are routinely "feminized". Discrimination can descend into gender-based violence, especially during emergencies when women are isolated and vulnerable. Another form of violence is women's lack of rights to "safe sex", a major factor in the spread of HIV/AIDS in some countries.

### **Gender equality and the MDGs**

The third of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) is to "Promote gender equality and empower women". It sets a target of eliminating gender disparity in all levels of education by 2015. Gender equality can also help the international community to achieve other important MDGs:

#### **MDG1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger**

Increasing rural women's agricultural production and participation in the labour force helps to reduce poverty and stimulate economic growth.

#### **MDG4: Reduce child mortality**

Rural women's lack of access to education and assets is directly linked to high rates of child and infant mortality.

#### **MDG5: Improve maternal health**

The vast majority of maternal deaths – estimated at half a million a year – could be prevented through better access for women to reproductive health services.

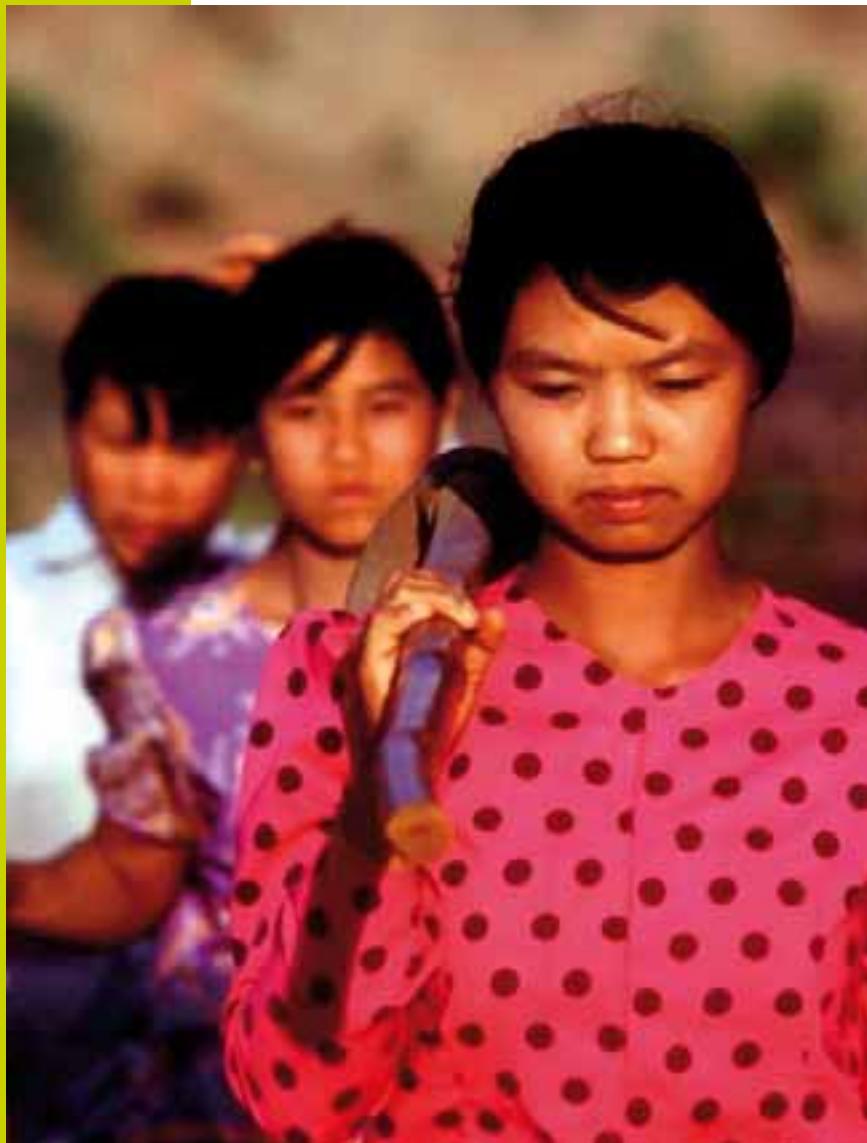
#### **MDG6: Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases**

Gender inequality is recognized as one of the driving forces behind the spread of HIV infection and AIDS.

#### **MDG7: Ensure environmental sustainability**

As farmers and household providers, rural women manage natural resources daily. Their participation in programmes for the sustainable management of land, water and biodiversity is essential.

# Why gender



***Gender equality is a state in which women and men enjoy equal rights, opportunities and entitlements in civil and political life***

For FAO, gender equality is equal participation of women and men in decision-making, equal ability to exercise their human rights, equal access to and control of resources and the benefits of development, and equal opportunities in employment and in all other aspects of their livelihoods.

Gender equality makes good sense. One study calculated that agricultural productivity in sub-Saharan Africa could rise by 20% if women had equal access to land, seed and fertilizer. A World Bank report concluded that reducing gender inequality leads to falling infant and child mortality, improved nutrition, higher economic productivity and faster growth. For the global community, gender equality is also a commitment, embedded in international human rights agreements and in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.

***Gender equity means fairness and impartiality in the treatment of women and men in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities***

FAO has placed gender equity in access to resources, goods, services and decision-making among its key strategic objectives in agriculture and rural development for the next 10 years. By creating social relations in which neither of the sexes suffers discrimination, gender equity aims at improving gender relations and gender roles, and achieving gender equality.

The essence of equity is not identical treatment – treatment may be equal or different, but should always be considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities. Since male predominance in the family, public policy and institutions – not only in rural areas, but worldwide – has long obscured women's interests

and concerns, a key strategy for gender equity lies in women's empowerment. Development must encompass rural women's long-term needs and aspirations, their decision-making power, and their access to and control of critical resources such as land and their own labour.

***Gender analysis is the study of the different roles of women and men in order to understand what they do, what resources they have, and what their needs and priorities are***

FAO uses gender analysis to address differentiated access to and control over resources and decision-making within rural communities and households. By understanding how different members participate in and are affected by development interventions – who stands to gain and who stands to lose – gender analysis helps planners to avoid costly errors of the past and design programmes and projects that are effective, efficient and equitable.

For example, gender analysis can reveal that if weeding and harvesting crops are considered "women's tasks", a programme to increase cash crop production may add to women's burdens and provide few benefits. A better investment may be piping water to rural households, thus giving women more time for small livestock production and horticulture. In emergency projects, gender analysis differentiates between potential impacts on girls and women – such as increased risk of malnutrition – and on men and boys, who may risk recruitment into conflicts.

***Gender balance is the equal and active participation of women and men in all areas of decision-making, and in access to and control over resources and services***

The United Nations considers gender balance fundamental to the achievement of equality, development and peace. To accomplish it in

agriculture and rural development, action is needed by rural communities, governments and international development agencies.

At the local level, for example, gender balance means men and women are actively involved in decision-making bodies, including those managing community facilities and infrastructure. Ministries responsible for rural development need to improve gender balance among technical and managerial staff, especially in extension work. FAO strives for gender balance by employing women among front-line staff in its development projects. FAO has trained female facilitators to pass on biological pest control measures to women farmers, built up cadres of female livestock assistants to advise women's poultry enterprises, and used female promoters to form women's groups for income-generation. Within FAO, the proportion of female professional staff has increased from 23% in 1994 to 40% in 2009.

***Gender mainstreaming is the globally recognized strategy for achieving gender equality***

Gender mainstreaming is defined by the United Nations as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action in all areas and at all levels. As part of its new strategic framework, FAO has made gender mainstreaming central to its development policies and programmes. The Organization's work now extends beyond "women's issues", into areas once considered "gender-neutral", such as agricultural science and economic policy making. Within the Organization, gender mainstreaming entails sensitizing staff to gender issues in technical and administrative work, creating accountability mechanisms, and ensuring the allocation of resources equal to the challenge.

This guide outlines the gender dimensions of each of the Organization's strategic objectives, and FAO action to achieve gender equity in agriculture and rural development.



**FAO strategic objective:**  
Gender equity in access  
to resources, goods, services  
and decision-making

# Gender equity

FAO's new strategy will mainstream gender equity in all of its programmes for agriculture and rural development

Mainstreaming gender equity has become a strategic objective of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. To achieve FAO's vision of a world free of hunger and malnutrition, its new strategic framework identifies a series of objectives that define impacts – in countries, regions and globally – to be achieved in the coming decade.



Strategic objective K – “Gender equity in access to resources, goods, services and decision-making” – responds to overwhelming evidence that gender inequality exacerbates food insecurity, malnutrition and poverty. FAO says strategies for agriculture and rural development do not always benefit rural populations, particularly women, but sometimes even amplify existing disparities.

That trend is likely to worsen in the face of today's unprecedented challenges, including climate change, international migration, transboundary infectious diseases and the global economic downturn. Unless gender is addressed comprehensively, the global community will not achieve the targets set by the 1996 World Food Summit, and the UN Millennium Development Goals.

## FAO's “comparative advantage”

As the United Nations lead agency for agriculture and rural development, FAO has a clear comparative advantage in addressing rural gender issues. For decades, FAO has championed the contribution of women to food production and food security, and spearheaded efforts to remove the barriers that limit their opportunities, and the full enjoyment of their rights.

Between 1989 and 2001, two six-year FAO plans of action for “Women in development” focused on improving rural women's access to resources, training and other services. In 2002, a new plan for “Gender and development” defined the different roles and unequal power relations between women and men as a central category of analysis, applying it not just to “women's projects” but to the Organization's wider programme of work, and linking it to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

## FAO: A voice for women's empowerment

The three key instruments for implementing the 2002-2007 plan were capacity development, raising awareness, and gender-sensitive indicators and statistics. FAO led efforts to promote gender mainstreaming in agriculture through socio-economic and gender analysis training courses for an estimated 4 000 development specialists in more than 100 countries. FAO also trained national policy analysts in the collection and use of sex-disaggregated data, and developed gender-sensitive indicators in technical fields ranging from animal health and water management to nutrition, fisheries and rural employment.

Through capacity building and access to more reliable data, FAO has promoted gender-sensitive policy and planning in 30 countries. Botswana and Namibia have adopted national action plans for food security, which seek to eliminate inequalities in women's access to productive resources. FAO's technical assistance contributed to mainstreaming gender in Chile's agricultural policy and helped to increase the use of gender statistics by policy makers in China.

In FAO, a Gender, Equity and Rural Employment Division (ESW) was created in 2007, within the Economic and Social Development Department, with corporate responsibility for gender equality. A training programme has enhanced both staff commitment to gender mainstreaming and the skills needed to carry it out. A network of senior-level focal points in the Organization's technical units has been created to mainstream gender in all FAO's technical programmes. For example, gender perspectives are now seen as central to FAO's strategy for disaster risk management, and have been incorporated prominently in its emergency relief and rehabilitation operations.

The Food and Agriculture Organization's support to rural women began in 1949, when it created a Home Economics and Social Programme to deal with issues related to women's domestic and reproductive roles. During the 1970s, when the real extent of their contribution to agriculture became clear, FAO's focus shifted to rural women as producers and providers of food for the household.

That evolution was part of a "global awakening" to the inequality between men and women, which was reflected in numerous United Nations declarations and international agreements. They included the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which entrusted FAO with assisting member countries to report on the progress made towards eliminating discrimination against rural women.

FAO's first Women in Development Plan of Action (1989-1995) aimed at incorporating international commitments in the Organization's policies and programmes. FAO was also designated the responsible Agency for the implementation of food and agriculture components of the first UN System-Wide Medium-Term Plan for Women in Development (1990-1995).

The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, renewed global commitment to gender equality. Gender mainstreaming emerged as the common strategy to promote gender equality throughout the UN system, and among member countries. FAO linked gender to food security issues at the World Food Summit in 1996, which declared that the full participation of women and men is fundamental to achieving food for all.

FAO's second Women in Development Plan of Action (1996-2001) reflected that broader understanding of food security issues. Its Gender and Development (GAD) Plan of Action (2002-2007) realigned the Organization's strategy to promote gender equality, with focus on emerging challenges such as the impact of globalization, population dynamics and pressure on natural resources. The second GAD Plan of Action (2008-2013) has been integrated into FAO's new strategic framework.

# Gender equity

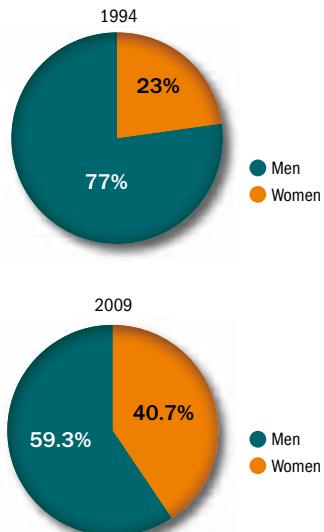
## Critical gaps remain

Thanks to FAO's work on gender, many countries have embraced development policies and programmes that are more gender and socially inclusive. But critical gaps remain: cultural biases and lack of political will have led to uneven adoption and implementation of internationally agreed policies and conventions on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Data needed to understand gender differences in access to productive resources remain scarce, and the capacity of many developing countries to integrate gender issues in development programmes is still weak. Even where progress has been made, the capacity to implement policies and evaluate impact is often inadequate. FAO's gender strategy seeks to close those gaps and raise the level of gender equality in rural areas.



Men and women in professional positions,  
FAO headquarters, 1994 and 2009



## Towards gender balance

In line with the United Nations goal of achieving gender balance in staffing, the proportion of women in professional positions at FAO headquarters in Rome rose from 23% in 1994 to more than 40% in 2009.



## FAO's targets 2008-2013

To mainstream gender equity in its programmes for agriculture and rural development, FAO has set itself the following targets to 2013:

### UN policies and joint programmes

Support gender mainstreaming in agriculture and rural development within the "One UN" initiative, identify needs, gaps and entry points for FAO technical support, and contribute to common approaches to gender within the United Nations system.

### Policies for agriculture and rural development

Assist governments in integrating gender into development policies and programmes through the analysis of disparities that affect people's access to resources and of issues that threaten gender equity and rural livelihoods.

### Capacity building

Expand support to training in gender mainstreaming (using tools pioneered by FAO's Socio-Economic and Gender Analysis programme), and to the collection, analysis and dissemination of sex-disaggregated data and statistics used in policy making.

### FAO skills, resources and technical programmes

Upgrade the gender analysis skills of FAO staff, allocate specific budgets to meet gender targets, and support the Organization-wide network of gender focal points to promote gender mainstreaming in all FAO's technical programmes.

**FAO strategic objective:**  
Sustainable intensification  
of crop production

## FAO's targets 2008-2013

**Horticulture best practices**  
Sharpen the gender focus  
of training in best practices  
for horticultural and other  
sustainable crop intensification  
and diversification initiatives in  
rural and in urban/peri-urban  
areas.

**Integrated pest management**  
In national IPM programmes  
and policies, focus on vulnerable  
groups, including women, in  
developing methods for the  
conservation and enhancement of  
ecosystem services.

**Crop diversity**  
Incorporate issues of concern to  
both men and women in efforts to  
develop policies and strategies for  
plant genetic resources.

**Bioenergy crops**  
Investigate the implications of  
new bioenergy crops for food  
security, the use of labour and  
time by men and women, and  
the division of income from crop  
production or employment.

# Crops

Women have the least access to the means for increasing yields  
and moving from subsistence crops to market-oriented production

Increasing crop productivity is crucial to food security, rural development and conservation of natural resources. To feed a world population of 9.2 million in 2050, agriculture will need to double food production, and do so despite a shrinking base of per capita arable land, a steady decline in crop yield gains, mounting stress on ecosystem services, and the impact of climate change.

The first of FAO's new strategic objectives, therefore, is sustainable intensification of crop production. FAO calls for increasing crop productivity and its contribution to food security and rural livelihoods, through sustainable farming practices (such as integrated pest management and conservation agriculture), better management of biodiversity, and a shift from subsistence farming to market-oriented production.



## Gender dimensions of crop production

Women make major contributions to crop production. They provide up to 90% of the labour used in rice cultivation in Southeast Asia. In sub-Saharan Africa, they produce up to 80% of basic foodstuffs for both the household and sale. In home gardens, rural women grow vegetables that are important to household nutrition. Women's roles in crop production are expanding: the out-migration of young men from rural areas in some regions has led to permanent changes in women's responsibilities and tasks.

Yet women have the least access to the means for increasing output and yields, and for moving from subsistence farming to higher-value, market-oriented production. Less than 10% of women farmers in India, Nepal and Thailand own land. Only 15% of the world's agricultural extension agents are women. A study of farm credit schemes in Africa found that women's share of loans was just 10%. Statistics on women's yields, technology adoption rates and use of inputs are rarely reported.

The lack of women's participation in commercial crop production is often not a preference, but the result of limited access to inputs and markets. One study calculated that agricultural productivity in sub-Saharan Africa could rise 20% if women had equal access to land, seed and fertilizer. Women's adoption of new crop production technologies is also strongly affected by who controls and ultimately owns the crop: men often move into "women's" crop production when it becomes more profitable.

Careful analysis is needed to evaluate the importance and impact on the rural poor of bioenergy crops, such as sugarcane, maize and jatropha. Small-scale biofuel crop production could provide income and a source of electricity that would reduce women's domestic burdens. But studies indicate that the alternative – capital-intensive, large-scale plantations – may compete for use of marginal land where poor women grow food crops.

## FAO action for gender equity in crop production

Many agricultural development programmes have undervalued women's role in crop production. FAO promotes participatory research, links between extension and small farmers' groups, and between formal and local seed systems that help identify and meet their needs.

Efforts to conserve and utilize agrobiodiversity need to consider the approach of both men and women towards managing crop varieties and ecosystem services. While male-dominated commercial systems typically use standard varieties of a single species, women manage complex and species-rich production systems designed for overall stability. Because the loss of crop diversity reduces the capacity of poor farmers to adapt to climate change, agricultural research needs to draw on women's production strategies and experience in crop selection.

Finally, gender differences can influence farmers' adoption of Integrated Pest Management (IPM), which aims at minimizing pest problems, misuse of pesticides and environmental pollution. The fact that women are responsible for family health makes them more responsive to information on pesticides and IPM techniques.

In Kenya, FAO used farmers' field schools to train men and women farmers in conservation agriculture, a production system that reduces crop vulnerability to drought and farmers' dependence on fertilizers. Conservation agriculture led to more stable yields, enhanced food security and more time for livelihood diversification.

In Tanzania, FAO helped to organize community seeds fairs where 14 000 farmers exchanged, local seed varieties suited to local conditions. Owing to constraints on women's mobility, more men participated from the surrounding villages, but more women than men from the host villages attended.

In Pakistan, FAO trained female facilitators to pass on IPM practices in cotton to women farmers concerned about the health risks of pesticides. Reduced applications of pesticide also benefited women farm workers, who pick the cotton by hand.



In Haiti, FAO helped to revive local bean production – and to protect genetic diversity in the process – by distributing 50 tonnes of seed for multiplication among 23 producer groups, composed mainly of women.

**FAO strategic objective:**  
Increased sustainable  
livestock production

## FAO's targets 2008-2013

**Policies and programmes**  
Develop gender-sensitive tools and approaches that enable livestock experts to mainstream gender issues in the planning and implementation of livestock policies and programmes.

**Gender "hot spots"**  
Analyse gender-related "hot spots" in dairy, poultry, confined and grazing production systems.

**Gender checklists**  
Prepare and use checklists to ensure that gender issues are incorporated and addressed in livestock sector studies.

# Livestock

Development programmes must take account of gender roles that shape the small-scale livestock sector

Traditional livestock systems based on local resources and animal breeds are the major source of livelihoods for 200 million rural families, and provide food and income for some 70% of the world's rural poor.

But the traditional livestock sector is under growing pressure. Booming urban demand for meat, milk and eggs is being met worldwide by intensive, large-scale production systems that squeeze traditional producers from markets, erode the genetic diversity of local livestock breeds, and favour the emergence and spread of animal diseases.

FAO's strategy aims at sustainable increases in world livestock production, which, in turn, contribute to food security, poverty alleviation and economic development. FAO calls for action to increase low-income producers' access to resources and services, such as land, water, credit, extension and veterinary care.



## Gender dimensions of livestock production

Males and females of all ages participate in small-scale animal production. Men usually own and manage large animals, such as cattle and buffalo, while women are almost always responsible for poultry and small ruminants, such as goats. In fact, their livestock is often one of the few sources of income over which women have complete control.

But gender roles change. A study in Tanzania found that women do perform "men's tasks" during labour shortages. The reverse rarely occurs, except when there is potential to gain control over assets – for example, when milk production becomes more profitable.

Although all household members are involved in livestock production, gender discrimination denies women access to resources, rights and services. Secure land tenure, for example, is crucial to productivity increases: farmers who own land are more likely to make long-term investments and try new production technologies. In most rural societies, however, women can only access land through their male relatives. Insecurity of title often extends to the animals themselves. In Namibia, it is still common (despite legislation to prevent it) for a husband's family to take livestock from a woman at her husband's death.

Male livestock keepers also have far better access to training and technology. Extension programmes are usually oriented towards men's livestock, and extensionists lack the incentive and communication skills needed to work with often illiterate women. Among households affected by HIV/AIDS in Uganda, the death of the male head of the household can leave women and children without the financial resources or extension services needed to care for the cattle.

Interventions to control animal diseases should also take account of gender roles. Men's income may be more at risk from outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease, which has decimated cattle herds

## FAO action for gender equity in livestock production

FAO advises governments on livestock sector policies and programmes. It also provides assistance in developing the skills of small livestock owners, and in facilitating their access to productive resources such as land, water and credit. It works with rural institutions to make extension and veterinary services more responsive to small producers' needs.

in many countries. But as the primary managers of poultry, women and children face greater health and economic risks from avian influenza.

The negative impact of gender discrimination on productivity is more obvious in the livestock sector than in most other areas of agriculture. But the potential benefits of gender equality have made the sector a privileged entry point for gender mainstreaming.

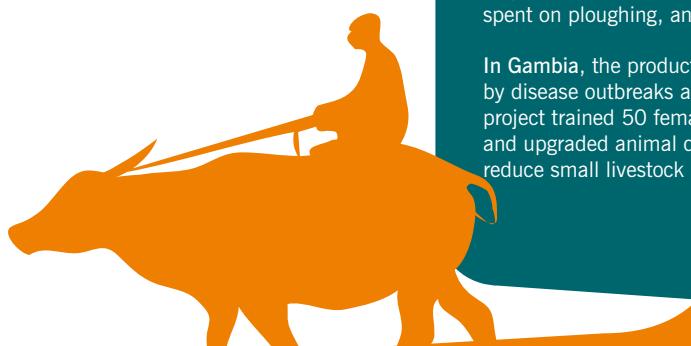
Low-cost investments in poultry and small animal production – which is easily managed and has a quick rate of growth and return – can provide women with new income generating activities. Because poor rural women spend most of their income on buying food and paying school fees, that can do more to improve family welfare than expanding men's cattle herds.

In Afghanistan, an FAO project helped to organize more than 20 000 rural women in poultry producers' groups, and provided them with training, improved pullets and equipment, and access to urban markets. Their poultry enterprises now produce 30 million eggs per year.



In Ethiopia, trypanosomiasis – a livestock disease transmitted by tsetse flies – limited milk production and the availability of healthy draught animals. FAO encouraged the participation of women farmers in a project that integrated tsetse control with improved mixed farming systems. The project helped 700 000 farmers to double their milk output, drastically reduce time spent on ploughing, and cut the need for veterinary treatment by 60%.

In Gambia, the productivity of small ruminants and poultry was limited by disease outbreaks and women's lack of access to extension. An FAO project trained 50 female livestock assistants to deliver extension advice, and upgraded animal disease diagnostic laboratories. The project helped to reduce small livestock mortality from disease by 45%.



**FAO strategic objective:**  
Sustainable management  
and use of fisheries and  
aquaculture resources

## FAO's targets 2008-2013

**Women's empowerment**  
Use women's empowerment  
as an indicator in assessing  
the contribution of small-scale  
aquaculture to sustainable rural  
development.

**Aquaculture training**  
Incorporate gender concerns in  
information and other tools for  
aquaculture development, and  
increase women's participation  
in training in management, seed  
production and entrepreneurship.

**Fisheries research and  
management**  
Improve the ratio of men and  
women trained or participating  
in capacity building in fisheries  
research and management.

**Global conference**  
Include gender as a thematic area  
in FAO's Global Conference on  
Aquaculture 2010.

# Fisheries

Gender discrimination is perpetuated in women's limited access  
to credit, storage facilities and training

Fisheries are essential to the economic well-being of millions of rural people in the developing world. Capture fisheries and aquaculture provide direct employment for some 200 million people, the vast majority of whom work in the traditional, small-scale sector, which accounts for about 70% of fisheries production.

Fish and other aquatic species are also vital to food security. They provide almost 30% of the animal protein consumed in Asia and the Pacific, and more than 20% in low-income food-deficit countries.

FAO's strategy for fisheries development seeks to enhance productivity in the small-scale sector – and its contribution to food security and livelihoods – in the face of growing competition from industrial capture fisheries and large-scale aquaculture.



## Gender dimensions of fisheries and aquaculture

Capturing fish in coastal and deep-sea waters is almost always a male domain, and carries with it high occupational health and safety risks. Women in fishing households do perform preparatory work, such as mending nets, although their contribution is often "informal" and rarely remunerated.

Women's most prominent role – in small-scale and industrial fisheries – is in post-harvest, processing and marketing. In West Africa, as much as 80% of seafood is marketed by women. In fish processing factories surveyed in India, 60% of workers were young women. In Viet Nam, females make up 80% of the aquaculture workforce.

Gender roles and responsibilities are evolving. In parts of Cambodia and Thailand, women increasingly fish and own boats. In Bangladesh, women make up about 60% of fish farmers, and many are successful entrepreneurs. But much of women's contribution to fisheries is "invisible". Gender discrimination stems from the low value attached to women's work and is perpetuated in their limited access to credit, processing technology, storage facilities and training.

Without training and storage technology, many women traders are unable to keep fish fresh, and suffer considerable post-harvest losses. In West Africa, studies found that the poorest fishmongers in the processing and sales chain had access to only low quality fish and no access at all to market information – or ice.

Programmes for the mechanization of small-scale fisheries production risk displacing women from traditional sources of livelihoods. In India, the motorization of fishing vessels in one area led to bigger catches and the replacement of women fishmongers by male merchants. Studies show that when improved fish preservation and processing facilities are made available, men engaged in capturing fish begin to compete with women for access.

## FAO action for gender equity in fisheries and aquaculture

As part of its global Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries, FAO has developed technical guidelines for mainstreaming gender in small-scale fisheries development. The code promotes the practice of “co-management”, in which entire fishing communities, comprising both men and women, participate in controlling fish and aquatic resources.

Gender discrimination follows women into the industrial processing sector. Women from fishing communities in India who became wage earners in the seafood export industry were found to be paid less than men, and were away from their homes for longer periods, making it more difficult for them to fulfill their domestic roles.

Opportunities offered by aquaculture also need to be assessed from a gender perspective. If a woman knows she may lose a fish pond at the death of her husband, she may not invest in the enterprise. The introduction of cage culture may deprive women of water used for drinking, washing dishes or soaking cassava. If aquaculture reduces water levels in wells, women may have to look for other, more distant sources.

In West Africa, FAO worked with 20 coastal and five inland countries in a programme aimed at sustainable improvements in the livelihoods of men and women in fishing communities. In Niger, literacy, management and accountancy training helped women fishmongers to increase their incomes and play a much greater role in community decision-making.



In Viet Nam, a project for aquaculture development gave high priority to raising awareness of gender issues among farmers and local institutions, and improving access to extension services, credit and fish seed. Thanks to loans and training, some 2 500 women started home fish ponds, which led to a rise of 20% in incomes and of 30% in household fish consumption.

In Malawi, incidence of HIV/AIDS is high in fishing villages, where male migration often leaves women with no choice but to trade sex-for-resources to ensure family survival. FAO recently helped to develop Malawi's Fisheries and HIV/AIDS Strategy, which incorporates both HIV/AIDS issues and gender dimensions in the country's development planning.

**FAO strategic objective:**  
Sustainable management  
of forests and trees

## FAO's targets 2008-2013

### Sector studies

Include gender issues in socio-economic analysis and forest sector outlook studies, and encourage countries to provide sex-disaggregated data.

### Income generation

Promote methodologies for men and women to generate income from forests and trees in order to reduce poverty and to manage natural resources on a sustainable basis.

### Stakeholder participation

Develop and implement approaches that increase the participation of male and female stakeholders in forest-related processes and activities.

### Forest tenure systems

Promote equitable forest tenure systems through policies and laws that improve access to, and use and management of, forest resources for the benefit of men and women.

### Forest institutions

Collect gender-disaggregated data on employment in public-funded forest research centres and graduation from forestry educational institutions.

# Forests

Given their responsibility for meeting household food and fuel needs, the depletion of forest resources increases burdens on women

Forests make a significant contribution to livelihoods in the developing world. An estimated 1.2 billion people rely on agro-forestry farming systems. Although the net loss of forests is slowing down, deforestation and forest degradation continue, especially in tropical regions.

Because of the growing demand for ecosystem services from forests, a strategic approach is needed to optimize the capacity of forests to mitigate climate change, conserve biodiversity, safeguard wildlife and protect land and watersheds.

FAO's strategy for sustainable management of forests and trees calls for action to increase the involvement of forest stakeholders in policy making and legislation, to enhance the contribution of forests to livelihoods, and to make forestry a more economically viable land-use option.



### Gender dimensions of forest management

Rural women and men often have disparate knowledge of forest resources and different roles in tree and forest management. Women practise traditional agro-forestry production systems, such as home gardening, and harvest and sell wood and tree products as part of small-scale enterprises. They are mainly responsible for collection of fuel wood for the household, and of wild plants used as food and medicines.

Men are involved more in high-value activities such as cutting and hauling timber. But gender roles vary – in parts of Nepal, men weave bamboo baskets, while in Lao PDR, women are more active in the craft. Women are the sole collectors of fuel wood in Bhutan, but men help out in Sri Lanka.

Research suggests that trees and forests are more important to rural women's livelihoods than to those of men. In Madagascar poor women in one community earned 37% of their income from forest products, compared to 22% earned by men. In Andhra Pradesh, 77% of women's income in some areas was derived from forests.

In many countries, forest land is owned by the state, while local men have rights to trees and women to tree products such as fruit. On Pacific islands, women harvest breadfruit for food, but breadfruit trees are controlled by men, who use its timber to make furniture. For both men and women, access to forest resources is becoming complex, as rights based in negotiable customary law give way, increasingly, to government action to protect threatened forest habitats by restricting human encroachment.

Restrictions on access affect men and women in different ways. Forests can be crucial to farming women's survival strategies. In sub-Saharan Africa, responsibility for caring for household members afflicted by HIV/AIDS falls mainly on women, leaving less time for agricultural production. As a result, they are becoming more reliant on forest foods and

## FAO action for gender equity in forest management

FAO's "community forestry" approach recognizes the intimate relationship between women, men and trees. It builds on local knowledge to increase the benefits of forests, especially for the poor, and involves rural women and men in designing and implementing forestry programmes.

income from fuel wood. During conflicts and natural disasters, displaced rural people also become more reliant on forest products and services.

Given their responsibility for meeting household food and fuel needs, depletion of forest resources increases burdens on women especially. A study in Malawi found deforestation was forcing elderly women to walk more than 10 km a day to collect fuel wood. Women spend on average 800 hours a year in Zambia and 300 hours a year in Tanzania on the same task. In East Africa, fuel wood scarcity has led to a reduction in the number of meals cooked in poor households.



In Uganda, FAO helped 200 women and 100 men living in communities around the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park to set up profitable enterprises such as beekeeping, cultivating mushrooms and conducting eco-tours to protected gorilla areas. The project helped to improve livelihoods while protecting the park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo, a three-year FAO project strengthened small-scale, non-food forest product enterprises in seven communities. As most traders are women, they were also the prime beneficiaries. The project trained them in marketing, supplied improved processing technologies, and linked them to financial services.

In Lao PDR, FAO is collaborating in a programme to preserve bamboo weaving, which is regarded as a national heritage and is also a significant source of rural livelihoods. In one village, FAO helped marginalized women to forge links with national and regional markets for their bamboo furniture, boosting their incomes by 50%.



**FAO strategic objective:**  
Sustainable management  
of land, water and genetic  
resources

## FAO's targets 2008-2013

**Land issues and gender**  
Develop training modules on  
gender and land rights, and use  
gender analysis as an integral  
part of land use planning.

### State of world land and water resources

In reporting on the state of  
world land and water resources,  
address differences in women's  
and men's access, control and  
ownership.

**Water management projects**  
Collect and disseminate sex-  
disaggregated data on agriculture  
water management and include  
gender analysis in water  
management projects.

### Plant genetic resources

In reporting on implementation  
of the International Treaty on  
Plant Genetic Resources, address  
women's access and share of  
benefits.

### Land cover and GIS

Develop geographic information  
systems that integrate gender-  
related environmental and socio-  
economic data.

# Natural resources

Understanding gender dimensions of natural resources management  
is a starting point for reversing environmental degradation

## Gender dimensions of natural resources management

The developing world's 1.3 billion rural poor  
make up the world's largest group of natural  
resources managers. Understanding their roles and  
responsibilities – including the gender dimensions of  
natural resources management – is a starting point  
for reversing environmental degradation.

Women manage natural resources daily in their roles  
as farmers and household providers. Typically, they  
are responsible for growing subsistence crops, and  
often have unique knowledge of local crop species.  
To meet family needs, rural women and girls walk  
long distances to collect fuel wood and water.  
Despite their reliance on natural resources, women  
have less access to and control over them than men.  
Usually it is men who put land, water, plants and  
animals to commercial use, which is often more  
valued than women's domestic uses.

Gender inequality is most evident in access to  
land. Custom prohibits women from owning land in  
many countries. Frequently women have only use  
rights, mediated by men, and those rights are highly  
precarious. Landless rural women often depend on  
common property resources for fuel wood, fodder  
and food. In many countries, overuse of those  
resources poses a serious threat to rural livelihoods  
and food security.

Without secure land rights, farmers have limited  
access to credit – and little incentive – to invest  
in improved management and conservation  
practices. Women and men are more likely to make  
environmentally sound land management decisions  
when they have secure ownership and know they  
can benefit.

Improved water management, especially irrigation,  
is critical to higher agricultural productivity and  
conservation of the resource. Women farmers have  
limited access to irrigation networks or, when they  
do, to irrigation management decisions: membership



of water users' associations is often linked to land ownership. Women's limited water entitlements force them to use subsistence agricultural practices that may lead to soil erosion, a major source of instability in watersheds.

Over generations, small-scale farmers have shaped a wide diversity of crop species and animal breeds. Commercialization of agriculture, driven partly by global trade in high-yielding crops and animals, is responsible for a rapid decline in agrobiodiversity, which threatens not only local production but, ultimately, global food security.

To protect their natural resources, rural women and men must be empowered to participate in decisions that affect their needs and vulnerabilities. Addressing the gender dimensions of natural resources management will help policy makers formulate more effective interventions for their conservation and sustainable use.

## FAO action for gender equity in natural resources management

FAO promotes community-based management of natural resources that gives a voice to the men and women who rely on them. It works with national institutions to improve inheritance rights and draft land reform legislation, promotes gender equity in irrigation water users' associations, and encourages local seed production to preserve agrobiodiversity.



In Morocco, an FAO project to reduce depletion of natural resources organized 3 500 rural people – mainly women, girls and boys responsible for collecting fuel wood and water – into village associations. The project installed cisterns, wells and irrigation canals to improve water availability, and introduced a system for rotating pasture use and forage production.

In Tajikistan, a joint FAO/UNIFEM project to improve poor farmers' access to land and agricultural services created 74 women farmers' groups and provided them with information on national land reform legislation. The project also linked the groups to legal services and a credit revolving fund, and trained the groups in business planning and marketing.

In Nepal, FAO's Livelihood Support Programme improved women farmers' production and incomes by promoting their participation in irrigation water users' committees. The project also provided them with training in literacy, leadership and women's rights.

