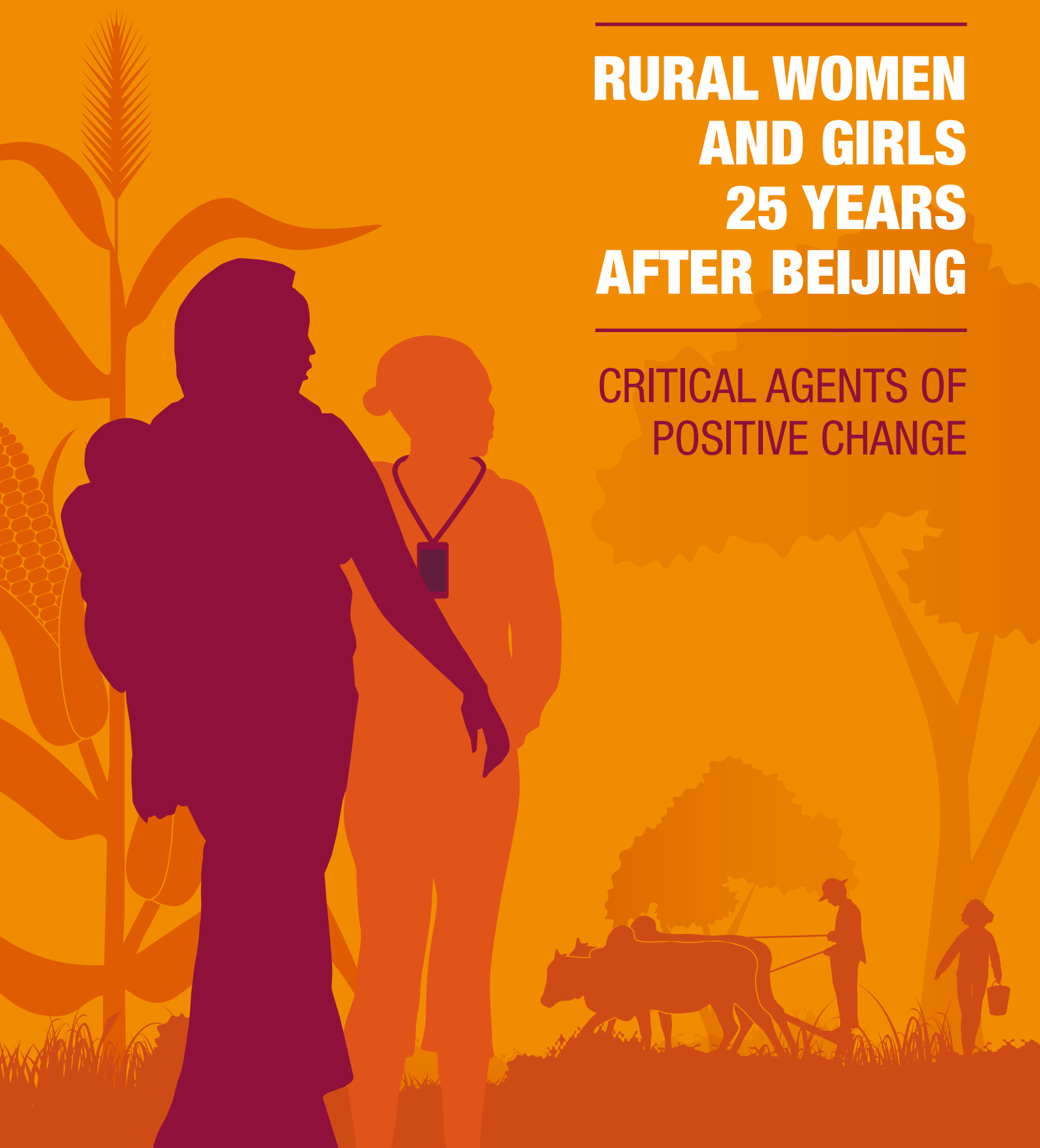




RURAL WOMEN AND GIRLS 25 YEARS AFTER BEIJING

CRITICAL AGENTS OF POSITIVE CHANGE



“Rural Women and Girls 25 years after Beijing: critical agents of positive change” was jointly prepared by the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality's (IANWGE's) Working Group on Rural Women and Girls: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (ITC/ILO), Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF), Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (UNDESA), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), World Food Programme (WFP) and World Health Organization (WHO). This publication also benefitted from the contribution of the Joint Programme on Gender Transformative Approaches for Food Security and Nutrition (JP GTA), implemented by FAO, IFAD and WFP with the financial support of the European Union.

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Rural women and girls 25 years after Beijing: critical agents of positive change. Rome.

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ISBN 978-92-5-133512-3 (FAO)

ISBN 978-92-9266-019-2 (IFAD)

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INTRODUCTION

In 2020, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), also known as “Beijing + 25”, provides an excellent opportunity for governments, civil society, the United Nations (UN) system and all development actors to take stock of progress made toward gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

The BPfA is an ambitious framework for change that calls for a world in which every woman and girl can realize her rights, have equal livelihood opportunities, live free from violence and participate in decision-making that affects her life.

The year 2020 also marks the twentieth anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, also known as UN Women, and the fifth anniversary of the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

It is in this context that members of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE)¹ seek to raise awareness about and promote opportunities for some of those left furthest behind: rural and indigenous women and girls.

Globally, and with only a few exceptions, rural and indigenous women fare worse than rural men and urban women and men on every indicator for which data are available. Although they share challenges in the form of rural location and gender-based discrimination, rural women and girls are not a homogeneous group. The opportunities and constraints they face differ across their lifetimes, contexts and circumstances; they are influenced by location and socio-economic status and social identities associated with other forms of marginalization, such as indigenous origin and ethnicity, age, disability and migrant or refugee status. The complex experiences of rural and indigenous women and girls mean that they commonly face varied and deeply entrenched obstacles to empowerment. It is thus imperative to not only take stock of the broad experiences of rural and indigenous women and girls, but also to recognize and address the specific needs and distinct realities faced by those constituting these two groups.

This is vital from both a human rights and a social justice perspective and because we cannot afford to leave rural and indigenous women and girls behind: their social and economic empowerment is fundamental to achieving the SDGs and implementing the BPfA. Despite



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Malaysia, The Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility (IPAF) finds solutions to the challenges faced by indigenous women and girls. It supports indigenous peoples' communities and their organizations. In the photo: The Jakun ethnic group of Kampung village supported by the Foundation for Community Studies and Development funded by IPAF.

1. IANWGE is a network of UN entities, specialized agencies, funds and programmes. It works to ensure coordination and cooperation on the promotion of gender equality throughout the UN system. The IANWGE Working Group on Rural Women and Girls was created at the sixty-third session of the Commission on the Status of Women and is co-led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP). Its members include the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF); the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women); the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (ITC-ILLO); the Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights; the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS); the UN Population Fund (UNFPA); the Indigenous People's Branch of the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs; and the World Health Organization (WHO).

the multiple constraints rural and indigenous women and girls encounter, they often have a great potential for the development of their own households and communities and for resilience-building because of their capacity, local knowledge and enterprise skills. They are active agents of agricultural and rural development; increasing food and nutrition security and eradicating poverty depend on empowering them and their achieving gender equality. There is evidence that when rural women have equal access to education, skills development, services, productive inputs and employment opportunities, they are more protected from discrimination and gender-based violence (GBV) and the yields on their farms increase, contributing significantly to economic growth, food security and nutrition. In an enabling environment, they are leaders in their communities and businesses, providing sustainable and innovative solutions to local as well as global challenges.

However, progress in empowering rural and indigenous women and girls has been slow and uneven across regions. Three-quarters of those living in poverty and facing chronic undernourishment reside in rural areas (FAO, 2017a); globally, there are 122 women aged 25–34 living in extreme poverty for every 100 men of the same age group (UN Women, 2018a), and it is estimated that more than 18 per cent of indigenous women live on less than US\$1.90 a day – the World Bank’s definition of extreme poverty (ILO, 2019). Rural women continue to have less access to and control over productive resources, technologies, services and opportunities than men. They also tend to lack self-esteem, confidence, negotiation and leadership skills (also referred to as agency), and often have lower education levels than their male counterparts. Many rural and indigenous girls and young women face massive barriers in agricultural labour markets and are restricted to low-status, poorly paid jobs, without legal or social protection or access to essential services and adequate health care. Many continue to face GBV in their homes, communities and workplaces. Gender-discriminatory behaviours and practices are commonly shaped by sociocultural norms regarding the roles played by women and girls, men and boys.

The role and status of indigenous women vary from one community to another, yet their concerns are often similar. In many indigenous communities, women and men have different roles and responsibilities, and thus different needs, aspirations and interests. Age is a key determinant of indigenous women’s roles and the types of challenges they encounter. Older indigenous women act as custodians of indigenous cultures, moral authorities, spiritual guides and healers; at the same time, however, they are among those who suffer most from cultural and territorial losses. Indigenous girls are exposed to specific types of discrimination because of their age and are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and trafficking (United Nations, 2015, paragraph 15).

These challenges and barriers must be overcome if young rural and indigenous women are to engage in and benefit from development. This requires transformative approaches that address the root causes of gender-based inequalities that impact their lives.

This document highlights some of the ways in which this can be achieved. This includes good practices from the members of the IANWGE network in the thematic areas of education; food security and nutrition; health; access to and control over land and other productive resources; leadership, decision-making and public life; social protection and services; care and domestic work; GBV; and resilience in the context of climate change and fragility.

EDUCATION

Quick facts

- Globally, more girls than boys do not attend school: of the 59 million children of primary-school age who do not attend school, more than 32 million are girls (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, data for year ending 2018).
- The relative disadvantage of girls compared with boys increases with poverty and rural location, especially in countries with low completion rates of schooling (Schultz, 2018).
- More than half of all poor rural women in developing countries lack basic literacy skills (UN Women, 2018b).
- Only 53 per cent of schools globally have access to handwashing facilities with soap and water, which are essential for menstrual hygiene management (UNESCO, 2019). Schools in rural areas may be particularly disadvantaged: in Nicaragua, for example, 64 per cent of urban schools had improved basic sanitation services, compared with only 32 per cent of rural schools (UNICEF and WHO, 2018).



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The main barriers to rural and indigenous girls' education include household poverty, geographic isolation, political marginalization, long distances to schools, and inadequate safety and deficient sanitation in the school environment. In many cultures, girls may not be able to attend schools or complete their education because of cultural and religious norms, such as the expectation that girls should marry early. A related problem is the functioning of schools and the curricula and materials used, which often ignore the importance of educating youth in their own cultures and languages and can reinforce gender stereotypes. Adolescent girls who do not attend school are more vulnerable to forced marriage, early pregnancy, violence

Sudan, Fardous North. Resumption of school meals in Blue Nile after a five-year hiatus. In the Photo: the Abubakr AISiddig School, Fardous North.

Good practice: WFP home-grown school feeding programme

School meals programmes create employment opportunities and improve the livelihoods of communities near the schools by sourcing or cooking the meals locally. To enhance skills development, WFP offers training and partners with local, women-owned businesses as part of gender-transformative school feeding and home-grown school feeding programmes.

A meta-analysis of school meals programmes in 32 sub-Saharan countries found that on-site meals combined with take-home rations for girls led to an increase in girls' enrolment that was 12 per cent greater than the change in boys' enrolment (Gelli, 2015).



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El Salvador, San Salvador, Barrio San Jacinto, Comunidad Cruz Roja. 21-year-old Rosa Raquel Gonzalez Molina applies the agricultural skills learned through WFP Vocational Trainings.

and even human trafficking than those who attend school. Addressing these challenges requires transformative education interventions that eliminate structural inequalities that act as a barrier to girls' and women's education in rural areas, including barriers outside the education sector.

Indigenous women and girls suffer specific severe challenges within the educational sector. Although there has been progress in their enrolment rates, indigenous girls continue to have the lowest chance of completing basic education, and their traditional knowledge and skills are often overlooked outside of their native communities (United Nations, 2017). They usually have less access to formal education; even when they do have access, they may have higher dropout, absenteeism and repetition rates, lower literacy rates, and poorer educational outcomes than their non-indigenous counterparts. Thus, formal education systems do not necessarily translate into socio-economic empowerment for indigenous women.

Efforts to address these educational issues are hampered by a lack of data and the paucity of the knowledge base on rural and indigenous women and their education. Currently, there are few disaggregated data available on education participation and learning outcomes, including literacy and numeracy, among women and girls living in rural locations or indigenous communities. This is in large part due to difficulties in data collection and tracking, particularly where communities are also part of ethnic, religious and/or linguistic minorities. Governments have committed to addressing these gaps by signing up to the targets under SDG 4 – Quality education, which require parity indices that specifically address sex and rural/urban location.

Good practice: UNESCO in Guatemala

Eleven per cent of adolescent girls in Guatemala have not received formal education (UNESCO, 2017). They also represent the highest proportion of those who cannot read or write. Indigenous girls are at a particular disadvantage: they suffer from lower levels of school attendance and have limited opportunities for learning in their own language and cultural contexts. This prevents them from fully participating in society and reaching their aspirations.

With support from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO's) Malala Fund for Girls' Right to Education, UNESCO has established two UNESCO Malala Centres in the Totonicapán department of Guatemala, where 98 per cent of the population is indigenous. These centres facilitate access to education for adolescent girls and young women, especially those marginalized from education because of ethnicity, rurality and poverty. They offer basic non-formal education in indigenous languages, including workshops on health and well-being, literacy, numeracy and financial autonomy. The centres are also challenging patriarchal beliefs that women do not need an education.

These UNESCO Malala Centres have expanded educational opportunities for indigenous girls, adolescents and young women in the western highlands of Guatemala. This has helped boost their self-confidence and improve their living conditions, while also benefiting their families and communities. The programmes at the centres are flexible, which allows women to adapt them to their needs and interests.

This model is being replicated across the country in collaboration with municipalities, with the aim of reaching more than 1 million females, including 650,000 indigenous adolescent girls and young women. In parallel, UNESCO is supporting the Guatemalan Government to develop a policy on gender equality to promote girls' and young women's education nationwide.

The right to education should be fully respected so that rural and indigenous women and girls have better access to quality formal and non-formal education. Special educational needs of indigenous women and girls should also be respected. Intercultural and bilingual or multilingual educational programmes are essential components of equitable education systems.

FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

Quick facts

- *Women are more likely than men to be affected by moderate or severe food insecurity on every continent, with the largest differences found in Latin America (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2019).*
- *Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to malnutrition. A nutritionally adequate diet for an adolescent girl is more expensive than for other household members because adolescent girls have the highest need for nutritious foods and nutritious foods tend to be more expensive than less-nutritious foods (WFP, 2018).*
- *The gender gap in food security is larger among the poorest and least-educated, people out of the workforce, the widowed and those living in suburbs of large cities (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2019, p. 24).*

Rural and indigenous women are resourceful economic agents who contribute to the well-being of their families and communities in many ways. They make up a significant proportion of food producers and play a major role in household food security and nutrition. They also support their households and communities by providing water, fuel and care, which are key resources for good nutrition and food security, and are repositories of ancestral knowledge for food production and preparation. Despite this, in many parts of the world rural and indigenous women have less access to and control over productive resources and assets, services and local institutions than do men and fewer opportunities to participate in decision-making processes. Rural women's contribution to food security often remains invisible due to factors such as sociocultural norms and conventional data-collection practices. Consequently, they may not be targeted with adequate services, technologies (including information and communication technologies), information or training. This discrimination and non-recognition restricts their opportunities to contribute to food security and nutrition, agriculture development and rural poverty alleviation. Aggregate evidence suggests that levels of hunger and malnutrition are higher in countries with a greater degree of gender inequality (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2019).

Food-insecure households are at high risk of undernutrition, with adolescent girls, women of reproductive age and young children being most at risk because of their higher-than-average nutrient needs. Lack of access to productive resources, limited decision-making power, lower educational status, and the restricted mobility of many rural women and girls make it difficult for them to meet their nutritional needs, receive adequate nutrition education or access health services. In addition, women's lack of time for childcare and breastfeeding can be a key cause of child undernutrition. Studies have shown the crucial importance of the nutritional status of women at the time of conception and during pregnancy, both for the health of the mother and for ensuring healthy fetal growth and development. Each year, about 32 million babies that are small for their gestational age are born globally, representing 27 per cent of all births in lower-middle-income countries. Fetal growth restriction causes more than 800,000 deaths each year in the first month of life, more than a quarter of all deaths of newborn children (Black et al., 2013).



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Fishing in Samar Sea, Philippines, 2013

Moreover, the “dual burden” of malnutrition – the simultaneous occurrence of under- and overnutrition – is increasingly observable in many countries. Overall, more women are obese than men (FAO, PAHO, WFP and UNICEF, 2018). Gender differences in overweight and obesity reflect disparities in lifestyles, food consumption and composition (especially the share of sugar-laden foods), hormonal changes during the lifespan and, in some contexts, cultural values that favour larger body size as a sign of fertility, healthfulness or prosperity. In lower-income countries, the prevalence of overweight/obesity is currently estimated at about 20 per cent in rural areas, while in urban areas it is even higher (Shekar and Popkin, 2020). In higher-income countries, prevalence of overweight/obesity among women is more equally distributed across urban and rural areas, dispelling the common misconception that overnutrition is limited to urban areas. There is also evidence that the prevalence of overweight/obesity in lower-income countries is now increasing faster in many rural areas than in cities (Jaacks, Slining and Popkin, 2015). By 2025, rates of overweight/obesity are expected to be higher in rural areas than in urban areas in all regions of the world except sub-Saharan Africa. These shifts may be related to a move away from household production of quality food as rural households transition from agriculture to other livelihoods, combined with the rapid expansion of transnational retail sectors and increased purchasing of consumer packaged foods and beverages; however, rigorous research in this area is still limited (Jaacks, Slining and Popkin, 2015).

Strong evidence indicates that improving women's socio-economic status results in positive nutrition outcomes, particularly when combined with nutrition education. For example, a multi-country analysis found that improvements in women's status and education were responsible for over half of the reductions in child underweight from 1970 to 1995 (Smith and Haddad, 2000). Women's low status and decision-making power in South Asia is a large part of the explanation for the "Asian enigma" of higher undernutrition rates than in sub-Saharan Africa, despite greater economic growth (Coffey, 2015). Among all the dimensions of women's empowerment, the most directly relevant for improving nutrition appear to be increasing women's access to and control over resources and reducing women's time and labour constraints (Alderman et al., 2013).

Interventions that increase the likelihood of women being able to control the income and resources accruing from their labour – for example, through inclusion of training and market opportunities for crops and animal products that women sell – improve both gender equality and nutrition. Similarly, introducing time- and labour-saving technologies and practices for tasks commonly performed by women can allow them to engage in informal or formal employment, with potential benefits for their earning power and associated improvements in household food security and nutrition.

Good practice: Joint UN initiative to improve food security and nutrition

FAO, IFAD, WFP and UN Women are implementing the UN Joint Programme "Accelerating progress towards the economic empowerment of rural women" (JP RWEE). This programme aims at achieving lasting improvements in rural women's livelihoods in seven countries: Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, the Niger and Rwanda. Implemented since 2014, the JP RWEE uses an integrated approach, in which a group of female farmers is targeted with a comprehensive package of capacity-development and technical-support interventions, complemented by measures to promote gender-responsive rural institutions and policies. By the end of 2018, the JP RWEE had reached more than 61,000 beneficiaries (49,089 women and 12,647 men) and approximately 316,000 members of their households.

Rural women in targeted countries have greater food and nutrition security as a result of having increased access to and control over resources, assets and services critical to their food and nutrition security and enhanced capacity to control local food security reserves and their production. As a result, for example, in Ethiopia 80 per cent of the targeted rural women were able to feed their household three times a day with a diversified diet.



Aleppo, Syria - Aicha Dalati works as a beekeeper with her husband in Aleppo Governorate. She wants to secure the family with income, find a proper home, and achieve food security.

Good practice: FAO's project, "Voices of the Hungry"

Sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics are fundamental for understanding rural women's roles and contributions to society and to the ability to elaborate gender-responsive rural-development policies. Despite this, such data remain scarce or incomplete. FAO is assisting Member States in addressing this gap in various ways.

- FAO's project, "Voices of the Hungry" (FAO, 2020a), is designed to support a novel survey-based measurement of access to food, based on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES). This project allows countries, for the first time, to generate global sex-disaggregated data on food insecurity. Since 2014, FAO has collected FIES data through the Gallup World Poll in about 150 countries, areas and territories by interviewing nationally representative samples of the adult population. The FIES data also enable countries to monitor SDG indicator 2.1.1 (percentage of individuals in the population with moderate or severe food insecurity). The findings are published annually in FAO's flagship report *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* (SOFI). As reported in SOFI 2019 (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2019), in every continent women are more likely than men to be affected by moderate or severe food insecurity, with the largest differences found in Latin America.
- FAO's Statistical Programme of Work 2018–19 included more than 30 statistical activities related to sex-disaggregated data or gender statistics in the agriculture sector. These included dissemination of seven data sets externally through databases, websites, yearbooks and flagship publications; three new activities to generate sex-disaggregated data; and nine new capacity-development activities, of which seven are related to one or more SDG indicators.

HEALTH

Quick facts

- *In low- and lower-middle-income countries, mother–child pairs living in rural areas are less likely to receive even basic health interventions than those living in urban areas (WHO and World Bank, 2017).*
- *Indigenous women and adolescent girls are even less likely to benefit from services and have worse maternal outcomes than other rural women (UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women, 2018).*
- *Globally, workers in agriculture, many of whom are women, run twice the risk of dying on the job than do workers in other sectors (ILO, 2013).*
- *Rural women working in agriculture can be exposed to endemic zoonoses, which are a major risk factor for human disease and the profitability of livestock for the rural poor. Fifty-six zoonoses were responsible for an estimated 2.5 billion illnesses and 2.7 million deaths a year (Grace et al., 2012).*

Despite substantial gains in recent years, major health inequities continue to exist between rural and urban areas in many parts of the world. These inequities are the result of the typically weaker health systems in rural areas; distance and geographical barriers to health facilities; underdeveloped infrastructure and transport services; and the adverse social, economic and environmental determinants of health experienced by rural residents. Another critical impediment to access to health and other social services by rural women and girls is that they are at a higher risk than their urban counterparts of lacking a birth certificate, due to weak civil registration and vital statistics systems. Wealth and urban/rural inequalities in birth-certificate coverage persist in most low- and middle-income countries. This results in rural and poor children being systematically excluded from the benefits tied to a birth certificate and prevents these children from being counted in national health data (Bhatia et al., 2017).

Child mortality and early marriage, pervasive GBV, vulnerability to sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, and lower levels of access to essential health information and culturally appropriate services, including on family planning, continue to threaten the health of rural girls and women. Agriculture-related diseases, accidents and injuries also take a heavy toll on their health, as do the nutrition-related health issues described previously.

Rates of preventable diseases and premature death may be higher among rural and indigenous women and girls because they often face adverse health determinants. An example is lack of sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. Contaminated water can transmit diseases such as diarrhoea, cholera, dysentery, typhoid and polio and can carry chemical contaminants from agriculture and industry (WHO, 2020). Ill-health of members of the household is likely to have a disproportionate impact on women because, due to social norms on gender roles, they are commonly the primary caretakers of sick family members.

Four million people die prematurely each year from illness attributable to household air pollution from cooking with polluting stoves powered by solid fuels and kerosene. Women and young children receive the highest exposure because they spend the most time in or near the kitchen when the stove is alight (WHO, 2014a; WHO, 2018). Access to clean cooking fuel and stoves remains much higher in urban areas, where 83 per cent of

households have access, compared to rural areas where only 32 per cent have access (WHO, IEA, GACC, UNDP, EnDev and World Bank, 2018; World Bank, 2018).

A particular challenge for women in many countries is access to sexual and reproductive health services. In the least-developed countries, a rural woman is 38 per cent less likely than an urban woman to give birth with the assistance of a skilled health professional (UN Women, 2015). Furthermore, rural women of working age often face massive occupational safety and health risks, as well as serious employment-related limitations in entitlements to health care services. Older rural women are also disproportionately affected and as a result suffer poorer health than women of a similar age living in urban areas. Additional barriers to acquiring access to health care and social care occur if older rural women also suffer from a loss in mobility or cognitive function. These systemic challenges are further compounded by the fact that, globally, there is a shortfall of 7 million skilled health workers in rural areas, compared with a shortfall of 3 million health workers in urban areas, and deficits in per capita health spending are twice as high in rural areas as in urban areas (United Nations, 2019).

Good practice: WHO Regional Office for the Americas/Pan-American Health Organization support to the “Health Plan for Indigenous Youth”

The Health Plan for Indigenous Youth is a joint initiative of WHO and the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) for the creation of opportunities for dialogue and social participation in health-related actions that benefit indigenous youth in Latin America and the Caribbean. In April 2017, WHO and PAHO convened a meeting of representatives of networks of indigenous youth from Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Suriname and Uruguay to analyse the achievements and challenges 10 years after adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The participants identified priorities for health and reached consensus on a proposed health plan for the indigenous youth of the region from their own perspectives. The Plan has the following lines of action: 1) gathering evidence to support health proposals, 2) intercultural competency, 3) political action, 4) sociocultural participation, 5) integration of traditional and complementary medicine, and 6) sexual and reproductive rights for indigenous youth.



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Indigenous women and girls continue to experience persistent and disproportionate inequities in access to health and health care services due to the tendency of mainstream health care providers to undervalue traditional health practices of indigenous women, such as indigenous midwifery. As a result, indigenous women and adolescent girls are less likely to benefit from conventional health care services and have worse maternal health outcomes, including higher levels of mortality in pregnancy and childbirth. For example, the birth rate of adolescent Amerindian girls in Guyana is twice that of the general population; Maasai women in Kenya are twice as likely to have had no antenatal care as Kenyan women in general; and San women in Namibia are 10 times more likely to give birth without skilled attendance than non-San women in the country (UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women, 2018). To improve the health situation of indigenous women and girls, there is also a need to increase availability of relevant data. In this context, it is worrying that of the 90 national and subnational surveys conducted under the last two rounds of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys and Demographic Health Surveys, only 43 included a question on ethnicity and only 27 of the published reports analysed findings by ethnicity (UNFPA, UNICEF and UN Women, 2018).

Good practice: UNFPA support for midwives in rural areas

UNFPA, together with many global and national partners, works to scale up quality midwifery education, policies and services around the world. UNFPA and its partners also work to strengthen midwifery training curricula, institutions, associations and regulations. UNFPA support for midwifery now spans more than 140 countries, including the 39 countries with the highest rates of maternal mortality; the latter receive targeted support through the Maternal Health Thematic Fund. Through this work, and many other programmes aimed at improving sexual and reproductive health and rights, UNFPA is supporting life-saving access to health care for women and girls around the world.

Much of this work also takes place in rural areas. For example, with UNFPA support, Ethiopia and the United Republic of Tanzania piloted a mobile learning system that provides a simple, portable and cost-effective solution for training health workers in low-resource and rural settings. By the end of 2017, 80 training sessions in Ethiopia had reached a total of more than 1,500 midwives, midwifery students, community health workers, and community members in seven training sites (two universities and five health centres). A particular success was that rural health workers were able to get world-class training. Multimedia e-learning modules covered key obstetric emergencies, family planning and antenatal care. Trainings on danger signs in pregnancy, acute watery diarrhoea and nutrition were conducted to raise awareness among community members as well as health care workers. Based on the success of the pilot, the national Government is scaling up the mobile learning system across several new in-service training and mentorship sites.

Similar successes have been achieved in the United Republic of Tanzania where to date more than 4,000 people (midwives, other health care workers, students and community members) have benefited from the training in life-saving skills in more than 15 remote and rural training sites.

LAND AND OTHER NATURAL RESOURCES

Quick facts

- Globally, women represent less than 15 per cent of all landowners, ranging from 5 per cent in the Middle East and North Africa to 18 per cent in Latin American and the Caribbean (FAO, 2018a).
- In many countries, women's plots tend to be smaller than men's. In Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Malawi, the Niger, Nigeria, Tajikistan, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda and Viet Nam, the average share of agricultural land area owned solely by women is around 15 per cent, compared with 62 per cent owned by men and 24 per cent in joint ownership (FAO, 2020b).
- In many countries, when women have the rights over land their plots are smaller and of lower quality than men's. The proportion of land value owned by women ranges from 5 per cent in Niger to 39 per cent in Malawi, while the proportion owned by men ranges from 34 per cent in Uganda to 78 per cent in Nigeria (FAO, 2017b).

Land is often the most important household asset for supporting agricultural production and providing food security and nutrition. To engage in farming effectively, rural women, like men, need to have adequate access to and control over agricultural land through secure tenure rights within both statutory and customary systems. Furthermore, land ownership is often a precondition for membership in rural organizations such as agricultural cooperatives and producers' organizations through which farmers can access important inputs, services and market opportunities.

However, in many parts of the world, women still have significantly weaker land rights. This is true for all dimensions of the rights associated with agricultural land: ownership, management, transfer and economic rights (Slavchevska et al., 2016). Indigenous women living in settings where patriarchal systems dominate are particularly at risk of being denied their rights to inherit and have control over land and other types of ancestral property. As a result of gender-based discrimination, only a small proportion of those who own and/or control land are women and women are less likely than men to have a legal document proving ownership of or rights to their plots. Furthermore, women's plots are often inconveniently located and of poorer quality than those owned or controlled by men.

Women and men also typically differ in their access to and dependence on other natural resources of their territories or landscapes, including forest products. For example, while some 1.6 billion people depend on forests for their livelihoods (IUCN, 2017), women and indigenous peoples commonly face persistent restrictions on their access to and governance of these natural resources, depriving them of equitable benefits (UNEP and IUCN, 2019).

For indigenous people, land is not only a factor of production, but also the source of livelihoods and the basis of their culture, spirituality, beliefs, food systems and traditional



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Nepal, Sindhuli District. In the photo: Kanchan Maya, a beneficiary of the RBA Joint Programme on the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women (JP-RWEE)

medicine (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 2019). Gender-based discrimination in access to and control over land thus limits indigenous women's capacities to survive and remain resilient to shocks and crises.

Despite the adoption of progressive legal and policy reforms in many countries, much remains to be done to ensure the realization of women's land and property rights. Unfavourable marital and inheritance laws, combined with discriminatory social norms and women's unequal access to land markets, land administration and law enforcement institutions, continue to limit women's land rights. Moreover, the prevalence of pluralistic legal systems, with often contradictory rules, can have negative implications for women's land rights. For example, even when formal laws and policies are gender sensitive, they may be disregarded in rural and indigenous communities that rely on traditional, unwritten customary practices rather than on written codified law.

A key mechanism to improve women's land rights and ensure gender-equitable land tenure is to reform the various legal and policy frameworks that affect land tenure. The SDGs and the *Voluntary guidelines on the responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests in the context of national food security* (VGGT) (FAO, 2012) offer significant opportunities for promoting such reforms. SDG 1 (no poverty) and SDG 5 (gender equality) have explicit indicators for monitoring women's land rights. SDG indicator 5.a.1 measures the proportion of women with ownership of and rights to agricultural land and indicator 5.a.2 is about women's legal land rights. The VGGT highlights the centrality of gender equality by adopting it as one of the 10 principles for the implementation of responsible land governance (see Good practice: Voluntary guidelines on tenure, below). Some other guidance materials were also developed to promote women's inclusion in local governance mechanisms through participatory processes. These include the *Practical guide for improving gender equality in territorial issues* (known as IGETI), which supports the identification and resolution of conflicts between competing users and seeks sustainable options to develop the territory/landscape.

Good practice: Voluntary guidelines on tenure

The primary aim of the *Voluntary guidelines on the responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests in the context of national food security* (VGGT) (FAO, 2012) is to support the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security. The VGGT highlights the centrality of gender equality by adopting it as one of the 10 principles for the implementation of responsible land governance in processes for policy formulation, institutional adaptation, service provisioning, land administration and ensuring access to justice and information. In order to encourage States to have a more proactive role in ensuring women's land rights, the VGGT makes specific provisions for improving gender equality in both formal and informal systems, for instance through amending discriminatory inheritance and property laws.

To support countries in the implementation of the gender equality principle of the VGGT, FAO has developed various knowledge products and capacity-development materials, including a learning programme for multi-stakeholder audiences that has been successfully implemented in Colombia, Kenya, Liberia, Mongolia, Nepal, Sierra Leone and South Africa.

In the fisheries sector, new institutional arrangements are being created as climate change, resource depletion, aquaculture development and global trade reshape the sector. These arrangements aim at ensuring new opportunities for equitable rights of access to resources, services and markets and equal benefits from aquaculture, especially for the most marginalized and poorest categories of men and women (FAO, 2017c). The handbook, *Towards gender-equitable small-scale fisheries* (FAO, 2017c) was developed to support the implementation of the *Voluntary guidelines for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries in the context of food security and poverty eradication* (FAO, 2015). It focuses on the specific responsibilities of States and all other stakeholders to implement policies and plans that help promote gender equality, while also supporting the sector's growth and sustainability.

Holistic, cross-sectoral and multilevel actions are needed to achieve rural women's land rights. For instance, working at the local level on customary laws is more effective when national laws replicate international legal standards on equality. Such an approach is necessary to deal with not only the legal, administrative and socio-economic constraints limiting women's access to land, but also to challenge pervasive perceptions and practices influencing women's land rights. Moreover, awareness-raising and capacity-development interventions are essential for realizing the opportunities offered by new land policies and laws. No agency or organization has the capacity to embark on this mission alone. Collaboration between UN agencies and other development partners, including civil society, academia and the private sector, is key to strengthening women's land rights and promoting gender-equitable land tenure. For instance, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations and producers' organizations are well placed to encourage governments to report on the SDG land-related indicators, adopt reforms and implement programmes.

Good practice: IFAD's support for women's land and inheritance rights

In Burundi, a major limitation to the efforts made to empower women and protect orphans is the legal discrimination against women and girls regarding inheritance rights. The IFAD-supported "Value Chain Development Programme" (2010–2019) addressed this issue by providing woman leaders with the legal training necessary to help other women claim their rights in cases of land conflict or GBV. To strengthen these efforts, the project established Centres for Family and Community Development, a form of community-based women's forum that works to raise awareness of social risks such as GBV and abuse and to offer preventive and responsive services to address such risks.



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Mulgeta Amas (left) and his wife Tesfar Kasin (right) show their land certificate for their 0.75 ha landholding. Listing his wife in the land certificate entitles her to inherit the land and be acknowledged as a joint owner for their plot. Land certificates not only secure their tenure rights, but also provide them the necessary incentives to carry out investments and conservation activities on their land.

LEADERSHIP, DECISION-MAKING AND PUBLIC LIFE

Quick facts

- *Rural women and youth remain excluded from participation and leadership roles, decision-making processes and services, both formally and informally (Kaaria et al., 2016).*
- *Producer organizations, cooperatives, workers' unions and out-grower schemes are commonly controlled and managed by men (Kaaria et al., 2016). For example, in Benin, the Niger and Togo, only 15 per cent to 30 per cent of members of cooperatives are women (FAO, 2018b; FAO, 2018c; FAO, 2018d).*

For rural development outcomes to be effective and sustainable, rural and indigenous women need to have greater voice and influence over the decisions that affect their lives, and their contributions to decision-making at household and community levels must be valued alongside men's. Major barriers to women's participation include entrenched sociocultural norms; time poverty due to their reproductive, productive and community managing roles; and their generally lower access to assets, resources and services such as agricultural extension. Furthermore, many rural organizations have rules of entry that discriminate against women.

Membership of rural organizations, such as rural producer organizations, cooperatives, community organizations and local administrative systems, can improve women and men farmers' access to an array of services and markets, strengthening their negotiating power, enhancing their access to and management of natural resources, and improving their access to information and knowledge. These institutional arrangements are also an effective means to empower small producers by helping them build their capacity to formulate and express their needs and concerns within their organizations and vis-à-vis influential economic

actors and policymakers (Herbel et al., 2012). Rural organizations can further enable rural women to build networks, increase their confidence and self-esteem, develop leadership and technical skills and engage in decision-making processes at different levels.

Rural and indigenous women have proven their capacities to play a major role in rural development. For example, in Latin America, they have, through diverse forms of organization, developed strategies for building the resistance to the exploitation of natural resources in their territories, which could

Women gather for a meeting at Wadi Mousa, Jordan.



otherwise yield irreversible environmental effects. To defend life and their territories, they have identified gender-specific impacts of extractive industries such as mining and have denounced the patriarchal and racist nature of such industries (Carvajal et al., 2015).

Yet, unfortunately, rural women are still too often excluded or under-represented (particularly in leadership roles) in producer organizations and other rural entities. There are few women in leadership positions in producer organizations, and even fewer as organizations progress from local to regional and national levels. Sociocultural restrictions placed on women's ability to express themselves in such organizations widens the gap between their concerns and the services and policies offered by producer organizations. These factors also hinder women's access to the benefits provided by producer organizations (IFAD, 2015). As a result, these women have limited access to processing facilities, technologies and markets, which consequently leads to higher food losses.

Barriers to women's participation in rural organizations – both as members and as leaders – need to be removed. Similarly, women's groups and rural producer organizations need to be supported to enhance opportunities for women to network for experience-sharing and advocacy.

Ensuring the active, free, effective, meaningful, and informed participation of rural and indigenous women at all levels of decision-making requires a comprehensive approach with several elements. These include:

- establishing quotas and targets for rural women's representation in decision-making positions;
- ensuring that rural and indigenous women and their organizations can influence policy formulation, implementation and monitoring at all levels and in all areas that affect them;
- removing barriers to rural women's participation in community life through the establishment of effective and gender-responsive rural decision-making structures;
- increasing rural women's engagement in the elaboration and implementation of all agricultural and rural strategies; and
- ensuring that rural development projects are implemented only after participatory gender and environmental impact assessments are completed.

Quotas, for example, have been used to help establish the necessary critical mass of women as members and leaders to bring about change in policy and institutional cultures. There is consensus that quotas can successfully increase women's participation when coupled with tools, charters and bylaws, monitoring systems, and capacity-building (Kaaria et al., 2016).

Governments play an important role in creating a gender-sensitive enabling environment where policies and legislation recognize that women and men from various social groups have differentiated roles and priorities and appropriate gender-responsive and gender-transformative measures are adopted so that all rural women and men can participate in and benefit from emerging opportunities, with a change in the traditional local power structures and gender roles.

For indigenous women, access to key areas of political decision-making is still an unresolved challenge. Currently, the exercise of power for indigenous women takes the form of opportunities to be present in decision-making processes, and speak and decide for themselves. For them, participation means visibility within the community and the ability to express their ideas, desires and concerns (United Nations, 2013, para. 9). Therefore, both governments and indigenous communities and organizations should eliminate gender discrimination in decision-making at the community and national levels. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and International Labour Organization Convention No. 169 guarantee indigenous women the right to be consulted and involved in processes relating to free, prior and informed consent. Indigenous women are emerging as actors and partners for inclusive and sustainable development. They have formed alliances among themselves, from the local to the transnational level, to demand participation in decision-making at all levels and decent work, while stressing their rights, cultures and identities as assets.

Good practice: FAO facilitates the empowerment and leadership of women and girls

Dimitra Clubs are a gender-transformative approach developed by FAO to facilitate people's empowerment and gender equality in isolated rural areas. The Clubs boost the self-esteem, confidence and leadership skills of rural women (agency) and actively engage men and other stakeholders who traditionally hold power in rural areas (village chiefs and religious authorities). This participatory process triggers social transformations that gradually lead to changes in behaviours and social norms at household and community levels. As the Clubs develop women's leadership, many rural women who are members of the Clubs have been elected in local institutions and operate as peace mediators in peacebuilding initiatives. In 2019, there were more than 6,000 Dimitra Clubs comprising 180,000 direct members (60 per cent being women) in hundreds of villages in several African countries (Burkina Faso, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Madagascar, Mali, the Niger and Senegal). It is estimated that the lives of nearly 5.2 million rural people are positively impacted by the achievements obtained by the Dimitra Clubs.

In Tshopo Province of northeast Democratic Republic of Congo, for example, the traditional Great Chief of the Chiefdom of Kombe sees the positive effects the Clubs have had on gender and women's leadership.

"Young people are taking part in the Clubs and women are involved in decision-making. Women are now keen to stand as candidates for local-council elections, which illustrates how female leadership has developed", he said. "For household tasks, a shift has started to emerge in the division of labour ... Men are beginning to play a greater role, alleviating the burden of women's daily list of chores".

EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK

Quick facts

- While estimates suggest that rural women comprise about two-fifths of agricultural employment globally, the share of rural women employed in agriculture varies widely across regions, from 46 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa and 39 per cent in South-East Asia to 21 per cent in Latin American and the Caribbean.²
- In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, as much as 79 per cent of women's total employment appears to be vulnerable employment, typically in agriculture (ILO, 2014).
- Rural women work considerably longer hours than rural men: for instance, in Cambodia, Mozambique and Nepal, rural women's daily workload often approaches two hours a day or even more than men's when non-employment work activities are taken into account (FAO, 2018e).

Women account for approximately half of total rural agricultural employment in low-income countries, within significant variability between regions.³ As raw material producers and small-business owners, processors, retail workers and consumers, women help agricultural value chains succeed and grow, contributing to agricultural production, food security, nutrition and natural resource management. Yet, estimates indicate that 75 per cent of women in developing regions work in the informal economy (Oxfam, 2017) or as contributing family workers. Such employment represents “vulnerable employment” because it is often associated with small-scale activities, low earnings, weak market orientation, informal work arrangements, difficult or dangerous working conditions, and inadequate access to social protection and social dialogue mechanisms.

Significant gender gaps persist in rural labour markets because of gender-based discrimination. While women's participation in rural labour markets shows much heterogeneity at the regional level, women are generally over-represented in unpaid, seasonal and part-time work and often receive lower wages than men for the same work. Furthermore, rural women face massive constraints that limit their access to productive resources, credit, market information and skills enhancement opportunities and their ability to make decisions and seize emerging employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. This not only holds back rural women's employment, undermining their economic and social well-being, it also hinders the economic growth of rural communities and their capacity to contribute to agricultural production and food security.



South Sudan, Kuac South, Warrap State. Rural women and girls, critical agents of change.

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2. Calculated from ILOSTAT modelled world estimates for 2020 from ILOSTAT.

3. Calculated from ILOSTAT modelled world estimates for 2020 from ILOSTAT.

Indigenous women in rural areas work mostly in agriculture, livestock raising and related activities. In some indigenous settings, these jobs are only available for two to three months in a year. Furthermore, the loss of traditional occupations, combined with climate change and the resulting degradation of agricultural land and natural resources, are major factors behind indigenous women's migration for work, which often renders them more vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation in their destination areas (ILO, 2017a).

A major gender issue within the agricultural sector is child labour. Of the 152 million girls and boys who are in situations defined as child labour, it is estimated that the vast majority – 108 million girls and boys aged 5–17 years – work in farming, livestock, forestry, fishing or aquaculture (ILO, 2017b). Although gender differences in agricultural child labour vary greatly across farming systems, rural girls are generally more likely than boys to work both in agriculture and in household chores, which negatively affects their well-being and ability to attend and benefit from school education.

Gender discrimination in rural areas also limits women's entrepreneurship and business opportunities. Women-led small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often lack easy access to financing for business expansion as a result of factors ranging from discriminatory social norms and women's lack of assets to poor infrastructure and restrictive laws and regulations. Local investors, banks and private companies are often reluctant to provide finance for women's SMEs because of their small scale and perceived low economic returns.

According to Sunderland et al. (2014), the percentage of women who participate in forest user groups (FUGs) is highest in Africa and lowest in Latin America. The literature suggests

that although women's participation in forest management institutions, such as FUGs, raises incomes and promotes resource sustainability, women overwhelmingly tend to be under-represented in such groups. In addition, although women seem to commercialize forest products less often than men, the sale of forest products tends to be an essential source of cash income for women, who lack many of the opportunities for generating cash income that are more commonly available to men. Women, and particularly those in female-headed households, are therefore, overall, more directly reliant on consumption and sale of forest resources than men.



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Edith Mutuku, a farmer, assists clients at her shop called Jiwaka Agrovet where she sells seeds, fertilizers and other farming products. Edith's shop is part of a program lead by FAO that financially helps farmers from the region to buy farming products. Edith follows the FAO Conservation Agriculture Program that helps farmers increase the production of their crops.

In the fisheries sector, millions of women around the world work, paid or unpaid, in all stages of the fisheries supply chain (FAO, 2018f). However, women are mainly involved in the tasks that come before and after the fish are caught or harvested. At the artisanal level, their preparatory work includes making and mending nets, baskets and pots, baiting hooks, and providing services to the fishing boats. They may also practice their own fishing for both

commercial and subsistence purposes, often in areas close to their community. However, due to deeply rooted discriminatory practices, women often have lower productivity rates. For example, in Zambia, WorldFish research shows that fish loss affects women more than men (WorldFish, 2017). Most of the fish losses – about a third – occur during processing, a stage dominated by women, rather than during the catch or sale of the fish. When women process fish, they lose more than twice as much fish as men who process it. This is caused by several factors: women have less time to process the fish, have less decision-making power over processing, and less control over important assets such as processing equipment. Processing work has a lower margin (2.6–5.5 per cent) than fishing (21.5 per cent) and selling fish (12.2–13.8 per cent). Women processors have a gross margin of 2.6 per cent, compared with 5.5 per cent for male processors

Women's participation and access to leadership roles in fisherfolk organizations is often marked by considerable challenges. The multiplicity of roles played by women in the fisheries sector, and their crucial contributions to it, is in stark contrast with their low presence in fisherfolk organizations around the globe, and their lack of access to decision-making positions in many formal fisheries-related organizations. The main drivers identified as catalysers of women's engagement in collective action include the need to enhance responsible management of fisheries resources, accelerate modernization, improve the allocation of fishing rights, and promote family welfare and women's rights.

The fisheries sector is mainly documented through statistics on capture and aquaculture, where the quality of sex-disaggregated data has been low and the reporting frequency variable. More efforts are still needed to increase the availability of data on women's roles in the fisheries sector, as a basis for interventions to address gender-specific constraints in fisheries and thereby boost production and improve household food security and nutrition for the poor, fisheries-dependent groups (FAO, 2016a).

Good practice: WFP P4P Programme

WFP Purchase for Progress (P4P) Programme encourages national governments and the private sector to buy food in ways that benefit smallholders. On the supply side, P4P works mainly with farmers' organizations, providing them with training and assets to improve entrepreneurship, facilitate access to finance and promote marketing. Women, whose role in farming is often unpaid and labour-intensive, are particularly encouraged to take part in decision-making and benefit economically from P4P. Over the years, P4P has expanded to some 35 countries and has helped transform the way more than one million smallholder farmers in Africa, Latin America and (to a lesser extent) Asia interact with markets.

P4P focused on gender-transformative interventions in more than 20 countries, addressing the root causes of gender inequality that limit the potential of women farmers. Activities included: equipping women with knowledge, tools and technology for farming and marketing; buying crops from women farmers/cooperatives; offering women farmers courses in literacy and small-business development; and supporting women through the provision of time- and labour-saving equipment (e.g. tractors and shellers).

Source: WFP (2020)

Good practice: FAO and ILO promoting decent work in agriculture for rural youth

Recognizing that rural youth, particularly young women, face significant challenges in accessing decent employment opportunities, FAO's Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools (JFFLS) concentrate on teaching rural youth sustainable farming practices and important life skills. The goal of the JFFLS methodology is to provide girls and boys with the livelihood options and gender-sensitive skills needed for long-term food security, while reducing their vulnerability to destitution and risky coping strategies.

In the JFFLS methodology, girls and boys work together in small groups to share ideas and try out different roles (group leader, marketing manager, finance manager, spokesperson, etc.). This methodology enables young men to learn to value young women as potential leaders, and vice versa, while focusing on jointly creating viable, inclusive agribusinesses. Prevention and mitigation of child labour is also a key element of the JFFLS approach. The JFFLS curriculum includes a module on prevention of child labour in agriculture, which was developed jointly by FAO and ILO.

Source: ILO and FAO (n.d.)

Rural transformation can generate new employment opportunities for rural women in the farm and non-farm sectors, thereby improving both their income-earning capacity and aggregate production, productivity and well-being indicators. However, non-traditional jobs may require specialized skills that many rural women lack because of low levels of education and limited access to training; they may also require geographic mobility that may be incompatible with women's household responsibilities or conflict with existing social norms, especially those that prevent women from taking up employment outside of their homes (Heintz, Kabeer and Mahmud, 2018). Non-traditional employment can also have negative implications for women, for instance by reducing the time they can spend with their children and in community participation (Korovkin, 2003) or by making them vulnerable to competition for lucrative private sector jobs and macroeconomic fluctuations in rural labour markets. Interventions that increase rural women's access to knowledge and education, technical know-how, finance, information and communication technologies can help them to take advantage of emerging employment opportunities and actively participate in the decision-making that affects their jobs.

Investing in rural infrastructure and rural services is an important complementary strategy to enhance rural women's access to decent employment, especially in remote areas with poor access to urban centres. However, infrastructure investment by itself does not necessarily generate decent jobs for rural women. High quality and low cost of access to infrastructure and services are critical for maximizing the benefits for low-income and marginalized groups, whose members are disproportionately women. Experience shows that investments in infrastructure that take into account the specific needs of women and girls – for example, by enhancing affordable access to water for household use – not only expand women's income-earning capacities, but also reduce their domestic workloads (UNCDF, 2017).

Good practice: IFAD's innovative household methodologies

IFAD is one of the leading development agencies working with household methodologies (HHM) to promote gender equality and livelihoods development. HHM are built around a gendered analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, an action plan, and indicators. Some HHM, such as Gender Action Learning Systems, use drawings, making them easy to use for low-literate individuals. Analysing access to and consumption of food is a critical dimension of the HHM.

Participants using HHM report an increase in agricultural productivity through participatory farm decision-making and shared workloads and better engagement in value chains by both male and female household members. Men participate more in household tasks, women have a greater voice in decision-making in the household, and there is more transparency in how resources and benefits are used. Food security and incomes are improved, joint investments in land and businesses are undertaken, and the capacities of household members are strengthened.

Expanding use of HHM has potential to reduce existing gender imbalances in food and nutrition security. HHM intervene directly in intra-household gender relations to strengthen smallholders' agency and efficacy as economic agents and development actors. Strengthening women's agency is a key mechanism for progressing towards collaborative, systemic farm management. This contributes to improved farm resilience in the face of climate change, strengthens food and nutrition security, and improves other development indicators.



Participants in household mentoring in Uganda.

Similarly, rural advisory services (RAS) can play a critical role in boosting women's access to the information, knowledge, technologies and services they need to engage in productive employment, implement agricultural innovations (including climate-change adaptations) and link more effectively to profitable markets. However, to ensure that women can access and benefit from RAS, both service users and providers must overcome several challenges (Petrics et al., 2018). For women to be recognized as legitimate RAS clients, sociocultural norms and perceptions have to be changed, women's time and mobility constraints addressed, and their participation in institutions such as producer organizations or cooperatives strengthened. At the same time, RAS providers need to do more to recruit and retain women RAS advisers and to ensure that the focus and content of RAS services is not biased towards male producers (e.g. by using participatory methods that do not require literacy and technologies such as radios and mobile phones that women farmers may not be able to access).

Good practice: FAO's work on gender-sensitive business development services

In Kenya, FAO's programme "Enabling women to benefit more equally from agrifood value chains" helped to establish a business development service centre (BSC). This was set up as a new unit within a district-level cooperative that supported dairy value chains. A local female dairy farmer coordinated the BSC in a way that made services accessible to both women and men while at the same time addressing the common gender-based constraints that undermine women's entrepreneurship. In its first year of operation (2017), a total of 654 farmers (54 per cent of whom were women) were trained on business-oriented farming and value addition. The BSC increased women's access to productive resources, knowledge and networks and improved their technical skills in dairy farming and business practices. Twenty-two households reported having introduced labour-, energy- and time-saving technologies to their dairy production (e.g. rainwater harvesting methods, biogas installations, feed processing). There have also been increases in women's participation in the cooperative and their decision-making power at the household and community level.

CARE ECONOMY AND WOMEN'S "TRIPLE ROLE"

Quick facts

- Available data suggest that women spend significantly more time than men on unpaid work, which includes processing and preparing food, cleaning and upkeep of the home, shopping for the household, laundry, gardening, subsistence agriculture, and care of sick and elderly family members and children (UNSD, 2015).
- Worldwide, women carry out between two and 10 times as much unpaid care work as men (Ferrant, Pesando and Nowacka, 2014). For example, in Mexico, nationally representative estimates suggest that indigenous women devote an average of 67.1 hours to unpaid domestic work per week, compared with 27.9 hours devoted by men (INEGI, 2014). In eastern Uganda, women spend 4.5 hours per day on household management and subsistence agriculture, while men spend only 3 hours per day (FAO, 2018e). In Cambodia, Mozambique and Nepal, time-use studies suggest the difference between women's and men's daily workload approaches or surpasses 2 hours (UNCDF, 2017). In Pakistan, rural women do 4.9 hours of unpaid care and domestic work per day compared with 0.5 hour for rural men (UN Women, 2015).

Rural women often play a "triple role" in productive, care and social spheres. Around the world, women perform approximately three times as much unpaid and domestic work as men (UN Women, 2019). Despite contributing 6.6 per cent of global gross domestic product, worth US\$8 trillion (ILO, 2018), direct and indirect care work is often undervalued and expected to be performed for free by women based on traditional gender roles.



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Nepal, Sindhuli District.
In the Photo: JP-RWEE beneficiary Sunita preparing food for her 11 month old daughter which she received as part of WFP's Food for Asset programme.

Rural and indigenous girls are often expected to perform domestic and care work; this takes time and energy away from their ability to invest in their education, skills and well-being. The time required for this type of work can be exacerbated by the lack of infrastructure and technology in rural areas. Rural and indigenous women of all ages spend much of their day engaged in domestic chores, including collecting water and firewood, processing and preparing food, travelling and transporting household goods and products, and caregiving. These tasks are unpaid and restrict a woman's time and mobility, representing a barrier to employment, capacity-development and well-being, as well as inhibiting the full exercise of their rights, thereby reinforcing gender inequalities. Moreover, the drudgery and lack of time for rest or leisure activities can cause poor health and malnutrition for women themselves and their dependents, in particular infants and young children.

In terms of social roles, women are often expected to take on community management tasks without formal recognition. Even in their productive roles, women continue to earn less for comparable work than men. This is the result of the misconception that their work is merely an extension of domestic tasks and a consequence of their unequal access to productive

Good practice: IFAD and labour-saving technology

An estimated 2.5 billion people rely on traditional biomass fuels (charcoal, dung, firewood) to meet their heating and cooking needs. More than 80 per cent of these people (over 1.7 billion) live in either sub-Saharan Africa or South-East Asia. Replacing these traditional fuels with renewable sources of energy could significantly change living conditions in these regions, particularly for women.

Biogas, especially portable biogas systems, is becoming increasingly popular as a source of energy to power rural communities in Africa that are not connected to the electricity grid. Biogas is a clean, renewable source of energy, produced from anaerobic fermentation of biomass and solid organic waste. As a low-cost integrated system providing both energy and organic manure, it also helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve soil fertility.

IFAD has supported the introduction of biogas, especially the Flexi Biogas system, in several countries, including Cambodia, Kenya, Mali and Rwanda. This was part of an environmental solution to reduce the cutting and burning of wood, still prevalent in rural areas, and to help rehabilitate degraded land and reduce women's workload.

Women benefit from the Flexi Biogas system in several ways. For instance, it reduces the need to collect firewood each day and carry it long distances – a task that is usually undertaken by women. Where local conditions allow, the time saved can be used for women's capacity-building and empowerment, which can eventually raise living standards for the whole community.

The new system introduced by IFAD includes a biodigester made of industrial plastic sheets and pipes that are easy to install, use and maintain. The system is portable, which means that, unlike more conventional built-in systems, farmers can take it to another house or even resell it should they need to. Biogas also has health benefits for women and children as they no longer have to breathe in all the smoke produced by burning wood in their house.

resources, assets and services. Rural and indigenous women are often overburdened by their daily workload. Therefore, achieving a more equitable balance in workloads and in the sharing of economic and social benefits between women and men is key to unleashing rural and indigenous women's development potential.

The burden of care work falls on women and girls not because they are better suited to it because of their gender, but because of specific socio-economic patterns, customs and cultural norms, which can be changed. Change can be achieved by doing three things economists and activists call Recognize, Reduce and Redistribute: recognize that women's unpaid work is still work; reduce the amount of time and energy it takes; and redistribute it more evenly between women and men. Policies that are effective in this regard include those that facilitate greater sharing of domestic and care work responsibilities within the household, provide affordable and good-quality care services and social protection, and create decent, paid jobs in the care sector. Labour-saving technologies and practices also promote inclusive development by reducing the domestic workload and freeing up women's time to perform productive tasks, to participate in decision-making processes and development opportunities, and to enjoy more leisure time. Ideally, this should be complemented by investments in rural physical infrastructure for the provision of water and energy to rural households; this usually has direct impact on domestic work, especially food processing, cooking and washing (OECD, 2019). With more time available during the day, women would be in a better position to choose whether to invest their energy in income-generating activities, improving household food and nutrition security or benefiting from leisure.



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Women grow vegetables in their gardens in the village of Bayzak.

Good practice in care economy: the Care Act in Uruguay

In 2007 and 2013, UN Women together with UNFPA and other development agencies supported time-use surveys in Uruguay. These surveys found that women spend two-thirds of their week doing unpaid work and only one-third doing paid work, while the reverse is the case for men. The data mobilized civil society and academia to lobby the government for policy change. In response, in November 2015, the Uruguayan Parliament adopted the Care Act (No. 19,353), which states that elderly persons, persons with disabilities and all children have the right to get care. The government subsequently started providing quality care services, supporting regulations and trainings. The Care Act also acknowledges the right of caregivers to work in dignified conditions, thereby challenging existing gendered division of care work.

Source: UN Women (2017)

SOCIAL PROTECTION

Quick facts

- Globally, less than one-third of the world's population is covered by comprehensive social security systems, with women over-represented among those who remain excluded (UN Women, 2019).
- Cash transfers can support women's entry into the labour market. For example, in northern Nigeria, women receiving cash transfers were 11 per cent more likely to work in a non-farm business and had business profits 80 per cent higher than those who did not receive cash transfers (Bastian, Goldstein and Papineni, 2017).

The rural poor tend to be family farmers, fishers and foresters, dependent on agriculture and natural resources for their livelihoods. They have little access to social protection or financial services, infrastructure, markets or innovative technologies and practices. Social protection has been recognized as an effective measure to reduce poverty, enhance food security and foster rural development. Investments in social protection can support rural populations in multiple ways, for instance, by increasing their access to health care, ensuring they receive adequate dietary intakes, allowing them to enjoy a minimum level of income security, ensuring they acquire quality education, and promoting and facilitating their engagement in decent and productive employment.



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Women receiving their cash transfer in Monguel, Wilaya of Gorgol, Mauritania.

Rural and indigenous women are disadvantaged in accessing social protection, for several reasons. First, they experience poverty and vulnerability differently than rural men or urban women because of sociocultural norms and inequalities in access to productive resources, services and opportunities. Second, rural women often work in low-wage jobs, have informal work arrangements, experience work interruptions often due to care and domestic responsibilities, and commonly work in difficult or dangerous working conditions. This constrains their access to social protection and social dialogue mechanisms. Third, social protection programmes are often designed in ways that do not consider gender constraints. This can reinforce gender inequality and exacerbate vulnerability for rural and indigenous women and their families, for example by contributing to their work burden or by triggering intra-household conflict.

For social protection to truly benefit women and girls, their needs, priorities and constraints must be taken into account in the design, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes.

Good practice: FAO's toolkit on gender-sensitive social protection programmes to combat rural poverty and hunger

FAO supports governments in the design of pathways from social protection to gender equality and economic inclusion. This includes taking into account the economic impacts of social protection programmes, the role of complementary activities, and the specific strategies needed to effectively and progressively involve the poorest in broader rural development and economic processes. To this end, FAO has developed the *Technical guidance toolkit on gender-sensitive social protection programmes to combat rural poverty and hunger*. The toolkit is designed to improve practitioners' and development partners' technical skills and to integrate gender issues into the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of cash transfers and public works programmes. This comprises an introduction (FAO, 2018g), a technical guidance note on design (FAO, 2018h), and one on implementation and M&E (FAO, 2018i) – all offering specific tips by intervention, many in-depth practical examples and short case-study illustrations, and final checklists and resources.

RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND FRAGILITY

Quick facts

- *Prolonged and frequent drought caused by climate change affect the availability of water. This in turn increases the workload to meet household needs, much of which falls on women and girls.*
- *In Madagascar, Malawi, Nepal, Pakistan, Rwanda, Uganda and Yemen, 56 to 86 per cent of rural women fetched water, compared with 8 to 40 per cent of rural men (UNDP, 2011).*
- *During the dry season in rural India and Africa, 30 per cent or more of a woman's daily energy intake is spent fetching water (WHO, 2014b).*
- *Depletion of forest resources is increasing the labour expended on firewood collection. For instance, in Malawi, rural women are spending an average of 9.1 hours per week fetching water and firewood, compared with 1.1 hours per week for men (Njuki, 2017).*
- *Women are particularly vulnerable to natural disasters. For example, in Myanmar, 61 per cent of fatalities after the 2008 cyclone were girls and women (UNSD, 2015).*
- *In India, after natural disasters, girls were more likely to be stunted and underweight than were boys; in Andhra Pradesh, twice as many women as men reported eating less in response to drought (FAO, 2018j).*



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Peru. Indigenous woman working for biodiversity conservation and climate change adaptation.

Climate change and the resulting disasters and depletion of natural resources jeopardize agricultural production and livelihoods and exacerbate other global challenges, such as price volatility and market insecurity, conflicts and protracted crises, and mass migration. Rural populations, particularly women and indigenous people, tend to be highly dependent on lands and natural resources, and changes in the ecosystems may have a profound impact on their livelihoods. Rural people, and women in particular, increasingly have to adapt their

production systems in the context of climate change and natural resource depletion (FAO, 2016b). Women are more likely to be dependent on natural resources for their livelihood than are men and are particularly exposed to climate risks as a result of the gendered division of labour (Enarson, 2000; Nelson, 2011). The social, financial and infrastructure stresses related to natural resource scarcity that particularly arise or are reinforced during and in the aftermath of weather-related disasters and climate change can heighten gender inequalities and GBV. It is therefore essential that all resilience-building interventions adapt agroecological practices

to the existing socio-economic context and address the specific concerns of both men and women belonging to different socio-economic groups. Moreover, it is important to recognize the traditional ecological knowledge of rural and indigenous women, which include complex adaptive responses to cycles of climate variability and positive environmental practices.

Protracted crises affect rural and indigenous women and men differently in three key areas: sexual exploitation and GBV; access to services such as health care and education; and stress on livelihood strategies and coping mechanisms, with impacts on food security and nutrition as well as rural poverty. Women and girls are generally more affected by protracted crises than are men and boys because they are at greater risk of being forced into exploitative sexual relationships; parents tend to prioritize boys for schooling and health care; and women are often over-represented in crisis zones because men are more likely to migrate for work elsewhere or become fighters in military operations (FAO, 2010; Brinkman, Attree and Hezir, 2013). Differences in gender roles and disparities in the way rural and indigenous women and men are treated play a major role in how protracted crises emerge and are experienced. Better understanding of these differences can improve responses to protracted crises by the societies affected and by providers of humanitarian assistance and the international community as a whole.

It is important to assess how food security policies and programmes can contribute to reducing social inequalities and preventing conflicts by supporting economic development (UN, 2015) and assisting countries and people to better cope with and recover from crises. To date, there is still limited evidence of the links between food security, gender equality, the onset, duration, mitigation and prevention of armed conflict and processes of sustaining peace in post-conflict societies and those at risk of conflict and violence (Justino et al., 2020).

Good practice: FAO and climate-smart agriculture

FAO develops and disseminates gender-responsive climate-smart agriculture (CSA) approaches to enhance the sustainability of agriculture and food systems. Together with its partners, the organization has developed a series of normative and capacity-development materials on gender and CSA tailored to policymakers, project staff and researchers working in rural development and CSA development. For example, Module 18, *Gender in climate-smart agriculture, prepared as an addendum to the Gender in agriculture sourcebook* (World Bank, FAO and IFAD, 2009), presents good practices and innovative approaches developed by FAO, the World Bank and IFAD to improve planning and implementation of climate-smart policies and projects. Other examples include the training guide, *Gender and climate change research in agriculture and food security for rural development* (FAO and CCAFS, 2012), prepared in collaboration with the CGIAR Research Programme on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security; the training module, *How to integrate gender issues in climate-smart agriculture projects*, developed by FAO with the World Bank; and the guide, *Good practices for integrating gender equality and women's empowerment in climate-smart agriculture programmes* (FAO and CARE, 2019), which includes tools and examples of successful integration of gender equality into CSA programmes for small-scale food producers in developing countries. The second edition of the *Climate-smart agriculture sourcebook*, launched in 2017 (FAO, 2017d), has a new module dedicated to gender equality.

Good practice: WFP Food Assistance for Assets

Food Assistance for Assets (FFA) is a key WFP programme that contributes to achieving SDG 2 to end hunger, achieve food security, improve nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. FFA programmes improve the food security and nutrition of populations vulnerable to hunger by addressing the immediate needs of women and men while contributing to longer-term improvements in food security. Under FFA, people receive food or cash-based transfers. This frees up their time for working together to build their communities' assets such as constructing a road, planting trees, developing small-scale irrigation schemes and community gardens or rehabilitating land. The new assets improve lives by creating jobs, fostering healthier natural environments, reducing risks and impact of shocks, increasing food productivity, and strengthening the communities' resilience to natural disasters.

FFA also contributes to gender equality and empowerment of women and girls by securing their role in determining, accessing and managing assets. Women are involved in discussions, decision-making, and design and implementation of the projects. As members of project management committees, women have access to opportunities for agricultural skills development, infrastructure development, and maintenance and money-saving. In 2018, 1.3 million women and 1.4 million men across 45 countries participated in WFP FFA programmes.

A 2016 study conducted in Mwenezi district, Zimbabwe, highlighted the impact of FFA programmes on the diet and health of recipients, especially women. Vulnerable households and communities developed community gardens and other assets. Women also received complementary lessons on gardening from the Zimbabwe Ministry of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement, including in the appropriate method of growing a range of vegetables for a diverse diet. After a six-month intervention, women reported eating a wider variety of vegetables and being sick less often. The community gardens helped to improve the diversity, quantity and frequency of food eaten by households (including women). Households reported having "enough food" more often than previously and being better able to withstand the drought resulting from the El Nino than were other households. Some beneficiaries indicated that children and adults are now healthier, children are more playful and their skin texture has improved. The community gardens also provided crop residues and fodder with which they could feed their livestock.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Quick facts

- On average, one in three women are affected by gender-based violence in their lifetime (UNFPA, 2019).
- Physical or sexual violence committed by a husband/partner took place more often in rural areas than in urban areas in 26 countries.⁴
- Women with disabilities are 10 times more likely to experience sexual violence than women without disabilities (MSH and UNFPA, 2016).

Gender-based violence (GBV) is a life-threatening problem that is exacerbated by poverty, natural hazards and conflicts, and by the lack of support systems and legal means to criminalize perpetrators. GBV undermines the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims, yet it often remains shrouded in a culture of silence. In addition to physical, sexual, economic and emotional effects, GBV causes fear, stigma, shame and devaluation of the victim. Many rural and indigenous women remain disempowered to deal with GBV as they lack the voice, decision-making power and resources to seek justice. While rural and indigenous women and girls are the most vulnerable to GBV, men and boys are also at risk.

GBV is closely related to food security, nutrition and agricultural development. It can drastically reduce a rural woman's ability to work, care for her family, and contribute to the rural economy and the well-being of rural communities. In addition, rural women and girls are less likely than their urban counterparts to report GBV or have access to adequate justice and services for survivors. In certain contexts, GBV can have a devastating impact on agriculture by negatively affecting the health, resilience and productive capacity of female victims (Castañeda Camey et al., 2020).

Evidence and experiences in the context of land and natural resources show that GBV is often employed as a way to maintain existing power imbalances, violently reinforcing sociocultural expectations and norms exacerbating gender inequality. For example, women trying to enter into agricultural markets may suffer violence at the hands of their partners as the latter seek to control finances and maintain economic dependencies. Moreover, gender-differentiated roles related to land and resources can also put women at risk of GBV while carrying out daily responsibilities, such as firewood and water collection (Sommer et al., 2015; Wan et al., 2011). Access to and control over natural resources are also often a source for sexual exploitation.



IFAD/Silvia Sperandini

India, IFAD-funded Tejaswini Rural Women's Empowerment Programme. Representatives of a Courage Brigade that intervene to tackle violence in their community addressing taboo subjects like rape, domestic abuse, caste violence, early marriages and other injustices.

4. UN Women analysis of data from the Demographic and Health Surveys Programme STATcompiler (www.statcompiler.com).

For indigenous women, GBV is shaped not only by gender discrimination within indigenous and non-indigenous settings but also by a context of ongoing racism, social exclusion of indigenous people, and bad economic and development policies (FIMI, 2006).

Efforts to address violence against women must be multi-faceted, based on reliable data, and provide appropriate services to women experiencing violence, and must also prevent violence from happening in the first place. Attention must be given to risk factors and multiples forms of discrimination that contribute to the underlying causes of violence, as in the case of rural women, indigenous women or women with disabilities.

Good practice: IFAD'S Tejaswini Rural Women's Empowerment Programme

Many IFAD-financed programmes help prevent GBV by supporting women's livelihoods in smallholder farming, fishing, livestock-keeping and rural entrepreneurship. By enabling greater access to land, credit and other productive resources, these initiatives accelerate the economic and social empowerment of rural women. In the process, they allow women a greater degree of safety from harm. IFAD's efforts to prevent GBV also include strengthening women's representation in producers' organizations and community decision-making bodies. In addition, IFAD works with rural men to create positive behaviour change in order to end violence against women.

In India, the Courage Brigades (*Shaurya Dals*) created by the IFAD-funded Tejaswini Rural Women's Empowerment Programme project have changed the lives of thousands of people. Started in 2014, by the end of 2019 they were operating in 2,733 villages across Madhya Pradesh state and intervened to tackle violence in the community. These groups are made up of five female and five male leaders who are chosen because they are well-liked and respected within their community. They intervene directly and work one-on-one with villagers to address taboo subjects such as rape, domestic abuse and caste violence, early marriage, and other injustices. The key to the Courage Brigades programme is exerting social pressure to enact change. The Brigades are well known and their members have authority, so people call on them to take action at any time of the day or night to prevent violence from escalating. As a consequence, the Brigades challenge structural violence and damaging conservative beliefs through community-based solutions.

Luz Trujillo, President of Asociación para el Futuro con manos de Mujer (ASFUMUJER), loves her role leading the project. Every two years, the project votes for a new leader, but because it requires so much work, few people want to take on the job. The Indigenous Peoples Assistance Facility has awarded a grant to the Climate change adaptation and food security for indigenous communities in Natagaima Tolima project (RENACER), which works with the Pijao-Natagaima indigenous people's group.



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GBV is an extreme manifestation of gender inequalities, mainly affecting women and girls. As such, interventions to protect against the risks and impacts of GBV include reducing the existing inequality between rural women and men in access to productive resources, services, rural institutions and decent employment; ensuring that women can have a say and be part of policy decision-making processes; and increasing their access to economic opportunities in order to improve their individual and household well-being. Additionally, barriers in access to justice and health and psychosocial services often faced by rural and indigenous GBV survivors must be urgently addressed. Confronting the deeply rooted gender inequalities that contribute to GBV implies working with both women and men, girls and boys, as well as with institutions and other partners.

The joint efforts towards implementing the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) are key not only to ensuring gender equality, the respect for human rights and the elimination of gender gaps on agriculture but also to preventing and ultimately eradicating GBV. In this context, men and boys can play an important role in collaborating with women in preventing GBV and in changing negative social attitudes and discriminatory practices against women and girls. Furthermore, rural institutions, social movements, profit and non-profit organizations, governments, and other actors of rural development are instrumental in changing how individuals and institutions respond to GBV.

Good practice: FAO and UNFPA in Syria

To strengthen the resilience of crisis-affected women in the Syrian Arab Republic, the joint UNFPA/FAO project, "Improving Livelihood of Women Through Empowering Vulnerable Crisis Affected Households," is providing sexual and reproductive health and GBV services to approximately 162,000 beneficiaries; 1,200 vulnerable women have also directly benefited from agricultural and livelihood activities. Women under this project received agricultural inputs and training on horticultural skills, marketing of produce and nutrition-sensitive agriculture to improve daily diet and food consumption using local resources.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Rural and indigenous women make significant contributions to agriculture, food security, nutrition and rural development. At the same time, millions of them are systematically disadvantaged relative to men in their access to land, markets, finance, social protection, services and socio-economic opportunities they need to lead productive lives and contribute fully to economic growth and sustainable development. Furthermore, women's labour burden generally exceeds that of men, mainly due to a disproportionate share of unpaid household responsibilities.

Gender-based violence continues to be an issue that women and girls encounter in their workplaces, communities and homes, undermining their health, productivity, socio-economic inclusion and empowerment. Indigenous women and girls face specific challenges associated with their ethnicity and the socio-economic characteristics of the settings where they live. In addition to these constraints, millions of rural and indigenous women find themselves in subordinate positions within their homes, communities, workplaces and rural institutions as a result of discriminatory socio-cultural norms and practices. Crises, conflicts and upheavals such as climate change tend to have disproportionate impacts on rural women and girls, but institutional responses often remain gender-blind.

While rural and indigenous women's roles and opportunities for advancement are diverse and vary across regions, countries and socio-economic groups within countries, the reality is that major gender inequities still exist in rural settings in every part of the world. On the other hand, when rural and indigenous women are enabled to have better access to resources, services, economic opportunities and decision making, the result is increased quality of life for themselves, their families and communities.

International human rights treaties and intergovernmental outcomes have brought awareness and attention to the issues of rural and indigenous women. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) – the only international human rights treaty with a specific article dedicated to the situation of rural women – calls on States and parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against rural women in a number of areas, with concrete suggestions for action. Similarly, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (2018) has a strong gender equality clause, requiring States to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against peasant women and other women working in rural areas and to promote their empowerment. The need to pay special attention to the rights and needs of indigenous women is highlighted in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Although the Beijing Platform of Action (1995) does not have a specific section on rural women or indigenous women, it does address their needs and priorities in many of the 12 critical areas of concern. Likewise, measures to facilitate gender equality in rural areas and to accelerate rural women's empowerment are included, implicitly or explicitly, in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and in several SDGs.



Women groups in Tajikistan received support in agriculture through a project focusing on “Strengthening Institutions and Capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture and State Veterinary Inspection Service for Policy Formulation”.

In addition to the above-mentioned policy blueprints, many good practices exist – some mentioned in this paper – from which governments and other development actors can learn in order to build effective interventions to promote and guarantee rural women’s rights, strengthen their voice and leadership, improve their livelihoods and thus enhance overall well-being of their families and communities. Improved data collection and analysis are needed over longer periods of time to assess the impacts of policy choices on rural women and their families and communities, and to compare the merits and demerits of different interventions.

The evidence presented in this paper clearly shows that achieving gender equality in rural settings and accelerating the socio-economic empowerment of rural and indigenous women and girls needs to be placed at the heart of the development agenda in the present decade and beyond. A wide range of stakeholders must be involved, including ministries of agriculture and natural resources (fisheries and forestry), agrarian reform, rural development, trade and finance, health, education, science and technology, labor, social affairs, and environment; national machineries for gender equality; donor countries; multilateral agencies; funding partners; research and academic institutions; employer organizations; trade unions; professional and trade associations; farmers’ organizations; rural women’s organizations; and the private sector.

Rural women’s empowerment represents not only an intrinsic human right and therefore a priority goal in itself. It is a key precondition for societies to benefit from the increased contribution of rural and indigenous women to sustainable agriculture, food security, adequate nutrition, and a fair, just and prosperous rural development. However, progress towards the empowerment of rural and indigenous women and girls can only materialize with wider recognition and acknowledgment – by women and men alike – of its benefits to all society, and of the vital importance of reshaping economic and social structures, reforming institutions and establishing comprehensive and coherent legal and policy frameworks.

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This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of FAO, IFAD and WFP and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

Globally, rural and indigenous women fare worse than rural men and urban women and men on almost every indicator for which data are available. Although they share common challenges such as rural location and gender-based discrimination, rural women and girls are not a homogeneous group. The opportunities and constraints they face differ across their lifetimes, contexts and circumstances, and are influenced by location, socio-economic status and social identities associated with attributes such as indigenous origin and ethnicity, age, disability, migrant or refugee status.

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, also known as “Beijing + 25”, provides an excellent opportunity for governments, civil society, the United Nations system and all development actors to take stock of progress made towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

It is in this context that members of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE) seek to raise awareness about and promote opportunities for some of those left furthest behind: rural and indigenous women and girls.

This document highlights key facts as well as some good practices from the members of the IANWGE network in the thematic areas of education; food security and nutrition; health; access to and control over land and other productive resources; leadership, decision-making and public life; social protection and services; care and domestic work; gender-based violence; and resilience in the context of climate change and fragility.

(FAO)



(IFAD)

