Gender Mainstreaming in Food Security: Promotion of Inclusive and Sustainable Agriculture Growth
(Final version, 2 October 2017)

The why, how and what of gender equality in relation to food security policy and practice

This Memo accompanies the Factsheet ‘Gender Mainstreaming in Food Security’. It gives background information on the arguments for gender mainstreaming and describes pathways and instruments for use in enhancing the integration of gender aspects in food security policies and actions. It also provides concrete examples of gender approaches in food security programmes and policies, as well as references and sources for further guidance.

Rationale

There is more than enough food in the world to feed everyone, but the number of people affected by hunger and malnutrition is still ‘unacceptably high’ (FAO et al., 2014), with disproportionate impacts on women and girls. Evidence shows strong correlations between gender inequality and food and nutrition insecurity. For example, despite rapid economic growth in India, thousands of women and girls still lack food and nutrition security as a direct result of their lower status compared with men and boys (BRIDGE, 2014).

Increased food production is insufficient to achieve food security. But it can be achieved if the necessary investment is undertaken and policies conducive to agricultural production are put in place. A profound change of the global food and agriculture system is needed if we are to nourish today’s 795 million hungry and the additional 2 billion people expected by 2050¹.

Women literally ‘feed the world’. Despite limited access to both local and global markets they constitute the majority of food producers in the world and usually manage their family’s nutritional needs. Addressing gender in food security has a dual purpose: closing the gender gap in agriculture is beneficial to achieve food security objectives while also contributing to greater gender equality and realising women’s rights. There is also a strong business case for including women in economic activities, especially those related to agriculture.

This Memo is based on the idea that addressing gender inequalities is not about tackling women’s issues and concerns in isolation from their social context and the social relations within which women exist. It is based on the idea that gender is relational, with the aim being to improve women’s position relative to that of men and ensure women benefit equally from policies and the implementation of programmes. It also emphasises the need for active

¹ See http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/
participation of both men and women in design, implementation and evaluation of policy and programmes to create ownership and promote context-specific solutions rather than international agendas only.

**Dutch food security policies from a gender perspective**

Gender is integrated in the Dutch Food Security Policy from 2014, as a cross-cutting issue throughout its three main themes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eradication of world hunger (people)</th>
<th>Promotion of inclusive and sustainable agricultural growth (profit)</th>
<th>Realisation of sustainable food system (planet)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific focus on nutritional status of young children and mothers, and linking this also to sexual and reproductive health and rights, health and water and sanitation.</td>
<td>Policy zooms in on farmers as entrepreneurs with the potential to grow and to answer to the demands of the market. The aim is to increase their income. The role of women and youth, as well as cooperatives, is being emphasised. The intervention areas are increase productivity; increase employment; increase the number of female entrepreneurs and unleash their potential.</td>
<td>Policies emphasise management of natural resources that are relevant for agriculture, such as land, water, soil, energy and biodiversity.</td>
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Also, the Dutch International Gender Policy Letter to Parliament (2011) refers to food security.

The main objective of the gender mainstreaming part (rather than the gender stand-alone part) of the policy is:

*Sustainable increase of production by and income for women, improved food security for women (e.g. through improved access and distribution), participation in decision-making on water management and improved access to energy, drinking water and sanitation.*

Within the three key Dutch food security policy areas, food security programmes zoom in on:

- Increased food production (i.e. through service provision, data etc.);
- Developing value chains for food products;
- Reforming markets/increasing access to markets;
- Improving land security and land rights;
- Improved production and distribution of food (avoid food waste);
- Nutrition-related interventions, focus on vulnerable groups;
- Youth employment in agriculture and agribusiness.

**Facts and figures on the gender gap in agriculture**

A gender gap remains in agriculture, inhibiting progress towards world food and nutrition security. While women’s role in agriculture is significant, it is *unrecognised* in relation to men; women have *lower access to resources* than men; and women do not *share benefits* as men do. Leaving women out is a waste of resources and of a potential opportunity to change their position and achieve food security.

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The **main reasons to work on gender equality in food security** in this context are as follows:

1. **Women form the majority of the food producers; reaching out to them and recognising the importance of their contributions improves scale in outreach and impact**
   - According to FAO (2011), women represent on average 43% of the agricultural labour force and a much higher percentage of food producers and processors in developing countries.
   - If women had the same access as men to sources of production, hunger in the world would decrease by between 12% and 17% (MFA, 2013).
   - A USD10 increase in a woman’s income achieves the same improvements in children’s nutrition and health as an increase of a man’s income of USD110 (G4AW et al., 2016).

2. **Women and men have multiple roles, all of which contribute to food security**
   - In most developing countries, rural women’s tasks often add up to 16 hours a day, including their work in the fields as well as in the home (FAO, 2016).
   - Rural women spend up to four hours a day walking to collect fuel and water for the household (FAO, 2011).
   - Women’s unpaid care work is often part of the non-cash economy of the household (since little or none of the output gets marketed). Such work may thus not be classified as productive activity and is often not reported or recorded in official accounts, including agriculture or population censuses (BRIDGE, 2014).
   - Women are mainly involved in small-scale informal trade of food products; they contribute substantially towards increasing incomes of small-scale producers and making food available to least valued markets.

3. **Improving and increasing women’s access to and control over resources supports women to realise their potential**
   - If women had the same access as men to productive resources, and extension services, as well as a voice in policy-making, they could increase yields by 20 to 30% (FAO, 2011).
   - If women farmers had the same access to resources as men, the number of hungry in the world could be reduced by up to 150 million.\(^3\)
   - Women lack decision-making power on important issues that affect their lives, including their time, how they manage their resources and how they spend their income.

The above three main reasons are **interrelated**. Women account for a great proportion of the agricultural labour force, produce the majority of grown food and perform most of the unpaid care work in rural areas. Yet these activities are often invisible and unrecognised in relation to their contributions to food security objectives. This is related to the fact that women lack ownership of and control over resources. This makes them invisible in national statistics, which means policies and programmes therefore do not target them. This hampers their opportunities to improve their food and nutrition security situation, their work, their education and their participation in decision-making (FAO, 2016). **MFA can make a difference to break this cycle.**

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\(^3\) [www.un.org/sgd](http://www.un.org/sgd)
How? The Pursued Transformation

Gender mainstreaming allows us to take an explicit approach to addressing the gender gap in agriculture by integrating gender concerns in all steps of the policy and programme cycle. This starts with a thorough gender analysis. On the basis of the findings of this, we can make informed decisions on how to move from gender-unaware and ‘do no harm’ interventions towards more gender-sensitive and gender-transformative approaches. The latter allows for changes in harmful/unequal gender norms, roles and structures towards increased gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Gender Analysis

Gender analysis is a process of collecting and analysing gender-disaggregated information in order to understand gender differences and relations. Gender analysis identifies relevant gender issues, constraints, risks and opportunities, to identify and address gender inequalities and understand their root causes; to eliminate barriers to women’s full and meaningful participation and decision-making; to identify potential impacts and prevent negative effects of interventions; and to provide a baseline to measure progress towards gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming in food security policies and interventions creates opportunities to:

- Ensure such policies and programmes are more effective, have greater impact for both men and women and are sustainable;
- Guarantee women, men and children’s positions are strengthened to ensure their own food security in a stable and sustainable way;
- Include women and men as experts in policies and programmes developed at different levels, based on a thorough understanding of their needs and interests;
- Recognise the multiple roles women play contributing to food security, making visible what women do and addressing their constraints;
- Understand the gender dimensions of ownership and control of resources, and the resulting different needs, interests, roles and priorities of men and women.

Gender mainstreaming starts with a better understanding of the situation, before policies and programmes can be designed and implemented. Examples of this are described below.

Understand the multiple roles of men and women

Women are contributors to food security as food producers, employees in the sector, entrepreneurs, main care-takers in the household and community workers. In these positions, women should be seen as key experts and therefore their active inclusion in the design and implementation of food and nutrition security policies and programmes is essential.

However, women’s disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care work, and the persistent and powerful gender stereotypes that underpin this unequal distribution, represents a significant
obstacle to achieving gender equality and women’s rights. Such rights include the right to
decent work,⁴ to education, to health and to participate in public life (UN Women, 2014).

Enhancing understanding of women and men’s roles, contributions and collaborations in
agriculture require looking at:
- where men and women play key roles, what level, what they do and how they are
related;
- where men and women contribute, based on their roles;
- where different roles are supportive and where they compete in terms of time and
other resources.

These insights should be taken as a starting point for the design and implementation of
policies and programmes.

**Understand women and men’s access to resources to undertake their roles and how decisions are made**

At rural household level, the dominant gender division of labour commonly assigns women a
multitude of socially accepted tasks, which determine their time use. Limited recognition of
women’s time burden and power imbalances within the household affects women’s capacity to
express their needs and seek support. When it comes to the allocation of household resources,
therefore, men tend not to prioritise women’s needs (FAO, 2016).

An example of this comes from nutrition-oriented interventions. Women are often part of
exclusive breastfeeding information campaigns, as they are the ones who do this activity. How
ever, informing only women is ineffective in terms of addressing nutrition when women
cannot decide for themselves whether and how much time they can allocate to breastfeeding.

### Example: importance of understanding the context

During use of the Nutrition and Gender Sensitive Agriculture Mapping Toolkit in Lao PDR,
exclusive breastfeeding practices were discussed. Infants in the country are often fed
steamed rice when they are only 1.5 months old. When researchers tried to find the
reasons for this, women told them they needed to work in the fields 1.5 months after
giving birth. The fields are far from their homes, which means they cannot go back to feed
their baby. As a result, they leave their baby at home with care-givers – their parents or
older siblings of the baby. Babies are also fed by hand, which may lead to contamination
and diseases. However, programmes and policies still encourage women only to
breastfeed.

*Source: Results from field-testing of Nutrition and Gender Sensitive Agriculture Mapping
Toolkit in Lao PDR.*¹

See below for promising pathways and strategies.

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⁴ Decent work sums up the aspirations of men and women in their working lives. It involves opportunities
for work that is productive and delivers a fair income; security in the workplace and social protection for
families; better prospects for personal development and social integration; freedom for people to express
their concerns, organise and participate in the decisions that affect their lives; and equality of opportunity
and treatment for all women and men ([www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)).
Policy Challenges and Opportunities

It is important to incorporate gender in the design, implementation (objectives and outcomes, separately or integrated), monitoring and evaluation (M&E) of policies and programmes. This poses a number of challenges at policy-making level as well as in terms of the institutions that need to mainstream gender.

Challenges

Policy process level:
- Food security policies and programme are still mainly considered technical areas, without explicit consideration for the social and gender aspects of underlying causes of food insecurity.
- There is a lack of gender expertise and limited participation of women in food security policy and implementation.
- Agricultural institutions and organisations dominate the stakeholders invited to participate in the policy process, rather than women’s organisations and other grassroots organisations.
- There is a shortage of gender-differentiated data and indicators and lack of a deeper understanding of how gender can be addressed.
- Women farmers are often visible only in female-headed households. Most M&E frameworks do not reach/consider women within male-headed households.

Institutional level:
- Policies are often rather generic and do not specify exactly how gender is going to be addressed and why.
- Staff who implement programmes often lack capacity on gender and clear instructions and guidance on performance indicators.
- For M&E purposes, indicators do not always measure what we intend to understand from our programmes.
- Under-reporting of women’s activity in agriculture and food systems is a major obstacle to gaining insights into what women contribute and how to strengthen their positions.
- Longer-term vision and commitment to gender is often lacking at management level.

'Dos' in policy-making

- Do demonstrate leadership and commitment to gender equality in the context of food security, to show you are serious about this and see opportunities to contribute more and better to food security. For example, ensure you have gender expertise in-house and in partner countries.
- Do set specific goals and planned outcomes on gender in food security, to enable better monitoring and sharing of results, including best practices. This also allows for a clear gender profile of the work of the MFA, including clearer accountability mechanisms relating to what programmes achieve.
• **Do include gender-related questions in all steps of the policy cycle.** For example, ask for gender analysis in Calls for Proposals (see G4AW third Call for Proposals). Engender the language of Calls for Proposals and other texts (i.e. use ‘he’/’she’).

• **Do distinguish between agricultural managers (those managing the land) and land-owners in data collection.** Statistics on land ownership by men and women show a smaller gap between men and women than appears in gender-disaggregated statistics on land management. This shows that women may own land but men actually manage it and decide what is happening on it.

• **Do complement data on farm ownership and management with data on intra-farm-level activities,** as women may perform essential tasks that otherwise remain invisible. Unless a survey asks questions about individuals within a household, we will miss important data on women living in male-headed households – i.e., the majority of the world’s women.

• **Do consider women’s role in agribusiness and agricultural trade.** Special measures are needed to achieve gender equality in access to knowledge and (financial) resources and to address gender-specific constraints that women traders encounter (e.g. sexual harassment, lack of access to information, lack of voice in policy-making and limited access to finance).

• **Do ensure women’s voices are heard,** their contributions are valued and they are represented at different levels and moments in policy processes. This makes the role women play more visible and will enable a better understanding of their issues and tailoring of policies and programmes to their needs and interests. Include women in project management teams in countries of implementation.

• **Do look for local partnerships with women rights organisations** and other civil society actors with local knowledge on gender issues and how to address these in the context of food security.

• **Do share best practices and lessons learnt as a source of inspiration,** new ideas and input for design, implementation and monitoring of results. Share and collect practical suggestions on how to include women farmers in projects as active participants and main experts.
### Key Conditions for Women’s Economic Empowerment

1. Economic advancement, increased income and return on labour;
2. Access to life chances and opportunities (e.g. skills development, education, information, job openings);
3. Access to assets, support functions and services to advance economically (e.g. land, inputs, financial services, extension, business development services);
4. Agency (ability to make and influence decisions within different spheres, including household finances, communities, farmer groups, etc.);
5. Manageable workload. This last dimension is closely intertwined with time and mobility and linked to productive, reproductive and community roles.
Recognise and value women’s multiple roles and contributions to promote inclusive and sustainable agricultural growth

Reduce, redistribute and recognise women’s disproportionate burden of unpaid care work

Women’s unpaid care work and their contributions to food security are interrelated. Without care work, there is no food security, and vice versa. This link should be further explored by acknowledging and increasingly valuing women’s role in unpaid care, through interventions in the promotion of inclusive and sustainable agricultural growth.

The example below outlines how ActionAid promoted a participatory approach to better understand women’s unpaid care work in the context of food insecurity and to develop appropriate, people-led responses.

CARE programme on participatory design: Join My Village

Though an innovative project on maternal health, Join My Village, CARE India is integrating gender and food concerns into the design of a maternal health project. Needs assessment exercises indicated that women had adequate knowledge of food intake during pregnancy from government programmes and the mass media. However, in practice, pregnant women often do not consume the recommended diet. Women usually cook food every day and serve it to their families, but often eat last and reduce their food intake when supplies are short. The CARE programme has been addressing these inequities in a number of innovative ways. First, project staff are encouraged to reflect on their own gender biases and assumptions around health, food and nutrition. Pregnant women and their mothers-in-law are then brought together to discuss how food intake patterns can be changed. Expectant fathers are also organised into groups and encouraged to reflect on some of the health needs of men and women, specifically during pregnancy. Many of them have said they are happy to begin eating together with their wives. Families who have tried these new practices shared their experiences at fathers’ group meetings and mothers’ group meetings. A few couples reported that this process had made their family closer. Some men also said they had been helping with household chores such as cooking and child care.

Join My Village shows that small steps such as these can go a long way in challenging and changing food-related gender norms at the household level.

Source: BRIDGE (2014).
Also, women often play roles in off-farm activities, such as food-processing jobs and agribusinesses. Depending on the context, women may play a role in (cross-border) trade. This is often in the informal economy. Recognising their roles as essential in the context of food security and agricultural development requires addressing these roles, e.g. through setting up women trader associations (collective action), providing them access to cross-border information services, simplifying local custom procedures, addressing sexual harassment and investing in border markets.

Promote solutions for women to access and control resources through collective action

Promote solutions for women to access resources through collective action, such as Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) or women-only farmer-based groups so they can access markets and inputs.
Promote gender equality through the realisation of sustainable food systems

Use context-specific knowledge of both women and men to realise sustainable food systems

The implicit knowledge of farmers, particularly women, is too often overlooked in the rush to create expert-led policies and programmes (BRIDGE, 2014). Taking the time to listen to and learn from local people, who have used different types of coping mechanisms in times of food and nutrition insecurity, is a vital part of developing appropriate, jointly owned and informed, solutions, while being empowering for the women and men involved at the same time. This also allows for solutions that are close to the daily practices of men and women.

Participation in programmes by men and women is not just a matter of talking to people in the context of a specific programme. Explicit and intentional efforts are needed to reach out, to hear, to analyse and to prioritise accordingly, without a pre-fixed idea of how things should be designed. This starts with an analysis of the positions of women in households and communities, as they are not a homogenous group, and how their positions shape their opportunities, ideas and ways they can contribute.

2SCALE programme: Access to finance for resource and collateral poor women

2SCALE is exploring forms of sustainable financing specifically designed for rural farmers within the partnerships being facilitated. VSLAs are a form of rural financing designed for rural communities and those excluded from the formal banking system. It is also suitable for those lacking collateral. 2SCALE has reached 3,500 households across its soybean and rice partnerships in Ghana by facilitating youth and women groups to establish over 150 VSLAs as well as strengthening the entrepreneurial and business skills of the selected groups. In the soybean partnership, 320 women organised into 15 VSLAs have received 2SCALE support to set up the schemes. The groups have been strengthened in group dynamics issues, financial education and management of income-generating activities, including soy-processing. Local volunteers have also been trained to support the groups. An additional 3,000 (2,000 women and 1,000 men) members of savings groups in the rice partnership are being supported to set up 150 VSLAs in the scaling phase of the initiative. These groups are linked to Advans Savings and Loans, who act as their financial partner by investing their savings in viable financial instruments. Through 2SCALE facilitation, the input retailer company, Guina Agricole in Niono, Mali, granted female customers with a credit supplier to procure seeds and fertilisers worth over €61,000 – fully reimbursed. Improved seeds, combined with training in onion-cropping practices, increased yields from 10 t/ha in 2014 to 13 t/ha in 2016.

**Promote women’s land rights with a focus on increasing women’s decision-making over the use of land**

When women’s access to and control over resources improves relative to those of men, agricultural productivity increases, time can be spent more effectively and women benefit more from interventions. However, the question of access to resources is not merely an economic issue, linked to improving the productivity of women farmers and/or women involved in farming activities. It is also a source of women’s empowerment and autonomy within the household and provides women fall-back options outside marriage (BRIDGE, 2014), as illustrated below.

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**Indonesian study, commissioned by the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), on power and resources**

A study of Indonesian women’s power relative to that of their husbands found addressing power relationships within households – such as by strengthening women’s ability to own assets – could have effects that go beyond the purely economic sphere. Women’s ownership of at least 25% of household assets was found to provide benefits in terms of decision-making power within the household. Women’s ownership and share of household assets was found to be a significant factor in their capacity to make autonomous reproductive health decisions, limit the number of children and use prenatal and delivery care.

*Source FAO (2011).*

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In 2014, FAO started a collaboration with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) to develop a common framework for producing gender-disaggregated indicators for
the FAO Gender and Land Rights Database (GLRD). The framework includes five main indicators:

1. Distribution of agricultural holders by sex;
2. Distribution of agricultural landowners by sex;
3. Incidence of female and male agricultural landowners;
4. Distribution of agricultural land area owned by sex;
5. Distribution of agricultural land value owned by sex.

FAO land statistics work

An important distinction in policies and the monitoring of these is between access and control. Examples from FAO (2017) show:

- Women may cultivate and manage land (access), but they may not have the rights (or incentives) to make productivity-enhancing improvements.
- Women may be legal owners of land (control), but may not have the access to it, or be able to make decisions related to the use of land, because of local norms, values and lack of empowerment.

Therefore: Distinguish between men and women’s needs and interests in relation to land tenure arrangements, given that women’s ownership does not mean they can actually use land, but also vice versa. Women’s empowerment is key to this, on the one hand, ensure women can demand access as well as control and, on the other hand, create acceptability of this in the immediate environment and through policies.


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Some background resources


Other relevant resources

Gender gap in agriculture – general

http://library.cgiar.org/bitstream/handle/10947/2769/Addressing_the_Gender_Gap_in_Agriculture_Opportunities_for_Collaboration_in_Gender-Responsive_Research.pdf?sequence=1

FAO website on gender and food security

FAO Policy Guidance Series on ‘Strengthening Sector Policies for Better Food Security and Nutrition Results’

World Bank, FAO and IFAD (2009) Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook
This presents analyses of issues that affect agriculture’s role as a source of economic development, rural livelihoods and environmental services. It is intended to be used for practical applications, such as through informing public discussion, policy formulation and development planning.

A film on why gender in research from CGIAR
http://gender.cgiar.org/the-gender-network/

Gender and situational analysis

FAO (2013) Women’s Empowerment as a Tool against Hunger
http://www.fao.org/wairdocs/ar259e/ar259e.pdf

FAO Guide to Socio Economic and Gender Analysis (SEAGA) tools

WFP Guidance Document for a Gender and Food Security Analysis
https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000019670/download/?_ga=2.123150603.1486469963.1502723635-1324242393.1502723635

Monitoring and evaluation

Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI)
http://www.ifpri.org/publication/womens-empowerment-agriculture-index
Women play a critical and potentially transformative role in agricultural growth in developing countries, but they face persistent obstacles and economic constraints limiting further inclusion in agriculture. WEAI measures the empowerment, agency and inclusion of women in the agriculture sector in an effort to identify ways to overcome those obstacles and constraints.

http://a4nh.cgiar.org/2014/05/05/three-things-you-need-to-know-about-sex-disaggregated-data/
BRIDGE 'Gender Indicators: What, Why and How?’  

FAO Gender and Land Rights Database  

FAO ‘Gender and Land Statistics: Recent Developments in FAO’s Gender and Land Rights Database’  
http://www.fao.org/3/a-i4862e.pdf

FAO (2016) ‘Agri-Gender Statistics Toolkit’  
http://www.fao.org/3/a-i5769e.pdf

Land Coalition ‘Gender Evaluation Criteria in Land-Related Programs Toolkit’  

GLTN 'Gender Evaluation Criteria’  

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