



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

# A snapshot of gender affairs in the agriculture and rural sector (ARS) of Guyana



# Context

Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) requires the Government of Guyana (GoG) to address the issues faced by rural women, taking all appropriate measures to ensure its application, including: planning, health care, social security, training and education, economic opportunities, community activities, housing, transport, technology, and communications.

In 1980, Guyana ratified the CEDAW signalling its intent to prioritize improving the lives and status of women – a commitment to plan and undertake a series of measures to combat discrimination against women in rural areas to ensure – on a basis of equality between men and women – that they participate in and benefit from rural and national development. The Guyana office of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) recently undertook a country gender assessment of the agriculture and rural sector (CGA-ARS),<sup>1</sup> which informs this brief.

## Overview

The GoG has over the years engaged in programmes to increase food and agriculture production and ensure food security and nutrition, particularly in rural areas, through an expansion of input supply and marketing structure, and providing extension services. In its Ninth CEDAW periodic report (2018), the GoG reported upon measures taken towards supporting rural women's access to healthcare; education; safeguarding access to clean water and sanitation; providing special programmes that recognise women as farmers. Efforts were made to increase the participation of Indigenous women in decision-making, particularly through the establishment of the National Toshiacs Council and mandates were given for women to occupy seats on governing bodies.

1. FAO Guyana undertook the CGA-ARS to assess the specific roles and responsibilities that women and men perform in the agriculture and agri-food sector, and to document the gender inequalities that persist in the sector. This activity was undertaken between August and January 2022.

## The gender situation at a glance

- As of 2019, Guyana's human development index (HDI) was 0.682, placing the country in the medium human development category with a position of 122 out of 189 countries and territories. For that same year, the HDI for females was 0.662 and 0.688 for males (Human Development Report, 2020).
- Guyana's Gender Development Index (GDI) in 2019 was 0.961. The measure considers the gender gaps in human development achievements by accounting for disparities between women and men in three basic dimensions of human development: reproductive health, knowledge, and living standards. (Human Development Report, 2020).
- For 2019, Guyana scored 0.462 on the Gender Inequality Index, placing it at 115 of 162 countries and territories. The Gender Inequality Index score ranges from 0 to 1, and the higher the value, the greater the disparities between women and men. (Human Development Report, 2020).
- Guyana's gross national income (GNI) per capita increased by about 263.1 percent between 1990 and 2018. Estimated GNI per capita is USD 4 676 for females and USD 10 532 for males (Human Development Report, 2020).
- As of 2017, Guyana's poverty rates stood at 42.1 percent, with higher rates of poverty in rural areas of the country (up to 55 percent in the rural interior) as of 2017 (Jaayfer, 2020).
- Female participation in the labour market is 43.9 percent compared to 68.5 for men. The estimated female share of employment in senior and middle management is 35.4 percent. The share of graduates in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics programs in tertiary education who are female is 27.2 percent and 72.8 percent for males (Ndaiye, 2020).

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- Mandatory paid maternity leave is thirteen weeks and there is no paternity leave in Guyana.
- Women occupy 36 percent of parliamentary seats (Gender Quotas Database, 2021).
- Agriculture and industrial sectors (e.g. gold and bauxite mining, oil and gas, manufacturing) employ mostly men, while most women are employed in the service sector. A total of 12.1 percent of Guyana’s population is employed in the agriculture sector (Guyana Bureau of Statistics, 2020) with no data on how this is disaggregated by sex.

With 72.8 percent of the **gender gap** closed, Guyana ranked 53rd on the 2021 Global Gender Gap Index, which benchmarks progress towards gender parity and compare countries’ gender gaps across four dimensions: economic opportunities, education, health, and political leadership (see Figure 1).

### Gender, agriculture and rural development

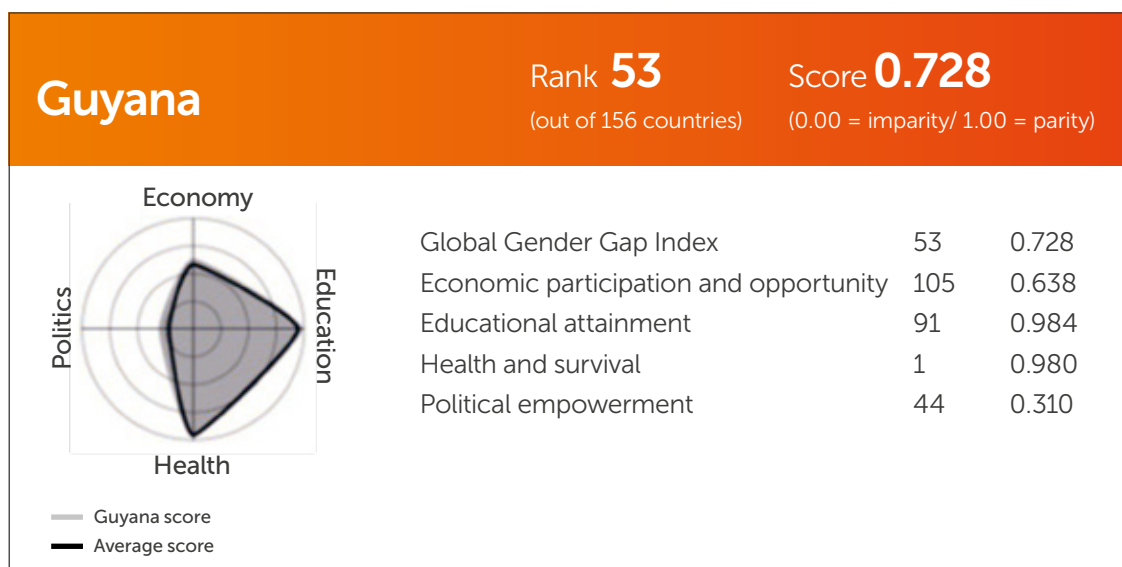
For many years, agriculture has been viewed as a male-dominated activity. Despite this, agricultural activities have continued to be a way of life for most women living in rural parts of Guyana. However, Guyanese women do not enjoy the same opportunities as men in terms of access and participation in social, political, and economic development, and this is mirrored in the agriculture and rural sector. Guyana’s Gender Inequality Index is 0.492 (UNDP, 2020), and this can be seen with women labour participation being lower to that of men – 41.2 percent compared to 73.6 percent, respectively (UNICEF, 2014). While both women and men suffer the consequences of structural inequalities, women are

more negatively affected, bearing most of the adverse impacts deriving from them.

Historically, the food and agriculture sector has been the main contributor to economic development in the Caribbean, including the generation of employment and enterprise development for women and men. In Guyana, the agriculture sector has not reached optimal production, and although Guyana is a net exporter of food in the Caribbean, the country still faces aspects of food insecurity (WUSC, 2017). While there are no production-based shortages of food (availability) in Guyana, the food insecurity challenge relates more to issues of accessibility (employment opportunities), utilization (nutrition related to health education, food preparation, food quality and safety) and stability (natural and economic shocks on the food supply systems) (Ballayram, 2017).

Producers are faced with several challenges such as inadequate access to sufficient extension services and technological input; inability to secure titled lands; inability to access credit; unreliable market linkages and climate change threats (WUSC, 2017). Producers are also challenged by limited knowledge on pre- and post-harvest handling techniques. While these challenges affect both female and male producers, female producers are disproportionately disadvantaged compared to men in terms of their access to land, labour, capital, and technology (WUSC, 2017). This is reflected in women’s limited participation across all nodes of value chains, for instance of the forty exporters engaged at the Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC), only thirteen (13) are women. Additionally, women make up majority of Guyana’s poor, although more women pursue tertiary level

Figure 1: Country profile on the Global Gender Gap Index



Source: World Economic Forum. 2021. Global gender gap report 2021. Geneva. [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2021.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf).

education and participate in middle and high-level management jobs than men.

## Legal and policy environment

Guyana's Constitution addresses the inclusion of women in leadership and decision-making, particularly in Article 29, Chapter II which states:

*Women's participation in the various management and decision-making processes, whether private, public or state, shall be encouraged and facilitated by laws enacted for that purpose or otherwise.*

The constitution also addresses equality for women under Article 149F (1) and (2), making it pellucid that sex or gender discrimination is illegal, and further stipulating that women have equal access and right to education, training, employment, pay, and advancement, in all aspects of life. Further, under Article 160 (3) (b) (iii-v), the document makes provisions for a minimum quota of female candidates for the list of candidates (The Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, 1980) but stops short of mandating quotas for parliamentary seats.

The constitution also establishes the Women and Gender Equality Commission.

The National Policy Paper on Women, prepared by the Women's Affairs Bureau in 1995, lays the foundation for mainstreaming strategies to ensure that issues of concern to women's conditions and positions are given focus at all levels of the national development planning process. This includes the need for equitable consideration in areas relating to the social, economic, political, and cultural development of Guyana; quantifying the unwaged labour of women; recognition of women's reproductive roles; shifting men's attitude regarding family responsibilities; the elimination of poverty; and the inclusion of gender equity on the national agenda (Government of Guyana, 1995).

In recent years, several policies (national and sector-specific), strategies, and programmes that support the food and agriculture sector in Guyana have been put in place. Key among them are the National Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (NGESI) Policy for Guyana and the National Strategy for Agriculture in Guyana 2013 - 2020.

The NGESI policy zeroes in on gender inclusion and provides guidance for social sector policy and developmental activities through the challenges in accessibility of vulnerable and or marginal groups and social inclusion, and the reduction of constraints to basic human rights of these groups. It also addresses the issue of including gender perspectives in budgeting (gender-responsive budgeting). It also identifies

coordinating mechanisms such as the Inter-Ministerial Committee of Gender Focal Points (GFPs) and the Regional Gender Action Committees. At present, there are gender focal points appointed in the Ministry of Agriculture and within the various sub-agencies.

Further, the work of the Ministry of Agriculture is guided by the National Strategy for Agriculture 2013–2020 (MOA, 2013). The 8-year Strategy is currently being revised for the period 2021–2025 (CANARI, 2021). There is no clearly stated mandate for addressing gender equality and equity. However, increasing the involvement of women and youth in agriculture is identified as a crosscutting aspect to Guyana's vision for agriculture. There is no mention of gender equity and equality or gender analysis for the sector, however, equity is referenced as part of the overall vision for agriculture (CANARI, 2021). There is also no specific mention of a coordinating mechanism for gender work in agriculture, and gender mainstreaming has largely been donor-led.

During the mid-1990s, there were attempts to implement a National Agricultural Policy in Guyana, which included a Draft Policy on Women in Agriculture (ILO, 2018). Although unclear as to what became of this Policy, the ILO (2018) reported that it intended to ensure that sustained attention is given to the integration of women into development activities in the agricultural sector; that the needs of women receive consideration during project formulation; and that the socioeconomic conditions of rural women and their families are enhanced.

## Rural population

Over 90 percent of the estimated 746 955 Guyanese population (GNBS, 2016) lives at or near the coast (GoG, 2012; GoG, 2018). This is also where most of the country's economic development, government, and infrastructure is clustered in a 16 to 64 km wide strip along the coast, covering just 5 percent of the country's total landmass (GLSC, 2013; GoG, 2018). Guyana is essentially a rural country, with 72.5 percent of the population living in rural areas. Around 90 percent of households whose livelihoods rely on agriculture, forestry, and fishing live in rural areas, and the rural poverty rate exceeds 50 percent. Crop and livestock agriculture contributes significantly to rural and traditional livelihoods, providing employment, household income, and food security. It is also an important part of traditional knowledge and values for Indigenous communities (GOG, 2019).

## Gender and agriculture labour

Agriculture employs most of Guyana's workforce (Guyana Labour Force Survey, 2020), and is critical

to the livelihoods of poor households (World Bank, 2020). In 2020, 12.1 percent of Guyana's population was employed in the agriculture sector (GNBS, 2020), representing a decline from 17.5 percent (42 732) of the employment in 2012. Unfortunately, this data is not disaggregated by sex. However, it is estimated that men are employed 3.17 times more than women (ILO, 2018).

Men outnumber women as labourers in the formal agricultural sector. Female participation rate in Guyana according to the 2012 census is two times lower than males and the disparity grows in the agriculture sector where this number stands to increase. Female employment in the agriculture, forestry, and fishing sector in the 2012 census was recorded at 4.1 percent or 3 014 as compared to 23.2 percent or 39 718 males. It is reported that 51.1 percent of the Guyanese labour force are unpaid workers (World Bank, 2020), and generally, women represent a higher percentage of unpaid family workers in the agricultural sector compared to the percentage of men unpaid family workers (FAO, 2020).

The country's last census does not capture the labour of unpaid family workers but notes that Guyanese men and women would spend on average 35.84 years and 16.95 years in the labour force (GBS, 2016). This means females spend approximately two and half times, less than their male counterparts in the labour force – a situation that depicts the universal interruption of female labour force participation due to women's reproductive roles, childbearing, and rearing, inter alia.

### Access to land ownership

In Guyana, 90 percent of female-headed households who farm have no title to their lands, and men account for most of the property titles in Guyana (WUSC, 2017). Most of the land on which the women farm is either ancestral family lands of which the male family members are the inheritors, or the land belonging to their spouses. Access to land and other resources has been changing over time, with more women owning farms. For example, in the past, land was passed down from father to son, not daughters, due to legal or cultural factors (e.g. traditional values).

There is no clear land policy and criteria used for the allocation of land by the Land Selection Committees. Despite the legal framework ensuring in principle equal access to land for men and women in Guyana, the control of land is usually a privilege for men (Ndiaye, 2020). The lack of data on gender and land rights compounds the difficulty to document the real situation of access to and control of land by women in Guyana, as there are major gaps in access and validity of the data related to land tenure.

### Access to credit

Since approximately 90 percent of female-headed farming households have no title to their lands, their ability to access credit from lending institutions is affected (WUSC, 2017). This poses challenges to the expansion of their livelihoods and leads to low productivity levels. The demand for high levels of collateral and interest rates puts formal credit beyond the reach of many women. Male farmers are therefore better able to access loans for development or for recovery of costs due to land ownership and income levels. Women farmers and processors or vendors do not enjoy the same levels of access to land or finance and credit due to the lending policies of public and private sector banks and financial institutions (CANARI, 2020). The growth of the microfinance sector in Guyana, which comprises both formal and informal institutions, is limited by Guyana's rurality, which affects people's accessibility to these institutions. Furthermore, the high cost of transportation and communication difficulties exacerbate the problem and creates barriers to access (Rizavi and Ganga, 2006).

### Access to services

While access to basic social services is adequate along the coastal regions, the sparsely populated Hinterland areas, where most of Guyana's Indigenous Peoples live, have very limited access to basic social services, and this poses enormous challenges for the delivery of essential services such as education, health, water, and electricity (GOG, 2020). This situation affects both men and women, but data to assess the disparity is scarce.

### Summary of key findings

Addressing gender inequalities by improving women's incomes and educational levels, as well as capacity building in relation to agricultural production and commercialization will improve their access to key resources, information, and decision-making processes that will enhance their capabilities and ability to contribute to and benefit from the sector. Current gender gaps hinder progress for women and reduce their contributions to the agriculture sector, the achievement of food security and nutrition and broader economic and social development goals.

The disconnect between policy, implementation, and limited disaggregated data for gender analysis, has led to persistent gender disparities that delays closure of the gender gap. The lack of sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators are some of the challenges that keep women marginalized as policies often do not consider gender goals and are not always informed by sound evidence-based analysis of existing gender disparities in access to resources, services, and markets.

Specific findings from the CGA have been listed as follows:

1. There are gaps in the mechanisms for integrating gender in the institutions responsible for agriculture and rural development.
2. There is a lack of gender balance within governmental agriculture institutions.
3. Institutional commitments to integrate gender in their work are less clear.
4. There are gaps in the existence of institution-specific gender strategies and action plans.
5. Gap in access to resources (land, finance and inputs)
6. There is a major lack of gender-disaggregated data.
7. The double burden of home-making and unpaid labour.
8. The division of labour in the agricultural sector responds not only to cultural norms but also to physical demands of specific responsibilities.
9. There are gaps in education and technical knowledge obtained between men and women.
10. Limited participation of women in decision-making and work in the agricultural sector.

The production and collection of sex-disaggregated data in Guyana would significantly facilitate the

development of projects adapted to the real needs of rural women. Without a systematic gender analysis at all levels for agricultural and rural policy; the role of women will remain officially unrecognized and undervalued.

Regarding the visibility of rural women's contributions to their households and the rural economy, suggestions include conducting an agriculture census and work to improve the systems of collection, production, and analysis of age- and sex-disaggregated data pertaining to agriculture and rural development.

Institutionally, the capacities of all relevant ministries should be strengthened to monitor and report on the impact of their policies, plans, programmes and services in a gender-sensitive manner; and implement a comprehensive monitoring framework on gender equality and rural women's empowerment covering key economic, social and political aspects.

From a policy position, the draft NGESI policy should be finalised, which has been tabled in parliament, and update the institutional framework to operationalize the policy using a strategic approach within the context of existing human and financial constraints. As a first step, greater institutional support for gender focal points in government agencies is needed, and provision of critical resources for rollout of relevant gender equality-based training to other staff. Training should include application of gender analysis to their areas of work and critical analysis of common errors in and misinterpretations of data utilised by government staff related to gender equality.



Farmer picking hot peppers

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Farmer in her field of bora (long beans). ©FAO Shara Seelall



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