Better life: Gender equality and women’s empowerment at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

2022-2023 highlights
Better life: Gender equality and women’s empowerment at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

2022-2023 highlights

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Rome, 2024
ABBREVIATIONS

AfCFTA - African Continental Free Trade Area
ASTA - Agrifood Systems Transformation Accelerator
BL - better life
CBS - cooperative business schools
CFS - Committee on World Food Security
CGAs - country gender assessments
EU - European Union
EWAT - Empowering women and boosting livelihoods through agricultural trade
FAO - Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFS - Farmer Field Schools
GDP - Gross Domestic Product
GEWGE - gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment
GTAs - gender transformative approaches
IFAD - International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFPRI - International Food Policy Research Institute
ILO - International Labour Organization
ILRI - International Livestock Research Institute
ITC - International Trade Centre
JP RWEE - Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress Towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment
JP GTA - Joint Programme on Gender Transformative Approaches for Food Security and Nutrition
MSMEs - micro, small and medium enterprises
SACCO - Savings and Credit Cooperative Organization
SDG - Sustainable Development Goal
UN - United Nations
UN Women - United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund
UNIDO - United Nations Industrial Development Organization
WFP - World Food Programme
WHO - World Health Organization
Introduction

Gender equality and women’s empowerment is a cross-cutting theme that is inextricably linked to the mandate of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the priorities defined by its Strategic Framework (2022–31). The FAO Policy on Gender Equality (2020–30) states that “persisting inequalities between women and men are a major obstacle to agriculture and rural development and that eliminating these disparities is essential to building sustainable and inclusive food systems and resilient and peaceful societies” (FAO, 2020). While gender equality is increasingly recognized as an essential building block for more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems, the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2, Zero hunger, SDG 5, Gender equality and SDG 10, Reduced inequalities, is still out of reach.

FAO’s Strategic Framework advocates for better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life, leaving no one behind. Part of FAO’s better life (BL) aspiration, Programme Priority Area BL1, is dedicated to gender equality and women’s empowerment and aims to ensure women’s equal rights, access to and control over resources, services, technologies, institutions, economic opportunities and decision-making and to eliminate gender-discriminatory laws and practices. BL1 contributes to specific SDG targets, particularly SDG 2.3, 5.a, 5.c and 5.4.¹

This report showcases gender equality and women’s empowerment highlights in 2022 and 2023 and is divided into global and regional sections. Its overall objective is to share major achievements, good practices and lessons learned from BL1 interventions in 2022–23 and to guide FAO’s upcoming work to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment.

The rationale behind the selection of the highlights is to showcase results that provide a clear path forward for FAO’s work in the next biennium and respond to gender-related priorities outlined in the 2023 FAO Status of women in agrifood systems report. Selected outputs are informed by the BL1 2022–23 workplan and reporting mechanism, the joint BL1, BL2 and BP4² workshop held in November 2023, as well as a survey conducted internally. All highlights contribute to fostering strategic synergies and collaborations to promote women’s empowerment and gender equality in agrifood systems.

Tags accompanying the highlighted output help the reader understand the area of work to which the highlight contributes.

Box 1. Thematic components under Programme Priority Area BL1 (FAO, 2021)

- Women and men have equal voice and decision-making power in rural institutions and organizations.
- Women and men have equal rights, access to and control over natural and productive resources.
- Women and men have equal rights and access to services, markets and decent work and equal control over the resulting income and benefits.
- Women’s work burden is reduced by enhancing their access to technologies, practices and infrastructure and by promoting an equitable distribution of responsibilities.
- Promote the uptake of GTAs in agrifood systems.

[1] SDG target 2.3: By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, Indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment. SDG target 5.a: Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws. SDG target 5.c: Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels. SDG target 5.4: Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.
[2] BL2: Inclusive rural transformation; BP4: Small-scale producers’ equitable access to resources
Leaving No One Behind: Greater involvement and empowerment of rural women in Türkiye and Central Asia project. Fikriye Şeyma Uçar (centre), and colleagues help dock a returning fishing boat at the Arsuz port in Hatay, southern Türkiye.
Global initiatives

Frameworks, guidelines and publications

Voluntary guidelines on gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment in the context of food security and nutrition

Promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment is fundamental to ensure human rights, including the right to adequate food. Ending hunger and ensuring food security and nutrition for all is at the core of the mandate of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS). In October 2019, at its 46th session, the CFS launched a policy process to develop specific voluntary guidelines to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment. Between 2020 and 2023, FAO provided technical support and policy guidance for the formulation and adoption of the Voluntary guidelines on gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment in the context of food security and nutrition. FAO played a central role in the negotiation process, including advocating for the inclusion of gender transformative approaches (GTAs) in the text. As a result of three years of negotiations among governments, intergovernmental and regional organizations, civil society, development partners and other stakeholders, the guidelines were finally endorsed at the 51st session of the CFS in October 2023. Their endorsement is a landmark achievement, paving the way to ensure the equal right to nutritious food for all, leaving no one behind.

A look into the future: Despite their non-binding nature, the guidelines provide concrete guidance to governments, development agents and resource partners to support the formulation and implementation of gender-responsive policies, programming and investments for food security and nutrition.

They also offer concrete opportunities for FAO, the Rome-based Agencies and UN Women to strengthen joint efforts and partnerships to advocate, generate knowledge and raise awareness among counterparts on the guidelines’ content and recommendations, as well as provide technical support to FAO Members to implement the guidelines and translate them into actionable interventions.

Status of women in agrifood systems report

Advocacy and communication
Data, information, evidence production
Dissemination and uptake

Published in 2023, the Status of women in agrifood systems report presents recent evidence and data on gender inequalities and gaps in agrifood systems, illustrating structural gender disparities and intersecting drivers of socioeconomic inequality. It also reviews evidence of what has worked in increasing gender equality and women’s empowerment and includes recommendations for strategic action for the international community to improve outcomes for women and girls.

According to the report, closing gender gaps in farm productivity and wages within agrifood systems could boost the global gross domestic product (GDP) by one percent and decrease global food insecurity by at least two percent, leading to a reduction of 45 million food-insecure people. To achieve this, it is crucial to address the challenges and structural inequalities that hinder women, by providing adequate financing for gender equality and women’s empowerment.
Catalysing investment to tackle discriminatory social and gender norms through GTAs is critical for eradicating hunger and malnutrition and could lead to additional gains in household incomes, dietary diversity and resilience. Additionally, the report highlights the need for targeted policies and investments that address and enhance women’s rights to ownership and control over agricultural land as well as facilitate their access to agricultural extension and financial services and formal childcare systems to increase women’s participation in decent employment, their bargaining power and overall food security. Throughout 2023, the report was widely disseminated, virtually and in person, through global, regional and national launching events, where FAO called for joint action to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment in agrifood systems, leveraging the findings and messages of the flagship report. Launch events in 15 countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas engaged partners who demonstrated an interest in and need for this kind of knowledge product to inform decision-making in global agrifood systems.

A look into the future: The report has set the stage for more data and evidence to be generated, including on promising approaches, and for regional deep dives that will provide more specific guidance to local partners and FAO Member Nations on gender-responsive policies and programmes at country and subregional levels.

Addressing gender issues in pesticide management

Addressing gender issues in pesticide management aims to highlight the gender-related implications of pesticide use and management, focusing on the roles of women in handling hazardous pesticides in agriculture, the reasons why they are at higher risk and the health-related consequences they face. Building on the publication’s recommendations, FAO reinforced knowledge and capacities while also fostering policy dialogue and learning exchanges on the integration of gender dynamics in pesticide management in Latin America and Tunisia.
Understanding the gendered impacts of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the underlying socioeconomic inequalities, including gender-related ones, worldwide. It also exacerbated gender inequalities particularly in employment, access to financial resources (savings, assets, access to credit), access to and use of health services, access to nutritious food and exposure to domestic violence. Women’s multiple care responsibilities, combined with disruptions in care and education services, increased their unpaid domestic and care work. To identify and monitor the differential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on rural women and men, FAO conducted several analyses. In sub-Saharan Africa, FAO partnered with the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) to conduct phone surveys in selected regions of Kenya, Niger, Rwanda and Uganda. The results showed that the COVID-19 pandemic had widespread impacts on rural people in the four selected countries, including loss of income, depletion of savings and assets, and reduced access to food. In partnership with the University of Central Asia, FAO also examined the gendered impacts of COVID-19 on agriculture, food security, access to resources and services, changes in workload and domestic violence in rural areas of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The analysis revealed that rural women were disproportionately affected due to pre-existing gender disparities and limited decision-making power. Women experienced compounded challenges, including increased unpaid work, additional agricultural labour and household chores, difficulties associated with online schooling and healthcare management, limited access to agricultural resources, and a higher risk of domestic violence (FAO, 2023a). The pandemic heightened women’s vulnerability to food insecurity, and Central Asian governments’ interventions failed to support all women effectively.

Addressing gender equality in sustainable soil management - a technical guide for policymakers and field practitioners

The *Addressing gender equality in sustainable soil management* guide was developed to facilitate the adoption of sustainable soil management practices and contribute to the achievement of gender equality and women’s empowerment. The guide considers various factors that affect women’s productivity and play a crucial role in shaping women’s experiences and challenges in relation to soil management. These include land and water scarcity, extreme climate events, unpaid care and domestic labour, and different access to technologies, markets and knowledge. To address these issues, concrete actions can be taken to support gender equality and women’s empowerment in sustainable soil management practices. The guide presents a set of gender analysis tools that can support users in identifying and addressing the priorities of rural women and marginalized groups of farmers, including Indigenous Peoples and refugees. Results of gender analyses can also help in the planning of gender trainings and in designing gender-responsive interventions, which address discriminatory gender norms and conditions that perpetuate gender inequalities and marginalize women and girls.
Eliminating gender-based violence and protecting rural communities through food security and agricultural interventions

Capacity development and institutional support

Data, information, evidence production

Policy dialogue

FAO contributes to the protection of men and women, boys and girls at risk of gender-based violence (GBV) through its work related to food security and nutrition, poverty alleviation, restoration and strengthening of rural livelihoods – all of which are shielding factors against GBV. Several tools and approaches have been developed over the years by the Organization to raise awareness on the implications of GBV and how to prevent and mitigate different forms of GBV affecting women and girls particularly.

The Eliminating gender-based violence and protecting rural communities through food security and agricultural interventions brief, updated in 2023, presents examples of some approaches that FAO uses and a set of recommendations to prevent and mitigate the risks of GBV. The aim is to support the fight against any form of GBV by integrating protection issues in the FAO project cycle and supporting the collection and analysis of data disaggregated by gender and other social variables to generate the evidence for policymaking and planning of gender-responsive and gender transformative interventions. The guide was developed based on promising approaches and experiences of the last decade that were successfully used to address GBV and protection risks.

A framework for gender-responsive livestock development. Contributing to a world free from hunger, malnutrition, poverty and inequality

Capacity development and institutional support

Data, information, evidence production

Policy dialogue

As part of its efforts to address gender dynamics in the livestock sector, FAO partnered with the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Bank to develop A framework for gender-responsive livestock development. Intended as an overarching framework for a wide range of stakeholders along the livestock value chains, the guide informs and supports the development of action plans and guidelines to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment in livestock development. The framework is also a key tool for advocating for gender mainstreaming in livestock-related policies and regulations, supporting gender-responsive research and development projects and creating an enabling environment towards gender-responsive livestock development.

A look into the future: FAO will present the framework as a policy paper that will focus on mainstreaming gender, youth, Indigenous Peoples and people in vulnerable situations to support sustainable livestock transformation, to be presented to the Committee on Agriculture’s sub-Committee on Livestock in 2024. If the policy paper is accepted, an action plan will be developed in the future to support the implementation of the livestock framework.

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.
Sustainable wildlife management programme

SWM Programme - Bapukeli, Democratic Republic of Congo - Mukine

Therese picks up cassava leaves just outside the village of Bapukeli in the Okapi Wildlife Reserve, Democratic Republic of Congo.

Sustainable wildlife management (SWM) is the efficient management of wildlife species to sustain their populations and habitat over time and maintain ecosystem services, while assessing the socio-economic needs of men and women from diverse backgrounds. Key factors in wildlife management such as human–wildlife conflicts, illegal wild meat trade, tenure rights, poverty and food security include significant gender dimensions. If these are not properly addressed, they may exacerbate existing gender inequalities and negatively affect women and youth.

The SWM programme, an initiative of the Organization of African, Caribbean and Pacific States, funded by the European Union (EU), puts people’s rights at the centre of wildlife management. To achieve this, the programme developed a Community Rights-Based Approach, for local and Indigenous communities to participate in all project activities equally and fully. A six-step gender approach is followed, consisting of conducting gender analyses, community and household assessments; collecting sex-disaggregated data; organizing capacity development initiatives and awareness-raising campaigns; developing targeted activities to empower women; formulating and using gender-sensitive indicators; and documenting and disseminating relevant good practices. Investing in women’s traditional knowledge and strengthening their capacities is actively contributing to managing wildlife in a sustainable way, while preserving forest ecosystems and biodiversity.

In 2023, gender analyses conducted in the framework of the SWM programme in Botswana, Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guyana, Madagascar, and Papua New Guinea showed that women often face a lack or limited access to and control over natural resources, and still play a leading role in wildmeat value chains as processors, vendors, wholesalers, importers, exporters and restaurateurs.
WeCaN: Nurturing community of knowledge practice for women in dryland forests and agrosylvopastoral systems

**Advocacy and communication**

**Capacity development and institutional support**

**Partnerships**

WeCaN provides a platform for women who work in dryland forests to connect and share good practices, promising approaches, experiences and knowledge, and to strengthen their engagement and leadership in advocacy and negotiation tables related to climate change policy processes.

In 2022 and 2023, the network enhanced the capacity of civil society organizations (CSOs) and public institutions to design, formulate and implement inclusive and gender-responsive policies and programmes to ensure the equal participation of women, men, youth, Indigenous Peoples and marginalized communities in sustainable integrated landscape management and in the restoration of degraded dryland forests and agrosylvopastoral resources. In particular, WeCaN conducted ten training sessions for potential negotiators from CSOs and four roundtables between WeCaN members and public institutions, universities and private sector stakeholders to promote gender-responsive policies in four dryland regions: Latin America, Near East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia. With increased knowledge and expertise and enhanced leadership, WeCaN members have been successful in influencing gender-responsive policies in climate change negotiations.

In 2023, WeCaN organized a global advocacy planning meeting for its members. Connecting women from the Global South with each other and at different levels to confidently share their knowledge and raise voices in their own languages proved critical in empowering them and enhancing their engagement and leadership in climate change negotiations.

As part of its efforts to position women and women-led CSOs in climate change negotiations, WeCaN organized a side event at the 28th Conference of the Parties (CoP28) in collaboration with the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). On this occasion, nine WeCaN members from various countries in Western Asia and sub-Saharan Africa highlighted the key role of women in drylands regions’ leadership and shared their commitment to participate and actively contribute to policy discussions, contributing to the call for strengthening the gender equality and climate nexus in climate negotiations.

Scaling up Implementation of the Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender and its Gender Action Plan in Agriculture and the Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture Under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

**Capacity development and institutional support**

**Normative and standard setting instrument**

**Policy dialogue**

The overall objective of the programme was to advance gender-responsive climate action by scaling up the implementation of the UNFCCC Gender Action Plan and gender mainstreaming in Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture (KJWA). The programme sought to achieve these by supporting the following countries – Kiribati, Samoa, Senegal, Solomon Islands, Uganda and Zambia, on: i) developing gender-sensitive policies and making evidence-based decisions; ii) strengthening countries’ capacities to implement gender-sensitive policies and climate actions in the revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and KJWA; and iii) supporting the participation and engagement of women in UNFCCC processes through capacity building and access to information and knowledge materials related to agriculture sector.
The programme reinforced the leadership and negotiation capacities of seven women from the participating countries and supported their travel and engagement in different UNFCCC processes to enhance women's participation and address gender inequality within these processes. The establishment of the community of practice and a mentoring programme for the seven women leaders ensured a continuous policy dialogue on social inclusion in agriculture and climate change at the country level. The effective and full participation of these women at all levels of decision-making in their respective countries enabled the mainstreaming of gender-related issues into national policies, strategies, and planning (NDCs and National Adaptation Plans [NAPs]) to achieve climate-resilient and sustainable agrifood systems.

Under the same programme, the Gender equality strategy in fishery sector 2022–25 was developed and launched in Cabo Verde and a gender-sensitive value chain assessment focusing on sea moss in Saint Lucia was developed. The results show that at least 80 percent of women involved in selected value chains benefited from better access to resources, improved climate-resilient services, innovations and practices. The programme promoted better awareness of the importance of gender- and climate-responsive value chain development through global webinars and a training of trainers for producers and practitioners on gender and climate change issues in agricultural and forestry value chains. The e-learning course on gender-sensitive value chains trained 476 people in 2022.

Advancing gender-sensitive global value chains and food systems

**Technical support, capacity development and internal exercises**

**Advancing gender-sensitive global value chains and food systems**

- **Capacity development and institutional support**
- **Data, information, evidence production**
- **Dissemination and uptake**
- **FAO internal capacity development**

In 2022 and 2023, FAO intensified its efforts to disseminate the gender-sensitive value chains analysis framework worldwide. This included the development and dissemination of specific guidelines to integrate climate resilience and disaster risk management factors into the framework. FAO staff was trained on gender integration into value chains analysis.

In addition, FAO developed a technical paper assessing the linkages between gender equality, climate resilience and agrifood value chains in Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Photo: Khlong Takian, Mai Rut, Khlong Yai, Trat province, Thailand - Pisamai Natesutri, a fisherwoman, holds a bag of fish she has caught.
Technical support to countries on women’s land rights, to monitor and report on Sustainable Development Goal indicators 5.a.1 and 5.a.2

FAO is the custodian agency of SDG indicators 5.a.1 and 5.a.2 and promotes women’s land rights through several interventions carried out at different levels. FAO provides technical support to countries to monitor and report on SDG indicator 5.a.2 (Box 2), and to develop policies and programmes that promote women’s land rights. As part of its technical support, FAO also facilitates capacity development and policy dialogue on gender and land. In 2023, for example, the Organization provided technical support to the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA), contributing to knowledge sharing and fostering a lively exchange of ideas and strategies among UEMOA country focal points.

**A look into the future:** Supporting countries to report on SDG indicator 5.a.2 is a long-term process that is expected to inform gender-responsive policymaking and programming regarding access and control over land, hence contributing to inclusive and resilient livelihoods. FAO plans to strengthen its efforts to support countries in the reporting process as well as through capacity development activities and knowledge generation and dissemination.

**Box 2. List of countries supported by FAO in 2022 and 2023 to report on Sustainable Development Goal indicator 5.a.2**

- Angola, 2023
- Armenia, 2023
- Belize, 2023
- Central African Republic, 2022
- Côte d’Ivoire, 2022
- Croatia, 2023
- Djibouti, 2022
- Ecuador, 2022
- Ethiopia, 2022
- Finland, 2023
- Georgia, 2022
- Germany, 2022
- Haiti, 2023
- Hungary, 2022
- Lebanon, 2022
- Lithuania, 2022
- Mauritania, 2022
- Republic of Moldova, 2022
- Namibia, 2022
- Russian Federation, 2023
- Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, 2023
- Senegal, 2022
- Turkmenistan, 2023
- Uganda, 2022

*This list outlines the countries that have successfully submitted their reports to FAO*

[3] SDG indicator 5.a.1: Percentage of people with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land (out of total agricultural population), by sex; and share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure.

SDG indicator 5.a.2: Proportion of countries where the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women’s equal rights to land ownership and/or control.
Engaging women and men equally in managing biodiversity. Guidelines to address gender equality in policies and projects related to biodiversity

Biodiversity and associated ecosystem services are essential for food security and the livelihoods of people involved in agrifood production. Analyzing how women and men use and manage biodiversity resources and identifying their specific constraints and opportunities can help guide the development of inclusive biodiversity interventions, which, in turn, can lead to increased income-generating opportunities, women’s economic empowerment and improved involvement in decision-making, reduction of unpaid work, and improved access to productive resources, food and essential household products, services and local institutions. To better integrate gender dimensions in biodiversity-related projects, FAO published the Engaging women and men equally in managing biodiversity guidelines.

Under the FESM, the scope of the safeguards standard on gender equality was expanded to provide improved guidance on the prevention of GBV, including prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

The FESM is accompanied by an online environmental and social risk screening checklist, mandatory for FAO projects. While acknowledging that FAO projects often have positive impacts on gender equality, the checklist ensures that FAO staff considers any unintended consequences related to gender-based discrimination or inequalities, GBV and risks of sexual exploitation and abuse. Where risks are identified, projects must adhere to risk management requirements. The FESM guidance helps FAO and its implementing partners take a robust approach in their efforts to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Screening FAO projects for gender-related risks

FAO’s 2022 Framework for Environmental and Social Management (FESM) – a revision of the 2015 Environmental and Social Management Guidelines – seeks to protect people and the environment from risks that might arise from FAO projects, while ensuring active stakeholder participation and access to effective channels for voicing their concerns. The FESM is aligned with environmental and social policies of other UN agencies and FAO’s largest resource partners.

Under the FESM, the scope of the safeguards standard on gender equality was expanded to provide improved guidance on the prevention of GBV, including prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.

The FESM is accompanied by an online environmental and social risk screening checklist, mandatory for FAO projects. While acknowledging that FAO projects often have positive impacts on gender equality, the checklist ensures that FAO staff considers any unintended consequences related to gender-based discrimination or inequalities, GBV and risks of sexual exploitation and abuse. Where risks are identified, projects must adhere to risk management requirements. The FESM guidance helps FAO and its implementing partners take a robust approach in their efforts to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment.

Al Seeb, Oman - Omani coastal woman repairing a fishing net with a netting needle.
Regional highlights

**Asia and the Pacific**

**Cambodia**

**Dimitra Clubs**

- Capacity development and institutional support
- Gender transformative approaches
- Partnerships

The Dimitra Clubs are living examples of the power of community-led initiatives for social inclusion and cohesion. They promote inclusiveness, people’s empowerment and women’s leadership in rural areas of low-income countries. This unique model empowers rural people to engage in self-development and bring about lasting, community-owned improvements to their lives. Organized on a voluntary basis, the clubs trigger transformative change in local communities where members resolve problems using their own resources, without relying on external support. Implemented in 12 African countries and currently expanding in Latin America and Asia, the more than 6,000 clubs, 60 percent of whose members are women, have brought benefits to more than six million rural people. Impacts range from raising women’s voices in local decision-making to improving nutrition and redistributing domestic and community workloads. Cambodia is the first Asian country to adopt the Dimitra Clubs. There have been 40 clubs implemented in 20 villages in Siem Reap and Banteay Meanchey provinces since October 2021.

The initiative has sensitized community members to the importance of self-help and collective action, and they have inspired 1,564 people, 60 percent of whom are women, to voluntarily create clubs.

Sreyhim Aoun who is a Dimitra Club leader in Ta Pho village.

Feature story: Women’s empowerment and market skills improve rural livelihoods
In Cambodia, the approach is being implemented through a partnership between FAO and the Village Support Group (VSG) non-governmental organization (NGO) and in collaboration with local authorities. Promising results have been achieved. 80 leaders, half of whom are women, have strengthened their leadership, facilitation and problem-solving skills. In all the target villages, the clubs have identified specific problems to be addressed and have worked together to implement solutions to improve the environment and quality of life in their communities. It is estimated that more than 2,500 villagers have benefited from community initiatives led by Dimitra Clubs so far. In Kok Chan village, the clubs cleaned the playground at the local nursery to ensure that the children have a clean and safe environment in which to play. They also cleared debris, weeds and bushes from the roads to make it easier for vehicles and pedestrians to cross. Both adults and children participate in these initiatives, promoting environmentally friendly behaviours among future generations. The clubs have also encouraged waste management activities in the village to improve health and sanitation. In Ta Srey village, a community effort to collect and manage village waste was implemented, and in Ta Pho village, club leaders acted as facilitators for other NGOs to provide health and agricultural education to villagers. Furthermore, members of the club-built drainage canals in Ponley and Svay Sor villages.

Nepal

Rural Women’s Economic Empowerment

- Capacity development and institutional support
- Gender transformative approaches
- Partnerships

Fostering partnerships is at the heart of achieving SDG 5, gender equality. The Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress Towards Rural Women’s Economic Empowerment (JP RWEE) exemplifies the power of joining hands with sister United Nations agencies to address the underlying causes of gender inequality, rooted discriminatory social norms and systems, through the implementation of GTAs. The JP RWEE works through holistic and integrated interventions to create the enabling environment that is critical to achieving systemic, sustainable and transformative change and to fostering rural women’s rights. It aligns closely with national priorities and policies and is implemented in close partnership with governments at the local and national levels, local NGOs, civil society and private sector actors. In Nepal, JP RWEE contributes to the Agricultural Development Strategy (ADS), a 20-year strategy of the Government of Nepal. It particularly aligns with ADS’ Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Strategy, which was developed and adopted with technical support from the JP RWEE (Phase I) in 2017.
In 2023, during its second phase, the programme achieved significant improvements in food security and nutrition for 2,400 rural women and men, emphasizing the importance of diversified nutritional diets. Additionally, rural farmers and their groups enhanced productivity through access to climate-resilient seeds and advancements in irrigation systems and post-harvest and storage practices, contributing to income generation.

The Nutrition Field Schools played a crucial role in empowering 360 rural women, including pregnant and lactating mothers, focusing on health and nutrition transformation. Women participants improved their knowledge in better-dietary and food safety practices through increased access to inputs and public health services, complemented by a behavioural change orientation for improved use of foods and hygiene and sanitation practices. Meanwhile, 690 rural farmers enhanced their knowledge and skills on climate change adaptation practices as well as values and attitudes needed to act as agents of change to advance agricultural production and livelihood options and solutions. Nutritional status improvements extended to 1,709 women and 63 men, emphasizing sustainable consumption practices. Furthermore, 1,930 women and 60 men made evidence-based crop planning using climate information and market systems, reducing post-harvest losses. The Home-grown School Feeding Programme introduced in local governments provided market opportunities for 1,990 rural women, improving their bargaining capacity.

The Gender Action Learning System (GALS) and Financial Education and Business Literacy (FEBL) tools empowered 2,096 rural women, enabling them to devise comprehensive action plans for positive changes. Custom hiring service centers were established, reducing women’s workloads, and 200 landless individuals strengthened their capacity in collective bargaining.

In Balochistan, with financial support from Australia, FAO worked to develop and strengthen women-led agroenterprises to boost their incomes, optimize their time and provide them with information to make better investment decisions. Female extension officers received training so that about 2,000 women farmers had access to extension advice from other women, which is considered socially acceptable in the local context.

Farmers from the district of Tando Allahyar who participated in the training activities under the FAO project Improved land tenure in Sindh to enhance farming skills. (FAO, 2023g)
It also supported the creation of women-only groups focused on adding value to activities in which they were already engaged, such as processing apricots, fattening sheep and spinning wool. Women who received foot-operated spinning wheels, and were trained in their use, increased their daily output of processed wool tenfold (FAO, 2023g), which contributed significantly to their livelihoods. Women also had access to a grant scheme where they received inputs to start their small-scale agribusiness. Because poultry raising is highly popular among women, the programme provided chicks, solar egg incubators and hatcheries to farmer groups, as well as 24 vaccinated hens per household and covered 75 percent of the cost of an initial supply of poultry feed. The women were then connected with local feed dealers and other providers who would support the long-term success of their businesses. The poultry businesses were also beneficial for household nutrition. On average, women earned a net profit of PKR 3,844 per bird. Murad Bibi, poultry producer and mother of 12 in Balochistan, stated that “in two years, poultry has provided nutritious food for my family and helped me earn PKR 40,000 (about USD 250) a year from selling eggs and chickens. I tell other women how this activity has changed my life.”
Strengthening gender equality and women’s empowerment commitments in Europe and Central Asia

Data, information, evidence production

Dissemination and uptake

Normative and standard setting instrument

Building on 12 country gender assessments (CGAs), the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia developed a comprehensive overview of the key findings, gender gaps and priority issues in the region: *Gender, agriculture and rural development in Europe and Central Asia*. This publication contributes to raising awareness of the importance of considering gender dynamics in agrifood systems and rural development, but also calls for greater adoption of GTAs, including in social protection interventions; increased collection, analysis and availability of gender statistics; and enhanced synergies with civil society organizations and the private sector.

As part of its BE1[^4] and BL1 work, FAO’s Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia also published in 2023 *Gender mainstreaming in climate investments in the agriculture, forestry and other land use sector in Europe and Central Asia*, a resource guide. Building on six case studies that demonstrate the benefits of addressing gender dimensions, the guide provides a framework for integrating gender considerations into climate investing programming, particularly in Green Climate Fund and Global Environment Facility programmes. To structure its work in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment in Europe and Central Asia, FAO’s Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia developed and launched its regional gender action plan (ReGAP) 2023–26. The ReGAP addresses existing and emerging regional challenges, including post-pandemic issues, increasing conflict and violence and climate shocks, both to ensure gender mainstreaming across FAO’s areas of work and to contribute to Programme Priority Area BL1. In particular, the ReGAP aims to strengthen the capacity of staff and partners to formulate, implement and monitor gender-responsive and gender transformative legislation, policies and programmes, and to support women’s access to markets, decent employment, knowledge and innovation and improved access to and control over natural and productive resources.

[^4]: Climate change mitigating and adapted agrifood systems

Novi Sad, Serbia - Workers harvest wheat in the fields of the Institute of Field and Vegetable Crops.

[^4]: BE1: Climate change mitigating and adapted agrifood systems
Regional initiative

Leaving no one behind – greater involvement and empowerment of rural women in Türkiye and Central Asia

Capacity development and institutional support

The project provides policy support to the ministries of agriculture and forestry, through capacity development and knowledge generation, to accelerate gender equality and rural women’s economic empowerment, reduce rural poverty, and empower rural communities. In Türkiye, the project supports gender equality units at province level within the ministries of agriculture and forestry. The intervention also equips rural women in Tajikistan, Türkiye and Uzbekistan with knowledge and skills to improve their economic status, start businesses and cooperatives, while empowering them to become agents of change in their communities. By bringing together representatives of the ministries of agriculture and forestry, the project provides a platform for peer-to-peer learning through exchanges of best practices.

“I got money in my pocket for the first time with the cooperative,” reflects Çiğdem Kudret, project beneficiary. “Our father did not want his daughters to work... But I had always wanted to work and contribute. I have potential, but because there was no support around me, we stayed closed, like a closed box.”

Watch video below:

Ayşegül Selisik (right), Gender Focal Point, FAO Türkiye at the Ankara Pastası, a gluten free bakery cooperative in central Ankara, Türkiye, established with the support of UN’s FAO, and employing a both Turkish and Syrian female staff members.
Albania

Gender-responsive value chains development

Data, information, evidence production
Capacity development and institutional support

Under the Gender, Rural Equality, and Tourism (GREAT) project, two agrobusiness incubators were set up in Elbasan (Kuqan) and Leskovik to support rural women. These incubators offer a chance for newly formed women’s groups to develop their skills and knowledge, manage their production, and market their goods. To enhance these initiatives, training sessions involving representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, national extension services, field extensionists, and civil society organizations that engage with rural women in Elbasan & Korça were conducted. Over 70 participants attended these sessions, focusing on the critical roles of farm co-management and creating gender-responsive value chains. National policymakers were provided with a policy paper on farm co-management, recommendations for the development of gender-responsive agricultural extension services and better monitoring of SDG 5.1.1 and 5.1.2 based on the assessments conducted.

Related story: Women at the forefront of agrifood systems transformation

Azerbaijan

Improved food security and rural livelihoods through women’s economic empowerment

Dissemination and uptake
Capacity development and institutional support
Data, information, evidence production

Under the FAO–Azerbaijan Partnership Programme, more than 200 rural women benefited from capacity development activities and received the necessary equipment to support their business activities. Under the same initiative, FAO developed and disseminated a country gender assessment, the National gender profile of agriculture and rural livelihoods: The Republic of Azerbaijan, an important resource for shaping efforts to achieve a more prosperous and inclusive rural society, with greater opportunities for all to realize their social and economic potential. The assessment represents the first country level analysis of gender issues in agricultural and rural context, based on comprehensive collection of data. The project held its concluding conference in December 2022, celebrating rural women from different parts of the country who participated in the project.
Country highlights from the Joint Programme on Gender Transformative Approaches for Food Security and Nutrition

FAO acts as the convening agency and provides the technical lead for the Joint Programme on Gender Transformative Approaches for Food Security and Nutrition (JP GTA) which has been implemented by the three Rome-based Agencies – FAO, IFAD and WFP – in collaboration with and through financial support from the European Union since 2019. The JP GTA seeks to tackle the root causes of gender inequalities by supporting the RBAs and their partners to embed GTAs in their policy dialogues, programmes, working modalities and institutional cultures. The JP GTA has become a key platform for sharing knowledge and developing capacities on GTAs within the RBAs. The JP GTA, through the Dimitra Clubs, implemented its first activities in Latin America in the parishes of San Antonio, Canuto and Boyacá, in the canton of Chone, province of Manabí, Ecuador. The clubs provided benefits for 500 families in the area. In Eloy Alfaro, the clubs have changed the way women and men view their roles in sports, allowing women to participate in soccer training within the community. In San Antonio, half the club’s members are young people and children. Through discussions and community initiatives, they have been able to reforest the area, helping to mitigate summer heat waves.

One of the club’s members, 11-year-old Maite, shared the relief that came with the activities implemented: “When we leave our classes, we only have one tree shelter and its shade is not enough for everyone. Through our Dimitra Club, we are organizing the reforestation of this area so that in the future we can have more freshness and comfort for our outdoor activities.” In a nearby community, the Dimitra Clubs have unleashed the entrepreneurial spirit of its members, 65 percent of whom are women, who now produce a variety of products from organic cocoa and who promote sustainable and ancestral Manabi practices.

Key resources recently published by the JP GTA include the Guide to formulating gendered social norms indicators in the context of food security and nutrition and the Guidelines for measuring gender transformative change in the context of food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture. 2022 and 2023 were also pivotal years for the JP GTA with regards to country-level testing of the JP GTA’s theory of change for gender transformative programming in Ecuador and Malawi.
Sustainable livelihoods for rural women in Jalisco

The Sustainable Livelihoods for Rural Women in Jalisco project promotes technical and organizational capacity building among women to strengthen their participation in value chains with a gender perspective. The project provided training and promoted innovation in value chains, encouraged the creation of mentoring and entrepreneurship networks, created an enabling environment for gender equality, and provided training to public officials of the Government of Jalisco. The support area includes the municipalities of Autlán de Navarro, Cuautitlán de García Barragán, La Huerta, Talpa de Allende, Tomatlán and Zacoalco de Torres, where 13 groups of women were supported and trained to work in pineapple, mango, tamarind, coffee, vegetables, honey and corn value chains.

Together, FAO Mexico and the Government of Jalisco aimed to promote policies that respond to the historical needs of rural women, and to recognize their contribution to food production. A total of 345 producers in six municipalities participated, together with 13 small enterprises and 22 representatives of the Government of Jalisco. In addition, under the JP GTA, the Secretary for Substantive Equality between Women and Men, Jalisco State Government, participated in the Learning Route on Gender Transformative Approaches for Food Security, Improved Nutrition and Sustainable Agriculture in September 2023, and developed an innovation plan to put in place a capacity development unit on rural women’s leadership and to support Renata, a network of rural women in the State of Jalisco.

Click here for related resource
The training provided by the ASTA project supported the processing facility of the Women Cooperative Redi Doti and Pierre Kondre, Asajaka Weno Verwerking U.A., located in the indigenous village Pierre Kondre, to start purchasing fresh fruits from women farmers in the community and processing them into fresh and natural juice, pulp, and frozen cuts of pineapples.

Feature story: Pineapple potential written all over the sandy soil of Suriname

Watch video below:

Building a new vision for the pineapple value chain in Suriname

Suriname

The Agrifood Systems Transformation Accelerator project: empowering women in the pineapple value chain

To help pineapple farmers upgrade their production models, increase their revenue and address gender disparities in Suriname, the Agrifood Systems Transformation Accelerator (ASTA) project was formulated with a strong focus on gender equality and women’s economic empowerment. The project, that provides technical assistance, access to finance and networking opportunities to pineapple stakeholders, also organizes capacity-development activities. It is implemented in partnership with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Throughout 2023, the ASTA project hosted a series of capacity building trainings in Suriname that were aimed at strengthening farmers’ skills and their knowledge of good pineapple production practices. The project also conducted an inception workshop on gender dynamics, with a view towards creating a more equitable and sustainable pineapple sector that benefits all stakeholders, women and men alike. The specific objectives of the gender capacity building were to raise awareness on gender equality, gender roles and GBV while discussing cultural identity and traditional norms.

By empowering women pineapple farmers, who are often marginalized and excluded from decision-making processes and market opportunities, ASTA has supported the establishment of a more inclusive and sustainable pineapple value chain, where women have increased access to resources, information and markets.

Photo: In Suriname, there are more than 15 unique pineapple varieties currently grown organically. This holds huge potential for tapping into export markets.
Support to women’s cooperatives and associations in the agrifood sector of Lebanon

The project contributes to strengthening Lebanon’s local economy and social stability by empowering and improving the livelihoods of rural women. Since 2019, the project has built the skills of 255 women’s groups, with a total of 3,927 members, by enrolling them in cooperative business schools (CBS). Two representatives from each women’s group – 577 women and 44 men – participated in 22 CBS training sessions on business ideas, market analysis, operational and financial planning, financial statements, risk management, environmental and social responsibility, and performance monitoring. Each women’s group participating in the project received a wide range of complementary trainings. Mentored by the project facilitators, they were able to develop business plans for viable and sustainable income generating small-scale projects. The project started the process of signing 150 grant agreements with the selected women’s groups in January 2022.

Learn more about FAO’s gender-related initiatives in Lebanon here

In the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, FAO is working to counteract the negative impact of COVID-19 on women-led micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and prevent a further decline in their economic participation and access to markets. The project aims to increase and improve the quality of women’s participation in the supply chain by strengthening their competitiveness, access to new markets, private and public procurement opportunities and finance. To date, 379 women-led MSMEs and cooperatives have received technical business development, market linkages and financial support to transform and sustain their businesses and adopt innovative models to respond to the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, 88 percent of the targeted women-led MSMEs reported improved skills in business planning and management. Of the targeted women-led businesses, 189 received financial support, including in-kind grants and blended loans to purchase machines, equipment and raw materials to restore productivity. The ongoing hostilities and humanitarian catastrophe in Palestine jeopardize the results achieved by this project.
Reinforced partnerships expand the Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress Towards Rural Women’s Economic Empowerment scope to promote women’s access to resources and services

As a result of intense resource mobilization and advocacy, the JP RWEE programme has expanded its activities into Tunisia as its first country in the Near East and North Africa region. The programme will carry out interventions in the governorates of Kairouan and Jendouba until 2027. The project is expected to reach 3 000 beneficiaries, of which 2 220 are women. Food security and nutrition for rural women and their households are expected to improve by increasing women’s access to resources, assets and technologies critical for climate-resilient agricultural production.

A look into the future: To increase rural women’s incomes and economic autonomy, the programme will work to link women’s cooperatives to new and diversified market opportunities and to enhance their members’ leadership skills.
In 2021, FAO partnered with the International Trade Centre (ITC) SheTrades Initiative to empower women in the agrifood sector to overcome gender-based constraints and take advantage of new trade opportunities under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). The *Empowering women and boosting livelihoods through agricultural trade: Leveraging the AfCFTA (EWAT) programme* promotes women’s readiness to engage in agrifood-related negotiations around the AfCFTA, and their access to capacity building and productivity-enhancing activities to capitalize on the new regional trade opportunities created by the agreement. In two years of implementation, the programme trained 247 women’s associations in-person and 288 online on trade facilitation, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, non-tariff measures, and technical barriers to trade. The programme also published five policy briefs and conducted two private-public sector dialogues for 350 participants from 62 countries to identify the priorities for women producers, processors, and traders in the agrifood sector to be included in the implementation of the AfCFTA, and in the negotiations and implementation of its protocol on women and youth in trade.

The programme held investment-readiness bootcamps for 70 women agripreneurs in Ghana and Nigeria. The bootcamps provided information, support, and a space for participants to network with financiers. To provide tailored guidance to women agripreneurs in Ghana and Nigeria, the EWAT programme selected 20 bootcamp participants, ten from each country, for a mentorship process using the FAO RuralInvest Toolkit. The 20 participants developed bankable and sustainable business plans and pitched them to capital providers during business-to-business meetings.

**A look into the future:** FAO plans to reinforce its work at the intersection of gender, agrifood systems and trade and intends expanding the EWAT programme to other countries in Africa.

---

*Photo: © FAO / Natalija Gormanova Augustina Tufuor, the founder of Tropical Snacks, proudly displays two varieties of JOY plantain chips.*

---

**Watch videos below:**

---

*Photo: © FAO / Natalija Gormanova Augustina Tufuor, the founder of Tropical Snacks, proudly displays two varieties of JOY plantain chips.*
Kenya

Agrinvest-Food Systems project

Capacity development and institutional support

The Agrinvest-Food Systems project identified indigenous African vegetables as a promising value chain to unlock sustainable investments due to their potential to improve food and nutrition security and create rural jobs, especially for women and youth. In Kenya, the project supported the women-led Nyamira North Women Savings and Credit Cooperative Organization (SACCO), to grow and sell indigenous vegetables to a private agrifood company Mace Foods that operates in both local and international markets. The project helped to establish profitable formal contractual arrangements between Mace Foods and the Nyamira North Women SACCO. In partnership with the Nyamira County government, the project also supported the SACCO to plan production schedules and in good agronomic practices, as well as in mobilizing funds to acquire cold storage facilities in order to improve the quality and quantity of vegetables sold, access new market opportunities and enhance the livelihoods of the SACCO members and their families.

Uganda

Talking Books

Capacity development and institutional support

Gender transformative approaches

Partnerships

The Talking Books initiative, implemented in 2022 in partnership with Amplio, a nonprofit social enterprise based in the United States of America, promotes women’s access to information and communication technology (ICT) on land rights and other topics such as climate change, by distributing talking books. These easy-to-use and battery-powered audio players are designed to overcome barriers such as low literacy, local languages, lack of electricity or internet, and traditional gender norms and biases that limit women’s and girls’ access to information. Leveraging the existing networks of the Farmer Field Schools (FFS) and the Watershed Management groups, the initiative, piloted in Uganda, distributed 400 Talking Books to provide information to women and men, address discriminatory gender norms, and improve women’s access to knowledge related to their land rights. The audio messages, which can be listened to individually, with groups of friends, neighbours or family members, tell stories about women’s land rights and the benefits they bring to households and communities. The Talking Books provide concrete examples that challenge discriminatory social and gender norms, mindsets, and ways of thinking. For example, one story illustrates the benefits of joint land registration, emphasizing that when both a woman and a man own land, they are more likely to invest in it, which ultimately benefits the whole family.
The way forward

In the 2024–25 biennium, FAO seeks to position itself as a key player in promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment in agrifood systems. In this regard, FAO’s Programme Priority Area BL1 will work to advance gender mainstreaming efforts and to promote a feminist agenda within the Organization and beyond. Visibility, knowledge sharing and learning exchange efforts will be maintained in order to harvest success stories such as the ones presented in this highlights report and to learn from the good practices and identified gaps to design, expand and upscale effective interventions. Audiovisual material such as videos, photographs and podcasts are particularly powerful and will be prioritized. Learning exchanges will be stimulated to raise awareness, disseminate lessons learned, and increase understanding and action on gender dynamics in agrifood systems.

GTAs, as highlighted in the Status of women in agrifood systems report, have the potential to yield high returns on investments and should be increasingly adopted following the examples of the Dimitra Clubs and the JP GTA and JP RWEE programmes. Additional approaches and tools will be tested, and evidence gathered to further demonstrate their effectiveness. The recently launched Guidelines for measuring gender transformative change in the context of food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture are a promising tool for assessing the impact of GTAs as regards transforming discriminatory social and gender norms and building models of positive masculinity and more equitable and just gender relations. Pilot initiatives that have proven successful will be scaled up. Lessons learned collected from pilot phases will be shared with other technical areas and regions where similar initiatives could generate benefits.

Efforts will be made to extend successful programmes such as the Dimitra Clubs, JP RWEE and JP GTA, as well as other multistakeholder initiatives, to additional countries. Experiences from the EWAT project, which was implemented in sub-Saharan Africa to empower women agripreneurs and traders in the context of the African Free Trade Continental Agreement, will be used to step up FAO’s activities to support women beyond primary production, as well as to improve FAO’s work on gender and agrifood trade in other regions. Enhancing visibility of these programmes will support their upscaling and expansion. Steps will also be taken to reinforce partnerships with United Nations agencies, development partners, decision-makers and civil society organizations in order to strengthen the impact of FAO’s gender work at the global, regional and country levels and to increase gender financing in the agrifood systems, in line with the priority theme of the upcoming 68th Commission on the Status of Women “Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective.”

Furthermore, the recently endorsed CFS Voluntary guidelines on gender equality and women’s and girls’ empowerment in the context of food security and nutrition will be translated into the six official United Nations languages and widely disseminated. For these guidelines to move from paper to action, FAO will advocate for their adoption and implementation at institutional levels, including by acting as a driver and catalyst for gender-responsive investment in agrifood systems and a key provider of gender-related technical support and capacity building to its Members.
REFERENCES


FAO. 2022g. Strengthening gender-responsive climate policies and actions in aquaculture and fisheries – From research to policies. Rome. https://doi.org/10.4060/cc2699en


FAO. 2022i. Strengthening gender-responsive climate policies and actions in agrifood value chains. Rome. https://doi.org/10.4060/cc2959en


© FAO / Natalija Gormalova: Augustina Tufuor, the founder of Tropical Snacks, records the amount of plantains and sweet potatoes she purchased from smallholder farmer Mr. Boateng.

Contact
Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division - Gender Team
gender@fao.org

Some rights reserved. This work is available under a CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO licence