



Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations

## Gender equality for resilience in protracted crises

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### SUMMARY POINTS, QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



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## Background

The webinar on gender equality for resilience in protracted crises was presented as part of a series of webinars organized between May and December 2016 by KORE - the Knowledge sharing platform on resilience- within the INFORMED programme and dedicated to sharing knowledge on resilience building. This series of webinars is the result of a collaboration between EU-DEVCO and FAO strategic programme on resilience.

## Introduction

[The State of World Food Insecurity](#) published in 2010 described **protracted crises** as a special category. They are situations characterized by recurrent human-made and natural hazards, prolonged food crises, breakdown of livelihoods and insufficient governance and institutional capacity to deal with the crisis.

Over the last 30 years, an increasing number of crises have evolved from catastrophic, short-term, highly visible events to more structural, longer-term situations, resulting from a combination of multiple contributing factors. Natural disasters, conflicts and weak governance, with climate change, financial and price crises are increasingly frequent among the exacerbating factors.

In short, protracted crises have become the new norm while acute short-term crises are now the exception. Today, the average length of displacement in major refugee situations is now 20 years and we are witnessing the highest levels of displacement on record, with over 65.3 million people around the world now forced from their homes. Among them are nearly 21.3 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18.

Food insecurity and malnutrition is significantly higher in protracted crisis contexts, with a prevalence of undernourishment 3 times higher than elsewhere. In 2012, the approximate combined population in 20 countries with protracted crisis situations was 366 million people, of whom approximately 129 million were undernourished. This was approximately 19 percent of the global total of food-insecure people. Addressing food insecurity and malnutrition in protracted crises is particularly challenging, and require a high political commitment.

Challenges to improve the situation are many and include limited resources to deal with the magnitude of the problem. For example, conflicts cost USD 14.3 trillion globally, a staggering 13 % of world GDP. In addition, there is increased competition over already scarce resources, compounded by climate change.

This was the starting point for the [Committee on World Food Security](#) to begin developing policy guidance to improve food security and nutrition outcomes in protracted crises situations. The 2015 Committee on World Food Security [Framework for Action \(CFS-FFA\)](#) is the outcome of a consultative process, including all relevant stakeholders from governments, UN agencies, civil society and non-governmental organizations, international agricultural research institutions, private sector associations and private philanthropic foundations, as well as international and regional financial institutions. The objective is to improve the food security and nutrition of populations affected by, or at risk of, protracted crises by addressing critical manifestations and building resilience; adapting to specific challenges; and contributing to addressing underlying causes. Among the 11 principles, there is a specific principle on [gender equality](#) and the empowerment of women and girls.

## Summary points

### 1. Why does gender matter in protracted crises?

***Protracted crises affect men, women, boys and girls differently*** – Protracted crises restrict access to economic opportunities, cause the destruction of household assets, and change the social fabric of societies, impacting the roles of men and women, boys and girls. The economic roles of men and women change. We often see an increase in the number of female-headed households, due to military conscription, death and outmigration of the working age men. Women often take on the breadwinner role. However, as women take on this new work, their domestic responsibilities do not decrease. Household tasks like collecting fuelwood or water may become more arduous and time-consuming and sometimes dangerous.

Globally, women farmers have less access to resources, assets and services required for engaging profitably in agriculture to begin with. This often means their coping strategies are also more limited. Negative coping strategies, such as transactional sex and early marriages tend to affect women and girls more.

Gender-based violence (GBV) is the most extreme manifestation of gender inequality. Crisis situations can create or exacerbate many forms of GBV. The collapse of social structures and psychological stress may contribute to the increase of violence and aggression towards women and children in particular. GBV also impacts the agriculture sector, by reducing the capacity and productivity of survivors as a result of illness, injury, stigma and discrimination.

Men, women, boys and girls are exposed to different types of risks and challenges in crisis situations, and have different coping strategies related to food and nutrition security.

A better understanding of these gender-related differences is critical to help communities to become more resilient.

***Women are important to resilience building efforts*** - What is important to bear in mind is that, despite all these challenges, women and girls in crisis situations are incredibly resilient and resourceful, and have a wealth of knowledge and skills that underpin resilience building efforts. Often men's and women's knowledge and skills are complementary, hence, the participation from both sexes is essential. Not capitalizing on the potential of women and girls and having men and women work together can exacerbate gender inequalities and undo development gains.

***Stronger programmes with better outcomes*** – There is a strong body of evidence that proves hunger and rural poverty can be reduced more efficiently when gender equality is factored into programming. FAO (2011) estimates that agricultural outputs in developing countries could be increased by between 2.5 to 4% by granting male and female farmers equal access to productive resources. This could reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12 to 17 percent.

A recent study by UN Women and the Institute of Development Studies showed that humanitarian interventions that ensured women's participation in economic activities were the most successful in delivering food security outcomes.

Over the past decades, time and again it has been shown that resources and income controlled by women are more likely to be used to improve family food consumption and welfare and reduce child malnutrition. For instance, studies from Brazil show that child survival rates increased 20-fold following small rises in female (but not male) earned income, and that when the individual incomes of women rise, spending on education and health increases six-fold, children weight-for-height scores rise eight-fold, and height-for-age scores are four times higher.

Duflo (2003) showed that pensions received by grandmothers in South Africa resulted in significant improvements in the height-for-age and weight-for-height scores of girls. Another related study conducted in Nicaragua found that conditional cash transfers paid to women resulted in more than doubling household expenditure on milk, and in 15% increase in food expenditures (Gitter and Barham 2008).

## 2. How to improve gender inclusion in food security programming and policies in protracted crises?

- **Gender analysis** as part of needs assessments
- **Build on women's capacities** and knowledge for livelihood support
- **Reduce the workload** of women and girls
- **Ensure protection** from gender-based violence
- **Transform** gender relations

In addition to programming, we should also be looking at the enabling environment – policies, institutions, and knowledge management systems – by:

- a) Facilitating gender-responsive and participatory planning processes, as part of the formulation of policies and regulatory frameworks.
- b) Developing capacities of local level stakeholders to enable them to participate in these processes.

IMPORTANT: A precondition for gender-responsive policies is to have the relevant evidence. Therefore, gender-sensitive information systems including the collection, analysis and use of sex-disaggregated data are needed. Protracted crisis countries tend to be weak in these capacities, so gaps need to be filled with different means of collecting data.

## 3. Future perspectives - Contribution to Sustainable Peace:

FAO conducted a study jointly with the Institute of Development Studies: *Food Security, Peacebuilding and Gender Equality: Conceptual Framework and Future Directions (Forthcoming)*. The paper identifies three recommended pathways ensuring gender equality and food security and nutrition issues are addressed in peacebuilding processes: 1) Strengthening collective action such as agricultural cooperatives, community organizations and women's networks, which can foster trust and high levels of social cooperation; 2) Promoting women's agency to enhance their engagement in peacebuilding processes; 3) Restructuring markets and economic structures to help households move from subsistence agriculture and allow men and women renewed and equal access to markets.

## Questions and Answers

### 1. Do we have concrete examples of FAO's work that illustrate women's contribution to food security and peace building?

The following resources provide you with good examples of FAO's work to improve gender equality and the empowerment of women in conflict, post-conflict and protracted situations - [Dimitra Clubs](#), [Junior Farm Field and Life Schools](#), [Gender and Land rights database](#). Consistent across these projects is an in-built focus upon gender issues and a strategy to ensure men's and women's participation and address their specific needs.

### 2. What are the major challenges in gender mainstreaming in building resilience and programme development?

- A major challenge is not having a systematic approach to collect and use sex-disaggregated information: often data is collected at the household level, which obfuscates the different experiences, needs and vulnerabilities of individuals within the household.
- Socio-cultural beliefs and practices also marginalise women from decision-making for a: although there are increasing efforts to include women and ensure they benefit equally from humanitarian and development projects, socio-cultural beliefs and practices can make inclusion of women difficult and sometimes dangerous if for example it is not acceptable for women to be seen with non-male relatives, work or receive money.
- Another challenge is the limited resources and capacities to mainstream gender e.g. implement [FAO's Policy on Gender Equality](#), provide gender analysis and monitoring – **past experience has shown that gender mainstreaming does not just happen**, it still requires staff with expertise in gender to ensure that gender issues are incorporated into all projects. Unfortunately, there are still insufficient resources and capacities for this to happen.

### 3. A) Are there any striking differences depending on the local context? If yes, what are they? Are there commonalities that are gender-specific?

### B) What would be the key elements that you would recommend in a “context-by-context” approach? Are there common practical actions that truly have an impact?

The relationships between men and women, and their specific roles and responsibilities vary according to the context, which means programming needs to be context-specific to not only be effective, but also to ensure that harm is not caused. It is not possible to list all the gender-specific differences, because each context is different, and there are a multitude of contexts. Hopefully a broad, but realistic example of how local specificities exist and affect programming will suffice. For example, we know that in some contexts, women do almost all of the work and are the breadwinners in all but in other contexts, once

girls reach puberty, they are not allowed to leave the house without the supervision of their parents. These two examples reveal two very different reality for women. In the first example, women are everywhere in the public space, selling and buying produce in the markets for example. In the second example, women are largely confined to the private sphere. In both situations, it may be difficult to consult with women and ensure their participation, which would need to be a consideration for project staff. Hypothetically speaking, in the first example, project staff may hold consultations with the 'community', but only men attend because the women are too busy in both paid and unpaid work. In this instance, a project would be developed based upon the opinions of individuals who are not even involved in agricultural work and so would not be meeting the needs of the farmers, who in this case are mostly women. In the second example, a project may be designed based upon the assumptions that women are exposed to certain gender-based violence risks when they collect water or fuel for cooking. However, in this context, it is young boys who carry out these roles and the risks that they face are not known and hence their specific needs may not be met.

The key elements in a context-by-context approach are:

- Sex-disaggregated data is collected and analysed;
- A gender analysis includes information on men's and women's roles, responsibilities, opportunities and challenges in that given context. More specifically the gender analysis would detail their livelihoods, the specific risks to their livelihoods, limitations and capacities to build resilient livelihoods;
- Monitoring project impacts on men and on women and adjusting the project to ensure men and women can participate safely and are benefitting from the project as intended;
- Adjust the programme strategy when the project is found to have unintended negative impacts for women, men, boys or girls.

**4. “Gender equality refers to ensuring everyone gets the same resources regardless of gender, whereas gender equity aims to understand the needs of each gender and provide them with what they need to succeed in a given activity or sector.” Since woman have greater needs and provide better return on investment (greater impact), shouldn't FAO promote gender inequity program in favour of women? In an environment (protracted crisis) where we already have difficulties to convince our partners (and sometimes our colleagues) to target the poorest of the poor, the selection of beneficiaries according to their gender might be very challenging. Do we have FAO policy advocacy messages for our government partners to support FAO approach giving priority to women?**

In general, gender equality refers to a state or a process whereby men's and women's access to rights and opportunities is unaffected by their gender. This is different to men and women being given the same resources, because the emphasis is not on treating men and women the same i.e. receive the same aid, but the focus rather is recognising and eliminating sex discrimination that has negative impacts upon an individual or a group.

Gender equity is also broader, it means acknowledging, challenging and compensating for historical and current social, cultural, economic and political injustices and biases disadvantaging women. The goal of equity is to create equitable conditions so women and men can enjoy equality i.e. not discriminated



against when accessing certain opportunities and rights. It is generally accepted that you cannot achieve equality without equity. This is why affirmative action/positive discrimination policies exist.

As you mention, it is difficult in some contexts to convince partners to target women, or even the “poorest of the poor”. The aim is not to target women because of their sex. There are, however, many reasons why women would be targeted, including that they probably constitute the majority of those considered in need, because due to a range of factors they are more vulnerable or perhaps because they are the ones with the (complementary) skills and knowledge necessary to achieve food security and nutrition objectives.

We do not have FAO policy advocacy messages *per se*, but we do have a [Policy on Gender Equality](#) that outlines the steps FAO must take to achieve gender equality and why. Within the Policy document, you may find some useful messages to use in your communication with partners.

## **5. Almost all agencies working on resilience building are strongly advocating on mainstreaming gender in resilience building. As a lead technical agency for agriculture and food security, what comparative advantage FAO can bring in this whole context of building resilience also applying the lens of gender equality? What good practices other partners get from FAO's work?**

FAO has over 70 years' worth of experience in building the livelihoods of men and women. FAO recognises the specific roles and needs of men and women in agriculture and food security and hence gender equality and women's empowerment are at the core of our humanitarian and development work. Over the years the Organisation has worked closely with governments and other national actors, implementing strategic practices in building the resilience of rural people so they can respond to threats and recover from shocks more quickly.

FAO has a number of approaches that are considered good practices in gender and resilience building, including the following: [Dimitra Clubs](#), [Junior Farm Field and Life Schools](#), [Improving Gender Equality in Territorial Issues](#) and [Caisses de Résilience](#). Consistent across these projects is an in-built focus upon gender issues and a strategy to ensure men's and women's participation and address their specific needs. The approaches have a strong community and empowerment focus.

As an example, the FAO Dimitra Clubs are lauded as unique in its strong gender-sensitive participatory communication approach. Groups of women, men and young people – mixed or not – decide to organize themselves so as to work together to bring about changes in their communities. They meet regularly to discuss the challenges they face in their daily lives, make decisions and take action to resolve their problems. Set up in several sub-Saharan African countries - DR Congo, Niger, Senegal, Burundi and Ghana - the Dimitra Clubs have had a great success wherever they have been established.

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