



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

## COUNTRY GENDER SPOTLIGHT



# Pakistan



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# Pakistan

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Facilitator Humma Malik (right side) is guiding a woman working in a vegetable field as part of the women open school (WOS) supported by the project **Boosting agricultural production and market linkages for small-holder farmers to counter soaring food prices**, in Kot Chutta, Pakistan.

Back cover photo: ©FAO/Farooq Naeem

Women attending the women open school (WOS), where they learn about pesticide risk reduction, kitchen gardening and small enterprise development, as part of the project **Boosting agricultural production and market linkages for small-holder farmers to counter soaring food prices**.

## COUNTRY GENDER SPOTLIGHT

Gender equality is essential to achieve the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations' (FAO) mandate of a world free from hunger, malnutrition and poverty. FAO recognizes that gender equality and women's empowerment are crucial to build efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for zero hunger, and to improve nutritional outcomes for all. The imbalance between women and men undermines social and economic development as well as the welfare of families and communities.

Conflicts and global crises such as the increasingly disruptive climate change impacts and the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated pre-existing gender inequalities, threatening to create even larger social gaps and curb food and nutrition security. Women and girls, especially those in rural areas, have been particularly affected. To make hunger truly zero, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is essential to not only take gender into account but also put it at the center of policies, programmes and investment plans in the agrifood sector. Not paying attention to the gender and food systems nexus risks dissipating any efforts for sustainable food systems over time.

This brochure briefly illustrates a few examples of the initiatives FAO has been carrying out to empower women, and to support the country's efforts to promote gender equality. While contributing directly to the sustainable development framework, the spotlight on the country's initiatives is intended to support the business case for gender equality and showcase some good practices that were carried out with different partners. These can be adapted and scaled up to enable replication in other contexts. In times of multiple crises, a focus on gender equality is greatly needed to accelerate overall sustainable development and help societies build back better. Investing in women and girls is not only the right thing to do, but it is also the smartest as it has social and economic benefits for families, communities, and nations at large.



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# Acknowledgements

This brochure was prepared by (in alphabetical order by last name): Stenio Andrade, Knowledge Management and Communication Specialist FAO, Melina Archer, Knowledge Management and Communication Specialist FAO, Johanna Schmidt, Gender Specialist FAO and Graeme Thomas, external writer, under the overall technical supervision of Tacko Ndiaye, Senior Officer FAO. Technical contributions were provided by Nomeena Anis, Gender Focal Point FAO Pakistan, Uzma Batool, Gender Specialist FAO Pakistan, Maurizio Furst, Gender and Development Consultant FAO, and Safina Ijaz, Gender Specialist, FAO Pakistan. Editorial support was provided by Sadhana Ramchander and creative, graphic design and layout by Donatella Marchi, Studio Pietro Bartoleschi.



# Abbreviations and acronyms

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FFS	farmer field school
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VGRC	Village Grievance Redress Committees
WOS	women open schools



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Shugufta Yasmeen, a farmer and community mobilizer, is having a meal with her children in her home in Vehari in Pakistan's southern Punjab province.

# 1

# Introduction

## Gender equality in Pakistan

**W**ith a population of close to 230 million, Pakistan is the fifth most populous country in the world (UNFPA, 2022a). It is also one of the youngest – 61.4 percent of Pakistanis are of working age (15–64 years old) and 34.6 percent are under 15 years old (UN Pakistan, 2022). The structure of the state is federal, with four provinces; Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh. Each province is populated by multiple ethnolinguistic groups (FAO, 2022a).

Pakistan has taken progressive steps towards protection of human rights and has adopted several key international commitments focused on or embedding gender equality and women's human rights, among which are the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UN Women, 2022).

Pakistan has also witnessed progress towards gender equality in its legal and policy frameworks, including the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act 2020 and the National Gender Policy Framework 2022, reaffirming the Government's commitment towards more concerted efforts to empower women (Government of Pakistan, 2022). Women's empowerment is also the first pillar of the country's key strategic planning document called Vision 25, signaling

determination to ensure a more central role for women in political, economic and other spheres of national life (UN Women, 2018a).

Despite strong commitment to promote gender equality, implementation is weak. Pakistan ranks the second lowest country in the world for gender equality according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2022 (World Economic Forum, 2022). Gender parity gaps are particularly high in formal labor participation and only 22.6 percent of women of working age participate in paid labor (Government of Pakistan, 2022; World Economic Forum, 2022). The gender literacy gap also remains high with literacy level of men 71.1 percent compared to 46.5 percent for women, indicating significant disparities in access to educational opportunities (Government of Pakistan, 2022). Despite some progress at local level, women's political participation is low and only 20 percent of seats in the national parliament were held by women in 2021 (World Bank, 2022a). Gender-based violence remains a major issue and an estimated 32 percent of women have experienced violence, including physical, sexual, psychological and digital violence (NIPS, 2019; UNFPA, 2022b).

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the multidimensional gender inequalities and gender gaps, expanding pre-existing challenges across the country with loss of income, increased rates of gender-based violence and disrupted essential health services (Government of Pakistan, 2022).

## Gender equality in the rural and agriculture sectors

Almost two-thirds of Pakistan's population live in rural areas with half of the population living in "multidimensional poverty" i.e. acute deprivation in health, education and standard of living (FAO, 2018b). Agriculture is the largest sector of the economy and contributes to about 24 percent of the gross domestic product (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2022). It is also the main labour activity of rural women with approximately 75 percent of women and girls employed in the sector. Women are mainly engaged in small-scale farming, livestock management and fisheries but only 19 percent are in paid employment and 60 percent work as unpaid workers on family farms and enterprises (UN Women, 2018b).

Despite their significant contribution to the agriculture sector and to the household food security, rural women's work largely remains informal, unrecognized, unpaid or underpaid.

In addition, they are performing most of the unpaid care work. On average girls and women spend 11 times more hours on domestic chores, such as fetching of water and fuel (UN Women, 2018b). Rural women also have less access to technologies, training opportunities and agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilizer, labour saving machines) compared to men.

Land ownership remains a major issue and rural women are largely excluded from ownership of property. This has a direct impact on their access to credits, knowledge and skills and to food security and rural development outcomes at large (FAO, 2022b; UN Women, 2018b). Data from a demographic and health survey revealed that 99.5 percent of women in rural Balochistan, 96.7 percent in rural Punjab and 98.7 percent in rural Sindh did not own land (NIPS, 2019). Constraining gender-based social norms also implies that even in the cases when women do own property, they may not control it.

Rural women are also disproportionately affected by natural disasters and climate change. A recent ranking on a climate-agriculture-gender inequality hotspot index, shows that Pakistan is ranked number one in Asia (Koo, *et al.*, 2022). Unequal access to productive resources and services, driven by social and gender-based norms result in that rural women having limited resources to cope with and recover from climate disasters (CGIAR Gender Impact Platform, 2022).



A woman and a man cutting hay in rural southern Pakistan.



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Young villagers carrying mustard on their heads after the harvest in a village in Vehari, a southern Punjab province.

# 2

## FAO in Pakistan

**F**AO, the Government of Pakistan, and partners are carrying out initiatives to address gender disparities, promote gender equality and empower rural women in agrifood systems. The FAO programmes and projects in Pakistan have dedicated activities to address the gender gap, particularly in rural areas. These activities focus on promoting women and men's equal access to natural and productive resources and services, technologies, market information, financial assets and more.

### Improved land tenancy for rural women in Sindh

PROJECT TITLE: Improved land tenancy in Sindh

RESOURCE PARTNER: The European Union

TIMEFRAME: 2017–2021

The rural areas of Pakistan's Sindh province have among the highest incidences of poverty in the country, and about 37 percent of the rural population lives below the poverty line – higher than the Pakistan average (World Bank, 2022b). The majority of the estimated



Signing of an informal land tenancy agreement between landlord and tenant in the Lutuf Ali Khoso village, Jamshoro district, Sindh region. These agreements were facilitated by the project **Improved land tenancy in Sindh**.

7.7 million people who work in Sindh's rural areas are landless sharecroppers – known as *haris*<sup>1</sup> – and wage workers on farms. Since most of them lack clear and legally enforceable land tenure, they are left vulnerable to poverty and exploitation by their landlords. Women are especially at risk due to prevailing gender norms and inequalities, and the lack of access to and control over productive resources.

Aiming to address these issues, the Improved land tenancy in Sindh project, funded by the European Union and in partnership with the Government of Sindh, was designed to improve the food and nutrition security of poor, agriculture-dependent communities in Sindh by improving their access to land tenure and knowledge of farming. The project established farmer field schools (FFSs), which are groups of small-scale producers engaged in participatory educational activities; they were trained to use sustainable, resilient, and economically feasible agricultural practices. The idea was that this would improve productivity and income, and encourage landlords to sign stronger written informal agreements with *haris*.

The project paid strong attention to promoting gender-equitable learning, and trained 4 543 women and 4 616 men in a total of 402 FFSs, including women open schools (WOS)

<sup>1</sup> The Sindh Tenancy Act, 1950, uses the term *hari* and tenant synonymously. The project uses the term *hari* for a tenant/sharecropper (FAO, 2022a).



dedicated exclusively to women, aimed at integrating homestead farming and other labour-saving technologies and practices (FAO, 2021a). Lessons focused on improving women's agricultural and food security knowledge, including small livestock management and rearing, nutrition, integrated pest management and basic literacy (FAO, 2020b).

The project also supported the signing of informal tenancy agreements between landowners and the *haris*, facilitating more balanced relationships among them, particularly involving women farmers. The project worked to actively include women in the negotiation of these agreements, hence seeking to enable them to fully participate in critical rural activities in the province. Women were also involved in activities related to participatory village mapping, which aimed at identifying the operator for each parcel of land/plot survey number with a special reference to gender equality perspectives.

## PARTICIPATORY VILLAGE MAPPING

Under the framework of the Improved land tenancy in Sindh project, the Government of Sindh's Revenue Department, with technical support from the Asian Development Bank, promoted the participatory mapping of landholdings, including field boundaries, water availability, water quality and soil salinity. This mapping activity allowed for highlighting any disputed/contentious tenancy agreements for follow-up actions, particularly for women farmers.

In addition, the project contributed to the establishment of Village Grievance Redress Committees (VGRCs), as a tool for conflict resolution, sustainable natural resource management and the preparation, signing and registration of informal tenancy agreements between landlords and peasant farmers and *haris*. Both women and men were significantly engaged in the formation of these committees. While landlords were reluctant for women to sign the agreements, the project promoted activities in tackling gender inequalities, mobilizing landlords and peasants to accept women's role and identifying women heads of household tenants for the signings (FAO, 2021a).

***Thanks to informal tenancy agreements and VGRC, our landlord now cannot evict us at the time of harvest, and we are paid on a timely basis.***

Hussan Banu, from the district Jamshoro, Sindh, Pakistan, shares her experience on benefitting from the VGRC.

The positive effects have effectively spread in the communities. Gul Bano, a mother of seven, generously allocated part of her garden to women trainees who did not have land of their own. After learning new and effective methods of land preparation, farming techniques and use of organic pesticides, Gul today spends most of her time tending to her crops on the 15×15 ft plot of land behind her home. At the same time, she oversees the crops of the women who are using her land. Seeing their enthusiasm and the improvement in their farming skills, other women from her community have started planting kitchen gardens in their homes as well, and reaping the benefits (FAO, 2020b).

The ITLS has proven effective in introducing changes in the local traditional system, making it possible for smallholder farmers, especially women, to achieve their goals.

***I don't have to go to the market every day to purchase vegetables. Now I am proud to say that I am growing my own produce and hope to be able to save money.***

Gul Bano, a farmer and mother of seven, from Tando Allahyar village, Sindh province.



Gul Bano (second from left to right) participated in the project **Improved land tenancy in Sindh**, where she learnt improved farming techniques. She now shares her knowledge and skills with other women in her community in the district of Tando Allahyar.

## Results

The Improved land tenancy in Sindh project, has proven to be effective for improving food security of poor and agriculture dependent communities in the Sindh, by improving access to land security and teaching farmers to use sustainable, resilient, economically viable agricultural practices. The participatory village mapping led to improved landholding security of women and men peasants – farming and *hari* families – through the production of mutually agreeable landholding maps and increased transparency in the implementation of tenancy agreements with landlords. Among the agreements, at least 327 were signed between landlords and women tenants in different districts (FAO, 2021a). Thanks to the project’s gender focus, women are now also better represented to raise their voices to resolve land- and agriculture-related issues at the village level through the VGRCs created in 40 villages. Further, 1 205 women along with 1 194 men participated in meetings for the formation of VGRCs (FAO, 2020c).

# Empowering rural women through horticulture

**PROJECT TITLE:** The Horticulture advancement activity

**RESOURCE PARTNER:** The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)

**TIMEFRAME:** 2018–2023

In April 2019, a group of women farmers boarded a bus in Peshawar, Pakistan, for a 460-km trip to a large fruit and vegetable farm near Faisalabad, in Punjab province. There, at the heart of one of Pakistan’s richest agricultural regions, they were able to see, at first hand, plastic tunnel greenhouses producing bountiful harvests of tomatoes, cucumbers, onions and chilies (FAO, 2019a). This two-day visit was remarkable because not only was it their first-ever exposure to the latest innovations in horticulture (and, for some, the first trip outside their home districts near the border with Afghanistan), but more importantly, all of the 10 farmers were women.

It was no small feat for women raised in some of Pakistan’s most conservative rural areas, where constraining gender-based norms dictate that women cannot interact with men outside the households, to travel by themselves or own land or other property (FAO, 2020d).



Women are cultivating vegetables under a high tunnel. This initiative is part of the **Horticulture advancement activity** project.

The women's visit to Faisalabad, organized as part of a FAO development project in 18 of Pakistan's poorest rural districts, showed that, when women are given space and choice, positive change is possible.

With funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the project modernized commercial horticultural value chains, with a special focus on expanding rural women's access to on- and off-farm income opportunities (FAO, 2018b). By building women's capacities, it helped overcome barriers that have long kept them from engaging in decent, productive and remunerative work. At the same, it opened exciting prospects for women entrepreneurs, paving the way for women's economic empowerment and gender equality.

***On my exposure visit to Faisalabad, I saw tunnel farming, and that motivated me to apply for a grant for a tunnel for off-season vegetable production in my village.***

Noor Jamala, Gusar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

The project operated in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces, where livelihood opportunities for rural women are more limited than they are for men. A FAO study (FAO, 2020d) of gender roles in the project area's horticultural value chains found that women make up a large informal workforce. They engage at lower levels of value chains, doing the weeding, harvesting, grading and some household-level processing and storing. Since this work is seen as part of women's "household chores", it generally goes unnoticed and unpaid. Women farmers and those in other parts of the value chains have the added disadvantage of low levels of schooling and high rates of illiteracy. Men are the links between the farm and the market. They organize supply of inputs and sale of the produce, in addition to performing the heavy lifting during production. Men also occupy the upper levels of value chains, as wholesalers, traders, retailers, and exporters (FAO, 2020d).

In preparation for its interventions in the two provinces, 56 project staff were trained on gender concepts and the integration of gender into the project cycle. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, in close collaboration with the provincial Department of Agriculture on the design of gender-sensitive approaches, a two-day gender sensitization workshop for extension staff was also held and attended by 26 officers, including eight women from FAO. To facilitate training, the project then supported women farmers who were interested in participating to organize themselves into FFSs where, advised by extension staff, they could experiment with improved technologies and production practices on demonstration plots (FAO, 2020e).



Women beneficiaries of the **Horticulture advancement activity** project have a stand in an agricultural fair in the Punjab province and visitors are viewing and purchasing their products.

The formation of these women groups was considered a first step towards economic empowerment. Of the 50 FFSs established between mid-2019 and mid-2020, 13 were exclusively dedicated to women farmers, benefitting 266 women working on kitchen gardening, apple, apricot, and tomato production. Training covered topics such as plant nursery management, biological control of pests and diseases, the use of farmyard manure in place of chemical fertilizer, and crop-specific harvesting and post-harvest techniques. Sixty women were trained in numeracy so they could make basic calculations (FAO, 2020e).

The women's groups also participate in "exposure visits", a form of peer-to-peer learning popular in South Asia, which enables farmers to learn successful and sustainable farming practices used in areas similar to their own (GREEN Foundation, 2022). For example, the 10 farmers who visited Faisalabad were already cultivating tomatoes, peas, okra and green chillies, but had never used tunnel greenhouses. During the visit, they also saw drip irrigation in action, familiarized themselves with new tomato varieties, and learned improved practices for produce grading, packaging and storage. The project reported that "the visit enhanced their motivation to apply similar technology in their own areas" (FAO, 2019a).

***I used to use bamboo sticks to support my tomatoes, but it was expensive and time-consuming, now I've learnt to use twine, which is very simple and economical, and will make my life easier.***

Gul Sanama, Amal Kot, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

## 🎯 Results

The project facilitated women's economic empowerment by providing training in new techniques for processing, packaging and value addition. Thanks to these activities, the participants were able to sell their produce and processed products at higher prices. The project interventions also created space for women's mobility, allowing them to participate in training and events not only locally, but in other parts of Pakistan as well. At the closing ceremony, FAO and USAID officials commended the project for empowering women and youth by providing them with improved access to resources, specialized skills in agricultural technologies, and entrepreneurship (FAO, 2022c).

# Agribusiness for improved livelihoods and nutrition

**PROJECT TITLE:** Australia Balochistan agribusiness programme  
Phase I and Phase II

Empowering women in Balochistan through  
agri-entrepreneurship

**RESOURCE PARTNER:** Australia

**TIMEFRAME:** 2012–2016 (Phase I)

2017–2022 (Phase II)

2017–2019 (Empowering women in Balochistan through  
agri-entrepreneurship)

The three combined initiatives (“the programme”) operated in six districts of Balochistan’s arid western plateau. Some of the objectives were to develop and strengthen agro-enterprises, owned and managed by women that would increase their incomes, reduce their workloads and allow them to make independent investment decisions. Major components of the programme supported women’s economic empowerment by addressing the social and economic hurdles



Farmers attend an awareness-raising session on kitchen gardening in the framework of the project *Empowering women in Balochistan through agri-entrepreneurship*.

that are preventing women from engaging in more productive work. FAO trained women extension officers so that some 2000 farming women had access to extension advice in “a socially acceptable manner” (FAO, 2019b). It also encouraged the formation of women-only groups focused on adding value to activities they were already performing, 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, 2019b). This contributed to raising their incomes as well as helping them invest more in their livelihoods.

The programme also introduced a grants scheme to support activities that improved household nutrition while increasing women’s income (FAO, 2019b). The scheme offered women wishing to start a small-scale agribusiness inputs and training in return for a small part-payment. One of the most popular activities it funded was raising poultry as eggs and chicken meat are a good source of protein in the family diet and provide occasional extra income for the household. In addition, household level poultry production is mostly owned by women and managed by women and children (FAO, 2017a). In this sense, it is traditionally accepted that the income from poultry sales remains with women to use at their discretion, often for family expenditures, such as school fees and medical care (FAO, 2021b).



Farmers attend an awareness-raising session on kitchen gardening. This initiative is part of the project **Empowering women in Balochistan through agri-entrepreneurship**.



The programme had a two-pronged strategy in poultry production. It worked with women at the household level for medium-scale poultry production through the provision of chicks and transfer of technology (solar egg incubator), and it supported farmer groups in commercial poultry production by offering hatcheries on a cost-sharing basis (FAO, 2021b).

On request, the programme delivered to each household, 24 vaccinated laying hens, with recipients paying 25 percent of the cost. Thereafter, the women were responsible for maintaining and expanding their flocks. The programme covered 75 percent of the cost of an initial supply of poultry feed, and helped connect the women with the local feed dealers. It also linked them with the provincial government's livestock department for supplies of vaccines, and with the private sector retailers of ready-made poultry shelters. The upkeep of a hen over its two years of productive life cost the women about 950 rupees (USD 4), while earnings from its eggs and in the end meat- totalled about 4 800 rupees (USD 22), giving them a net profit of 3 844 rupees (USD 18) per bird (FAO, 2017a).

***In two years, poultry provided my family with nutritious food and helped me earn 40 000 rupees (about USD 250) a year from selling eggs and chickens. I tell other women to see how this activity has changed my life.***

Murad Bibi, a poultry producer and mother of 12 in Balochistan

***Apart from feeding my four children with these eggs, I sell some in the market for a good price. I earn my livelihood from the poultry business with dignity and have started sending my children to school.***

Pari Jan, a woman farmer in Balochistan

### **Results**

By 2020, 1469 women had been trained in poultry management and provided with a total of 36 350 birds (FAO, 2017b; FAO, 2021b). An evaluation found that the women were earning enough from egg sales to increase their spending on personal and household needs, and to enrol their children in school. Thanks to the extra household income and increased engagement of family members in paid work, there were fewer conflicts between family members among the participants (FAO, 2021b).



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Farmers from the district of Tando Allahyar who participated in the training activities under the FAO project **Improved land tenancy in Sindh** to enhance farming skills.

# 3

## Conclusions

**T**his brochure features some examples of the initiatives that FAO is carrying out to end hunger, malnutrition and rural poverty, while empowering rural women and girls and reducing gender inequalities. It also intends to give visibility to the potential of rural women and men in achieving food security and improving nutrition.

As part of its effort to “leave no one behind”, FAO collaborates with the Government of Pakistan and other partners to promote the equal participation and decision making of women and men in rural institutions and in shaping laws, policies and programmes; as well as their equal access to and control over productive resources, services, income, markets and decent employment.

These initiatives illustrate how FAO has contributed to building women’s resilience, increasing their skills and knowledge and enabling them to boost their livelihoods through production and income-generating activities. These efforts contributed directly to many of the country’s national strategies and plans.

FAO continues to support the Government of Pakistan's efforts to promote rural and agricultural development, paving the way for building more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood system.



A woman shifting peanuts at the Galla Mandi Market, one of the biggest grain markets in Multan, Pakistan.

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## COUNTRY GENDER SPOTLIGHT

**The Country gender spotlight, puts a spotlight on countries, showcasing examples of initiatives that have improved the lives of rural people and empowered rural women. Building on each country's context, these initiatives illustrate how the inclusion of principles that promote gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and men can ensure more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable agrifood systems.**

### Pakistan

This brochure highlights some of the good practices the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has carried out with the Government of Pakistan and other partners, to promote gender equality and build the resilience and economic empowerment of rural women and men. Some of the initiatives include building skills and knowledge for income generation, improving women's access to land and more. These examples show how FAO is working with rural women and men to boost agricultural production, improve their livelihoods and secure their nutritional and food security.

Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division  
[www.fao.org/gender](http://www.fao.org/gender)

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
Rome, Italy