

6. Closing the gender gap for development

Evidence from an extensive body of social and economic research surveyed in this report confirms the contributions women make to the agriculture sector and rural enterprises, the gender-specific constraints they face in accessing resources and opportunities, the potential benefits for the sector and society that could be achieved by reducing those constraints, and lessons learned from policies, programmes and interventions aimed at closing the gender gap in agriculture. The conclusions are clear: (i) gender equality is good for agriculture, food security and society; and (ii) governments, civil society, the private sector and individuals, working together, can support gender equality in agriculture and rural areas.

Enabling women to achieve their productive potential requires many of the same reforms that are necessary to address constraints facing small-scale farmers and rural people in general, but additional care must be taken to ensure that women's voices are heard in the design and implementation of policies and interventions. No simple "blueprint" exists for achieving gender equality in agriculture, but some principles are universal and many lessons can be learned about best practices. Basic principles for achieving gender equality and empowering women in agriculture include the following:

- **Eliminate discrimination against women under the law.** Governments have a fundamental responsibility to ensure that their laws and policies guarantee equal rights for men and women to control assets such as land and to receive services such as education, extension and credit. Governments also have a responsibility to ensure that institutions and officials at all levels are fully supportive of the realization of equality under the law. Officials must understand the law and be held accountable for implementing provisions and policies on gender equality. Governments and civil society must work together to ensure that women are aware of their rights and have the support of their governments, communities and families in claiming their rights.
- **Strengthen rural institutions and make them gender-aware.** Strong, effective and inclusive rural institutions are essential for poverty reduction, economic development and the empowerment of small producers and the rural poor, particularly women. Efforts are required to ensure that women and men are equally served by rural institutions such as producers' organizations, labour unions, trade groups, and other membership-based organizations. Other public and private service providers that operate in rural areas, such as extension services, animal health services and microfinance organizations, should consider the specific needs of men and women to ensure that their activities are gender-aware. Women's groups have an important role to play, but other rural institutions must also be accessible to women and responsive to their needs.
- **Free women for more rewarding and productive activities.** The most valuable asset most poor people have is their own labour, but many women are compelled to spend too much of their time in drudgery: fetching water, carrying wood, and processing food by hand. Such work has to be done because water pumps, modern fuel sources and grain mills are missing. Investments in basic infrastructure for essential public services can liberate women from this drudgery and free them for more rewarding and productive work.
- **Build the human capital of women and girls.** No single intervention can by itself address the multiple challenges

enumerated in this report, but building the human capital of women and girls is fundamental. General education and the ongoing transfer of information and practical skills will broaden the range of choices women can make and give them more influence within their households and communities. Building women's human capital makes them better farmers, more productive workers, better mothers and stronger citizens.

- **Bundle interventions.** Some assets are complementary and the constraints women face are often mutually reinforcing. Interventions therefore should be appropriately bundled and sequenced and should consider women within their broader social contexts. Relaxing one constraint may be helpful, but others may soon become binding, so it is often necessary to address multiple constraints. What is more, it is impossible to separate women's economic activities from their household and community roles and responsibilities. The gender-related constraints women face due to power relations within the family and community may affect their ability to engage in economic activities and retain control over the assets they obtain. Bringing men into the process will help ensure that progress towards gender equality is broadly beneficial and sustainable.
- **Improve the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data.**²² Understanding of many gender issues in agriculture – including crop, livestock, fisheries and forestry sectors – is hindered by the lack of sex-disaggregated data, and inadequate analysis of the data that exist. Agricultural censuses should focus more attention on areas in which women are relatively more active and collect sex-disaggregated data on ownership of, access to and control over productive resources such as land, water, equipment, inputs, information and credit. They should avoid gender biases in the concepts and definitions

used to ensure that the resulting data accurately highlight gender interactions and inequalities in the agriculture sector. More detailed time-use surveys would lead to greater understanding of women's contributions to household production and welfare as well as to their time constraints. The quantity and quality of sex-disaggregated data for policy-making can be increased through the integration of agricultural censuses and surveys and the retabulation of existing census data. Gender differences and their implications may be more visible when sex-disaggregated data are collected, analysed and presented at subnational levels and by age groups.

- **Make gender-aware agricultural policy decisions.** Virtually any agricultural policy related to natural resources, technology, infrastructure or markets will affect men and women differently because they play different roles and experience different constraints and opportunities in the sector. Good agricultural policy requires an understanding of the gender dimensions at stake. Because some agricultural and gender issues are location-specific, these may best be addressed through location-specific assessments and tailored policies and programmes. Because interventions may have gender-impacts that are difficult to predict, policies and programmes should include the collection of baseline data and rigorous monitoring and evaluation, and practitioners should be prepared to reformulate their activities in response to unforeseen developments. Making women's voices heard at all levels in decision-making is crucial in this regard.

²² FAO has developed the *Agri-Gender Statistics Toolkit* (FAO, 2010i), providing technical guidance to support the enhanced production and use of sex-disaggregated agricultural data.