The war in Ukraine has led to extensive damage, civilian casualties, and disruptions to the country's sustainable development path. Prior to this, Ukraine had made commendable progress towards the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), although considerable challenges remained, including equal access to productive resources in rural areas and women's participation.

The war has undone many development advancements, leading to a renewed set of priorities involving humanitarian assistance, recovery and reconstruction. In light of these events, the Ukraine-UN Partnership Framework 2018–2022 was suspended in 2020, resulting in the establishment of the UN Transitional Framework for Ukraine 2022–2023, which focuses on urgent recovery needs. To offer adaptive and relevant support, the UN Country Team in Ukraine, including FAO, is now developing a new Common Country Analysis. This comprehensive analysis will facilitate a cohesive approach to Ukraine's recovery and sustainable development, fostering stakeholder coordination. Subsequently, the design of a Cooperation Framework set to commence in January 2025 will be informed by this analysis. Among other issues, this framework will identify priorities for gender mainstreaming across all levels and sectors, including emerging priorities.
International Day of Rural Women celebrated across the region

Amid the gloomy picture caused by the war in Ukraine, and climate change and other social pressures undermining the quality of life in rural areas, the region is celebrating the International Day of Rural Women (IDRW) with a series of events. In Tajikistan, FAO and development partners will join the local government of Khatlon region in an exhibition where FAO’s women beneficiaries will present the products they have made under the FAO-led projects. Participants will also benefit from an FAO consultant’s masterclass session on “Pest and Disease Control in Millets”.

In Uzbekistan, an international forum on “Women’s Role in Ensuring Food Security and Innovations Development in the Agricultural Sector” was held on 11 October, with the participation of WB, UNDP, FAO, USAID, GIZ, ADB and the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA). Stay tuned for the next issue of the regional gender newsletter to learn more about the outcomes of IDRW celebrations. Until then, development partners are invited to check out the latest interactive story based on the FAO’s Status of Women in Agrifood Systems report.¹

New resource guide to mainstreaming gender in climate investments

FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia’s (FAO REU) latest resource guide was published in July 2023.² The guide is the result of extensive collaboration and expertise sharing between technical officers, country programming staff, gender focal points and their alternates. It is designed as a go-to resource for decision-makers, development practitioners, trainers and civil society organizations to mainstream gender equality in climate investment projects and programmes in the Europe and Central Asia Region. The guide proposes a practical conceptual framework for gender mainstreaming in climate investment programming with a particular emphasis on the Green Climate Fund and Global Environment Facility modalities.

Shedding light on practical examples and lessons learned relating to gender mainstreaming from the FAO regional climate investment portfolio, the guide features six gender mainstreaming experiences from Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Kosovo³, Tajikistan and a regional project in Central Asia. These case studies demonstrate how key results contribute to women’s empowerment, by increasing their access to decision-making mechanisms and realizing women’s pivotal role in taking forward climate change adaptation and mitigation work at the three levels of intervention (policy, institutional and beneficiary).

Readers can find out about practical tools, roadmaps and approaches that were developed in different country settings. The FAO REU team plans to organize capacity building sessions in the autumn of 2023 to present the resource guide and promote gender mainstreaming in climate investments in the region.

Gender equality at the UN Food Systems Summit agenda

The UN Food Systems Summit took place at FAO’s headquarters during the last week of July. More than 2 000 participants from 180 countries attended the event, including over 20 heads of state and government and 125 ministers. During the summit, a side event⁴ was organized by the “Making Food Systems Work for Women and Girls” Coalition for Action to elaborate on the role of gender equality and women’s empowerment in transforming agrifood systems in the light of two fresh reports.

First, Lauren Phillips, Deputy Director in FAO’s Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division, presented

¹ The story is available at https://www.fao.org/interactive/women-in-agrifood-systems/en/
² The resource guide is available at https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc6412en
³ References to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)
⁴ The session recording is available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4HwtW08WcA
FAO’s Status of Women in Agrifood Systems report[^5] which provides recommendations and lessons learned on how to increase the linkages between gender equality, women’s empowerment and food systems transformation for the achievement of poverty reduction and food security. In her presentation, Lauren Phillips underlined that women in agrifood face multiple inequalities including access to land, equipment, extension services and decision-making mechanisms. This is aggravated especially in times of shocks and vulnerabilities, which have gendered consequences. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, women were more vulnerable to losing their jobs and facing food and nutrition insecurity. FAO’s report urged food system actors to produce better data disaggregated by sex, age and other socioeconomic dimensions, to intervene at scale to close down asset and resource gaps, and to focus on women’s empowerment in food system interventions.

Second, Jemimah Njuki, Chief of Economic Empowerment at UN Women, presented the findings of the Global Food 50/50 2022 Report[^6] which entails an assessment of 51 global food system organizations based on 11 variables related to inequality of opportunity in career pathways inside organizations and inequality in who benefits from the global food system. The report found that only two percent of the board seats of global food system actors are occupied by women from low-income countries.

During the side event, Reema Nanavaty, from the Self-employed Women’s Association (SEWA) representing 2.5 million women workers most of whom are in the agrifood sector in India, emphasized that organizing along the value chain from seed banks to food processing facilities is key to improving women’s collective bargaining power. Yet, this is rather a slow process which requires patience and long-term commitment. As Maria Helena Semedo, Deputy Director General of FAO, noted in her closing remarks, justice in the food system can only be achieved if women directly and vocally shape its transformation.

[^6]: The report is available at https://globalfood5050.org/2022-report/

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**Capacity building workshop in Ankara as part of the “Leaving No One Behind” project**

A four-day workshop under the “Leaving No One Behind: Greater Involvement and Empowerment of Rural Women” project was held in Ankara in June 2023. Implemented with the support of the FAO-Türkiye Partnership Programme, the project aims to reduce rural poverty, accelerate gender equality and empower rural women in Türkiye and Central Asia. The workshop brought together 20 women and 20 men participants from the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry representing extension and forestry staff mostly from the provincial directorates. The workshop agenda focused on gender development concepts and practical approaches to achieve socially inclusive outcomes.

The highlight of the workshop was the presentation by Professor Ayşe Ayata which focused on the findings and recommendations of the baseline assessments and gender and forestry study conducted in the project’s pilot provinces of Türkiye – Burdur, Kahramanmarş and Ordu. The assessments and the study showed that improving the quality of life for women in rural areas and women’s access to skills and technologies are both necessary to stop rural depopulation and maintain the vitality of rural areas, which can then ensure food and nutrition security in Türkiye.

In addition, the workshop covered the 2030 Agenda, gender-responsive disaster risk reduction, and a special focus on FAO’s practical tools for addressing gender issues in the agricultural sector, particularly in the provision of rural advisory services. To put the improved skills into practice, participants developed action plans for their respective units in the pilot provinces.

The workshop entailed a field trip to the Kınalı Eller women’s cooperative[^7], located in Beypazarı district in Ankara. The cooperative shared its experiences in organizing rural women. The “Leaving No One Behind” project will continue

[^7]: More information is available at https://kinalieller.business.site
working with partners to help exchange good practices and practical information to address gender equality challenges.

**New Gender Spotlight Initiative report for Kyrgyzstan**

FAO is working with rural women and men across Europe and Central Asia to boost agricultural production, improve livelihoods and ensure food and nutrition security for all. To document and disseminate local good practices in empowering rural women, FAO publishes the Gender Spotlight Initiative series. The latest issue, published in July 2023, showcases FAO’s inspiring experience in Kyrgyzstan.

The report shines a light on the outcomes of three projects: the Joint Programme of Rural Women’s Economic Empowerment, the Cash+ Pilot project, and the Mountain Partnership Products initiative. Within its pages, readers will discover how the dedicated FAO team tackled the challenges faced by local communities, learn about the approaches they took, and explore the remarkable results they accomplished.

For example, the Joint Programme of Rural Women’s Economic Empowerment worked with 5,147 rural women to boost their self-confidence, leadership and status in local communities by forming 498 self-help groups in the country. These groups steered joint economic activities and mobilized collective resources such as savings, experience and knowledge. Almost 3,000 self-help group members generated additional income in baking, poultry farming, sewing, beekeeping, handicrafts and more. Through the project, more than 3,000 women farmers increased their productivity and secured an additional income of USD 250 to USD 480 per agricultural season. The report also features FAO’s renowned Cash+ experience in Kyrgyzstan, which was also implemented in Armenia and Tajikistan. As a key social protection tool, the Cash+ project improved welfare, crop productivity, women’s and children’s nutrition, and resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report is not a dry read. It tells the story of how the local project team went the extra mile to amplify the voices of women who had been left behind, and we read how the Barskoon-based “Topchu” art group’s felt enjoyed a Haitian-Italian fashion designer’s touch and exhibited at Milan Fashion Week in 2021. FAO’s Gender Spotlight Initiative publications are a rich source of inspiration for those seeking to empower women through innovative and tested methods.

**Gender-responsive value chains and rural advisory services in focus in Albania**

The “Gender, Rural Equality and Tourism” (GREAT) project is in full swing in Albania with two fresh reports scheduled for publication by the end of 2023. First, the “Gender Responsive Value Chain Analysis in Albania” report outlines how to select and develop gender responsive sustainable value chains. The second report presents the findings of a qualitative study that assessed the extent, progress and challenges of providing gender-responsive agricultural extension services in the country.

Following this path, the first report identified gender responsive potentials in developing the vegetable value chain in Elbasan, dried mushrooms, dried fruits and forest...
fruits in Puka, and winter food (zahire), whole fruit jam, and pickle production in Leskovik. The report noted that, “The development of these value chains should enable women’s skills enhancement through training courses, provision of know how and relevant information on technical issues, food safety and standards, financial and analytical skills, as well as facilitating women’s decision making, access to markets and networking”.

“Our priority was first to identify sustainable value chains that can empower rural women. In Albania, the project team collaborated closely with rural women to learn about their strengths, challenges and perspectives. Access to up to date knowledge and skills development is an area that needs constant attention beyond the project. In parallel with the value chain identification, the project team conducted in-depth analysis of rural advisory services in order to suggest concrete policy recommendations for targeted and gender-responsive approaches,” says Anna Jenderedjian, Gender and Social Protection Specialist at FAO REU.

Based on the analysis, and in close collaboration with the local municipalities, the GREAT project is in the process of establishing two agribusiness incubators. The incubators serve not only economic purposes in developing the selected value chains but also meet social and cultural needs, as women interact, collaborate and enhance their networking, bargaining and decision making abilities, share working spaces, and benefit from child care facilities under the same roof.

Agricultural extension services are instrumental to sustaining and further developing these achievements. Based on the FAO Gender and Rural Advisory Services Assessment Tool (GRAST) methodology, the second report identified two major shortcomings at national, organizational and field levels that hinder the achievement of the relevant SDGs and the country’s progress towards inclusive and sustainable agrifood systems. First, without specific data on the different challenges faced by rural women and men in agriculture and rural development, it is hard to create services that address women’s unique needs in farming, especially because women’s labour is often unpaid or informal. This further limits opportunities for developing services driven by a sound understanding of the gender-specific barriers that prevent farmers to move towards more resilient, productive and sustainable agrifood systems. And, second, the lack of well-articulated and mainstreamed gender and social inclusion policies for targeting and reaching diverse women and men clients impedes the progress towards national goals and commitments for reaching gender equality. The study emphasizes that for sustainable development of agriculture and related sectors, it is crucial to ensure that agricultural extension services are grounded on the principles of gender mainstreaming.

Merita Meçe, the Coordinator of the GREAT Project, underlines that, “to continuously reduce the gender gaps in agricultural productivity and to ensure a sustainable food system, it is necessary to implement gender-focused innovative practices that incentivize gender equitable agricultural extension service delivery in rural areas”. As such, the project is committed to delivering lasting change in rural Albania.

### Empowering rural women in the Republic of Moldova: a response to the effects of the war

The ongoing war in Ukraine is having a significant impact on food security, both nationally and globally. The war has left behind more than 6 million refugees, destroyed critical infrastructure, and disrupted agrifood supply chains. The Republic of Moldova was particularly exposed to these impacts due to its proximity to the front line. The country is coping with record-high inflation, especially in food and energy prices, a decrease of economic growth, and loss of markets for agrifood products. In addition, Moldovan agrifood businesses had to reorient key supply chains away from Ukraine despite additional logistics costs, which hampers the competitiveness of local products and services.

Coupled with these pressures, in 2022, the agriculture sector experienced one of the most severe droughts of the last few decades. Maize, sunflower and legumes were among the most affected crops, with up to 40 percent losses compared with the last five-year average. Smallholders, and among these women farmers, have been disproportionately affected by the war and climate change due to their numerous vulnerabilities, including lower skills and knowledge, and weaker access to retail markets, agrifood logistics, extension and certification services, and public support programmes.

FAO has been assisting local partners to ensure that agricultural production is continued, climate-resilient agricultural practices are applied, and the evolving food security situation is monitored and documented. In this scope, FAO provides smallholders and women

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farmers with emergency support to help them cope with socioeconomic, climate and energy crises.

“Our aim is not only to mitigate the immediate impacts of the war but to tackle structural challenges that local smallholders and women farmers have long been coping with. We aim to make sure that all farmers have equal opportunities in adding value to their products through sorting, processing, packaging and commercializing their products at a fair price,” says Tudor Robu, Assistant FAO Representative in the Republic of Moldova.

So far, more than 4 050 households and smallholder farmers have been provided with seeds of critical crops, fertilizers and animal feed, along with information materials and capacity building training. Beneficiaries included livestock farmers from southern rayons, as well as maize, sunflower and corn growers from provinces that were affected most by the drought. One-third of the beneficiaries were women and one-fifth were young farmers. Tudor Robu describes the scope and methodology of FAO’s comprehensive response in the following way:

“We seek to build a nexus between emergency response and development support to bring about lasting impact. In doing so, we will help establish farmer field schools and women-led cooperatives in the country, while implementing our emergency response which includes direct transfer of critical agricultural inputs.”

The emergency programme team is now building 15 farmer field schools in the country that will involve women and young producers, and will undertake demonstration activities, introduce new technologies for resilient production and offer much needed tools and equipment. The team has already identified cereals, vegetables and berries as priority value chains. The latter two in particular have substantial women’s involvement and high potential for improving production, value addition and marketing standards. As a key example, the programme envisages a streamlined domestic supply chain for high-quality fresh berries and better vegetable yields through fully equipped greenhouses.

Promoting climate-smart agriculture and cooperative entrepreneurship is a daunting task which requires local allies. For instance, in Rîșcani rayon, in the northwest of the country, with around 60 000 inhabitants, the programme team collaborates with the local farmers’ federation, informal community leaders and women’s associations in reaching out to women farmers, identifying the main challenges in the value chain, and organizing women farmers to cooperate.

“We believe that establishing women-led cooperatives will be an innovative step in empowering women farmers to cope with the structural challenges. We found that women-headed rural households were among the worst affected by the war and the drought. These households generate their income through one or two cows in their backyard. They sell fresh milk to local collection centres and market their surplus cheese and other dairy products. Distributing agricultural inputs such as animal feed and expanding their market access via women-led cooperatives will save these cows, as productive assets, from being slaughtered and help women-headed households to feed their families,” says Tudor Robu.

“So far, 20% of advance payment subsidy applicants in 2022 were women and one-fifth of the investment subsidy recipients and half of the number of women who applied for subsidies. As a result, one-fifth of the investment subsidy recipients and half of the advance payment subsidy applicants in 2022 were women farmers. The numbers illustrate a progress in levelling the playing field for smallholders and women farmers, especially at times of crisis.

As the European Union granted candidate status to the country in June 2022 and set a target date of 2030 for accession, the Republic of Moldova needs the equal participation and contribution of rural women and men in this challenging journey. FAO continues to support national partners in making this journey equally appealing and beneficial for women farmers in the country.

Acknowledgements

The FAO REU gender team would like to thank the following colleagues for their contributions and support in preparing this issue of the newsletter:

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