

What Works for Women

Proven approaches for empowering women smallholders and achieving food security



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PRACTICAL ACTION



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Self Help Africa

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Acknowledgements

This backgrounder was inspired by the presentations and discussions at the Roundtable on “Food Security and Gender: Approaches that work for women smallholder farmers” co-hosted by ActionAid International and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) on 5 October 2011, with participation from CARE, Christian Aid, Concern Worldwide, Find Your Feet, Oxfam, Practical Action, Save the Children, Self Help Africa, and the University of East Anglia (Dr Nitya Rao).

The backgrounder is the result of a collaboration between Ruchi Tripathi and Youjin B. Chung (ActionAid International); Karl Deering (CARE); Nadia Saracini (Christian Aid); Robin Willoughby (Concern Worldwide); Olivia Wills (Find Your Feet); Monique Mikhail (Oxfam); Hilary Warburton (Practical Action); Daphne Jayasinghe (Save the Children); Jenny Rafanomezana and Marina Churm (Self Help Africa).

Design: Youjin B. Chung

London
March 2012



“Before working in agroecology, cacao was the main crop and the most important crop placed under men’s responsibility. Women now fight and acquire the independence to plant other crops. We can increase the family’s food intake as well as its income.”

– Andrelice “Déo” Silva dos Santos, from Bahia State, Brazil

“I never imagined I could become a village leader. We have a very hard time with water shortages and drought in this area. We know the climate is changing and droughts are more likely, so we are conserving water in better ways.”

– Sar Ren, from Peam Commune, Sanaki Meanchey District, Kampong Chnang Province, Cambodia



“For the first time, I was given my own land to work on. Now with water I have two crops already. It gives me more than enough food, and I can sell the grain to pay for fees, medical bills, and extra help in the fields. I can even support my extended family who don’t have their own land.”

– Ipaishe Masvingise, from Gutu District, Zimbabwe

“I have improved my knowledge and I share this with my children. Previously I was a silent woman, I feared expressing myself and trembled with fear. Now I have a radio programme through which I spread the word on the work of the Kamayoq [community-based extension agents] and on technological advances.”

– María Huaman Quispe, from Pampa Ccalasaya Community, Canchis Province, Cusco Region, Peru





“I remember the first time I sold all my tomatoes. I made about £37. It felt so good when I had all that money in my hand. I look back to that time as being my proudest moment. I used that money for the walls of my house.”

– Leyla Kayere, from Mnembo, Bvumbwe, Malawi

“We set up a cooperative around our gardening activities. The standard of living in my community has improved a lot and we now have a better economic situation. I hope that our group will collect more in our reserve fund so that we can help and assist other members of the community.”

– Mavluda Akhmedova, from Dekhanabad, Tajikistan



“After learning new agricultural techniques and being linked to a local cooperative, I can now produce up to 200kg of maize. I also grow green vegetables. Previously, I only ate one meal a day and I had no porridge. Now we have an abundance of food. It is because we are growing food in a good way.”

– Genevieve Manishimwe, from Nyange Village, Murambi Cell, Gakenke District, Rwanda

“The Self Help Group is of great help to all of us. Because we are Santhals (a tribal group) the government officials didn’t used to listen to us. Now we are strong as a group and they have to listen to us. We don’t depend on anybody anymore.”

– Muklu Tudu, from Mahuapather Village, Dumka District, Jharkhand State, India



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Introduction

What changes do we need to empower women smallholders and achieve food security? This question has been asked repeatedly over the past several decades, but transformative changes in both public policy and practice have been few and far between. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), closing the ‘gender gap’ in agriculture – or increasing women’s contribution to food production and enterprise by providing equal access to resources and opportunities – could reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12-17 per cent, or by 100 to 150 million people.¹

In fact, over the last few years an unparalleled attention has been given to the issue of food security and the importance of smallholder agriculture, with particular recognition of the role of women farmers. The 2011 FAO flagship report, *The State of Food and Agriculture*, focused on the vital role of women in agriculture, and the 2012 UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) has as its priority theme: *The empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges*. The global momentum around this theme is also reflected in the draft Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition (GSF) of the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS)² and in the 2009 UN International Assessment on Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology (IAASTD) report, which all emphasise the growth and changes in women’s involvement in agriculture and rural development.³

In this context, nine international development agencies have produced this briefing to share the lessons learned based on their experience of promoting gender equality and working with women smallholders and rural women over many decades. This paper concludes with a number of recommendations for policy makers on measures to help close the gender gap in agriculture.

Current realities for women smallholders

Women are a critical component of agriculture in developing countries, comprising an average of 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force,⁴ and contributing to ensuring food security and nutrition. They are farmers, unpaid workers on family farms, paid or unpaid agricultural labourers on other farms and agricultural enterprises, food processors and vendors, home gardeners, cooks, and carers for children and the elderly. Moreover, due to their specific roles in food production⁵, many women are the repositories of knowledge about cultivation, processing, and preservation of nutritious and locally adapted crop varieties. Given the right possibilities, such knowledge can allow women to be innovation leaders in sustainable agriculture.

Unfortunately, despite their wealth of knowledge and capacity, women farmers are neglected by policy makers, often not being recognised as 'productive' farmers. Their farm work is frequently unpaid or undervalued; they tend to be excluded from decision-making; and they do not have equal access to land and other resources, credit, markets, education, extension services and inputs. In Africa for example, women own just 1 per cent of agricultural land, receive only 7 per cent of extension services and access less than 10 per cent of agricultural credit offered to small-scale farmers.⁶

Rural women also face time and labour constraints due to unpaid care work responsibilities and lack of adequate rural infrastructure. They tend to carry chief responsibility for child care within the family and community. Poor water, sanitation and energy infrastructure in many developing countries adds to their time and labour burdens for water and fuelwood collection. Like their work as farmers, women's unpaid care work is overlooked by policymakers, often at the expense of potential increases in agricultural productivity and the wellbeing of women and their families.

Furthermore, women are often disproportionately affected by poverty and hunger. This can be even more extreme for women from the most marginalised and socially excluded communities such as Dalits in South Asia which face discrimination in their access to basic services and entitlements.⁷ Social norms can impose even more restrictions on women's mobility, decision-making power and control over family income, limiting their ability to develop small businesses.

Overcoming these kinds of gender inequalities can have powerful social and economic impacts. Food security interventions often focus on improving food production and food security at the community level and/or household level. However, even when targeted towards women producers, they frequently overlook intra-household gender dynamics. Yet, research from a number of countries indicates that women are more likely to channel the income that they control into the nutrition, health and education of their children.⁸ Thus, improving the status of women within the household and at the community level would deliver significant improvements to agricultural production, food security, child nutrition, health and education.

Lessons from working with women smallholders

1. Collective action is key to economic and social empowerment



“The establishment of the honey cooperative has brought the market closer to us and it also helps us to save money. With our saving gradually fattening we are contemplating how we should best spend it. We are thinking about other businesses that we could set up close to our hives.”

Wubalem Shiferaw, 24, a member of the Mecha Village Honey Cooperative, Amhara Region, Ethiopia⁹

Collective action is a powerful means for women to increase productivity and access to markets whilst sharing knowledge, information and productive assets including land, livestock, and credit. Supportive collective structures – such as producer organisations, farmer field schools, community-managed savings and credit groups, enterprise and marketing cooperatives, cow banks and water sharing committees – help smallholders through economies of scale, greater bargaining power, facilitating access to agricultural services, and strengthening political voice. They also reap additional social benefits by creating a safe environment for women to meet, share information and tackle social problems such as gender-based violence. Groups can be especially empowering for women, providing opportunities to participate in decision-making and take on leadership roles.

To maximise the benefit of women’s collective action, it is important to understand what strategies are most effective in different contexts and for different groups of women. In some contexts, women-only groups can provide “enabling spaces” where marginalised women can gain self-esteem, confidence and skills by creating a space for them to identify their needs, understand their rights and begin to articulate their demands. Women-only groups can also provide a step towards wider participation in mixed groups and other decision-making forums. For example, in Northeastern Brazil, women farmers have created a forum through which they exchange their knowledge and experiences on agroecological farming, while strengthening their identity as rural women and building their self-confidence. For many, this forum helped to demystify the common notion that women are “helpers”, whose labour is of less value than that of men. Politically, it served to unveil the diverse types of oppression suffered by women.¹⁰

Involvement in mixed groups can also be empowering, although work is required to raise equity within the groups. Activities pursued by many cooperatives are generally skewed towards men. For example, in many countries land is usually required as collateral for some activities, but women are not usually the registered owners of the land they farm. Some approaches that have helped address this gender imbalance include: working directly with individual cooperatives to raise awareness of the issue of women's participation and empowerment, supporting cooperatives in drafting gender-sensitive by-laws, making their activities and benefits relevant and accessible to women, and training 'model' cooperatives on gender-sensitive business plan development.¹¹

CASE STUDY I. Promoting Gender-Sensitive Cooperatives in Ethiopia¹²



As Africa's largest producer of honey and beeswax, and the world's fourth largest beeswax producer¹³, smallholders in Ethiopia have a ready market. Yet, low productivity, poor quality, and limited market access force smallholders to sell locally at lower prices. Through formation of the Zembaba Bee Products Development and Marketing Cooperative Union, small-scale producers were provided training in production techniques and the use of new technology that was more socially acceptable for women.

The cooperatives and project partners encouraged local government to expand extension services and help the cooperatives to build capacity, ensuring that training was available at times when women could attend. New village honey collection centres allowed women to engage in processing and marketing and gave them better access to information. Women also began making the specialist overalls, gloves, and veils required to handle bees. These measures have helped to increase women's confidence and overcome the gender specific barriers to women's participation in honey production.

Women have organised themselves into self-help groups and are negotiating with cooperatives to revise the by-laws on women's membership and introduce a functional adult literacy intervention. Gradually through this collective action, they are becoming involved in the management of the union and cooperatives.

Due to all of these efforts, farmers who previously produced small quantities of low-quality honey have increased production by 400% in two years, boosted household incomes by 200–400% and are now exporting certified organic honey to international markets. Increased incomes have enabled smallholders to invest in education and other services. Moreover, women's participation in beekeeping has jumped from 1% to 17%, and their training involvement has increased to 30%.

2. Access to productive resources is essential

Smallholder farmers need secure and stable access to productive resources including land, water, forests and fisheries, as well as access to inputs and appropriate financial services (including social transfers¹⁴) in order to invest in and improve their production systems. They also need appropriate extension services, training, technologies and access to appropriate marketing facilities. This need is particularly acute for very marginalised and excluded communities who face particular issues in securing access to land.

Natural Resources – land and water

“Owning a piece of land only would enable us to live with dignity and without hunger. We have no other way except to continue our struggle till we get land.”

Kindati Lakshmi, Thimmayapalem in the Mahabubnagar District, India¹⁵



Unequal gender relations mean women and men have unequal access to assets and productive resources. Women generally have smaller landholdings¹⁶ and less security of tenure than men, and are also more heavily dependent on common property resources (which are increasingly being privatised and degraded) for animal fodder, fuel, food and other essentials.¹⁷ Women especially need access to sufficient, safe, and clean water for farming and domestic use. Men and women must be represented in local community structures so that they can make decisions about management of water and irrigation schemes and ensure that women farmers receive what they need.¹⁸ According to the FAO, if women had equal access to land and other productive resources as men, they could increase their farm yields by 20-30 per cent.¹⁹ Gender relations also mean women and men acquire and use resources in different ways in different contexts. A full understanding of these differences is essential to inform gender-sensitive development programmes.²⁰

CASE STUDY 2.

Sensitising rural women, men, and traditional leaders on women's land rights – Case of Malawi²¹



In Malawi, as in several other African countries, national laws dealing with women's right to own land coexist with (often contradictory) a parallel set of customary laws. For example, when divorced women return to their natal villages (birthplaces), they may only use land through their male members of the family, or be allocated a piece of land by the Chief or their clan members. In many cases, however, most widows are chased away from their natal villages.

As part of the Women's Land Rights in Southern Africa (WOLAR) Project, rural women, men and traditional leaders have been sensitised on women's rights and national land policies, and were educated through the REFLECT (Regenerated Freirean Literacy through Empowering Community Technique) methodology.²² Currently, there are 91 REFLECT Circles across Malawi, and as of 2010, a total of over 2,000 landless women were allocated land through the WOLAR Project. Some chiefs have also changed their mindsets and attitudes towards women's right to land ownership:

"I am Baldwin Chavula, also known as Group Village Headman (GVH) Chakoma. I was one of the participants who attended the dissemination of the national land policy as part of the WOLAR project. I never knew that women also had the right to own land, because according to our culture a woman is supposed to use her husband's land. When I came back from the training I held community meetings about women's rights to land and also shared the information with my children. Since the training I have allocated land to 11 women. The biggest piece of land allocated is five acres which has been given to a woman who is HIV positive."

In Machinga District in the Southern Region of Malawi, 109 women were allocated land and are now able to control and own their farm produce. Sifati Justin Kwalakwata, a member of Tithandizane REFLECT Circle in Ngokwe village of Machinga District narrates her story:

"All these years, land ownership and the control of land use including the proceeds from the land were men's issues. You could grow maize, rice, pigeon peas and other farm produce, but all these were controlled by the men. Through the WOLAR project and the REFLECT Circles, we, women, came to realise that the state of being landless was a serious human rights issue and that we had to find solutions. We now have access to land and have control over the produce and income. A man manages his own piece of land and a woman does likewise. We now have the choice of whether or not to sell our produce and how much to sell. As a result, there are fewer conflicts between women and men over who controls the farm produce and the proceeds from sales. We appreciate this change because we feel liberated now since we are able to decide what to do with what we have and when we want".

Appropriate extension services, research, and technologies



“My biggest problem is the back-breaking exercise of watering the vegetables using ‘buckets’ in the morning and evening. If I can get a water pump, pipes, rubber and other irrigation equipment I can produce more vegetables for my household consumption and sale in schools.”

Regina Jackson, Akiriamet Village, Simotwa Sub-Location, West Pokot District, Kenya²³

Women farmers, are often not recognised as productive farmers, and rarely receive appropriate farming inputs, extension services, and training or benefit from new agricultural research and technologies. The type of technology promoted by governments is often incompatible with women’s needs, and underestimates the value of diversified production practices and the range of farming tasks for which women are responsible.²⁴

Hence, in order to achieve gender equality, investment should be made in extension services and training specifically targeted towards women, gender-sensitive technologies, and changing discriminatory policies and practices that negatively affect women’s work outside the home (e.g. policies on land, credit, labour legislation, marketing, etc.).²⁵ Some examples of gender-sensitive practices include: using community radios, investing in literacy programmes for rural women, supporting farmer field schools and farmer-to-farmer exchanges, increasing opportunities and “mentoring” support for women producers’ organisational and technical skills, and establishing plant clinics in local markets.

Women involved in agriculture can be key informants and agents for research and development of appropriate technologies. One example of a technology that has proven to be helpful for women smallholders is drip irrigation. This technology significantly reduces time spent watering vegetable gardens, helps make efficient use of limited water supplies, and facilitates crop diversification and year-round production, thereby reducing the risks of waste associated with household food storage and enhancing income.²⁶ In order to develop gender-sensitive technologies, women farmers should be involved when priorities for agricultural research and technology are being debated and decided.

Markets and financial resources

“The Savings and Credit Co-Operatives (SACCO) Group has changed our relationships with our husbands. Our financial independence has given us an equal footing in the home with a particular impact on the quality of our relationship with men. The husbands now treat us with more respect and family decisions are now made as equal partnerships.”

Fusa Savings and Credit Cooperative, Ethiopia²⁷



Gender inequalities are prevalent in both traditional and modern agricultural value chains. Cultural stereotypes about men and women’s work govern the role women can play in cultivating commercial crops and marketing produce. Women tend to be confined to petty trading, buying and selling small volumes directly for retail in local markets, while men tend to predominate in wholesaling into regional and international markets.²⁸ As traders, women face challenges posed by inadequate transport infrastructure as well as social restrictions over their mobility. In modern value chains, men are concentrated in more remunerative and permanent positions since they generally control household land and labour, while women predominate as temporary wage earners or casual labourers in agro-industries.²⁹

To market their produce, women need timely, reliable and accessible market information. Loan finance and credit are also essential so that women smallholder farmers can pay for inputs, improve farming, and develop small business enterprises to empower themselves economically³⁰ and support their families. Moreover, they need advice, formal and informal training and short courses on how to access markets combined with better infrastructure.

However, accessing financial services (including micro-credit) can be extremely difficult for women smallholders. Women smallholder farmers need accessible information on types and terms of credit facilities in languages that all can understand. In West Africa, East Asia and Central America, rotating savings and credit associations have helped overcome the challenges for women in accessing financial services. These structures have shown great success in terms of low-cost replicability, building confidence, and creating new opportunities.³¹ The poorest may benefit from community-managed savings and credit groups which can help them improve the way they manage money, and when appropriate, can provide small loans on flexible and competitive terms and without requiring collateral, to meet emergency needs or for investment in small enterprises.

Perhaps most importantly, women smallholders and marginal farmers need support to enable them to make informed decisions before applying for credit (which in some circumstances can place farmers in unmanageable debt, resulting in loss of land or other assets put up as collateral), and in developing viable business plans.

3. Economic empowerment is not enough, underlying gender inequalities must be challenged

“Before, it was only the men who had the right to discuss issues relating to the development of our village. When I became the leader of a women’s group in my village, I ensured that we invited the men to our meetings so that they would come to understand our issues. Over time, most of them have changed their attitudes and as I speak, all the men in our village now respect their wives’ needs and views.”

Fudia Conteh, Kathirie Village, Sierra Leone ³²



Rather than be passive recipients of aid or extension programmes, women smallholders need to drive their own development agenda. However, women face structural barriers to engaging in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. They often lack political voice and representation, and are largely excluded from the development of agricultural research, policies and programmes. They are more likely to be isolated from formal decision making mechanisms and under-represented in local and national forums. As a result, women are less likely to be able to voice their needs or lobby for investments in infrastructure and services that are specifically needed to help them secure their livelihoods and increase their income generating opportunities. This may be the case even where a broad spectrum of women pay taxes. In Ghana’s informal sector, for example, research showed a very high proportion of women paying taxes but most of these reported not seeing the investment in services and infrastructure that they need.³³

These challenges are often compounded by the lack of a policy and legislative framework designed to protect and promote women’s rights. Poor public services are a structural barrier to women’s empowerment as it increases the burden of care, making it difficult for women to engage in paid employment, continue their education and participate in public life.³⁴ Therefore, women’s economic empowerment must be accompanied by measures to address broader gender issues including power imbalances, gender stereotypes and discrimination against women. Among and between both men and women, activities that promote discussion and mutual understanding of issues such as gender roles, unequal workload, rights and responsibilities are important for raising awareness, informing programmes and policies and ultimately addressing gender inequality.

In fact, evidence shows that interventions that address the underlying causes of gender inequality can bring about positive impact in curbing malnutrition. For example, in Bangladesh, it was found that by addressing the causes of deeply-entrenched power inequalities between men and women, poor sanitation and poverty, in addition to direct nutrition interventions, led to a significant reduction in child stunting; the stunting among children between 6 and 24 months old was reduced by 4.5 percentage points per year.³⁵ However, for very marginalised and excluded communities, addressing gender inequalities alone is not enough; interventions also need to guarantee non-discriminatory access to basic services and entitlements.³⁶

In short, integrated and holistic approaches to agricultural development and food security should be rights-based. Women have human rights and need to be supported in their productive and social reproductive roles. Development actors need to recognise women as farmers in their own right, and their unpaid work (including farm work and care work) needs to be valued and recognised. In doing so, women would be more able to make informed choices regarding their time, labour, income, leisure, and social reproductive roles at multiple levels: the household, communities, and within work spaces.

CASE STUDY 3.

Women's Participation in Decision-Making – Case of NGOMA in Kenya³⁷



Mrs Hellen Yego, Secretary of NGOMA, is taking an active role in decision-making processes that affect smallholder farmers, particularly women. © ActionAid Kenya

NGOMA is an organisation for small-scale dairy and maize farmers representing seven districts in the Rift Valley Province. First launched in 2002, NGOMA has been organising dairy and maize farmers to address the problems related to production, processing and marketing, and to advocate for agricultural policies that support small-scale farmers. Also meaning “drum” in Swahili, NGOMA symbolises small scale farmers’ rallying call for the revitalisation of the maize and dairy sectors through active policy engagement.

Mrs Hellen Yego is a farmer, a trained horticulturalist, and the Secretary of NGOMA. Realising that women smallholder farmers in the dairy and maize sector do not benefit proportionately from national agricultural policies, Mrs Yego initiated the NGOMA Campaign to advocate for policies that provide equal access to inputs to rural women farmers, and to educate and mobilise them to come together to speak out on the issues that affect them the most. At the national level, the NGOMA Campaign is playing an active role in influencing the formulation of agricultural policies, such as the National Agriculture and Livestock Extension Programme (NALEP) and the National Agricultural Accelerated Input Access Programme (NAAIAP). Mrs Yego has also been active in the campaign against the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the EU and the ACP states (including Kenya). She is also serving as a Trade Ambassador of the Ecofair Trade Dialogue, making the public and the EU policymakers aware of the negative impacts of trade agreements and the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) on the lives of smallholder farmers in Kenya.

4. Disaster resilience and risk management approaches must be gender-sensitive and integrated with development interventions



“After the disaster, we received training to learn how to save ourselves. I learned that if there is a signal on the radio between level 1 and 3, then the water is going to come and we have to prepare. I learned how we have to carry dry food so we can stay alive. I did not know this before. In the future, if there is another event, I will shelter in the brick building nearby which has two floors, or I will go to the embankment. There are also going to be boats in the river in the future which will have flags, so if the rivers rise too much, or if there is going to be another emergency, they will signal to us to let us know in advance.”

Rashida Khaton, Satkira District, Bangladesh³⁸

Disasters result when people face natural hazards with a high degree of vulnerability and exposure to risk. Resilience can be understood as the capacity to maintain social structures, productivity and food security in the face of disasters, climate change, seasonal fluctuations and other risks and uncertainties. Women and men involved in agriculture are affected differently and may need different approaches to reduce the risks they face, adapt to change, cope with the aftermath of disasters and rebuild lives and livelihoods.³⁹ Women are often instrumental in incorporating risk reduction in household economies, yet this frequently goes unrecognised.⁴⁰

The people best placed to define problems and identify solutions at the community level are the communities themselves. It is important to note, however, that women and men experience risks differently. For example, women may lose crops and livestock for which they are primarily responsible, with direct detrimental impacts on family food security. Where women are responsible for fetching water, they may be particularly vulnerable to drought, with impacts on their workload.⁴¹ The involvement of women in disaster risk management activities, including hazard mapping, planning and implementation of mitigation measures, is hence critical and often the key to introducing disaster risk management at the household level.

Women’s access to information about hazards and trends is also often less than that of men, and it is important to address this problem in disaster preparedness and early warning systems.⁴² In the face of climate

change and other uncertainties, women and men are also likely to employ different adaptive/coping strategies which need to be supported.⁴³ Innovations for risk reduction (such as crop insurance) need to be gender-sensitive and accessible to women as well as men. Gender-sensitive programmes can empower women to identify their households' specific vulnerabilities and to make decisions towards planning for disasters and organising community-based mitigation measures. In a climate-constrained world, addressing poverty and vulnerability and their structural causes, including gender inequalities in access to secure and sustainable livelihoods, is essential.⁴⁴

CASE STUDY 4.

Disaster preparedness programme tailored to women – Case of Tajikistan



In a high mountain community in Tajikistan, food security is an increasing challenge due to shifting seasons that are negatively impacting women's kitchen gardens. In a dialogue with local men and women, simple technologies were introduced to help them adapt to climate change. Cold frames (simple wood and glass frame structures that act as small-scale greenhouses) were constructed to start herb and vegetable seedlings earlier in the spring and to extend the growing season into the fall. This resulted in increased household production, crop diversity and nutrition.⁴⁵ Another disaster preparedness programme tailored to women is being conducted in an area vulnerable to floods, landslides, and earthquakes. Female trainers run women-only groups to build confidence, encourage them to voice concerns, and deliver training on skills such as first aid and disaster management. These women then train other women in their community. Recently, one of the prepared communities noticed an imminent landslide, sent out a warning, evacuated the area, and saved the lives of 35 households.⁴⁶

Building smallholder farmers' resilience to climate change will require greater adoption of technologies that ensure both food security and ecosystem health and make the most of limited resources through measures such as water and soil conservation. In Cambodia, for example, smallholding rice farmers are developing integrated ecological farming systems through 'Multi-Purpose Farms (MPFs)', which combine rice production with fruit trees, multi-purpose trees, perennial crops, vegetables and seasonal crops, animals, and fish. The MPF system has been instrumental in improving and ensuring the sustainability of farmers' livelihoods, especially for women smallholders (with fields from 0.2 to 0.6 ha) who cannot otherwise produce enough food to support their

families.⁴⁷ Such techniques can help to support the development of small and medium enterprises which can provide diverse and sustainable sources of income to help cushion families through periods of scarcity.

Women's knowledge is important for managing disaster risks and climate change adaptation. Crop diversification and the preservation of indigenous crop varieties, which hold the potential to support adaptation to climate change as well as provide nutritional benefits, are other areas in which women farmers make a huge contribution. For example, the Gene Campaign in India promotes gene-seed banks, in which women involved in self help groups conserve agricultural biodiversity by collecting and multiplying varieties of legumes, oilseeds and vegetables. The project identifies useful genetic traits, revives underutilised crops, and also provides training in the processing of minor forest produce and locally available fruits and vegetables.⁴⁸ Other examples include community seed banks supported by the Paraiba Semi-Arid Network (ASA-PB) in Brazil⁴⁹, and the seed banks of neglected and under-utilised crops supported by the Sustainable and Equitable Development Academy (SEDA) in Nepal.⁵⁰

As well as local-level mitigation and adaptation projects, women can also play a key role as advocates for change. In India, thousands of women farmers were mobilised in a campaign by the Deccan Development Society (DDS) and the Millet Network of India for the inclusion of millets in the definition of food grains in the National Food Security Bill and the decentralised public distribution system. Women smallholders have over many years demonstrated the potential of millets to contribute to food security, nutrition and productivity in drought-prone and poor soil areas, and advocated for these changes based on their experience and knowledge.⁵¹

Conclusion and Recommendations

Women employed in agriculture continue to face many specific barriers preventing them from fulfilling their potential as farmers and entrepreneurs and undermining their food security, nutrition, health and incomes as well as that of their families and communities. The robust approaches documented in this paper attest to the effectiveness of targeted support to women smallholder farmers. Nonetheless, current agricultural policies and programmes continue to be gender-blind and largely disadvantageous to women smallholder farmers.

The inability to fulfil their potential also hinders the achievement of national food security goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Furthermore, despite clear evidence that tackling the gender gap can lead to improved food security and nutritional outcomes, many multilateral and bilateral donors are still failing to invest in gender-sensitive interventions. Indeed, gender issues are explicitly incorporated into less than 10 per cent of official development assistance (ODA) that is directed toward agriculture⁵²; and the 2011 Gender Audit of the FAO found 'woefully meagre financial resources for, and time allocated to, gender mainstreaming.'⁵³

Creating a more enabling environment for women smallholders and improving food security outcomes requires agricultural and nutrition policies, resources and programmes that recognise the potential of women's multiple roles as food producers and providers, such as those documented in this paper. With the G8 Summit and the EU 2014-2021 budget plans afoot and the MDGs deadline looming in 2015, the golden moment for change is now.

Recommendations for national governments

- **Address discrimination in land ownership and tenure** by taking immediate steps to guarantee equal rights to land, property and inheritance for men and women, independent of their civil status; and implement policies and programmes to facilitate women's access to and control over land, water and other natural resources.
- **Overhaul extension services to make them gender-sensitive**, for example by increasing the number of female extension agents, creating accessible demonstration plots within villages, establishing pro-female farmer field schools and farmer-to-farmer exchanges, and setting up gender-sensitive learning and evaluation mechanisms to improve extension service

delivery. Given their many responsibilities, women may not have time to access extension services so these need to be tailored to women's routines and needs.

- **Engage women in policy-making and planning processes** at all levels, for example by establishing quotas and targets for women in decision-making roles, legislating to remove barriers, and encouraging the establishment of effective collective structures that are gender-sensitive.
- **Integrate gender dimensions in nutrition and agricultural policies and research** by uncovering the social, economic and political barriers to women's participation in agricultural production and marketing and seeking to minimise them.
- **Ensure that disaster risk reduction at all levels addresses the different vulnerabilities and risks faced by women and men (especially in the most marginalised and vulnerable communities).** Community-level structures and mechanisms for disaster risk reduction, such as disaster preparedness programmes, crop diversification, and agrobiodiversity preservation, should be adequately resourced and offer equal opportunities for women, men and children to contribute to decision making, planning and implementation of disaster preparedness, mitigation measures and disaster response.
- **Increase investments in gender-sensitive public services and infrastructure** such as clean and renewable energy and childcare centres, which can significantly optimise women's time and resources spent in care and reproductive activities, and allow them to engage in other productive and leisure activities.
- **Invest in rural infrastructure beyond agriculture**, including health, education, and water and sanitation services, to reduce burdens on women's time, and increase their health and well-being to enable improved livelihoods
- **Increase investment in women smallholders and ensure funding is gender-sensitive and reaches women smallholders.** Governments should use sex-disaggregated data to track funding and improve food security planning and policymaking, as well as to track progress against gender specific indicators. Nonetheless, policies that specifically target women are not enough on their own. Existing policies that intentionally and unintentionally reinforce gender discrimination must be addressed. For example, some government-sanctioned cooperatives require household heads to be members; this often leaves out women. To address embedded gender barriers such as these, governments should implement planning processes that identify the specific constraints women smallholders face to accessing information, knowledge, markets, technologies, and natural and productive resources such as time constraints caused by unpaid care work.

Recommendations for multi-lateral and bilateral donors

- **Allocate the necessary financial, human and material resources to strengthen gender-sensitive food security and nutrition interventions with priority given to supporting sustainable smallholder farming and gender-responsive essential services in rural areas.** Gender responsive budgeting and budget tracking can help to achieve this aim.
- **Support more research partnerships involving collaboration among poor farming communities, extension services and agricultural scientists and ensure research programmes examine what kinds of sustainable agricultural techniques, equipment and crops can most benefit women.**
- **Introduce a nutritional dimension into agricultural programmes;** this could involve increasing the diversification of smallholder agriculture, providing a range of local varieties rich in micronutrients, monitoring nutrition-related outcomes, and supporting agricultural research that is conducted from a nutritional perspective.
- **Encourage national governments to develop, implement and monitor gender-sensitive policies and legislation,** relating not only to agriculture, food security or nutrition, but also to issues such as property/land rights, access to productive resources, social protection and basic services, and protection from domestic violence and non-discrimination.
- **Collect, track and analyse comprehensive sex and age-disaggregated data on food security and nutrition that is timely, accessible and comparable;** and promote gendered analyses of food security and nutrition related issues, including - but not limited to - food price volatility, large-scale land acquisitions or “land grabs”, and land titling. A good example is the monitoring and evaluation system of Feed the Future - the U.S. government’s global hunger and food security initiative - aims to track gender impacts through three main approaches: 1) engendered performance monitoring; 2) gender-focused impact evaluations; and 3) the development and utilisation of the Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI).
- **Support and engage actively with women’s civil society organisations and networks** (such as farmers’ groups and women’s cooperatives) and facilitate their systematic inclusion and participation in the development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of agricultural research, policies and programmes.

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