



The Gender Tool Box gathers knowledge material and method support on gender equality in the form of Tools, Briefs and Thematic Overviews.

Gender equality is achieved when women and men, girls and boys, have equal rights, life prospects and opportunities, and the power to shape their own lives and contribute to society.

## [ BRIEF ] Women and Food Security

**There is a strong link between food security, good nutrition and gender. This brief gives an overview on why and how to consider gender aspects in both short-term humanitarian assistance and long-term development cooperation that address food security. A gender approach to food security can enable shifts in gender power relations and assure that all people, regardless of gender, benefit from, and are empowered by development policies and practices to improve food security and nutrition.**

**Every woman, man and child has the right to adequate food.** In far too many cases, women and girls are overrepresented among those who are food-insecure, partly because women often are denied basic human rights such as the right to own property, to find decent work, and to have an education and good health.

People's overall access to food relies to a great extent on the work of rural women. Women comprise, in average, 43 percent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries.<sup>1</sup> Hence, securing women's human rights is a key strategy in assuring food security for all. Women are involved in a variety of agricultural operations such as crops, livestock and fish farming. They produce food and cash crops at subsistence and commercial levels. At community level women undertake a range of activities that support natural resource management and agricultural development, such as soil and water conservation, afforestation and crop domestication. Women often have

unique perspectives on, as well as understanding of local biodiversity importance for the development of adapted and improved varieties. Also for dietary diversity women have a decisive role. Poor households headed by women often succeed in providing more nutritional food for their children than those headed by men. There is a strong correlation between a higher level of gender equality and lower level of child mortality.<sup>2</sup> Cultural traditions and social structures often mean that women are more affected by hunger and poverty than men even though women, and in particular expectant and nursing mothers, often need special or increased intake of food. And too often, child hunger is inherited: a mother who is stunted or underweight due to an inadequate diet often give birth to low birth weight children.

### The critical link between women's social status and nutrition

The wide differences in women's nutrition among countries that have similar income levels indicate that something other than income affects women's nutrition. Research indicates that cultural norms about eating and women's low social status often affect women's diets. In 2003, India and Bolivia had similar gross national incomes, but 36 percent of Indian women were underweight, compared with only 1 percent of Bolivian women.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> FAO 2011 (see references under "Further reading").

<sup>2</sup> ADB 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Ransom, E. & Elder, L. (2003) *Nutrition of Women and Adolescent Girls: Why It Matters*. Population Reference Bureau.

**Women face numerous obstacles to access productive inputs, assets to land and services required for rural livelihoods.** These include access to fertilizers, livestock, mechanical equipment, improved seed varieties, extension services, agricultural education and credit. Women receive for example only 5 percent of agricultural extension services worldwide (UNDP 2012). As rural women often spend a large amount of their time on additional household obligations they have less time to spend on food production or other income opportunities. Women also have less access to markets than men which hamper their opportunities to earn an income even further, and thus their possibilities to be able to buy food. With fewer assets and heavier burdens, women are more vulnerable to shocks and less well positioned to respond to e.g. the effects of climate change or other rapid changes in the environment.

**Social and economic inequalities** between men and women result in less food being produced, less income being earned, and higher levels of poverty and food insecurity. If women farmers had the same access to resources as men, the agricultural yield could increase by 20 to 30 percent. This could raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5 percent, which could reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12 to 17 percent (FAO 2012).

Another emerging challenge in food security and nutrition that needs to be addressed is to enhance women and men's resilience to climate change; e.g. by diversified production as well as strengthened capacity to respond to challenges related to climate change, building on the different needs and coping mechanisms of women, men, boys and girls.

**Disasters, especially droughts, and emergency situations are the most common causes of food shortages in the world (WFP).** In humanitarian contexts discrimination of women and girls may be reinforced, and the occurrence of domestic violence increase during times of food scarcity. Because of women's specific roles and experiences in food production and preparation, it is crucial to include them in emergency-related food security planning and decision making as potential change agents and decision makers, rather than as the "victims" they often are portrayed to be.

Gender dynamics within households must be taken into account in situations of displacement when food aid and other relief items are distributed. This includes men's and women's ability to access and equitably distribute relief items within households. Humanitarian interventions that radically alter gender roles, for example by giving wom-

en greater control over water and food distribution, may impact power dynamics negatively and can also lead to increased gender-based violence.

### The four dimension of food security from a gender perspective

**Availability** – inequalities in ownership of, access to and control of livelihoods assets negatively affect women's food production and food security. Tenure insecurity for women results in lower investment and potential environmental degradation; it compromises future production potential and increases food insecurity. It reduces women's income and the availability of food.

**Stability** – differences in risk and vulnerability between men and women can affect the stability of their food security in different ways. During times of crisis, women and girls are often forced to reduce their intake in (favour?) of other household members. In cases of crop failure or natural disasters, cultural traditions make it easier for men to leave their farm in search for employment elsewhere, leaving women behind to struggle for feeding their families and making ends meet.

**Utilization** - women's role in food utilization for food security is perhaps the most critical and outweighs the importance of their role in food production and how they spend the income they earn. Women are typically responsible for food preparation and thus are crucial to the dietary diversity of their households.

**Access** - access to food within the household is determined by cultural practices and power relationships within the family. Although food may be available, adequate amounts to maintain nutritional intake may not necessarily be as accessible to women compared to men.

Source: FAO (2013): Gender and climate change research in agriculture and food security for rural development.

### ENTRY POINTS FOR SIDA

Food security and agricultural programmes can strengthen human rights and be more effective if they also tackle the constraints around women's access to resources. This is done through addressing the issue of unequal gender roles, responsibilities and workloads. To acknowledge women's role in food security, contributions are needed at all levels in a variety of result areas. Entry points for Sida can be identified within the following areas:

#### Women's right to food

- Assure women's human rights including the rights to education, knowledge and employment and women's equal rights to land, water and other resources that are necessary for raising the productivity of their agricultural activity, food and nutrition security.
- Promote women's productive activities by providing trainings, credit and access to improved and appropriate technology to reduce their work load.
- Ensure that women are empowered and trained to exercise their rights and take active participation in decision-making bodies.
- Mother-and-child health and nutrition programmes can break gender barriers in childcare by including men and boys in nutrition and health education activities.

#### Women's access to land

- Contribute to the reforming of laws on tenure, land distribution, land reform and family law, including marital and inheritance laws, to become gender equal.
- Support education and capacity building for government officials, legislators, and local land officials on gender equality in access to land and property rights.
- Advocate the creation of mechanisms to monitor the enforcement of policies, targets and laws on women's access and rights to land.
- Promote women's access and rights to land in customary law e.g. by supporting women's participation in bodies responsible for interpreting customary law.
- Support awareness-raising and access to information among women regarding land rights, including information about complaints mechanisms.

#### Women's equal participation in labour markets

- Support government legislation that guarantees equitable employment conditions that protect workers in both formal and informal employment.
- Extend the coverage of social protection to all categories of rural workers and ensure that they incorporate women's special needs.
- Support policies and investments in labour-saving technologies and support public investments that make it easier for women to participate in the labour market.
- Intensify the provision of better-quality education and vocational training for women.

### Policy processes and frameworks

- **"The right to adequate food"**: 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
  - **Women's specific role for rural development**: 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), (Article 14)
  - **Special attention to the gender gap in nutrition**: 1992 The Global Plan of Action on Nutrition of the International Conference on Nutrition
  - **Highlight the close interlinkages between gender equality and women's empowerment**: 1992 the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
  - **Emphasize the specific role that women play in food security**: 2004 The Voluntary Guidelines to support Member States' efforts to achieve the progressive realization of the right to adequate food in the context of national food security
  - **Highlights full and equal participation of men and women for achieving sustainable food security**: 2006 World Summit on Food Security and The World Food Summit Plan of Action (e.g. 16, 1.3)
  - **Gender issues in food security and nutrition**: 2012 The First Version of the Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition GSF
  - **Women's empowerment & equality of opportunity**: 2012 UN Secretary General "Zero hunger Challenge"
  - **The importance of empowering rural women as critical agents**: 2012 Rio +20 Outcome Document
  - **Food insecurity indicator allowing disparities in food access based on e.g. gender**: 2013 FAO's Voices of the Hungry
- Support women's engagement in producer organisations, cooperatives, labour unions, outgrow schemes etc. to strengthen women's voice and decision-making power.
  - Support women's groups and other forms of collective action that builds relations and networks addressing gender gaps by reducing transaction costs, pooling risks, developing skills and building confidence.

#### Women's access to financial services

- Improve financial systems and services, e.g. loans and insurances, to respond to the needs and constraints of women producers and entrepreneurs.
- Ensure that women are being consulted and included in discussions, decision-making, planning and provision of financial services.
- Support financial institutions, governments and NGOs to offer financial literacy training to ensure that women can make informed financial decisions.

- Promote technological innovations, such as prepaid cards and mobile phone plans for making loan payments and transfer cash, to facilitate for women to gain access to capital.

### Women's access to technology

- Promote productivity enhancing agricultural techniques, including machines and tools, improved plant varieties and animal breeds, fertilizers, pest control measures and management techniques that address women's needs.
- Invest in labour-saving and productivity enhancing technologies and infrastructure, e.g. water sources in villages, fuel efficient stoves, and roads, to free women's time for more productive activities.
- Promote women's training on farming adaptation techniques such as rainwater harvesting and agroforestry, and on agricultural diversification to increase their resilience.
- Promote extension services that are more gender-responsive, i.e. considering all the roles of women and are closely linked to women's activities.
- Support participatory gender-inclusive research and technology development programmes.

### Example of indicators

- **Share of population (women/men) in targeted areas suffering from starvation** (impact level indicator, measures effect on target group)
- **Proportion of population (women/men/girls/boys) below minimum level of dietary energy consumption** (impact level indicator, measures effect on target group)
- **A monitoring system providing food-security data disaggregated by sex, geographic location (or other as relevant in the specific context) in use** (outcome level indicator, measures capacity development)
- **Share of women and men using agricultural extension services** (output level indicator, measures capacity development)

### Gender mainstreaming in humanitarian assistance

- Collect sex-disaggregated data for planning, implementation and evaluation of food aid.
- Ensure that women and men take part equally in decision-making, planning, implementation and management of food aid programmes.
- Design services to reduce women's and children's time spent getting to, and from food distribution points.
- Ensure that women's access to services is routinely monitored through observations and discussions with affected communities.

### FURTHER READING

**Asian Development Bank (2013) & FAO (2013):** [Gender Equality and Food Security – Women's empowerment as a tool against hunger](#).

**FAO (2013):** [Training Guide: Gender and climate change research in agriculture and food security](#)

**FAO (2012):** [Global Strategic Framework for Food Security and Nutrition](#)

**FAO (2011):** [The state of Food and Agriculture – Women in agriculture](#)

**Gender in agriculture:** [Platform for knowledge sharing](#)

**Global Gender & Climate Alliance and UNDP (2012):** [Gender, agriculture and food security](#)

**IFAD, FAO & WB (2009):** [Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook](#)

**IFPRI, 2012 Global Food Policy Report, chapter 4:** [Closing the Gender Gap](#)

**IASC (2006):** [Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action](#)

**World Bank (2012):** [World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development](#)

**World Food Program:** [Causes to hunger & the Zero Hunger Challenge](#)

**UN Human Rights Council (2010):** [HRC's Advisory Committee on discrimination in the context of the right to food](#)