



TALKING POINTS –STRENGTHENING FOOD SECURITY THROUGH INVESTMENTS IN GENDER EQUALITY

Women play a vital role in advancing agricultural development and food security. They participate in all aspects of rural life—in paid employment, trade, and marketing, as well as tending to crops and animals, collecting water and wood for fuel, and caring for family members. Yet, women face many constraints that limit their contributions and productivity. Providing women and men with the tools and resources to build strong agricultural systems will create the foundation for long-term sustainability, improved health and nutrition, as well as increased economic productivity and growth. An end to poverty and food insecurity will only be possible when the political, economic, and social barriers holding back women are eliminated.

BENEFITS: How a focus on women is critical to greater food security

TPI. Women farmers are under tapped resources for food production

- Women already comprise a significant portion of the agricultural labor force (on average 43% in developing countries) and are the majority of the agricultural labor force in over 30 countries.ⁱ
- The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has found that women farmers are 20-30 percent less productive than men.ⁱⁱ Extensive empirical data show that this productivity gap between female farmers and male farmers is attributable solely to differences in inputs.ⁱⁱⁱ FAO estimates that if women had the same access to productive resources as men, their productivity could potentially reduce the number of hungry in the world by up to 150 million people.^{iv}
 - According to the World Bank, if women farmers had the same access to fertilizers and other inputs as men, maize yields in Malawi and Ghana would increase by almost 16 percent.^v
 - Similarly, in Kenya, researchers found that women could increase crop yields by about 20 percent if they had equal access to the same resources as men.^{vi}

TP2. Greater women’s empowerment directly augments food security and child health

A project in Bangladesh tested a range of interventions to reduce childhood stunting, including improvements in maternal and child health and nutrition, agricultural production, sanitation and women’s empowerment. Women’s empowerment interventions had the greatest impact, reducing stunting by over 20%. Additionally, when investments in women’s empowerment accompanied other interventions, the results increased for every other activity undertaken by the project.^{vii}

TP3. Increasing female farmers’ income or productivity promotes family and community well-being

- When women’s productivity and income increase, the benefits amplify across families and generations. Women tend to devote a larger fraction of their income to children’s health and nutrition, laying the foundation for increased children’s lifelong cognitive and physical development.^{viii}
 - In Nepal, children of women who own land are twice as likely to be adequately nourished as children in households where women work on family land they do not own, or children growing up in landless households. Mothers who own land are better able to provide more nutritious food to their children and ensure their health and wellbeing.^{ix}

BARRIERS: How women's contributions to agriculture productivity are constrained

TPI. Constrained land ownership, inheritance, and use rights

- Women across all developing regions are consistently less likely to own or operate land, with females representing less than 20% of agricultural holders in Latin America and the Caribbean and less than 10% of agricultural holders in North and West Africa.^x

TP2. Limited access to agricultural education, technology, and extension resources

- In 97 countries assessed by the FAO in 1988-89, female farmers received only 5% of all agricultural extension resources.^{xi}
- In much of the developing world, women have significantly lower literacy and numeracy rates, inhibiting their ability to read instructions for use of fertilizers, seeds, tools and technologies, or to participate in training or other extension programs.^{xii}

TP3. Limited access to credit and financial services

- Financial services, such as credit, insurance, and savings are more difficult for women to access. Women are less likely to own assets that can serve as collateral. Legal and social rules and norms can inhibit women's ownership and management of bank accounts.
 - In Ghana, access to bank services by rural and urban poor was 8% in 1998. Of the 92% lacking access to savings and credit, women suffer the greatest constraints to access, including household and child care duties that make it difficult to travel long distances to banks.^{xiii}
- Limited education inhibits women's ability to review contracts and collateral requirements, such as land title, hurting women farmers' ability to purchase essential inputs or invest in their land.^{xiv}
- Lack of monetary assets, reduces the likelihood that women purchase fertilizers, improved seeds, mechanical equipment and other agricultural inputs relative to men.^{xv}
- Rural women's access to financial resources is also limited by biased lending practices that emerge when financial institutions in the area consider them smaller, less experienced and therefore less attractive clients, or when institutions lack the knowledge to offer products tailored to women's preferences and constraints.^{xvi} Lending institutions also may not know how to market products to women.

TP4. Less access to agricultural assets

- Women own fewer larger animals, such as horses and cattle, and do not always control the income they earn from the small animals they typically manage, such as goats, sheep, pigs and poultry.^{xvii}
- Although the gap is negligible in some countries, women's farms can be, on average, half to two-thirds the size of men's farmlands.^{xviii} A 2011 FAO study reports that the livestock holdings of female farmers are much smaller than those of men in all countries examined in their report, with women much less likely to own large animals, such as cattle and oxen, which are useful as draught animals.

TP5. Constrained access to farm employment

- In rural areas of most developing countries, agriculture is considered the most important source of employment for women. Yet, women are more likely than men to hold low-wage, part-time, seasonal employment. And they tend to be paid less, even when their qualifications are higher than men's.^{xix}
- Time-use surveys across a wide range of countries estimate that women undertake 85-90% of household food preparation and that they are also responsible for child care and other household chores.^{xx} Cooking, retrieving water and collecting firewood can occupy much of the day, leaving less time for paid farming.
- Depending on cultural norms, some farming activities, such as plowing and spraying, are solely performed by male farmers – if female farmers do not have available male dependents in their homes, they face delays that impact production.

ENDNOTES

- ⁱ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2011a). *The State of Food and Agriculture: Women in Agriculture – Closing the Gender Gap for Development*. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e00.htm>
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- ^v World Development Report. (2012). *Gender Equality and Development*. <http://econ.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTDEC/EXTRESEARCH/EXTWDRS/EXTWDR2012/0,,contentMDK:22999750~menuPK:8154981~pagePK:64167689~piPK:64167673~theSitePK:7778063,00.html>
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- ^{vii} Lisa C. Smith, Faheem Kahn, Timothy R. Frankenberger, and Abdul Wadud. (2011). *Admissible Evidence in the Court of Development Evaluation? The Impact of CARE's SHOUHARDO Project on Child Stunting in Bangladesh*. <http://www.ids.ac.uk/files/dmfile/Wp376.pdf>
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- ^{xi} Food and Agriculture Organization. (1993). *Agricultural extension and farm women in the 1980s*. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/012/u5350e/u5350e00.pdf>
- ^{xii} UNICEF. (2007). *State of the World's Children*. Figure 2.5 http://www.unicef.org/sowc07/docs/sowc07_figure_2_5.pdf
- ^{xiii} IFAD, *Ghana: Rural Financial Services Project, 2000*. Pre-Appraisal Mission.
- ^{xiv} Mehra, Rekha and Rojas, Mary Hill. (2008). *op cit*. <http://www.icrw.org/files/publications/A-Significant-Shift-Women-Food%20Security-and-Agriculture-in-a-Global-Marketplace.pdf>
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