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# Fact Sheet

## Empowering Women in Agriculture

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Rural women around the world play a key role in supporting their households and communities in achieving food and nutrition security, generating income, growing small businesses, and overall well-being. They contribute to agriculture and fuel local and global economies. As such, women are active players in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Yet every day, rural women and girls face persistent structural constraints that prevent them from fully enjoying their human rights, and hamper their efforts to improve their lives and the lives of those around them.

### Agriculture

- Women constitute half of the agricultural labor force in low-income countries.<sup>1</sup>
- Nearly 70 percent of employed women in South Asia and more than 60 percent of employed women in sub-Saharan Africa work in agriculture.<sup>2</sup>

- If women farmers across the developing world had the same access to labor, fertilizer, extension services, and seeds as male farmers, yields would increase as much as 20-30 percent per household, and reduce hunger for 100-150 million people.<sup>3</sup> Equal access to production resources for men and women would raise total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4 percent, contributing to food security and economic growth.<sup>4</sup>
- Recent estimates show that only 5 percent of foreign aid that is directed to the agricultural sector focuses on gender equality.<sup>5</sup>
- Overall, the labor burden of rural women exceeds that of men and includes a higher proportion of unpaid household responsibilities related to preparing food and collecting fuel and water.<sup>6</sup>
- Women and girls spend a significant amount of time carrying water. According to Stanford researchers, a decrease of even 15 minutes in walking time to fetch water is associated with significant reductions in child mortality.

### Land Rights

- For rural women, land is perhaps the most important household asset to support their families and provide for food, nutrition, and income security.
- Less than 20 percent of all landholders are women because of legal and cultural constraints in land inheritance, ownership, and use.<sup>7</sup>

### Labor Force

- In most countries, women in rural areas who earn an income are more likely than men to hold seasonal, part-time, and low-wage jobs. Women receive less pay for the same work.<sup>8</sup>

### Access to Credit

- The share of female small farmers who can access credit is 5-10 percent lower than for their male counterparts.<sup>9</sup>
- In rural sub-Saharan Africa, women in smallholder agriculture access less than 10 percent of available credit.<sup>10</sup>

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## Nutrition

- Malnutrition during the 1,000 days between pregnancy and a child's second birthday has irreversible physical, cognitive, and health consequences, reducing a person's lifetime earning potential.
- Empowering women to promote healthy, diverse diets through the production and consumption of nutrient-rich crops using local food systems is critical for ensuring food and nutrition security.<sup>11</sup>
- For many countries, the low status of women is a primary cause of high rates of hunger and malnutrition.<sup>12</sup>
- In some societies, girls are far more likely than boys to be stunted by malnutrition. A combination of efforts to improve agriculture, focus on better nutrition for pregnant women and children younger than 2, and empower women as agents of change will help reduce gender disparities in household food consumption.
- Putting more income in the hands of women translates into improved child nutrition, health, and education.
- In all developing regions<sup>13</sup> of the world, rural children are more likely to be underweight than their urban counterparts.

## Leadership and Decision Making

Progress has been made in women's political representation since 1995, particularly in Africa and much of Asia, where the number of female politicians has risen. Globally, however, a gender gap in women's access to power, inclusion in decision making, and leadership remains at all levels, including in local government.

- Strikingly, Rwanda made great gains, with women now making up 56 percent of the parliament, compared to 17 percent in 1995.<sup>14</sup>
- In 2010, women in Asia represented between 0.2 percent (Bangladesh) and 7 percent (Cambodia) of chairs or heads of rural councils, while they represented between 1.6 percent (Sri Lanka) and 31 percent (Pakistan) of elected representatives in rural councils.<sup>15</sup>



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## Infrastructure and Information and Communications Technologies

When women don't have access to education or information, they cannot influence research agendas that benefit women. As a result, they are less likely to adopt new practices and technologies.

- Access to new technology is crucial in maintaining and improving agricultural productivity for women.
- Gender gaps exist for a wide range of agricultural technologies, including extension services, machines and tools, improved plant varieties and animal breeds, fertilizers, pest control measures, and management techniques.
- In Ghana, only 39 percent of female farmers adopted improved varieties, compared to 59 percent of men.
- The differences are largely explained by women's unequal access to land, labor, and education, which reduces the likelihood of women's awareness of new technology or practices, and limits women's resources for obtaining them.

Women can change their economic status. This, in turn, will transform the economic life of the communities and countries in which they live. The effort to combat poverty and ignite economic development can only come to pass if women are an integral component of the solution—if not the motor. The economic empowering of women in agriculture will translate into healthier and better educated families. It also helps lift their countries out of poverty.



# 40 billion:

the number of work hours that women and girls in Africa spend fetching water.

*Endnotes on next page.*

## Endnotes

- 1 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), *The Role of Women in Agriculture* 2011. Available from: <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/am307e/am307e00.pdf>.
- 2 *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011 (SOFA)*. pp. 16-17. Rome.
- 3 FAO, 2011. *The State of Food and Agriculture: Women in Agriculture, Closing the Gender Gap for Development*, Rome.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Organization for Economic cooperation and Development (OECD), *The Development Report* 2011.
- 6 FAO, 2011. *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011 (SOFA)*. p. 17. Rome. Available from <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/i2050e/i2050e.pdf>. Primary source: ILO. 2009. *Key indicators of the labor market*, sixth edition. Geneva, Switzerland.
- 7 FAO, 2010. *Gender and Land Rights Database*. Available from <http://www.fao.org/gender/landrights>.
- 8 FAO, 2011. *The State of Food and Agriculture: Women in Agriculture, Closing the Gender Gap for Development*, Rome.
- 9 FAO, 2011. *The State of Food and Agriculture: Women in Agriculture, Closing the Gender Gap for Development*, Rome.

10 United Nations, 2011. *Report of the Secretary-General on Ten-year appraisal and review of the implementation of the Brussels Program of Action for the Least Developed Countries for the Decade 2001-2010*, A/66/66.

11 *Enhancing Women's Leadership to Address the Challenges of Climate Change on Nutrition Security and Health*. Centre for Public Health and Climate Change at the Public Health Institute (PHI) of the World Food Programme, the U.N. Standing Committee on Nutrition, and Action Against Hunger.

12 UNICEF, 2009. *Tracking Progress on Child and Maternal Nutrition. A Survival and Development Priority*.

13 United Nations. 2011. *Millennium Development Goals Report*. p. 67 states: "Since there is no established convention for the designation of 'developed' and 'developing' countries or areas in the United Nations system, this distinction is made for the purposes of statistical analysis only." Available from [http://www.un.org/millennium-goals/11\\_MDG%20Report\\_EN.pdf](http://www.un.org/millennium-goals/11_MDG%20Report_EN.pdf).

14 World Bank. 2012

15 World Bank. 2012. *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development (WDR)*. p. 112. Washington DC. Available from; (<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTWDR2012/Resources/7778105-1299699968583/7786210-1315936222006/Complete-Report.pdf>)



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