

CFS Policy Round Table on “Gender, food and nutrition security”

A concept note

Expected outcomes from the session

- Greater awareness on the gender-food, and nutrition security nexus
- Propose recommendations for consideration by CFS, including:
 - identifying strategies and actions to support country level efforts that establish linkages between gender-sensitive food and nutrition security
 - developing guidelines and tools to promote/advance such strategies and actions.

Background

Women make significant contributions to food and agricultural production but also to the rural economy in all developing countries as farmers, labourers and entrepreneurs. On average, women comprise 43 percent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries. Yet one fact is strikingly consistent across countries and contexts: women have less access than men to agricultural assets, inputs and services and to rural employment opportunities. The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11 report estimates that removing these gender inequalities could reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 100–150 million.

Agricultural development programmes that aim to address food security by increasing production of staple crops are by themselves often not enough to accelerate reductions in hunger and malnutrition. Increased staple crop production may result in increased energy availability, but it does not by itself guarantee comparable improvements in nutrition outcomes. Similarly, increases in income do not generally result in proportional reductions in malnutrition. Though higher incomes generally do improve nutrition outcomes, they tend to do so slowly. A person’s nutritional status results from a combination of food, health and care and women play a leading role in these three areas.

Women are generally responsible for household food and nutrition security, and are the principal care-givers of family members, especially young children. There is substantial evidence that interventions which promote gender equality and the empowerment of women, significantly improve nutrition and well-being for the entire household. Better access to resources allows women to devote more time to income-producing activities and to caring for their own needs as well as those of their families. When women control additional income they tend to spend more on food, health, clothing and education for their children.

By improving a woman’s nutritional status, that of the foetus, of the new born and of the breastfed infant, will also improve. Women's nutritional status also has a direct impact on their children’s learning capacity and, later in life, on their productivity. Raising women’s nutritional status is a powerful way to improve the health, longevity, mental and physical capacity, and productivity of the next generation, thereby increasing food and nutrition security. The UNSCN sixth report on the world nutrition situation supports this view and calls for a renewed effort to invest in maternal nutrition in a sustainable and holistic manner.¹

Long-term investments in the role of women as full and equal citizens—through better nutrition and education, and economic, social and political empowerment through equal access to resources and opportunities—will be key to deliver sustainable improvements in food and nutrition security. Such investments should focus on:

- the empowerment of women
- the improvement of women's nutritional status
- the eradication of the gender gap in agriculture.

Principal recommendations for CFS to consider

Member States:

At policy level

- ensure that laws and policies guarantee equal rights for men and women to control assets such as land, and to receive services such as health, education, extension and credit
- include the improvement of women's, adolescent girls' and children's nutritional status among the main goals and expected outcomes of agriculture, food and nutrition security related programmes, strategies and policies
- build the human capital of women and girls through scaling up direct nutrition interventions, targeting educational efforts and building their vocational skills thereby broadening women’s choices, and strengthening their influence within their households and communities
- develop strategies aimed at increasing the number of women and their positioning at decision-making and policy influencing levels in the agriculture sector
- invest in strengthening basic infrastructure for essential public services and rural institutions, and make these gender-sensitive. This will liberate women from time-intensive tasks, and will enable them to look for more rewarding and productive work

¹ UNSCN, the 6th Report on the World Nutrition Situation "Progress in Nutrition". Geneva, October 2010

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- enhance efforts to include sex-disaggregated data in food security and agriculture information systems, that allow for a gender-focused data analysis and for the better understanding of gender related constrains and more gender-aware policy decisions
- conduct nutritional impact assessments in food security and agricultural programming at the early planning stages, to assure they are "gender sensitive", help improve nutrition, and mitigate potential adverse effects
- ensure that interventions that aim at removing the gender gap in agriculture and food and nutrition security are appropriately bundled and sequenced, and take account of their broader social contexts, including men, in the process
- ensure that the impact of threats such as climate change, and the food and economic crisis, on the food and nutrition security of women and girls, is considered.

Secretariat and the Advisory Group:

- Prepare "Voluntary guidelines for the progressive implementation and integration of policies and interventions which support the role and contribution of women and girls in agriculture, food and nutrition security" to be submitted for the consideration of the CFS 39th Session. A progress report should be presented at the 38th Session of the CFS
- Develop a mechanism to monitor progress in the implementation of such Voluntary guidelines.