



THE ISSUE IN BRIEF

CLIMATE CHANGE AND WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

What's the issue?

Intensifying climate disasters, changing weather and rainfall patterns, droughts and floods, are increasingly disrupting rural communities, devastating crops and damaging livelihoods dependent on the agricultural sector.

In Asia and the Pacific, women play a large role in agriculture but their contribution is often overlooked and undervalued. Women's agricultural work lacks formal recognition and women are greatly underrepresented within policy and decision-making related to agriculture and climate change. However, for billions of women, agriculture is a life-support system – providing food, resources and jobs.

Gender inequality is known to make women suffer disproportionately from the adverse effects of climate change; with social, economic and political barriers increasing women's exposure and susceptibility to the negative impacts of climate change. Consequently, a gender-responsive approach to both climate change resilience and economic resilience within the agricultural sector is crucial to address the increased levels of vulnerability experienced by women and to empower women in the face of climate change.

Key Facts

Agriculture contributes significantly to the economies of Asia-Pacific countries; agriculture contributed 10.3 per cent to total ASEAN (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations) GDP between 2005-2018.¹ Whilst, in 2020, agriculture, forestry and fishing were found to contribute 27 per cent to Afghanistan's GDP, 23.1 per cent to Nepal's GDP, 22.8 per cent to Cambodia's GDP, 18.3 per cent to India's GDP, 14.9 per cent to Viet Nam's GDP, 14.9 per cent to Fiji's GDP, 12.6 per cent to Bangladesh's GDP, 10.3 per cent to Samoa's GDP and 10.2 per cent to The Philippines GDP.²

As such, the impact of climate change on agricultural production, will aggravate food insecurity and poverty in the region. This is particularly concerning as poverty is currently concentrated in rural areas; with 85 per cent of those living on less a dollar a day in Asia living in these areas.³ Moreover, without effective climate adaptation measures, South Asia is predicted to lose 1.8 per cent of its annual GDP by 2050 and 8.8 per cent by 2100, with major impacts on agricultural-dependent communities.⁴

Agriculture remains the largest employment sector in Asia-Pacific. In 2019, 41.8 per cent of total employment in South Asia and 24.8 per cent of total employment in East Asia and the Pacific⁵ were in this sector. A large proportion of this labour force is made up of women; nearly 58% of the female labour force in Asia and the Pacific work in agriculture⁶, emphasizing how women play a central role in rural economies.

Moreover, in India as high as 70 percent of rural households still depend primarily on agriculture for their livelihoods, 82 percent of farmers are small and marginal, and women make up 65 percent of the agricultural workforce; with 79 percent of rural women being engaged in agricultural activities⁷. This further highlights how women's livelihoods are highly dependent on natural resources, making them particularly vulnerable to a changing climate.

Key social, economic, and political barriers impact women in agriculture, and cause concerns over the realization of their human rights. These human rights include substantive rights, such as the right to food, health and decent livelihoods, as well as procedural rights, such as access to tools and climate information and the right to be consulted in regards to climate adaptation & mitigation policies.⁸ Moreover, gender norms and weak property rights, alongside patrilineal land tenure and a lack of accountability mechanisms⁸, inhibit women's land ownership which in turn prevents women from accessing credit, inputs, extension services and from investing in or receiving agricultural training. Inevitably, this limits women's agricultural productivity and overall economic empowerment.⁹

For example, women may not be able to advance to high-value crops, due to restraints on plot size, plot quality, and plot ownership. Women are more likely to plant subsistence crops, due to assigned social norms, which determine that women are primarily responsible for household food production/food security. Women carry the burden of domestic care work, which occupies a large portion of their productive time. Women often struggle to access credit from financial institutions, due to a lack of collateral or financial literacy. Women lack access to networks to support their growth and market access. Women tend to be excluded from the lucrative stages of value chains due to discriminatory beliefs and practices.¹⁰

Finally, limited access to agricultural extension services and climate change adaptation tools and technology restricts women's capacity to scale up crop production and hinders their ability to build resilience to climate shocks and stressors.¹⁰ For example, in Viet Nam 71 percent of rural women

labourers have been unable to access training, compared to 60 percent of rural men.¹¹ Moreover, the type of vocational agricultural training available to women is often short-term and concentrates on traditional women skills, leading to greater gender inequalities in the adoption of new technologies.¹¹

In South Asia, a lack of land ownership means that women are more engaged in agricultural wage employment than in any other region. Due to the devaluation of women's labour, women are offered lower wages than men by agricultural employers, meaning they must work longer and harder to make ends meet. Additionally, women can often remain unpaid for their agricultural labour, as they frequently work for their husband or the family business.¹² For example, in Pakistan rice production is heavily subsidised by women's unpaid and unskilled labour, whilst in Viet Nam the out-migration of males causes women to engage in heavy activities, such as land preparation and the application of fertilisers.¹³

As a result, the negative effects of climate change on agricultural production will impact women the hardest as they work under the most perilous circumstances in the sector, with lower wages, tougher conditions and poorer livelihood opportunities. As women and young people make up the majority of the rural poor, their economic ability to adapt to shifting agricultural constraints & opportunities in a changing climate is restricted. Therefore, the empowerment of women in agriculture should be seen as essential to ensuring greater food security, reducing poverty, increasing economic development/boosting GDP and further advancing effective and sustainable climate adaptation solutions.

In fact, improving women's access to productive resources and inputs could increase their productivity by 20 to 30 percent,¹⁰ subsequently increasing agricultural outputs in developing countries by 2.5 to 4 percent and reducing the number of hungry people in the world by 12 to 17 percent, or 100 to 150 million.¹⁰ Finally, including women in decision making concerning agricultural production and providing them with opportunities to participate in climate-smart agricultural programmes, has been proven to dramatically improve yields and climate resilience.¹⁴

Our Solutions

- **Political commitment to gender-mainstreaming; ensuring national policies related to agriculture and climate change involve gender integration.**
- **Improve existing national information regarding the role of women in the agriculture through the collection of sex-disaggregated data and generation of gender statistics.**
- **Increase collaboration between the Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Labour, and the Ministry of Women's Affairs.**
- **Develop capacity building and livelihood diversification of women and marginalized groups working in agriculture to help them deal with the economic impacts of climate change.**
- **Ensure gender-responsive climate financing and support the generation of expertise on gender mainstreaming within environmental and economic ministries through increased resource allocation and training.**
- **Conduct studies by country and region on the gendered impacts of climate change within the agricultural sector to identify entry points through which to integrate gender into climate-related policies.**
- **Dialogue and stakeholder consultations with women working in agriculture; utilising a bottom-up approach to facilitate knowledge sharing and awareness raising amongst policymakers.**

End Notes

- ¹ The ASEAN Secretariat. (2019). *ASEAN Key Figures 2019*. Jakarta: Indonesia.
- ² World Bank. (2021). *Agriculture, forestry and fishing, value added (% of GDP)*. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.AGR.TOTL.ZS>
- ³ Islam, N. & Von Braun, J. (2008). Reducing Poverty and Hunger in Asia. Agricultural and Rural Development for Reducing Poverty and Hunger in Asia: Past Performance and Priorities for the Future. *International Food Policy Research*.
- ⁴ Ahmed, M & Suphachalasai, S. (2014). Assessing the Costs of Climate Change and Adaptation in South Asia. *Asian Development Bank*.
- ⁵ World Bank. (2021). Employment in agriculture (%) of total employment (modelled ILO estimate) – South Asia/East Asia & the Pacific. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.AGR.EMPL.ZS?locations=8S>
- ⁶ UN Women & UNEP. (2020). Think Piece: Gender and Climate Change in the Context of Covid-19. *EmPower: Women for Climate Resilient Societies*.
- ⁷ Ministry of Finance, Government of India. (2020). *Economic Survey 2019-2020*.
- ⁸ UN Women. 2021. Climate change, gender equality and human rights in Asia – Regional review and promising practices.
- ⁹ Kelkar, G. & Krishnaraj, M. (2013). *Women, Land and Power in Asia*. New Delhi: Routledge.
- ¹⁰ UN Women. (2017). *Securing Rights of Women Farmers: Developing a Roadmap for Action*.
- ¹¹ UN Women & FAO. (2014). Policy Brief and Recommendations on rural women in Viet Nam: Prepared for World Food Day 2014.
- ¹² FAO & ILO. (2010). *Gender dimensions of agricultural and rural employment: Differentiated pathways out of poverty. Status, trends and gaps*
- ¹³ Nguyen, H., Mortenson, S. & Pravalprukskul, P. (2019). Pathways for women’s empowerment in agriculture in South and Southeast Asia. *Stockholm Environment Institute*.
- ¹⁴ FAO & CARE International. (2019). *Good Practices for Integrating Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Climate Smart Agriculture Programmes*.