

C2A Notes

Agriculture and Food in question

Issue n°14 - November 2013

COMBATING HUNGER AND STRENGTHENING THE RIGHTS OF PEASANT WOMEN

Between 60% and 80% of family farmers in countries of the global South are women¹. These rural women are more affected than men are by hunger and poverty, and they make up the majority of the world's poor². So the same women who produce food are likely to suffer from hunger.

Women working in the food and agricultural sector perform a wide variety of tasks in the production and processing of food, depending on where they are in the world, their age, and the social category to which they belong. They may be peasant farmers working their own land, unpaid labourers on a family farm, or wage-earners working in agriculture or in the processing or selling of food, for example. Despite this diversity of situations, peasant women all share the fact that they are the victims of strong discrimination «from farm to plate»³ and are given roles and responsibilities which differ from those of men.

The virtuous circle of gender equality for food security

Many studies show that the yields of plots farmed by women are inferior⁴ to those farmed by men. This is explained not because women are less effective than men, but because they have less fertile land and less access to inputs and adequate training. Women would therefore achieve the same yields as men if they had equal access to resources and services⁵. Moreover, as gender inequalities exacerbate food insecurity, malnutrition and poverty⁶, the reduction of gender inequalities would have a highly positive impact on food security. Research by the FAO⁷ on production gains related to the reduction of the gender divide shows that if women had the same access as men

« Peasant women are a bastion against future food crises. »

to productive resources, they could increase their farm yields by 20%-30%. This would increase global agricultural production by 2.5%-4%, and thus reduce by 12%-17% the number of under-nourished people in the world. Based on these estimates, it is calculated that gender equality in agriculture could reduce the number of people suffering from malnutrition in the world by 100 to 150 million. It is clearly necessary to strengthen women's rights in all cases, irrespective of the results hoped for, and to take into account the positive effects that this would have on alleviating food insecurity.

¹ L'agriculture à égalité – Faire la différence en défendant les droits des femmes et l'égalité femmes-hommes, ActionAid and Peuples Solidaires, 2011.

² Gender equity in agriculture and rural development - A quick guide to gender mainstreaming in FAO's new strategic framework, FAO, 2009.

³ UN Joint Programmes - Integrating gender issues in food security, agriculture and rural development, FAO, 2010.

⁴ The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-2011 - Women in Agriculture, FAO, 2011.

⁵ Op. Cit. Référence n°4.

⁶ Op. Cit. Référence n°2.

⁷ Op. Cit. Référence n°4.

The reduction of gender inequality in the agricultural sector would also have significant positive effects in the social domain. When women contribute to increasing the household's income, they have greater control and spend more of the family's budget on the children's education, health, clothes and food⁸. This unquestionably has consequences on the training of human resources and on economic growth. The reduction of gender inequalities is above all a matter of respecting rights – and morally

essential – but it is also a powerful lever to combat food insecurity and favour rural populations' well-being. Peasant women are a bastion against future food crises. This is why Jacques Diouf says that it is important to promote gender equality and women's advancement in agriculture, in order to sustainably combat hunger and extreme poverty⁹.

Generalized discrimination

Women in rural areas are victims of discrimination throughout the food production supply chain¹⁰, both in family farming and in industrial farming¹¹. While it is true that in the countries of the South peasant farmers face many difficulties, those that women in particular have to deal with, due to the role they are given in society, are far worse and more numerous. Women are strongly discriminated against when it comes to control over and access to resources of all kinds:

- Natural: only 10% of land owners are women;
- Financial: they have less access than do men to loans, insurance and savings; for example, in Africa they are granted fewer than 10% of the loans to small farmers;
- Physical and social: women have limited access and less control than do men when it comes to energy, technologies, agricultural inputs and technology, cooperatives, unions, and so on;
- Human and training: in Africa, only 6% of women have access to agricultural extension services, and their high rate of illiteracy is a major obstacle to their access to and control over resources.

To combat these forms of discrimination, it is necessary for women to be stakeholders and full participants in the making and implementation of agricultural policies.



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International protective conventions

Several international human rights conventions protect the rights of peasant women. Like Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights guarantees the right to food. Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women protects the rights of rural women and requires all signatory States to take measures to eliminate discrimination against women in rural areas. State parties undertake to ensure that women participate in rural development and derive their benefits from it, on the basis of gender equality.

⁸ Op. Cit. Référence n°4.

⁹ Former Director General of the FAO

¹⁰ Op. Cit. Référence n°4.

¹¹ What works for women – Proven approaches for empowering women smallholders and achieving food security, ActionAid, 2012.

Women's difficulty of gaining access to land

The gendered approach

The gendered approach consists in challenging processes that differentiate between individuals on the basis of their gender, with a view to ensuring the equality of rights and «the equitable sharing of resources and responsibilities between women and men» (French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2007). One of the key concepts of the gendered approach is the notion of empowerment, which can be defined as the reappropriation, by women, of all four dimensions of power (power over, power to, power with, and power within), or the way in which the individual increases her skills, thus enhancing her self-esteem, self-confidence, initiative and control (Eisen, 1994).

thin the family and community. These benefits are however acquired only if they have access to land that is as fertile as that of men, and if they benefit from the same protection. Many countries have undertaken in-depth reform of their legal systems to ensure women's rights to land, but in practice high levels of discrimination persist. It is therefore crucial to eliminate this discrimination and to implement ambitious government policies that fully integrate gendered approaches by strengthening women's rights to land, by making them aware of their rights, and by raising consciousness throughout society as a whole. Thus, the idea is not to integrate women without changing the systems that generate gender inequalities, but rather to foster a process of integration on which a social system can be built in which the roles of women and men are determined on a basis of equality and equity.

An essential contribution that is overlooked

On average, women account for 43% of the agricultural workforce in countries of the Global South, and are over-represented in seasonal, temporary and poorly-paid work. There are two main reasons for this. First, women are forced to devote most of their time to domestic chores at home, such as helping elderly people and children, preparing food and doing housework. Second, they are the victims of strong discrimination with regard to access to employment and conditions at work. It is therefore necessary to act on both of these levers: first, by spreading out domestic tasks in the home as equitably as possible, so that women have the choice to devote their time to stable paid work; and second, by eliminating discrimination against women to ensure that their rights are observed. Women's contribution to agriculture is moreover largely underestimated as most studies overlook their essential but unpaid work. Often responsible for fetching water, wood or fuel, for cooking and working on the family's land without any remuneration, peasant women are invisible to many decision makers.

The issue of access to and control over land is fundamental, for without land there can be no farming, and in many regions its control is synonymous with wealth, status and power¹². Access to land provides essential security for families whose income depends on agriculture. In some cases it affords access to loans and increases populations' resilience to hunger and poverty.

Yet FAO estimates show that only 10% of women worldwide have access to land. Unequal access to land ownership via the acquisition of deeds is glaring in Africa and Asia where the laws are clearly discriminatory. In India, for example, women are strongly discriminated against when it comes to land access, despite reforms since the 1970s to remedy this. The Gandhian movement Ekta Parishad has pointed out that 75% of agricultural workers in India are women; yet these women own neither the land nor the farms. In Africa, where women contribute to 80% of the food production, only 2% of them have access to land. Moreover, in general, women's rights to land are more precarious in case of separation, divorce or widowhood.

Women's ability to have access to land and to control it enhances their autonomy and strengthens their economic independence. It thus affords them greater influence in decision-making processes wi-

¹² Op. Cit. Reference n°4.

Solutions based on human rights

Most small producers throughout the world are women, yet almost all agricultural policies assume that farmers are men. Public policies thus reinforce persistent inequality between men and women. Many forms of discrimination against rural women are violations of their fundamental rights and especially their right to food. It is therefore essential to implement effective agricultural policies based on an approach via human rights. In order to respect women's rights, to put an end to the discrimination against them in the agricultural sector, and to effectively combat food insecurity, it is necessary to:

- Guarantee equal basic human rights for men and women, and progressively implement reforms to guarantee women's equal access to and control of natural, financial, physical, social and human resources, irrespective of their matrimonial situation;
- Implement, at national level, the International Human Rights Law and in particular Article 14 of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) ;
- Promote effective consultation and participation of women and men in designing, implementing and evaluating projects, programmes and agricultural policies concerning them, in collaboration with farmers' organizations representative of women, with a view to defining relevant and effective strategies;
- Raise the awareness of rural communities and institutions as to gender inequalities, with a view to analyzing and redefining the roles and responsibilities traditionally attributed to men and women;
- Implement public policies that serve to break

out of the vicious circle of discrimination in order to distribute household tasks more equitably between men and women, particularly by reinforcing public services, and thus to enable women to also have the choice of emancipating themselves through work and thus of contributing fully to the household's income;

- Develop policies enabling girls to have access to the same basic education as boys, and women to develop their leadership through empowerment;
- Support public policies that take into account gender, generalize the attention paid to it in agricultural policies, and collect sex-disaggregated data;
- Ensure that the share of agricultural PDA specifically devoted to women is increased, and that investments in agriculture support women in particular.



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As part of its mission to support the collective advocacy of its members, Coordination SUD has set up working committees. The Agriculture and Food Commission (C2A) brings together international solidarity NGOs working to realize the right to food and increase support for smallholder farming in policies that impact world food security: 4D, ACF, aGter, Artisans du Monde, AVSF, CARI, CCFD-Terre Solidaire, CFSI, CIDR, CRID, Gret, Inter Aide, Iram, Oxfam France, Peuples Solidaires in association with ActionAid France, Réseau Foi et Justice Europe, Secours Catholique, Secours Islamique, Union Nationale des Maisons Familiales Rurales, and one guest : Inter-réseaux.

The aim of the Commission is to coordinate the work conducted by its participants and to facilitate consultation among its members for their advocacy work with social actors and international policy makers. The members of the Commission reach agreements on who represents Coordination SUD in a range of arenas (Concord in Europe, FAO, WTO, UNCTAD) and share information on current international issues. The Commission is mandated by Coordination SUD to formulate the positions taken by the group during the major institutional meetings on the subject of agriculture and food.

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The C2A Notes are produced with support from the French Development Agency (AFD). The information and views set out in this document do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the AFD.

