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GENDER KEY TO FOOD SECURITY AND FOOD SAFETY

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GLOBAL COMMITMENT FOR FOOD SECURITY

Counting the Hungry

In 1996 FAO stated that “Food security exists when all people at all times have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet the dietary needs and food preferences for an active, healthy life”.

Only ten years now remain before the 2015 deadline by which world leaders have pledged to reduce hunger and extreme poverty by half and to make substantial gains in education, health, social equity, environmental sustainability and international solidarity. Without stronger commitment and more rapid progress, most of those goals will not be met.

Although significant progress has been made towards achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of halving the proportion of the population who are undernourished, the pace will need to be accelerated if the target is to be reached by 2015. Achieving the World Food Summit (WFS) goal of reducing the absolute number of hungry people from about 800 million to 400 million will prove more challenging, requiring much more rapid progress.

Among developing regions, only Latin America and the Caribbean has been reducing the prevalence of hunger quickly enough since 1990 to reach the MDG by maintaining its current pace. The Asia-Pacific region also stands a good chance of reaching the MDG target if it can accelerate progress slightly over the next few years. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the prevalence of under nourishment has been decreasing very slowly, although the speed of progress improved in the 1990s and the region will need to step up the pace dramatically to reach the MDG.

Reduction of hunger and malnutrition leads to:

1. Reduced pressure on the environment;
2. Greater participation in trade and development;
3. Improved school attendance, learning and literacy;
4. Improved gender equality and empowerment of women;
5. Reduced disease vulnerability and lower child mortality;
6. Improved maternal and infant health;
7. Greater resistance to HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases.

Women's Contribution to Agriculture

Agriculture continues to play an important role in most non-industrial economies, as a major contributor to the country's export earnings and as a source of employment and livelihood. Official statistics often underestimate the value of women's work and their overall contribution to national wealth. Women continue to provide a large proportion of the labour that goes into agriculture. FAO's estimates show that women represent a substantial share of the agricultural labour force, as individual food producers or as agricultural workers, and that around two-thirds of the female labour force in developing economies is engaged in agricultural work.

FAO has noted that while the overall production of the economically active population working in

agriculture declined during the 1990s, the percentage of women working in agriculture at global level remained nearly 50 percent through 2000 with an even higher percentage in developing countries (61 percent) and in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) (79 percent). Although FAO projections to 2010 indicate a continued reduction in the overall female participation in agriculture, the percentage of economically active women working in agriculture in LDCs is projected to remain above 70 percent.

Part of the overall decline in the percentage of economically active women in agriculture globally is attributable to the greater involvement of rural populations in off-farm employment, in addition to the on-going increase in migration to urban areas. FAO data show that, as an aggregate, the low-income countries of the world - where agricultural production is still labour-intensive - also tend to have the highest percentages of economically active women working in agriculture, particularly in the LDCs. These percentages are also linked to an increase in male migration to off-farm activities, with women either assuming more responsibility for the family farm or for increased production of cash crops and food processing activities in order to increase family incomes.

As FAO reports, "this finding is even more significant given that data for the economically active population in agriculture tends to exclude the unpaid work by rural women in farm and family economies. If unpaid work were included, the figures for female employment in agriculture would be even higher".

Land and Water Resources

Land and water form the basis of all farming systems, and their preservation is crucial to sustained and improved food production. Women farmers take a leading role in conserving soil fertility. In fields where cash crops are grown, women are often responsible for applying fertilizer and for cultivating the crops. In smaller plots and home gardens where women grow food for consumption at home, they usually employ a variety of techniques to conserve and improve soil fertility, including intercropping, crop rotation, fallowing and mulching. Women farmers tend to use and improve traditional cropping methods that protect natural resources.

There is a shortage of good-quality agricultural land, and access to land concerns both rural men and women because it is essential to improving agricultural productivity and to household well-being. However, systematic differences between women's and men's land tenure rights continue, contributing to structural inequality and to poverty for women. In many countries and communities, women are blocked by tradition or law from owning land. Insecure land tenure reduces farmers' incentives to maintain soil quality because they have no permanent rights to the land.

Women suffer also from inequalities in rights and access to water. Although they represent the majority of the developing world's farmers, and are also usually responsible for providing water for domestic use and agriculture, tradition often excludes women from managing water. In many cases, lack of access to adequate water, sanitation and fuel may prove to be the principal cause of food-borne illnesses. If the only water available is polluted, or if fuel scarcities make it impossible to boil water and cook food, families will suffer from illness and malnutrition. With the assistance of local non-governmental organization, women need to learn how to be more fully involved in water management decisions and actions, thereby improving food security for their families and communities.

Special attention should be given to promote gender equality in access to and control over and management of natural resources. This implies to support men and women with information, training and technology (i.e. conservation agriculture techniques such as no tilling and direct planting to reduce the workload of men and women farmers) that will help them to participate equally in decision-making and in management of water resources (i.e. restructuring of irrigation schemes).

Gender, Food and Nutrition

Food Security. Household food security does not necessarily mean the same as food self-sufficiency, which refers to sufficient domestic production to meet the needs of the population. It refers both to the availability and stability of food, and the purchasing power of the household where food is not produced. The collection of water and firewood are often the tasks of women and girls, who are

responsible of transforming rations and food into adequate diet. Food processing, conservation and storage are also important considerations when planning food security interventions.

Food security is an issue for individuals within households, for households as a whole, for nations and for the international community. At household level, individual members may be malnourished while others have sufficient adequate food. In some societies, women and/or children are the victims of food discrimination. The conditions of access to food for men and women, and the general gender-disaggregated calorie intake deficit among the affected population should be assessed. At national level, there can be sufficient food supplies, but food insecure households or areas due to production/supply shortages, low-income levels and general lack of access to those supplies. Internationally, food production levels are more than sufficient to feed all people, but not equally available or accessible.

Improving food security means ensuring households have the means to produce sufficient food of acceptable quality for their own consumption - or earn enough regular income to purchase it and access the market, while ensuring all members of the household share sufficient access.

Whether in terms of labour input, decision-making, access to or control of production resources, gender issues should be mainstreamed in food security, looking at the four dimensions mentioned earlier: availability, access, utilization and stability. Gender aspects are relevant to the majority of these issues since women and men have different access to and control over finances and resources. Women are active in cash and subsistence agricultural sectors and their work in producing food for household and community consumption is still often not valued.

Many failures in food security programmes and policies are due to the assumption that large groups of people are homogeneous, rather than being composed of socio-economic groups with different needs and interests. Goals and objectives cannot be achieved without a clear understanding of the target group. Knowing who does what work and carries out what roles in providing for household food security is essential in policy planning. If women are responsible for a particular aspect of food policy they need to be specifically targeted, rather than assuming that they will automatically be reached - equally so for men.

Food security assessment in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

In 2003, FAO and WFP undertook a comprehensive food security and nutrition assessment across all districts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. A key objective was to understand the factors and conditions affecting livelihoods and food security and nutritional vulnerability of men, women and children. In addition to reviewing secondary data, the mission conducted a primary data collection and analysis exercise in urban, camp and remote/rural locations. This involved extensive field visits, focus group discussions, pairwise comparison ranking, household observations, and interviews using a gender focus.

The effects of food aid, subsidies and rehabilitation programmes on women, as the principal providers of food for the household, need to be considered, as opposed to looking at households as units. There may be no man associated with the household and even where there is one, it may still be considered women's responsibility to provide for food by whatever means possible. Good knowledge is required of food security related socio-economic issues and an understanding of how people make their choices and interact.

Although both rural women and men each have different and complementary roles in guaranteeing food security at household and community levels, women often play a greater role in ensuring nutrition, food safety and quality. Female-headed households, both *de jure* and *de facto*, are on the increase globally because of internal and external migration, civil conflict, disease, and disruptions to traditional family structures. But whether or not male spouse is present in the household, in most societies women are responsible for food processing and preparation, providing and obtaining health care and clothing their children.

Women tend to spend a considerable part of the cash income that they generate from marketing activities on household food requirements.

Recognizing women's and men's distinct roles in family nutrition is a key to improving food security at household level. To tackle this issue, FAO bases its approach to nutrition on the economic and cultural context of the area concerned, and considers that food security depends not only on food availability, but also on access to food, food adequacy and acceptability to consumers, as well as the availability of clean water and firewood. Other underlying causes of malnutrition must also be addressed, including the dietary intake and diversity, health and disease, and maternal and child care areas in which women play decisive roles. Another issue is respecting the knowledge of traditional communities, particularly women, on the nutritional value of local crops and foods gathered from the wild.

Importance of Home gardens

Across most of the developing world, people typically rely on one or two staple crops such as rice, wheat, maize or millet for as much as 80 percent of their daily caloric intake. Home garden foods also have an important "safety net" function as supplements to staple crops. Unlike field crops, home garden foods can be cultivated to provide food for the family to eat all year round, as long as enough water is available. Home garden foods can augment or replenish family food supplies; and cash earned from selling the produce of home gardens can be used to purchase food items that the family cannot produce itself.

Women are the main cultivators of home gardens and grow most secondary crops. Home garden foods include roots and tubers, green leafy vegetables, legumes and fruits, all of which are rich in vitamins and minerals. Teaching women and men about the nutritional value of certain foods, and encouraging them to grow and eat these is an effective way of improving nutrition and preventing micronutrient deficiencies.

Food processing contributes to food security by regularly assuring a diversity of diet, minimizing waste and losses and improving the marketability of foods, thereby enabling women to participate in the trade of food products. In developing countries, women carry out most food processing activities, which often create a heavy workload. In parts of North Africa, women may spend up to four hours a day grinding wheat for couscous. Food processing also contributes to nutritional well-being, not only by making food more digestible, but also by enabling foods to be preserved and marketed, which generates additional income and gives people access to a wider range of products and nutrients.

Food storage also greatly increases food security. Men are usually responsible for constructing storage facilities, while women prepare the food to be stored and maintain and use the stocks and facilities. In some developing countries, as much as 25 percent of the food produced becomes spoiled or is eaten by insects and other pests before humans get to it. Reducing such post-harvest losses can make more food available as effectively as increasing production.

Food Safety. Good nutrition depends on the quality and quantity of the food that is available and on health. Contamination of foods by bacteria or chemicals can make them inedible, dangerous or even deadly. Through their responsibilities for processing food for markets and preparing it for the home, women generally play a key role in ensuring the quality and safety of what people eat. Diarrhoea and many food-borne illnesses reduce the body's capacity to absorb nutrients and increase the loss of water and body salts. Where food-borne illnesses are widespread, even people who consume adequate amounts of food are frequently malnourished. Education about hygiene and sanitation needs to target the concerns and schedules of women, as they do most of the cooking in their homes.

Food discrimination. Nutritional demands vary depending on age, sex, health status and activity level. In their reproductive years, women have specific additional nutrient requirements, which determine both their own and their children's nutritional status. Women themselves are often the

victims of food discrimination, which compromises the nutritional and health status of female family members. In many households and communities, women and girls eat only the food that is left after the males in the family have eaten.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW TO PLAN AND IMPLEMENT GENDER-RESPONSIVE FOOD SECURITY PROGRAMMES?

a) What are the demographic factors?

- Number of landless poor (disaggregated by sex).
- Number of herdless pastoralists (by sex).
- Number of poorest in caste groups (by sex).
- Most marginalized communities (composition and size).
- Number of temporary and long-term or permanent migrants.
- Disaggregate data by age, wealth and marriage status.

b) What are the social factors?

- What are the different types of households (for example, female- or child-headed households)?
- Composition of the households needing special assistance (i.e. children, widows without families, disabled and men, women and children affected by HIV/AIDS).
- Has there been recognition of the roles of men and women in caring for their extended families and dependents?
- Are the specific needs of men, women, children and disabled recognized?
- Is the local knowledge of men and women recognized and used in planning food security interventions?
- What is the local level of organization of men, women, youth and disabled in the rural communities? Can informal networks or formal associations be supported and how?
- Is there any community support to men and women for food production, transport and delivery?
- What are the community and household power structures in relation to the use of food, water, land and other productive resources?
- How acceptable to the population are the proposed commodities, according to gender-disaggregated needs?
- Who controls resources (production tools, food, and so on) both at the community and household level?
- Who in the household is responsible for food safety and the hygiene considerations for ensuring food and nutrition security?
- Who in the household is responsible for processing, conservation and storage of food?

c) What are the economic factors?

- What is the level of poverty of men, women and children?
- Do women and men have equal access to the local market?
- What is the local food procurement for men and women?
- Do both men and women have access to cash and food for work opportunities, credit and agricultural inputs?
- Is cash available for men and women to meet non-food needs?
- Do both have access to food aid services and programmes?
- What are their levels of self-sufficiency in particular crops?
- Is there adequacy and stability of food supplies and access (quantity, quality and nutritional aspects) for men and women?

d) What are the political factors?

- Is any group being discriminated against?
- Are national and/or customary practices and laws limiting women's access to land and other productive assets?
- Do both men and women have access to agricultural services?
- Do the national legislation and laws ensure equal rights (for example, to land) to men and women?

- What are the consultation procedures in policy formulation and implementation processes?
- Do mechanisms exist for involving women and most vulnerable groups in decision- and policy-making?
- Do subsidies on products exist and what are their effects on production of food crops and incomes of poor men and women?

e) What are the institutional and security factors?

- Have institutional arrangements and mechanisms been taken to ensure that the views and concerns of women and vulnerable groups at village, regional and national levels are brought to the attention of policy-makers?
- What are the information dissemination and communication channels, and are special measures taken to ensure the access to women and most vulnerable groups?
- Is the presence of weapons and land mines creating any mobility problems for men and women to reach the local market for the purchase of food or their agricultural fields?
- Do men or women, boys or girls face problems with physical security in accessing food security assistance?

ACTIONS TO ENSURE GENDER EQUALITY PROGRAMMING IN FOOD SECURITY

a) Household food supply and food access

- Establish the gender-specific food insecurity situation. Is it due to i) loss of own production or stocks; ii) loss of income and/or tradable assets; iii) difficult economic access to food (i.e. price increase); iv) break-down of traditional support systems or any other cause.
- Ensure that both men and women have equal access to food and other productive resources.

b) Gender-sensitive needs assessment

- Assess the priority needs and constraints of men and women to increase household food security at short and long-term.
- Gather the perceptions of the target population to provide a basis for decision-makers in the design, targeting and implementation of policies, strategies and interventions to protect and promote food security.
- Assess if any problem resulted from the division of labour or from the inequitable access to resources for women and men.

c) Vulnerability maps

- Identify areas and sectors of population (men, women and children) most at risk of food insecurity.
- Identify types and levels of hazards based on past, present and projected trends to assess the needs of the areas and groups of people (disaggregated by sex) most at risk.
- Formulate supplementary feeding programmes for at-risk sections of the population, with the active participation of men, women and children.

d) Gender-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators

- Disaggregate by sex existing data on different socio-economic groups in food insecure communities.
- Conduct surveys and rapid appraisals to collect direct information from men and women, with adequate representation of the different socio-economic groups.
- Analyze data with a gender perspective taking into account the division of tasks, access to and control over productive resources and decision-making patterns between men and women at household and community levels.
- Disseminate information disaggregated by sex to raise awareness among policy-makers on relevance of gender issues in food security programmes and policies.
- Formulate a core set of gender-sensitive indicators to monitor and evaluate the impact of food security programmes and policies on men, women and children.

e) Livelihood analysis

- Assess constraints, productive capacity, capabilities as household food securers of different

socio-economic groups, including female- and child-headed households and families with disabled and HIV/AIDS affected people.

- Identify livelihood strategies of men and women to overcome (transitory) food insecurity and vulnerability.
- Make recommendations to facilitate women's access to land and other productive resources (for example, credit and technology).
- Consider if rations are to be provided in grain or meal/flour form as this could add to women's tasks.
- Assess the local cultural practices for women and men when planning food aid programmes to see how acceptable the proposed commodities are to the different segments of the community.
- Promote new-income generation and diversified activities for men, women, boys and girls.

f) Stakeholders analysis

- Identify the main stakeholders of the food security programme.
- Ensure that men and women actively participate in the design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of food security programmes and policies.
- Actively involve women in policy-making bodies, key advocacy and interest groups.
- Consult with women, men, girls and boys to select appropriate targeting mechanisms.
- Identify potential risks and consequences for creating lasting direct benefits for recipients and to local governance.
- Carry out field visits, focus group discussions, pairwise comparison ranking, household observations and interviews with mixed or separate groups of men, women and children.
- Identify with the population the priority problems and development opportunities for each socio-economic group.

g) Gender-sensitive targeting

- Establish mechanisms to reach the specific target groups of men, women and children.
- Assess women's participation in defining target groups.
- Ensure enough flexibility for programmes to be adjusted if particular target groups of men, women and children are being adversely affected, using a participatory approach.

h) Capacity building

- Raise awareness of decision-makers and extension workers on the importance of gender issues.
- Assess what support men and women need to increase their capacities and skills and if both will benefit from new skills introduced by the food security programme.
- Promote equal access to training, extension, and information to women and most vulnerable groups.
- Organize business skills development courses (joint or separate training according to the socio-cultural context) for men, women, boys and girls.

CHECKLIST TO ASSESS GENDER EQUALITY PROGRAMMING IN THE FOOD SECURITY SECTOR

1. Analysis of gender differences

- A participatory needs assessment is undertaken, consulting an equal number of women and men to gather information on:
 - ❖ short- and long-term losses of livelihood assets of men and women (e.g. single season's harvest or permanent loss of land) is undertaken.
 - ❖ changes in women's and men's access to and control over land or other critical productive resources.
 - ❖ literacy level and employment rates of male- and female-headed households.
 - ❖ the coping strategies of men and women in the crisis situation.
 - ❖ malnutrition rates for boys and girls in terms of stunting, wasting and underweight; and in micronutrient deficiencies is undertaken.
- The data is analysed and used for programming to assess how proposed activities will benefit women, girls, boys and men directly and indirectly.

2. Design

- The operation is designed to address the differential needs of men and women and build on existing/available capacities, of women, men and children in the community.

3. Access and control

- Women's, girls', boys' and men's access to services as well as control over productive resources is routinely monitored through spot checks, discussions with communities, etc.
- Obstacles to equal access are promptly addressed.

4. Participation

- Women and men are systematically consulted and included in food security interventions.
- Women and men participate equally and meaningfully in decision-making and management of livelihood assets.
- Women and men participate equally and meaningfully on registration and distribution committees.

5. Training/ Capacity building

- Training and skills development is made available to balanced numbers of women, men and adolescent girls and boys based on a needs assessment.
- Training and skills development activities are organised at a time and venue convenient for both women and men.
- Training and information materials are developed based on the education level and knowledge of different socio-economic groups.

6. Actions to address Gender-based Violence (GBV)

- Training on GBV-related issues and potential risk factors is conducted for an equal number of female and male extension and humanitarian workers to enable them to provide support to affected persons and direct them to adequate information and counselling centres.
- Put in place programmes to ensure income-generating activities and economic options for women and girls to avoid that they engage in unsafe sex in exchange for money, housing, food or education - or in other ways are exposed to GBV because of being economically dependent on others.
- Sensitise women and men in the community on violence against women and girls, including domestic violence.

7. Targeted actions based on gender analysis

- Organize public awareness campaigns on women and children's rights (e.g. right to food)
- Sensitize vulnerable groups on their property rights (e.g. land) to increase their negotiating power and diminish abusive relationships.
- Support social mobilization process to raise awareness on main (practical and strategic) needs of the most vulnerable groups as part of their empowerment process.
- Restore and protect basic and productive infra-structures to ensure food security for most vulnerable communities.

8. Monitoring and evaluation based on sex-and age-disaggregated data

- The perceptions of men and women regarding changes in their lives (positive and negative) as result of food security interventions are recorded and the implications are addressed in programming.
- Assessments of the specific changes occurred in the livelihood systems of the benefited female, male and child-headed households are conducted.
- An analysis of how women's and men's different needs could have been met more efficiently is prepared and informs future programming.

9. Coordinate actions with all partners

- Number of sector actors who participate in or contribute to inter-agency coordination efforts on gender equality programming, including regular meetings of the gender network.

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