

# International Day of Rural Women, 15 October

## 2017 Theme: “Challenges and opportunities in climate-resilient agriculture for gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls”

### ***Background: The situation of rural women and girls and climate change***

The crucial role that women and girls play in ensuring the sustainability of rural households and communities, improving rural livelihoods and overall wellbeing, has been increasingly recognized. Women account for a substantial proportion of the agricultural labour force, including informal work, and perform the bulk of unpaid care and domestic work within families and households in rural areas. They make significant contributions to agricultural production, food security and nutrition, land and natural resource management, and building climate resilience.<sup>1</sup>

Even so, women and girls in rural areas suffer disproportionately from multi-dimensional poverty. While extreme poverty has declined globally, the world’s 1 billion people who continue to live in unacceptable conditions of poverty are heavily concentrated in rural areas. Poverty rates in rural areas across most regions are higher than those in urban areas. Yet smallholder agriculture produces nearly 80 per cent of food in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa and supports the livelihoods of some 2.5 billion people. Women farmers may be as productive and enterprising as their male counterparts, but are less able to access land, credit, agricultural inputs, markets and high-value agrifood chains and obtain lower prices for their crops.<sup>2</sup>

Structural barriers and discriminatory social norms continue to constrain women’s decision-making power and political participation in rural households and communities. Women and girls in rural areas lack equal access to productive resources and assets, public services, such as education and health care, and infrastructure, including water and sanitation, while much of their labour remains invisible and unpaid, even as their workloads become increasingly heavy due to the out-migration of men. Globally, with few exceptions, every gender and development indicator for which data are available reveals that rural women fare worse than rural men and

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<sup>1</sup> UN Women (2015). *Progress of the World’s Women 2015-2016. Transforming Economies, Realizing Rights.*

<sup>2</sup> IFAD (2016). *Rural Development Report 2016: Fostering inclusive rural transformation.*

urban women, and that they disproportionately experience poverty, exclusion and the effects of climate change.<sup>3</sup>

The impacts of climate change, including on access to productive and natural resources, amplify existing gender inequalities in rural areas. Climate change affects women's and men's assets and well-being differently in terms of agricultural production, food security, health, water and energy resources, climate-induced migration and conflict, and climate-related natural disasters.<sup>4</sup>

Women's dependence on and unequal access to land, water, and other resources and productive assets – which are compounded by limited mobility and decision-making power in many contexts – mean that they are disproportionately affected by climate change. In addition, women and girls typically carry the largest burden of unpaid care and domestic work, which only increases in a changing climate. Women often have primary responsibility for water and fuel provisioning; thus, changes in their availability due to climate-induced drought and scarcity affect the time and level of effort required to collect, secure, distribute and store these resources.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Women's economic empowerment through climate-resilient agriculture***

In agriculture, climate change exacerbates the existing barriers to gender equality faced by women farmers. Globally, women comprise 43 per cent<sup>6</sup> of the agricultural workforce and play a critical role in supporting household and community food security. However, due to discriminatory policy frameworks or inequitable social norms, women farmers have less access than men to secure land tenure, agricultural inputs, financing, water and energy, appropriate infrastructure, technologies, and extension services.

According to some estimates, closing the gender gap in access to land and other productive assets could increase agricultural outputs by up to 20 per cent in Africa.<sup>7</sup> It would also enable women farmers to adopt climate-resilient agricultural approaches at the same rate as men, as key initiatives that address these gender gaps such as secured land tenure, greater financial inclusion and access to information are also essential to accelerate the adoption of climate-resilient agricultural practices. In essence, providing equal access to women and men farmers to land and

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<sup>3</sup> FAO (2016) *State of Food and Agriculture: Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security*, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> A.H.X. Goh (2012). "A literature review of the gender-differentiated impacts of climate change on women's and men's assets and well-being in developing countries," CAPRI Working Paper No. 106, International Food Policy Research Institute.

<sup>5</sup> UNEP (2016). *Global Gender and Environment Outlook; UN Women, Progress of the World's Women 2015-2016.*

<sup>6</sup> FAO (2011). *The role of women in agriculture. p.2. Available at <http://www.fao.org/docrep/013/am307e/am307e00.pdf>.*

<sup>7</sup> FAO (2011). *The State of Food and Agriculture 2011: Women and Agriculture, Closing the Gender Gap for Development.*

other productive resources can provide a “triple dividend” of gender equality, food security and climate management, thereby offering a cost-effective and transformative approach to the pursuit of the Sustainable Development Goals.

A changing climate means that there is a shrinking window of opportunity to close gender gaps in agriculture. Climate change aggravates existing barriers, limiting women farmers’ access to long-term affordable finance and agricultural extension services, and increasing their unpaid care work burden as water and fuel become scarce. Women farmers are at risk of being trapped in a downward spiral in the absence of concerted efforts to close these gender gaps.

Therefore, it is a priority to foster women’s empowerment through climate-resilient agriculture approaches such as: (i) engendering climate-resilient agricultural policies; (ii) increasing women’s land tenure security; (iii) facilitating women farmers’ access to finance to invest in climate-resilient and time-saving assets; (iv) enhancing women farmers’ access to climate-resilient information; and (v) expanding opportunities for women farmers to participate in and move up the climate-resilient agricultural value chain.

### ***Rural women and girls acting to respond to climate change***

Women are powerful change agents to address climate change at scale. They are key actors in building community resilience and responding to climate-related disasters. Women tend to make decisions about resource use and investments in the interest and welfare of their children, families, and communities.<sup>8</sup> Women as economic and political actors can influence policies and institutions towards greater provision of public goods, such as energy, water and sanitation, and social infrastructure, which tend to matter more to women and support climate resilience and disaster preparedness.<sup>9</sup>

Systematically addressing gender gaps in responding to climate change is one of the most effective mechanisms to build the climate resilience of households, communities and nations. The growing recognition of the disproportionate impact of climate change on women and girls has been matched in recent years by the rising awareness of their roles as change agents and the tremendous value of gender equality and women’s empowerment for producing social, economic, and climate resilience benefits.

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<sup>8</sup> UNEP, Global Gender and Environment Outlook; UN Women, *Progress of the World’s Women*.

<sup>9</sup> Lori Beaman and others (2011). “Political Reservation and Substantive Representation: Evidence from Indian Village Councils,” in *India Policy Forum 2010–11*, ed. by Suman Bery, Barry Bosworth, and Arvind Panagariya (Washington: Brookings Institution and National Council of Applied Economic Research); UN Women (2014). *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Gender Equality and Sustainable Development*.

## ***UN Women's work on climate change and climate-resilient agriculture***

In line with our composite mandate (Normative, UN Coordination and Operations), UN Women is following a mutually supportive three-pronged approach to climate change: (i) engendering climate negotiations and normative instruments; (ii) developing the capacity of partners to mainstream gender into their climate management efforts; and (iii) supporting transformative multi-stakeholder initiatives to leverage development co-benefits between gender equality and climate action.

### **Normative work:**

Together with the UN system, national governmental and civil society partners, UN Women supports UNFCCC negotiations to integrate gender equality dimensions in climate change decisions and policies. For example, UN Women and its partners were closely involved in the preparation process of COP 21 and engaged climate change negotiators on co-benefits between gender equality and climate action to ensure that gender considerations would be included in the Paris Agreement. Similarly at COP 22, UN Women and other gender equality advocates supported the Parties to extend for three years the Lima Work Programme on Gender adopted in 2014 at COP 20. The Lima Work Programme on Gender aims to advance implementation of gender-responsive climate policies and mandates across all areas of climate negotiations.

UN Women is also working to advance the goal of gender balance in multilateral and intergovernmental processes. For example, the research [report](#) prepared with the Mary Robinson Foundation – Climate Justice analyzed the participation of women in decision-making and management processes at national and global levels of governance. The report included a set of recommendations for Parties and observers to the UNFCCC to consider in preparing their submissions to the UNFCCC secretariat on options and ways to advance the goal of gender balance.

To complement its normative work with the UNFCCC, UN Women is also engaging with other normative bodies. For example, UN Women is contributing to the elaboration of the CEDAW General Recommendation on Gender-Related Dimensions of Disaster Risk Reduction in a Changing Climate. The Committee is the body of independent experts that monitors implementation of the landmark Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

### **Mainstreaming gender equality considerations in climate management efforts:**

UN Women also provides advisory services to non-UN partners around mainstreaming gender equality considerations into climate action projects. We have trained national designated authorities and focal points at the request of the Green Climate Fund on preparing more gender-responsive projects and moving away from seeing gender as an environmental and social safeguard towards engaging women as agents of change. As part of this training, UN Women prepared both a guidebook and a specific manual for the GCF on mainstreaming gender considerations in climate change projects. UN Women also organized trainings organized at COP 22 notably for civil society. For more information, visit the [training centre website](#).

### **UN Women programme development in climate management and climate-resilient agriculture:**

Three of UN Women's principal programming areas directly contribute to climate change management efforts: (i) women's empowerment in climate-resilient agriculture; (ii) women's entrepreneurship and access to decentralized sustainable energy; and (iii) the gender inequality of risk. Each programming area is underlined by a robust theory of change that identifies and addresses all the underlying barriers that women and girls face in an integrated manner and in collaboration with our partners. A range of our materials, including specific programming documents and shorter briefs, can be found on our [website](#).

Over 12 UN Women country offices in sub-Saharan Africa are working on developing the climate-resilient agriculture focus. National project documents have been formulated in most of these countries, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, Cote d'Ivoire, Malawi, Mali, Rwanda, Senegal, and Tanzania, and are currently discussing financing opportunities with development partners. Liberia is building climate-resilience into its rural women's economic empowerment programme (part of a seven-country joint global programme with FAO, IFAD, WRP, funded by Norway and Sweden).

The Government of Luxembourg provided €3.95 million to support programme implementation in Mali, which began in the second semester of 2016. The UN Women country office in Mali had previously secured \$1 million in support from national private sector entities. Project implementation in Mali has involved a wide range of grassroots organizations, private sector and government partners. The project has identified 21 women's groups (2,695 members) in three regions as participants; embarked on training of 240 women farmers on entrepreneurial, organizational, managerial, commercial and partnership skills development, including climate-resilient sustainable agricultural techniques; about 350 women have been supported in taking action on rights and access to land; and the project has negotiated a preferential interest rate of 8% for women farmers, charged by the national agricultural bank, compared to 12 per cent normally charged by commercial banks.



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Planet 50-50 by 2030  
Step It Up for Gender Equality

Within the climate-resilient agriculture programme, UN Women developed the first mobile-enabled enterprise platform for women farmers, linking them to customers, suppliers, finance and markets. The platform was piloted with 5,000 farmers in Rwanda in partnership with the government and the World Food Programme.