

SESSION 4 Q&A

Chair: Mr Nigel Hart,
Director GRDC

Chair: I would like to invite our speakers up onto the stage, and invite questions from the floor.

Audience -Salma Indonesia:

I'm Salma from East Java, Indonesia, representing rural farmers and women farmers. My question is: How can we measure women's empowerment in line with climate-smart agriculture? In East Java, especially among sugar palm and soybean farmers, access to resources, research, and technology is limited. We really need stronger government intervention.

Ms Selane Tairea:

In the Cook Islands, women are commonly involved in agriculture, often working alongside men in plantations. However, the imbalance appears after harvest: women typically handle selling, accounting, and household responsibilities. To make things more equitable, unpaid domestic and administrative work must be redistributed, with men taking on more of these roles as well.

Audience - Grace, Indonesia/Melbourne:

We often hear about the feminisation of agriculture, where women are portrayed as vulnerable or as victims. *How can we design interventions that avoid this narrative?*

Dr Sonia Akter:

We don't see women as victims, but as agents of change. In our research, households experiencing climatic hazards and greater feminisation were actually more food secure. This strength can be better leveraged if women have access to resources, knowledge, and technology.

Ms Selane Tairea:

It depends on context. In our case studies, women's local knowledge has been critical. By creating spaces where women can lead, express priorities, and apply their expertise, we've seen resilience strengthened.

Ms Vyta Hanifah:

Before designing interventions, we consult leaders of women's farmer groups, then directly engage with women themselves. By facilitating discussions and understanding their needs, we can design interventions that truly empower rather than impose.

Audience member Wendy:

Across many contexts, men and women often have different perceptions of women's roles in agriculture. *What differences have you observed, and how can we raise awareness of women's contributions?*

Ms Vyta Hanifah:

Empowerment surveys often capture perceptions. But ethnographic and generational research is also needed. Women's roles must be seen in the context of their *whole lives*, including care work. Time-use surveys reveal important differences between genders, which can spark conversations about balance.

Dr Sonia Akter:

In my early work, many women undervalued their contributions, calling themselves “helpers” rather than farmers. There was even resentment from men when women were given more visibility. This is changing, but the mindset persists in some areas.

Ms Selane Tairea:

On paper, men are listed as household heads. But in practice, women often handle finances, run households, and even complete census forms. Awareness could be raised through better communication strategies, including media and user-focused design, to inspire rather than confront.

Dr Sonia Akter:

In Southeast Asia, women take on productive, reproductive, and social roles. Yet many women still see themselves as merely “helping” their husbands, not as farmers themselves. Changing this perception is vital.

Mr Acacio Sarmento da Silva:

Cultural barriers remain strong. For example, feeding children is seen solely as women’s work, with men discouraged from participating. Through participatory projects, we’ve learned to view men as part of the solution, not the problem, while also addressing hidden influences like elders reinforcing traditions.

Chair:

Thank you for those thoughtful contributions. This wraps up our Q&A session. A big thank you to our inspiring panel for sharing their insights on such an important topic.