

## SESSION 4: RESILIENCE THROUGH EQUITY, INCLUSION AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

### Gender Equality and Food System Resilience

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#### **Abstract**

Gender dynamics within food systems illustrate deep-seated structural inequalities that impede progress toward economic, social, nutritional, and environmental objectives. This presentation explores the progression from key concepts to measurement and solutions, underscoring the influence of gender across the food system and the strategies required to reshape these dynamics.

A range of methodologies now exist that can be used to examine and highlight how gender dynamics in society affects food system transformation. Evidence-based solutions addressing structural inequality—such as cash transfers, community-based initiatives, and gender-sensitive financial inclusion in agriculture—are emerging in rural contexts and provide promising models of change.

Transformative laws, national programs, and policy frameworks play a critical role in reinforcing and scaling such community-driven efforts. Altogether, this presentation builds a conceptual, empirical, and rights-based argument for sustained investment in social transformation—through measurement, targeted solutions, and policy innovation—to advance global food system goals.

#### **Introduction**

Thank you, Nigel, for your kind introduction, and thank you, Cathy, for inviting me to be with you all today. On behalf of the CGIAR team, we are delighted to be partners on this journey of building evidence to support inclusive development for all and to create sustainable, resilient, and healthy food systems.

Today, I will focus primarily on insights from our research on gender equality and food systems resilience, spanning a wide range of topics. I want to acknowledge our many funders for supporting our research on gender inequity, including the Australian government. I also want to recognise my colleagues—gender leaders at IFPRI: Agnes Quisumbing, Hazel Malapit, Elizabeth Bryan, and Emily Schmidt - for their contributions to this presentation.

Let me deeply acknowledge the partnerships and collaborations that generate evidence and contribute to the impact of our research around the world - None of this work happens without our implementation, research and policy partners.

## Gender (In)Equality as an Outcome in Food Systems

Gender inequality in food systems is a critical issue.

Women's greater vulnerabilities stem from structural barriers rooted in patriarchal norms, reflected in legal systems, including those governing land rights. Women are often marginalised in food systems, and for all of these structural reasons — not for any inherent reasons — they have lower adaptive and coping capabilities. We live in a world of poly crises, and with every crisis, women are more vulnerable — even as they hold the tools to respond.

For instance, research shows that heat stress and other climate extremes have greater impacts on women's labour in food systems compared to men. For example, labour force data from 30 African countries shows that heatwaves and drought reduce labour intensity, and women's labour contributions can increase relative to demands. Women in fragile contexts are particularly vulnerable to shocks and stressors, and these impacts also affect the children they bear.

Research also shows the effects of rising food prices and increased conflict on malnutrition, disproportionately affecting women and children.

So, how do we address these challenges? First, we must take a full food systems view, not just focus on agriculture. There are excellent frameworks to guide us, such as the High Level Panel of Experts (HLPE) food systems framework, which has proven durable and adaptable.

### The Gender and Food Systems Framework

With colleagues like Jemima Njuki, we have applied a gender lens to the food systems framework. For every level in the framework, we must consider how women are affected and how they can contribute, then act accordingly. I highly recommend using such conceptual frameworks to anchor our work and thinking.

In addition to using robust conceptual frameworks, at IFPRI, we also approach research-to-policy in four connected dimensions that cut across the policy cycle and enable us to gather insights that help to set agendas, identify solutions, create enabling environments and support capacity sharing:

1. **Clarifying the situation and outlook:** Are we doing enough to help people grasp the problem and its outlook and help set the development agenda? We cannot offer solutions to tackle major challenges without engaging people around why the problem itself matters.
2. **Testing, adapting and scaling solutions:** We constantly test, adopt, and scale solutions, identifying entry points for delivery. In this work, it is key that we keep our eyes on scalability, feasibility and cost effectiveness in addition to assessing the impact of solutions.
3. **Shaping enabling environments:** Since solutions cannot scale without an enabling policy environment, we examine political economy, governance, and financing issues that underpin the extent to which effective solutions can be deployed.
4. **Strengthening Research Methods and Capacity:** We invest in efforts to strengthen research methods and capacity across all dimensions.

Let me give you a brief tour of how these approaches that are part of IFPRI's strategic research-to-impact pathways play out in our work on gender equity and resilience, drawing from work with grassroots communities and governments around the world.

### **Clarifying the situation and outlook**

Investments in research on understanding the state of play of gender inequalities in food systems is key to setting the agenda for gender transformation. Our work on metrics, measurement and capturing gender and other inequalities in large-scale datasets has helped us to understand the state of play.

Our work on the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index, or in analyses of large-scale analyses depicting the overlay of gender-agriculture and climate hotspots are key examples of this work.

Another example is some new work looking at how women's roles play out across the food system. It's one thing to have a food systems framework, and another to recognise that gender is important in the context of that. Now, we are increasingly at a point where we can begin to put data around this.

In South Asia, for example, using a simple five-minute task allocation tool, we showed that women are heavily involved in agriculture and food systems and yet still carry the largest burdens of domestic work. If we want full-scale food systems transformation, we must consider women's roles across the entire system and identify entry points for rebalancing gender dynamics. In addition to imbalanced gender dynamics across the food system, we also hypothesise that there are likely implications for healthy diets in this. If women are time-stressed and are the primary household members who also carry domestic work burdens, we are likely to see an increasing reliance on unhealthy, convenient foods, which, in turn, presents a major challenge for healthy diets.

### **Testing, adapting, and scaling solutions**

Now pivoting to some of our work on testing, adapting, and scaling solutions. Over the past decade and a half, much work has focused on engaging women in agriculture, measuring women's empowerment, and delivering more gender-friendly outcomes. We know from some of our experimental studies that empowered women are more likely to adopt climate-smart practices. New evidence from multidimensional interventions at the nexus of agriculture, gender, and nutrition—such as the ANGEL trial in Bangladesh—shows sustained impacts on food security, diets, nutrition, and gender dynamics, even four years post-program.

Our challenge is now to make these tested interventions more cost-effective and scalable.

Another crucial area is social protection and its intersection with gender. Adaptive social safety nets, especially when bundled with key activities and targeted to women in rural communities, can have a significant impact in supporting women during climate shocks. Increasingly, we are seeing that social protection, especially adaptive social safety nets, can be a core strategy for addressing climate shocks. This is a major research area for research ahead, and we need to

understand it better from both policy, financing and implementation perspectives.

### **Shaping enabling environments**

Examining policy and legal barriers to women's empowerment in agriculture and food policy is vital. For example, policies and laws to strengthen women's land and resource rights are a well-documented area for continued effort, as is work with civil society and community efforts to realise those rights. Other policy areas that need attention are increasing women's access to information and financial services. Without access to technology, markets, extension services, climate information, and insurance products designed with a gender lens, women will be held back in food systems and society. Deliberate, intentional policy design is necessary to build evidence and achieve desired outcomes.

Much work on women, gender, policy, and law has focused on land and resource rights. Increasingly, we must also look at women's leadership and participation in system-level governance, not just land ownership. In this instance, the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture tool is now being adapted to bring a governance lens to different contexts.

We also bring a gender lens to long-term government collaborations, such as to our policy support program in Papua New Guinea, helping design updated national food security policies that ensure gender is central to reformulation.

### **Strengthening research methods and capacity**

Capacity building to use measurement tools that gender has been a cornerstone of our work on gender and food systems. As noted above, explicit efforts to measure women's empowerment have helped to highlight problems and drive action, and a key part of this has been to build capabilities amongst a large partner network to deploy, analyse and use these metrics effectively. New efforts are underway to strengthen and scale measurement, including the new women's empowerment metric for national statistical systems.

### **Priorities for future research and policy action**

In closing, as we look to the future, we must continue generating timely evidence on the state of women in the context of food systems transformation, and to sharply examine the implications for women's lives. We need to continue to build the evidence, not just on the benefits, but also on the cost-effectiveness of the diverse suite of interventions that are delivering success. Going beyond evidence of effectiveness, we also need to think about how to finance and scale effective interventions. Recognising the vital role of enabling environments, we also need to look at governance all the way across the food system, and also all the way from community and local levels, to policy and leadership in national systems, because women are not at the table.

The issue of how women are affected is often not asked in different rooms where policy decisions are taken. Ensuring that the data and evidence used to shape policy are gender-disaggregated and that advocates for gender are always included in decision-making spaces is indeed vital to progress.

In closing, we must continue to strengthen capacity and co-create tools that help us understand problems, identify solutions, and build enabling environments for a better world for women,

which in turn contributes to a better world for all.

Thank you very much, and I end with much gratitude to my colleagues at IFPRI, our partners, and our funders.

Dr Purnima Menon is Senior Director for Food and Nutrition Policy. She also serves as Acting Director for Transformation Strategies (as of January 2025). In this dual role, Dr Menon works closely with IFPRI's Director General and IFPRI's research unit directors to manage IFPRI's global research strategy.

Dr Menon has extensive research experience in evaluating large-scale programs in nutrition, health systems, agriculture, gender, technology, and food systems for better nutrition. She has published extensively in high-impact journals across disciplines and has co-authored and/or advised major global reports on nutrition and health. Her contributions to the field are reflected in over 200 peer-reviewed publications. Notably, she has played a pivotal role in agenda-setting academic collaborations, including the Lancet Series on Nutrition, Countdown to 2030, the Global Nutrition Report, and more.

Dr Menon collaborates widely across disciplines and invests deeply in research translation with policy communities. She has conceptualised and co-facilitated policy courses focused on nutrition, engaging a diverse audience of policymakers holding significant decision-making roles globally and within South Asia. She is a founding member of the Next Gen(d)eration Leadership Collective, an initiative to nurture effective leadership practices for a better-nourished world. In 2020, Dr Menon received the prestigious Nevin Scrimshaw Mid-Career Award in Global Nutrition from the American Society for Nutrition, in recognition of her contributions to the field.

Dr Menon previously served as a Senior Research Fellow in IFPRI's former Poverty, Health, and Nutrition Division and a Research Associate at Cornell University. She holds a PhD in International Nutrition from Cornell University and an MS in Nutrition from the University of Delhi. Her research and engagement efforts have extended across diverse regions, reflecting her commitment to shaping a sustainable and nutritious future. She speaks many languages and has lived both in India and the United States. She is currently based in India with her husband, Jitendra Balakrishnan, and their daughter.