

ESCWA Centre for Women Newsletter

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Gender and Food Security

Centre for Women
UN- ESCWA
A quarterly ECW issuance aiming at raising the gender awareness and responsiveness through highlighting the gender dimensions in various fields.

The recent and ongoing global food crisis has shed a spotlight on the issue of food security. Yet still only few people are aware of the gender dimension of food security and the major role that women play in finding sustainable solutions for fighting the food crisis. Naturally, ESCWA countries will be effected by this global dilemma, whether in the context of food availability, production or food importation from other countries as it is the case in UAE 100% or Yemen 80%. However, the situation for the ESCWA countries remains unclear due to the lack of gender-disaggregated data in this field and the scarcity of studies on the impact of the food crisis on women.

Why are women more vulnerable than men to the food crisis?

Women have a lower social and economic status in nearly all countries around the world. Due to cultural practices in many societies, women and girls eat last and least. This can lead to malnutrition, disease and increased mortality. It also affects their ability to learn and reduces their productivity. Women further have limited access to formal and decent work, limited or no access to land and credit, and limited or no access to power and decision-making in all institutional spheres (household, community, market and state).

Moreover, women have special physical needs: Pregnant women without access to sufficient and sufficiently nutritious food are in greater danger of infection, miscarriage and premature labour. If they are HIV positive, they also are more likely to transmit HIV to their children. Lactating women without access to nutritious food cannot feed their children sufficiently. Malnutrition is then rising.





Special events in the ESCWA Centre for Women

Workshop on "How to prepare National Reports – Beijing +15", 24-26 March 2009, League of Arab States premises, Cairo, in collaboration with the League of Arab States (LAS), United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), Arab Women Organization (AWO) and Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR).

Highlights:

Did you know, that...

- 1- Why is it Important to Fight the Food Crisis with a Gender Perspective?
- 2- Women and the Right to Food

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 25

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 11

Some things to consider for gender-sensitive planning for fighting the food crisis

Did you know, that...

- Even before the global food crisis, 7 out of 10 hungry were women and girls.
- In Africa, women provide 75% of the labour for food production.
- According to the World Bank, money invested in women is 17 times more
 efficient as when it is given to their male counterparts due to different
 spending patterns.
- Although markets for agricultural goods are expanding rapidly, women's
 access remains limited due to their societies' gender barriers which result in
 limited or no access to information, education, resources and finance.
- Hunger refugees have no legal protection, because the Geneva Convention does not cover hunger as grounds for refugee status.

You can learn more at: www.fao.org/gender/

Why is it important to fight the food crisis with a gender perspective?

In general, women tend to take care of household food production and small-scale crop cultivation while men tend to be working in larger crop production. This means that any effective programme, project or activity in the context of agriculture and food must take gender perspectives into consideration. The vast majority (up to 80%) of smallholder farmers in developing countries are women, thus providing the major work force for producing food and securing and protecting nutrition for those countries. Women and men further have different spending character: Studies show that differently from most men, most women spend almost all their income to meet the needs of their family and the household, most importantly nutrition. According to the World Bank, money invested in women is 17 times more efficient as when it is given to their male counterparts. This is also the experience of micro-credit projects and programmes.

Despite their major role in food production and in nutrition for their families, women mostly have little or no control over the resources needed to fulfill these roles.

Studies show that agricultural production could be increased significantly if agricultural inputs were distributed based on gender-equality and if women were better targeted by development activities, projects and programmes. Women are active at every point of the food chain and often responsible for ensuring the integrity and safety of food. Women in good health are better able to contribute to economic development.



FAO Telefood Rabbit Raising Project, Morocco

Photos by Djibril Sy/FAO

"According to the World bank, money invested in women is 17 times more efficient as when it is given to their male counterparts

Women and the Right to Food

The right to food is one of the universal human rights. It is closely related to the right to health, to education, to information, to participation, and to land. In the year 2000, the Secretary General of the United Nations appointed a special rapporteur on the right to food. One of the major aspects of his mandate is to highlight in his or her yearly report the gender dimension of the right to food.

The right to food has been formally recognized in many instruments of international law, e.g. the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).



Refugees waiting for food distribution, Sudan

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted 1948), Article 25

- Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being
 of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and
 necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment,
 sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances
 beyond his control.
- Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (adopted 1966), Article 11

- 1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions. The States Parties will take appropriate steps to ensure the realization of this right, recognizing to this effect the essential importance of international co-operation based on free consent
- 2. The States Parties to the present Covenant, recognizing the fundamental right of everyone to be free from hunger, shall take, individually and through international cooperation, the measures, including specific programmes, which are needed:
- (a) To improve methods of production, conservation and distribution of food by making full use of technical and scientific knowledge, by disseminating knowledge of the principles of nutrition and by developing or reforming agrarian systems in such a way as to achieve the most efficient development and utilization of natural resources;
- (b) Taking into account the problems of both food-importing and food-exporting countries, to ensure an equitable distribution of world food supplies in relation to need.

Although International Organizations and their Member Countries are working on improving women's right to food on the legal level, as in other areas, practice does not follow the progress yet.

You can learn more at www.fao.org/righttofood (with online course)

Some things to consider for gender-sensitive planning for fighting the food crisis:

- When technology for increasing productivity in agriculture is introduced in an untargeted way, usually
 men benefit from it and women do not get access. Only if women and men are directly targeted, an
 even distribution can be reached.
- → When planning projects, design activities directly for women and/or for men, not for the population in general, so that you reach everybody.
- Women and men have different expectations from technology for food production, processing, conservation and distribution. It is important to get feedback from both about what characteristics of a new technology to be introduced would be important for them (e.g. easy handling; safety devices to avoid accidents, also while not in use, in order to avoid injury of children and other family members; maximum weight of tools; etc.)
- → When including technology for food production, processing, conservation and distribution in your projects, find out what concrete needs the women and the men in your target group have and plan accordingly in order to answer to their actual needs.
- Women are not a homogeneous group. It is important to ensure that all women can benefit from the
 activities.
- → Never assume that "men" or "women" are one homogenous group. Rather find out the characteristics of your target group and which subgroups exist, and plan accordingly in order to answer to their needs and to reach everybody.
- For cultural reasons, in many societies women hesitate to speak their mind in groups where both men
 and women are present, but also where different social classes of women are represented. It is
 important to get the feedback from these women by addressing them in a targeted and culturally
 sensitive manner.
- → Find out social and cultural sensitivities and make sure to get feedback from everybody. Maybe you need to apply different survey techniques for different social groups in order to get the whole picture of your target group.
- Due to their social role, it may be necessary to plan special outreach activities for women in order to reach them, because information is otherwise mainly distributed among men.
- → Never assume that information is automatically available for all and is shared evenly in a target group. Rather find out how information flows in your group of beneficiaries and share it in a targeted manner so that it reaches everybody.
- When projects support women to grow cash crops on homestead land, even very poor women with no access to agricultural land can benefit.
- → When planning projects, always keep those in mind who do not have access to resources. In many cases you can plan activities that reach them directly nevertheless, even before they acquire more access so that they can benefit from your activities even before the bigger framework can be changed and access improved.

We're on the Web!

See us at:

www.escwa.un.org

About Our Organization...

The ESCWA Centre for Women was established on October 1, 2003, following the Commission's adoption of Resolution 240(XXII). This resolution, recognizing that a fundamental part of development is the empowerment of women, called for the creation of a Committee on Women comprising the member countries, and for the establishment of a women's Centre at ESCWA. The Centre continues and expands on the work carried out by the Women Empowerment and Gender Mainstreaming Team, formerly a part of the Social Development Division at ESCWA.

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