



Conclusions from the online exchanges: Strengthening Women's Leadership in Family Farming and Sustainable Food Systems

1. Introduction

On July 21, 22 and 30, 2021 online exchanges on “Strengthening Women’s Leadership in Family Farming and Sustainable Food Systems” were held, organized by the World Rural Forum (WRF) in collaboration with FAO. These events are part of a series of exchanges that the WRF is organizing. Similar online exchanges were held in Africa, America and Asia in the framework of the United Nations Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028 (UNDF), which reaffirms the fact that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls make a critical contribution to progress on all Sustainable Development Goals and targets.

The event gathered together a total of more than 180 participants from 54 countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. The participants were mainly women farmers from family farmers’ organizations, women organizations, and from the National Committees of Family Farming (NCFs). Other actors coming from different constituencies, including women organizations, governmental agencies, international organizations, FAO gender team also participated.

In America, the event brought together 64 participants from 18 countries from Central America and the Caribbean and South America. In Africa, 78 participants participated from 22 countries from West, Central, East and South Africa. In Asia, 46 participants participated from 14 countries.

The exchanges were divided into three blocs; the first part consisted in the presentation of a tool for gender sensitive policy analysis and a toolkit for mainstreaming gender in the National Action Plan of the UNDF designed by FAO Gender with the WRF collaboration. The second part was focused on sharing experiences and, finally, space was given to detailed exchanges between the participants.

Among the experiences shared, the following could be highlighted:

America: (i) Law for the empowerment of rural women and the Directorate of Rural Women in Peru, presented by Conveagro; (ii) The *Marcha das Margaridas*, in Brazil, shared by Contag; (iii) The Costa Rican National Action Plan, shared by the Costa Rican Ministry of Agriculture.

Africa: (i) Gender Equality and Investments in Agriculture and Food Security in Rwanda, shared by FAO; (ii) The experience of the *Collège des Femmes du Burkina Faso*, presented by ROPPA; Local mobilization on COVID-19 in Cameroon, shared by REFACOF; (iv) The National Action Plan of Sierra Leone, introduced by the Sierra Leone NCF.

Asia: (i) The experience of Joint Land Ownership in Nepal, introduced by NLR; (ii) The experience of Lakambini, the women farmers’ committee in The Philippines, shared by



representatives of Lakambini; (iii) The South Asia Regional Plan of the UNDF, presented by AFA.

2. Objective

Based on the experiences of various processes of social mobilization, implementation of public policies, construction of Family Farming Action Plans and various tools already designed, the aim of the events was to reflect on lessons learned and key elements for the success of these processes and for the empowerment of rural women. These key elements and lessons learned will be used to design strategies and tools and recommendations for public policies to be implemented within the framework of the UNDF.

3. Background

These online exchanges were part of a process of empowerment and alliance building in favour of rural women, which started in 2019, when an International Meeting of women family farmers took place in the framework of the *Marcha das Margaridas* in Brazil. The organizations which came together at this meeting endorsed a Declaration of Intentions, in which they committed to: i) strengthen the alliances between organisations; ii) bring the voice of rural women to international spaces; iii) carry out exchanges iv) promote networking, and monitor and evaluate the progress of women's agenda in the framework of the UNDF. As a follow up to these commitments a participatory process was put in place in 2020 to design a roadmap with proposals for public policies for women in the framework of the UNDF.

After two years of implementation, the UNDF is seen as an enormous opportunity and a robust process of engaging with a wide range of stakeholders to identify and implement concrete policies and measures in support of family farming. Efforts to implement the UNDF have been actively pursued by many relevant actors, including governments, UN agencies and family farmers' organizations, in 45 countries.

Due to the extensive and two-way dialogue built under its umbrella, implementation of the UNDF offers a unique mechanism for achieving Agenda 2030.

The UNDF recognised that there is gender gap that limits rural women's ability to take advantage of the opportunities, and prevents them from reaching their full potential, undermining the achievement of the multidimensional and inclusive rural development by the 2030 Development Agenda. The UNDF, through its Pillar 3 Promote gender equity in family farming and the leadership role of rural women¹, and the National and Regional Action Plans are great opportunities to implement comprehensive and dedicated policies and program, pushing forward the women's agenda at international and country level.

Pillar 3 emphasizes that strengthening women's capacities and improving their participation and leadership role in processes for policy, social, cultural and economic equality must

¹ <https://www.familyfarmingcampaign.org/en/>



translate into an increased capacity to propose, design and participate in specific public policies that address gender inequalities.

4. Key takeaways of the meetings

Rural women play an important role in agriculture and rural economies, accounting for almost half of the agricultural labour force in developing economies, and developing multiple roles (productive, reproductive and community management) e.g., caring for children and the elderly, providers of food, water, and energy. They are engaged in on- and off-farm activities and diversify income sources and ensure food security, nutrition and well-being for their families and communities, are repositories of ancestral knowledge for food production and preparation and they play a central role in natural resource management and food production, processing, conservation and marketing.

In the three online meetings the gender sensitive policy analysis was introduced by FAO. The aim of these analyses is to assess gender equality gaps in existing policies and to stimulate formulation of more gender-responsive policies and programs.

Among the different attributes that these analyses should include are: specific gender equality objectives, measures and indicators to address rural women needs, rural women's meaningful participation in all the policy cycle, budget lines, training, awareness raising and other activities to strengthen gender institutional capacities, monitoring and evaluation processes based in concrete sex-disaggregated data, etc.

The analysis should focus on all the stages of the policy cycle: problem analysis, policy formulation, definition of goals and indicators, budgeting, CD of policy actors, M&E, policy adaptation. And among the key areas area: Land and productive resources; rural organizations; Financial services; Rural Employment; Agricultural Research; Agricultural Technology; Rural Advisory Services; Agricultural Markets and Agri-food value chains.

In the course of the debate, attention was drawn to several key points that should be included in the process of analysis and policy development:

- It is vital to identify the priorities of women and men at all levels, addressing the practical needs of women as well as their strategic gender interests. This implies an assessment of the existing gender gaps in order to formulate concrete policies to reduce them.
- The process must ensure women's participation in each phase, particularly in multi-stakeholder groups to identify where gender needs to be addressed, as well as through gender disaggregation of data and capacity building, and with an explicit recognition of the heterogeneity of rural women when constructing objectives in programs and policies.
- The gender tool should be incorporated in the processes of the different Ministries of Agriculture as a support for gender-responsive implementation and monitoring, which should include specific indicators, including indicators for policy coherence, with clear



references to SDG 5, CEDAW and other international mechanisms, and training in how to monitor them

- The incorporation of a transformative gender focus agenda requires the development of a clear strategy, with accompanying budget commitments.

Guidelines for mainstreaming gender in the National Action Plans for Family Farming (NAP)

Specific Guidelines to mainstreaming gender in NAP and in other policies are at a draft stage. The Guidelines identify 3 different approaches depending on the different gender inequalities to be addressed, the context, the possibilities and the level of transformation to be reached.

They propose different actions for fully integrating a gender perspective in NAPs, including a specific, inclusive consultation process, a stocktaking of existing evidence of rural gender inequalities in the country and current policies and initiatives contributing to gender equality; and the appointment of a gender focal point within the coordination team of the NAP. For each of the actions, the Guidelines provide suggestions on how to achieve them and a set of useful materials that can be used.

Nine steps are set out in the Guidelines: (i) stocktaking of gender gaps, (ii) identification of specific challenges to be addressed by the NAP, (iii) definition of objectives and outputs to address the challenges, (iv) design of activities and strategies, (v) analysis of the gender considerations associated with each pillar of the GAP; (vi) discussion of the risk of exacerbating gender inequalities; (vii) adjust interventions to ensure that women and men benefit equally; (viii) design appropriate monitoring and evaluation strategies, through the use of disaggregated indicators; and (ix) allocate sufficient resources through clear budgeting.

5. Main debate

The main points addresses and proposals which emerged during the regional meetings are described below:

America (key elements from the online exchange held on July 21)

Policy level:

- Develop a strategy at two levels: the legislative and executive branches. This is fundamental to ensure the implementation of public policies.
- Territorialize policy and raise the interest of local governments, including training processes for municipalities to integrate the gender perspective and designing focal points in Ministries and Directorates.
- Develop gender specific lines of budget.
- Carry out clear follow up activities of the relevant institutional bodies (Directorates, etc.) to ensure that they truly represent rural women in the NAP.

Mobilisation level:

- Raise awareness and position rural women's issues in public opinion, including the division of gender roles within the family.



- Build the capacity of women as rights holders, to carry out proposals and analysis.
- Promote the active participation of women in different spaces, ensuring attention is given to gender inclusive management of the spaces
- Raise awareness, promoting the meaningful participation and leadership of women in mixed family farming organizations and defining the existing gaps, including a review of the organization's statutes if necessary.
- Work on social norms and carry out awareness raising for men and women to highlight the key role of women and their contributions to family farming
- Establish multistakeholder partnerships, including alliances with other women, trade union and international organizations. As an example, the *Marcha das Margaridas* is built on the basis of a process of concrete struggle as an alliance of organisations.
- Strengthen rural women's organizations and women sections within family farmers' organizations.
- Organize regular consultations among women's groups, as well as with mixed groups.

Africa (key elements from the online exchange on July 22)

Policy level:

- Promote high-level and multi-stakeholder dialogues, training of parliamentarians and knowledge sharing.
- Ensure there is enough gender analysis, gender disaggregated data that can feed the proposals.
- Ensure the political commitments are made and fulfilled, for example on gender-responsive regulations and budgeting.
- Build more parliamentary alliances and take an active role in policy dialogues.
- Work in inheritance laws, in particular related to access to land.
- Establish clear budget lines to support women that can, for instance, reinforce the diversification and the generation of added value of women's products.
- Support women to develop local action plans at a municipal level, carrying out advocacy actions directed at local elected officials and traditional leaders and initiating processes from the family level.

Mobilization level:

- Carry out situation analysis, identifying groups to work with, developing tools and conducting interviews with target populations, using different existing methodologies and questionnaires to interview and guide, as well as organising focus groups in the villages (1 group of women, 1 group of men, 1 group of young people), adapting the standardised form to the target populations and groups.
- Work on social norms and carry out awareness raising for men and women to



highlight the key role of women and their contributions to family farming

- Ensure the correct use of statistics, in order to predict tendencies, using reliable data, disaggregated by sex.
- Promote discussion groups separately with women, men and youth. In this regard, dialogue should be held with the partners and husbands themselves. It is important to lobby traditional chiefs to support women.
- Identify potential partners through district level meetings, making sure that women are represented in the process.
- Carry out documentation activities for dialogue with local authorities and collect statistics to support arguments.
- Define gender specific needs and collect the proposals on how to integrate women's needs into agricultural policies through inclusive processes, organization of specific meetings and then conduct a validation workshop to mainstream gender. In these cases, the NCFE should act to monitor the NAP and specific indicators should be used.
- Institutionalise a gender focal point in the NCFE.
- Give full recognition to relevant women's days. As an example, *the Collège des Femmes of Burkina Faso* has taken the lead in organising activities on the 15th of October (Indigenous Peoples' Day) in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.
- Follow up on commitments made during elections campaigns.

Asia (key elements from the online exchange on July 30)

Policy level:

- Expressly recognise women farmers' needs in land policies.
- Carry out long term campaigns, with a view to sustainability and include meaningful participation women in policy decision processes. When the number of women participating in policy negotiations increases, they bring renewed strength and introduce new elements into the agenda setting.

Mobilisation level:

- Raise awareness at the household level, for both women and men, on the benefits of participating in organisations and cooperatives.
- Raise awareness about women rights, collecting the proposals coming from grass roots organizations to ensure a gender transformative agenda and a gender-sensitive participatory approach.
- Work on social norms and carry out awareness raising for men and women to highlight the key role of women and their contributions to family farming
- Look for innovative entry points in which the agenda can be systematically included
- Strengthen women's organizations.



- Mainstream gender in mixed organizations.
- Maintain permanent dialogue with the authorities to ensure the implementation of commitments.

6. Conclusions and steps forwards

The meetings strengthened dialogue and exchange among women family farmers, national committees of family farming, state representatives and FAO, IFAD officials, contributing to a greater collaboration and coordination in favour of rural women in the framework of the UNDF 2019-2028.

Participants reaffirmed that the Decade of Family Farming is a very powerful tool which enables advances in gender equity in family farming and the leadership role of rural women. Pillar 3 of the Global Action Plan includes the main demands of women in relation to access to land and financing, access to extension services, representation in decision-making spaces, protection against gender violence, etc. The need to reinforce actions to develop Pillar 3 was underlined.

The profound inequality faced by women, existing gender gaps and the major challenges related to social barriers, land rights and a lack of representation in advocacy and policy building processes require holistic, specific and ambitious gender transformative approaches.

In order to unleash the capacity of women farmers to develop their crucial roles in family farming, including food production and addressing climate change, the following points should be addressed:

- An explicit recognition of the gender gap and solving data gaps through the generation of sex disaggregated data and information that will feed policies and interventions that will respond to concrete needs of rural women.
- Holistic comprehension and providing a space for the proposals coming from women's organizations or mixed organizations for a gender transformative agenda
- The importance of inclusive processes and consultations at grassroots level
- The need to raise awareness on women rights among women farmers themselves
- The importance of establishing permanent dialogue and working together with local parliaments and municipalities, including strengthening their capacities to promote gender equality
- The relevance of supporting and stimulating women's equality through specific gender policies, as well as mainstreaming gender into agricultural policies within governmental programmes, legal frameworks and ensuring adequate budget allocation to ensure their implementation
- The centrality of capacity building for rural women, ensuring their visibility, strengthening their ability to mobilise and lobby and empowering them to reinforce their participation and leadership role in policy-making processes.



To achieve all these advances, it is necessary to build and strengthen partnerships based on knowledge, dialogue and mutual trust. Strategies should be both holistic and specific to each context, constructed together with women family farmers, with rural women and with women's organizations. These online exchanges have demonstrated the importance of taking into account the enormous experience of women who have been fighting for their rights for many years, with a vast experience of proposing and implementing policies and programmes for women linked to Family Farming.

The Decade of Family Farming and, specifically, its pillar 3 is an instrument which belongs to all women in Family Farming. The Decade sets out 7 pillars or priorities to ensure the future of family farming. The third pillar, which acts as a cross cutting theme for all the other objectives, is centred precisely on the promotion of gender equality in family farming and the leadership role of rural women.

In the framework of the Decade, the WRF, together with FAO and the organisations which participated in the online exchanges, will continue to work in alliance, proposing and demanding women's adequate participation in decision-making spaces. The next steps will be to continue work to promote the gender-transformative agenda in policy spaces at global, regional and local levels, through continued lobbying for the construction of concrete strategies and policies which accelerate gender equality and the economic and political empowerment of women.

With this aim in mind, participants expressed various priorities, among them i) the importance of continuing to carry out and scale-up this type of exchanges, collaboration and alliance; and ii) the need to reinforce the capacities of women of FOs, to guarantee their meaningful participation in the elaboration and implementation of National Action Plans and other policies for rural women in the framework of the UNDF, and to ensure that these policies and plans contain strategies and instruments that accelerate gender equality and the economic and political empowerment of women.