

POLICY BRIEF

# Promoting Climate-Resilient Agrifood Systems Governance with Gender Inclusivity: A Policy Brief

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Although livelihoods within agrifood systems (AFS) are generally vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, women bear a disproportionate burden from rising climatic stressors. In agrarian regions in the Global South, women face unique and intersectional vulnerabilities that limit their voice in governance and decision-making processes. This, in turn, impedes their ability to participate in and benefit from the food system. Addressing these vulnerabilities is crucial for promoting women's empowerment, enhancing climate resilience, and ensuring food security at various levels, with a particular focus on community-level participation in AFS. This policy brief highlights existing evidence on barriers women face in AFS governance and known approaches that can be scaled up to improve women's voice and agency in climate-relevant AFS governance.

## Introduction

Amid rising intensity and frequency of climatic stressors in the Global South, mitigating the effects of agricultural production on climate change and increasing the resilience of farmers and farming practices to the effects of climate change will be central to ensuring future global food security (Wheeler and Von Braun 2013; Woodhill et al. 2022). Both mitigation and adaptation raise key governance challenges, such as resolving collective action dilemmas, addressing externalities of activities of individual entities on systems, and making at-scale investments in climate-resilient infrastructure. Thus, governance—the systems and processes through which decisions within a community are made and implemented—will be critical for securing AFS through climate change.

Neither the climate crisis nor existing governance systems are gender neutral. There exists an imbalance between men and women in their access to decision-making authority, knowledge, abilities, assets, and networks, leading to gender-based differences in environmental risk exposure and susceptibility (Awiti 2022; Grillos 2018). Yet, women face unique and intersectional vulnerabilities that limit their voice in governance and decision-making processes. The absence of greater participation of women in governance can result in policies and solutions that do not effectively



address their needs and interests. Similarly, women's minimal oversight and representation in community-level leadership can result in lower levels of participation.

Addressing women's inequitable participation in AFS governance at the community level is paramount for several reasons. The community level is where strategies for sustainable agricultural practices, resource management, and food security are devised and executed (Doustmohammadian et al. 2022). Furthermore, this community-level participation enables the equitable sharing of resources and responsibilities, ensuring that women have equal access to vital assets and opportunities, which, in turn, can lead to enhanced agricultural productivity, economic empowerment, and the overall wellbeing of communities.

Based on the existing scientific evidence we identified the barriers that hinder women's participation in AFS governance at the community level. Additionally, we highlight community-driven interventions that engage, benefit, and empower women to participate and benefit from AFS governance.

## Barriers women face in climate-relevant agrifood systems governance

### Barriers: accessing agricultural inputs and strategies

- Formal breeding programs in developing countries have acutely underrepresented women's voices and needs. Most plant breeding programs (government and private) have focused on crops with commercialization potential and high yield, typically cultivated by men, including maize, wheat, soybeans, and groundnut, with little attention to food crops and vegetables (Kramer and Galiè 2020).
- Women do not have their climate information needs met nor do they benefit fully from rural climate services (Gumucio et al. 2020). Evidence suggests that extension workers prefer men over women farmers regarding information diffusion (Witinok-Huber et al. 2021), and that women are less likely to participate in climate-smart technology and information programs (Alidu et al. 2021) and have poor access to early warning climate information (Elias et al. 2018; Ngigi et al. 2017).
- Women have lower access to improved technology; including machinery, fertilizers, and high-yielding seed varieties that boost agricultural productivity (Nyasimi and Huyer 2017). In some cases, men openly oppose the use of technology by their spouses for fear of insubordination when their wives became financially independent (Badstue et al. 2020).



### Barriers: shaping local approaches

- Inequalities in educational attainments between men and women have been a longstanding obstacle to bridging the AFS governance gender gap, especially in agrarian regions (Todes and Turok 2018). UNESCO (2022) note a persistent gender gap in adult literacy in South and Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa, with 81 literate adult women for every 100 literate men as of 2018.
- Legal constraints significantly hinder women's ability to participate in food system governance and assert their leadership and decision-making power. In many agrarian regimes in the Global South, few laws protect women against discrimination. In cases where laws exist to protect women's rights and their ability to realize those rights, they are not consistently enforced (Eastin 2018).
- Normalized routines and social norms often (re)produce inequalities that translate into cultural inscriptions of what women can access. Social norms often propagate women's disproportionate discrimination in accessing crucial resources such as land, labor, capital, and information by reason of essential discourses and social norms (Elias et al. 2018; Nyahunda et al. 2021).
- Mobility and transportation barriers limit women's movement to training centers, access to information on innovation, or voicing of their opinion on its adoption (Sorgho et al. 2020). This lack of mobility outside the home often leads to a lack of awareness of available services, which decreases women's prospects of learning about improved agricultural practices or opportunities to lead (Eastin 2018).

## Opportunities for enhancing gender equality in agrifood system governance

The best practices that improve women's voice and agency in AFS governance meet the following criteria: consideration of women's perspectives, potential enhancement of their welfare through these measures, their capacity to shape decisions, and the potential for broader societal changes.

### Best practices: social innovations

- Programs that advance equitable access to agricultural resources (for example, technology and seeds), such as the AKIS (Agriculture Knowledge Information Systems) app in Sierra Leone, have provided women with better access to up-to-date information on the latest weather and market prices to help them in crucial agricultural decisions (Kamara et al. 2019).
- Gender-responsive breeding ensures that modern breeding takes advantage of opportunities to improve gender equality in agriculture. The CGIAR Gender and Breeding Initiative has developed a gender-responsive, social targeting approach used in public and private sector breeding to address some of these shortcomings. This involves women and men farmers and scientists working together to assess and improve varieties suitable for local farms, including selecting locally preferred traits (Vernooy 2022).
- Gender-balanced climate information diffusion helps women farmers challenge the limiting roles of gender norms and practices and improve their decision-making and representation in food systems governance (Gumucio et al. 2020; Rengalakshmi et al. 2018). For example, in Pakistan, access to information improved women's inclination to take on leadership and decision-making roles (Cardey et al. 2019).
- Education and financial literacy and inclusion plays a crucial role in women's empowerment and greater decision-making ability in Bangladesh, Benin, Malawi, and the Philippines (Quisumbing et al. 2021). Financial literacy empowers women farmers to improve their bargaining power, attain financial freedom, and compete for governance roles in AFS.

### Best practices: organizational strategies

- Gender budgeting as a public financial management practice has been adopted by many governments across the globe as a way of ensuring that their budgets respond to the needs of all people, especially women (Nolte et al. 2021; Stotsky 2016). Gender budgeting uses public financial management practices to correct inequalities between and among various populations, with a particular focus on using public services,

infrastructure, and social protection to achieve gender equality.

- Women-led agroecological interventions such as crop diversification, intercropping, agroforestry, mixed crop-livestock systems, soil management measures, and farmer-to-farmer networks have been reported to have positive food security and nutrition outcomes and improve women's autonomy in the household and community (Bezner Kerr et al. 2021, 2022; High Level Panel of Experts 2019). Enabling women to lead has the potential to increase women's autonomy in their communities and empower them to challenge gender norms.
- Training women on how to approach government/leaders and influence community decision-making helps women better appreciate the importance of participating fully in various stages of the agricultural systems and value-chain systems. For instance, the Suchana Intervention, a large-scale development program in Bangladesh, actively provided social intervention on behavior change communication to empower women of the poorest social segment in women's decision-making.
- Self-help groups (SHGs) and networks can provide a valuable platform for women to come together, share knowledge and experiences, and advocate for their rights and interests. In Ethiopia, Alemu et al. (2018) showed positive and significant impacts of SHG participation on empowerment, suggesting that SHGs can be an effective platform for women to share information and raise awareness about their rights. Finally, SHGs can create a supportive and empowering environment for women, where they can feel safe to speak out, share their ideas, and advocate for their rights and interests (De Hoop et al. 2014).

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Constraints	Implication						Outcomes								Interventions	
	Decreased Participation and Empowerment	Limited Access and Resources	Gender Inequality and Discrimination	Low Productivity and Adoption	Reduced mobility and opportunities	Gender-Based Violence and Social Dynamics	Capacity Building and Information Access	Market Access and Risk Reduction	Market Access and Income	Agricultural practices and productivity	Empowerment and leadership	Assets and workload	Food security and nutrition	Gender norms and equality		Community engagement and political participation
Educational constraints	●							●	●	●	●			●		Equitable access to agricultural resources
Information constraints	●	●	●						●	●	●	●	●	●		Gender sensitive participatory crop and livestock programs
Legal constraints		●	●				●				●			●		Gender balanced climate information diffusion
Normative constraints	●	●	●									●	●			Engaging men in the advancement of women
Mobility Constraints			●	●	●					●				●		Education
Technology and asset-based barriers				●		●			●			●	●	●		Financial literacy and inclusion
Safety and security constraints				●	●	●			●							Gender budgeting
Women's exclusion from plant-breeding programs			●							●	●	●		●		Women self help group and associations
	●	●												●		Training empowering women on how to approach government/leaders and influence community decision-making
	●									●		●	●	●		Farmer/women led agroecological interventions
										●						Devolution/decentralization of service delivery
		●	●													Private sector and value chain governance (standards, corporate social responsibility, decent work, equal pay, employment opportunities)