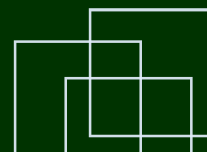




Rural Women at Work: Bridging the gaps



International
Labour
Organization



Introduction

The ILO estimates that rural women comprise a quarter of the world's population. Women also make up 41 per cent of the world's agricultural labour force, a ratio which rises to 49 per cent for low income countries.

Rural women work as farmers, wage earners and entrepreneurs. They represent an important share of the agriculture workforce. Their social and economic empowerment can have a powerful impact on productivity and agriculture-led growth.

Gender inequalities in the agricultural sector are significant but difficult to quantify.

As women are concentrated in both unpaid care and household work and their role in subsistence farming is often unremunerated, their contribution to the rural economy is widely underestimated.

Women from local, indigenous and tribal communities are often custodians of traditional knowledge that is key for their communities' livelihoods, resilience and culture. Their contributions are unique and vital especially in the context of natural resources management, agriculture and forestry - sectors that are critical for both mitigation of, and adaptation to climate change.

Key challenges rural women face at work

Rural women are concentrated in low-skilled, low-productivity, and low or unpaid jobs with long working hours, poor working conditions and limited social protection. They are more likely to work as unpaid contributing family members which means their work is largely unrecognized or undervalued.

They are most active in the informal rural economy and are far less likely than men to participate in rural wage employment (both agricultural and non-agricultural). When they do work for wages, rural women are more likely to be employed in part-time, seasonal, and time- and labour-intensive activities.

Less than 20 per cent of landholders worldwide are women. In rural areas the gender pay gap is as high as 40 per cent.

Rural women have less access than men to productive resources. The gender gap exists for many assets and services, including land, improved seeds and fertilizers, livestock, extension and financial services. Women also have less opportunities for education and training, potentially limiting them from adopting new technologies as readily as men.

If women had the same access as men to resources, agricultural output in developing countries would increase between 2.5 and 4% and the number of undernourished people in the world would decrease by approximately 12–17% (FAO, 2011)

Rural women shoulder a disproportionate amount of unpaid care and household work, which is neither recognized nor remunerated. They undertake multiple roles including caring



for children and the elderly, cooking, as well as collecting firewood and water, and working on farms or family enterprises.

When working as they often do as contributing family members and subsistence farmers, rural women receive no income for their labour. When they are in paid employment, the tasks they undertake in agriculture, or on plantations are often undervalued. Women are paid less than men even for the same tasks. Many rural women also do not have the same opportunity as men to obtain work that attracts higher levels of pay.

When paid and unpaid working hours are combined, women work much longer hours compared to men.

Rural women are at high risk of abuse, sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence. The heightened risks are due to factors such as gender power imbalances, a lack of oversight, and working alone in relative isolation or in remote locations.

Climate change threatens to exacerbate rural women's vulnerability to discrimination, exclusion and exploitation. Women in rural areas are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood. With climate change, women's already unequal access to productive assets is further impacted. Indigenous and tribal women are disproportionately affected.

Rural women are under-represented in institutions, governance and leadership, and have less decision-making power.

Why bridge the gaps for rural women?

Everyone should have the right to Decent Work, including rural women.

Studies show a positive correlation between increasing the labour force participation of women and a rise in GDP.

The ILO estimates that reducing the gap in labour force participation rates between men and women by 25 per cent by the year 2025, could raise global GDP by 3.9 per cent, or US\$5.8 trillion.

There is enormous potential for rural women to contribute to raising GDP as well as the revitalization of agriculture and rural economies if the barriers to equality are addressed.

If women in rural areas had the same access to agricultural assets, education and markets as men, agricultural production could be increased and the number of hungry people reduced by 100-150 million.

Addressing gender inequality and promoting decent work for rural women as a priority will translate into economic and social gains for all.

Creating decent jobs, entrepreneurship training and access to finance, protecting rural women from unacceptable forms of work, enhancing social protection, ensuring their voices are heard and closing the representation gap are key elements needed for transformative action, if the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is to be achieved.

How to bridge the gaps for rural women?

- Adopt integrated and holistic approaches based on a human rights framework that also focus on the broader conditions necessary for women to prosper economically.
- Provide equal access to and control over productive resources such as land and financial services.
- Ensure the economic empowerment of rural women, including access to minimum wages and targeted guaranteed-income schemes in public works.
- Advocate for changing stereotypes and promote sharing of household work and care more equitably within the family, including addressing the time poverty of rural women. Access to publicly funded childcare and paid maternity and paternity leave should be available.
- Ensure greater voice, organization and representation for rural women, driven by social dialogue, including through national and regional collective bargaining. This should include supporting rural workers' organizations and cooperatives to defend their rights and interests. Collective action such as cooperatives provide a platform for involvement in policy debates and decision-making, as well as enabling economies of scale in production.
- Explore alternatives to agricultural wage labour for women-entrepreneurship, women's business, non-agricultural jobs and women's access to land to run their own production. Rural women also need access to business training



“I got an opportunity to train with the ILO on how to run a business. My income is increasing and I am also able to save as well. I could not get an education but my children are in schools.”

Shazia, trained by the ILO in Pakistan

and financial support.

- Enhance access to social finance for rural women and encourage financial institutions to adopt a gender responsive strategy. The staff and culture of such institutions need to be gender-aware and gender-balanced in order to address the different needs of women and men in the rural economy related to the household, farms, equipment, education and health expenses.
- Introduce effective measures to prevent and address violence and harassment in the world of work.
- Recognize and support indigenous women as custodians of traditional knowledge in natural resources management and in increasing the resilience of agriculture in the face of climate change. This includes ensuring that women participate in any new initiatives being rolled out to create decent and green jobs in rural economies, including as part of the SDGs to reduce poverty.
- Adopt a multifaceted approach by actors in the rural economy to provide a package of complementary social protection measures which can enhance efforts in attaining the SDGs. For women, such a package needs to include provisions for maternity protection as in many countries rural women are excluded from national legislation guaranteeing these rights.
- Provide more and better sex-disaggregated statistics on work in the rural economy.



“My children tell everyone that their mother is now working as a barefoot technician. They proudly tell their teachers how I supervise rural infrastructure.”

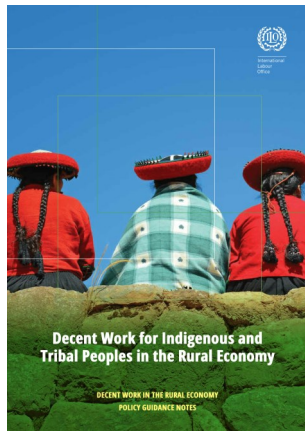
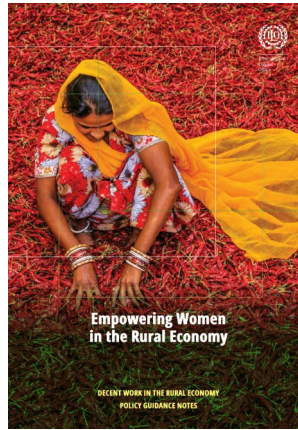
Radhika Sahu, barefoot technician trained by the ILO in India



The Decent Work Agenda offers an integrated framework for rural women’s empowerment, underpinned by international labour standards, social dialogue and the recognition that rural women play a key role in climate change action.

To Learn More:

**Empowering Women in the Rural Economy
Policy Guidance Note**



**Decent Work for Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in the Rural Economy
Policy Guidance Note**

**Gender, labour and a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all
Brief**

Gender, labour and a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has noted that “(p)eople who are socially, economically, culturally, geographically, educationally, or otherwise marginalized tend to be more vulnerable to climate change and its associated risks and impacts... [I]f this high-level vulnerability is made that more people suffer. Further, it is the problem of intersecting social processes that result in inequities in exposure to climate change and its effects, as well as in response. Such social processes include, for example, discrimination on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, age, and disability.” These findings illustrate that the global effort to tackle climate change and its impacts, while the world has made progress in gender equality, has not been enough to ensure that all people are included. While progress on gender equality has undoubtedly been made, more work is needed to ensure that all people are included in the transition to a just and sustainable future. Climate change risks widening existing gender gaps, but efforts to address gender equality can contribute to a more resilient and sustainable future. This brief provides a summary of the key findings and recommendations of the IPCC report on climate change and its impacts on gender equality and social justice.

In the world of work, as highlighted by a 2018 ILO report, several challenges remain in achieving gender equality. Climate change related impacts, as well as actions that include women, can serve to enhance these challenges. Women already face significant obstacles to gender equality, including risks, especially in regularly hazardous work, as well as men provide in global labour markets, in respect of opportunities, treatment and resources. Gender gaps remain. The ILO estimates that globally, women earn 17 per cent of what men earn, and in certain trends, it will widen. The gaps in the gender wage gap, in the same time, method and occupational segregation continues to contribute to gender gaps both in terms of the number and quality of jobs. Furthermore, additional barriers to other the

Gender, Equality and Diversity Branch Decent Jobs Programs

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