

Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment, and Food Systems

Co-organized by International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA)

The UNFSS Side Event on Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment, and Food Systems underscored the importance of addressing gender equality to transform food systems. While there is a broad consensus in the literature about how to improve gender equality and women's empowerment in food systems, there is little evidence on causal pathways or processes. This side event presented evidence from a new review of evidence on gender equality, women's empowerment, and food systems. Dr. Jemimah Njuki, Director for Africa, IFPRI, presented the findings from the review. The presentation of findings was followed by a panel discussion with Steve Cole, Senior Scientist, Gender Specialist, International Institute for Tropical Agriculture, Corinna Hawkes, Director, Centre for Food Policy at City, University of London, and Reema Nanavaty, Self Employed Women's Association, where the discussants provided key insights on pathways mentioned in the review, practical approaches to addressing gender inequality in food systems, comments on the recommendations provided by the review, and future action steps for the advancement of the results found in the review. Dr. Ruth Meinzen-Dick, Senior Research Fellow, IFPRI, provided closing remarks.

Review's Conclusions

- ▶ Evidence shows that context-specific pathways link women's empowerment to important outcomes such as household nutrition and dietary diversity, albeit these pathways may vary between and within settings. These pathways are influenced by women's access to resources, social norms, policies, and institutions. However, few studies have been conducted to better understand best practices and effective pathways for engaging men in the process of women's empowerment in food systems. While there are gender-informed assessment studies that look at the efficacy of gender- and nutrition-sensitive agricultural initiatives, there is limited evidence to indicate the long-term sustainability of such impacts.
- ▶ Additionally, current evidence is very localized and context-specific, limiting its application beyond the focus area of the study. Relatively few studies used a gender-informed design and conceptual framework to better understand mechanisms that promote equality and empowerment.
- ▶ Investments are needed in several critical areas, including maternal education, particularly nutrition-focused education and counselling; programs/interventions that aim to improve women's influence and role in decision-making and leadership at all levels of the food system (household, community, and systems); interventions that promote positive and equal gender norms at the household, community, and systems levels; and improvements in women's access to important and necessary resources.
- ▶ We cannot continue using gender-blind analytical frameworks to analyze and design food systems innovations. The review provides an analytical framework that covers four core elements of gender equality: women's agency; access to resources, services, and opportunities; addressing harmful gender and social norms; and equitable policies and institutions

Key Issues Emerging from Discussion

- ▶ Women have been engaged in food systems but we need to understand their leadership styles and how to promote more women's leadership in food systems. There is already demonstrated capacity of women's leadership in homes.

- ▶ The role of women organizing is essential for achieving successful results in food systems; men need to be included and engaged in women's empowerment programs.
- ▶ We need partnerships that prioritize gender equality and promote positive gender norms through investments and actions that promote change. These include boosting women's asset ownership, including land, and access to financial products such as savings and credit at the household level.
- ▶ We need to go beyond current approaches and be intentional, for example, by engaging men and traditional leaders in efforts to increase women's tenure rights, including women's names on assets such as land, in order to allow women to own these assets jointly with their spouses.
- ▶ To increase agricultural productivity, women need access to the necessary equipment, such as seed banks and fertilizers.
- ▶ While COVID-19 has exacerbated inequalities, it is an opportunity to build back better food systems that work for all.
- ▶ R&D efforts must shift from identifying the fundamental causes of gender disparities to tackling restrictive norms and power relations. By doing so, we will provide opportunities for both male and female stakeholders to contribute to more equitable standards and social interactions.

INTERNATIONAL FOOD POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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