



## Near East and North Africa Gender Newsletter

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### Promoting nutrition and gender equality in a synergic way

On June 22, the FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa (RNE), in collaboration with the Nutrition Division (ESN) and the Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division (ESP), organized the online event **“Promoting nutrition and gender equality in a synergic way: challenges and opportunities”**. The event aimed to echo FAO’s commitment to enhance the work on gender equality and nutrition in alignment with the new corporate Policy on Gender Equality 2020-2030 and the Vision and Strategy for FAO’s work on nutrition.

More than 160 participants attended the event, including FAO colleagues, experts from other UN agencies, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and the academia.

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The event provided a compelling chance to explore the linkages between nutrition and gender equality and explore the challenges and opportunities for promoting these two thematic areas in a more systematic and synergic way. After the opening remarks provided by Abdulhakim Elwaer (Assistant Director-General and Regional Representative for RNE, FAO) and Nancy Aburto (Deputy Director for Food and Nutrition Division for ESN, FAO), Valentina Franchi (Regional Gender Expert for RNE, FAO) welcomed the panel, composed of four experts with long-standing experience in the advancement of nutrition and food sciences as well as gender and social inclusion: Ms Karima Ahmed Al-Hada'a (Planning & Liaison Specialist, Scaling-Up Nutrition Secretariat in the Ministry of Planning & International Cooperation in Yemen), Dr Zahra Saleh Ahmed (Professor of food sciences in the National Research Center in Egypt), Dr Farah Naja (Associate professor in Nutritional Sciences in the American University of Beirut in Lebanon), and Dr Alia Hafiz (Head of the Nutrition Unit in World Food Programme Regional Bureau in Egypt).



An example of gender-responsive communication used in the WFP nutrition campaign in Egypt, shared by Alia Hafiz during the webinar.

The panellists' interventions highlighted how gender inequalities and discriminations lead to persisting food and nutrition insecurity in the region. Dr Naja presented interesting findings of the relationship between gender and nutrition, showing that gender gaps in nutritional outcomes are evident even in very young children due to prevailing social and gender norms. In addition, examples from Egypt, on how to address linkages between gender equality and nutrition in field projects were shared by Dr Saleh, who highlighted the positive experience with "Community Nutrition kitchens". Dr Karima enriched the discussion by highlighting the need to ensure policy coherence to accelerate gender equality and nutrition efforts, with specific attention to fragile contexts and countries in protracted crises. Dr Hafiz's intervention underlined the need to adopt gender-transformative approaches in nutrition programmes, to engage men and boys in roles and responsibilities related to childcare, breastfeeding and household nutrition.

The event was an opportunity to call attention to the critical role played by women in ensuring nutrition and food security at the household and community level. In particular, as food producers and agricultural entrepreneurs, as decision-makers for the food and nutritional security of their households and communities and as "managers" of the stability of food supplies in times of economic hardship. Unfortunately, as all panellists reiterated, women's contributions often remain invisible and undervalued, inadequately reflected in policy, legal and institutional frameworks, neglected by service providers and other actors operating across agri-food systems.

*The Community Nutrition Kitchens is a project that aims to empower women raising their awareness and capacities to prepare healthy meals and use traditional recipes that have been adapted to have higher nutritional values. Nutrition messages adapted to the local context are shared in a friendly manner and through the participation of women, disseminated to families, relatives and neighbours.*

**Contribution by:** Maggie Refaat, Gender Specialist, RNE, FAO with inputs from Valentina Franchi, Regional Gender Expert, RNE, FAO.

## Strengthening women's engagement in rose production and trade in Saudi Arabia

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), rose cultivation has been practised for centuries in the mountainous Taif governorate of the Makkah region, in the northwest of the country. The Taif rose-oil, rose-water and other perfumery products are recognized for their unique, complex fragrance, high quality and traditional techniques and practices. According to recent estimates, there are about 500 rose farms in and around Taif city, growing nearly a million rose plants, spread in an area of about 270 hectares.

Despite the relatively small cultivation area and the short flowering season (February-April), the sector is a respectable source of employment. Although mostly seasonal, it can generate a considerable revenue through all around the year. Every year, the government organizes the Taif Rose Festival in spring, to stimulate rose-products and attract tourists, new businesses and customers. The government is keen to modernize and diversify rose production and transformation to increase employment opportunities, specifically for local youth and women, and expand its foothold in the market's beauty and consumer goods sector.

This year, the Taif Rose Festival was organized virtually from 25 April to 7 May 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, nevertheless, several activities were undertaken with the objective to promote engagement of youth and women in the sector. FAO was invited to deliver an online seminar and participate in workshops organized by women-oriented producer organizations and associations. The discussions focused on creating opportunities for family-based units, promoting employment, upgrading skills and introducing innovations that could enhance the participation of women as workers and entrepreneurs throughout the rose value chain.



Rose collection in Saudi Arabia

These gender equality and women’s empowerment objectives are included in the ‘Rose and Aromatic Plants component’ of the FAO-KSA project on “Strengthening MoEWA’s<sup>1</sup> capacity to implement its Sustainable Rural Agriculture Development Programme”. Within the rose sector, most farmers are smallholders with family-owned, small to medium-sized farms. The project seeks to engage with these stakeholders to increase production, productivity and profitability across the rose value chain.

Innovative and gender-responsive business models and mentoring strategies for agri-preneurship and agri-business are required to engage women from rural families and women-led associations across all areas, from production to marketing of rose-based products. Besides rose, other aromatic plants will be introduced such as lavender, rosemary and thyme, as they also offer a commercial potential for year-round occupation. However, nurseries for healthy planting material, packaging, start-up resources and support will be necessary to support family farmers. Agri-cooperatives, particularly the new generation of cooperatives that promote a business-oriented approach, can play a crucial part in this transformation. Digital tools would also offer innovative ways for marketing and customer engagement. Another potential, yet largely underdeveloped area, is the possibility of engaging more women in the expanding agro-

tourism sector in and around the picturesque Taif rose farms.

Moreover, many activities linked to agro-tourism such as online promotions, back-office management and related tasks can be offered to women with adequate training and support. Given the national significance of the rose sector and the high value of Taif rose products, there is a huge opportunity in widening its role in promoting gender inclusivity to accelerate the strategic development of the sector while meeting the Saudi Vision 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals.

**Contribution by:** Kakoli Ghosh, Coordinator Officer and Gender Focal Point and Salih Bazaid, National Professional Officer, FAO KSA.

## Gender equality and the prevention of Gender-based violence at the heart of FAO’s work in Lebanon

FAO contracted International Alert, an international NGO with sound experience in the region, to conduct gender equality and gender-based violence awareness campaigns under the framework of the project “Support to Women’s Cooperatives and Associations in the Agri-food Sector in Lebanon”. These campaigns are implemented in coordination with the Lebanese Ministry of Agriculture’s General Directorate of Agriculture and General Directorate of Cooperatives and funded by the Government of Canada.



A poster that was developed for the campaign and disseminated accordingly

<sup>1</sup> Ministry of environment, water and agriculture

The purpose of the gender equality awareness campaign is to create a socially and culturally enabling environment for Lebanese women to participate in business development and capacity building activities that will enable them to be innovative and play a more active role in the agricultural sector. Whereas the gender-based violence awareness campaign aims at increasing the awareness of displaced Syrian women on the prevention and response of gender-based violence.

Throughout the year 2020, FAO and International Alert followed a participatory and conflict-sensitive approach, targeting Lebanese and Syrian refugee women and members of their families and communities.

The campaigns disseminated several messages, raising awareness on stereotypes and rigid socially prescribed gender roles. They aimed at promoting a conducive environment for women participating in economic activities and family decision-making; and focusing on awareness raising programs and activities targeted at men on anger and stress management.

The awareness material was uploaded on a digital platform allowing all Lebanese participants to have access. The same material was also disseminated through Zoom and WhatsApp to Lebanese and Syrian participants. Following the dissemination through different channels, Lebanese and Syrian refugee women, men, girls and boys took part in online-facilitated discussions where they had the chance to share their reflections on the gender equality messages.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the project supports women's cooperatives, associations and informal groups by enrolling them in Cooperative Business Schools and building their business and soft skills, such as communication, marketing, conflict resolution, ethics, value chain and gender in agriculture. The project will also provide in-kind and cash grants to selected women groups to develop and implement sustainable income-generating businesses in the agri-food sector.

In parallel, the project is developing the capacity of the General Directorate of Cooperatives at the Ministry of Agriculture to improve the directorate capacity to support the cooperatives.

**Contribution by:** Elite Shehadeh Sfeir, Communications Consultant, reviewed by Marie Louise Hayek, Programme Assistant and Gender Focal Point, FAO Lebanon.

## Food heroes in Sudan are making a difference

During this difficult time, the FAO office in Sudan calls on all partners to support the building of more resilient and robust food systems to help the Sudanese nation, especially the most vulnerable, recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and the recent floods.

There are many “Food Heroes” - farmers and workers throughout the food system - who are making sure that food makes its way from farms to tables, despite these challenging times. Regardless of the circumstances, those heroes have continued to provide food to their communities and beyond. In the early days of the pandemic, when shelves went empty; when fruit-pickers went missing; when markets fell silent, it was realized how these food providers and their services have been taken for granted.



Aisha with the Ministry of Agriculture staff inquiring how to combat the pests and get rid of the harmful plants around her Molokhia (*Corchorus olitorius*).

This year, one of the Food Heroes in Sudan is Aisha Mohamed Sharif, a 50-year-old woman, living in Hadal (Awlieb locality) about 45 km from Port Sudan. During the pandemic, Aisha cultivated her home garden and a feddan in the neighbourhood, producing vegetables, such as legumes and okra, to feed her family and earn some income from selling the surplus to a nearby market. The lockdown of markets and restricted movements affected her family. However, she managed not only to produce enough to feed her family, but also to give some of her surplus for free to the neighbours in need. Besides vegetables, Aisha cultivated clover to feed her livestock, ensuring milk for her family.

“FAO helped us increase our seeds crops, such as legumes and vegetables, enabling us to improve our yields and the quality of our diets. This was reflected in the health of our children. Regarding the surplus production, I used to share it with our needy neighbours in the village who have limited access to food and markets”, Aisha assured.

Aisha stated that “during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have continued to cultivate crops, thanks to the seeds we collected after our last harvest and that enabled us to keep our family farm going”.

“I am very grateful for FAO’s support in increasing our production thanks to the well-conducted agricultural sessions that expanded our knowledge in preserving dried vegetables. The food processing training to the women in the village was essential during this difficult time”, Aisha confirmed.

Sudan is at a critical period facing desert locusts and floods. The compounded effects of these multiple shocks and threats, left many exposed to increased vulnerabilities and food insecurity. Without urgent livelihood assistance, already vulnerable populations are at risk of falling into more severe phases of acute food insecurity.

Food prices are expected to rise and the availability and access to food to be limited, due to both COVID-19 related containment measures and the impacts of the floods. This will worsen the conditions of Sudanese farmers, particularly smallholders and vulnerable rural households, who cannot afford to purchase food for their families or agricultural inputs to resume farming.

“As a follow-up to FAO’s technical training, we cultivated the improved feed and green fodder seeds. We fed our goats from our fodder production, doubling the amount of milk from 0.5 litres /day to 1 litre/day”, Aisha said.

Aisha is the model of a strong woman in her village and surroundings. She is an advocate for women’s rights, food security, decent livelihood and nutrition. Aisha thankfully said, “FAO supported me and 51 other households, most of which were female headed-households in my village, through the provision of certified packages of seeds, of different crops, including vegetables and legumes, which helped us to always have access to nutritious food”.

In a country with Food Heroes like Aisha, the soul of cooperation and strength to fight poverty will always play a role in eliminating hunger!

**Contribution by:** Amani HagAlBashir, Communication and Partnerships Officer and Gender Focal Point, FAO, Sudan.

## Pumping hope into Tammoun through improved irrigation systems in Palestine

Aysha is a Palestinian farmer from the Tammoun area in the south of Tubas, West Bank. As a single mother of two sons, she has dedicated her life to maintaining her farming business to support her family. For years, Aysha has been cultivating one dunum<sup>2</sup> of green house with one crop of tomatoes only, and there was no possibility for crops diversity due to the irregular availability of water and its high price. Tubas is considered one of the leading agricultural areas in the West Bank and is known for its relatively hot weather and favourable conditions for cultivating different kinds of corps. However, farmers in the area face several obstacles to unlocking the full agricultural potential of their land, such as lack of access to water and high prices.

In 2019, FAO, as part of its project to support economic growth through optimized agricultural value chains in the West Bank funded by the Government of Canada, provided farmers in Tammoun with water reservoirs with a capacity of 1 500 m<sup>3</sup> that act as the main building block for the water irrigation system in the area. As a result of this intervention, the water supply became more consistent and reliable for 220 farming families with 500 dunums of greenhouses and open fields. The price of water per cubic meter went down from 4 shekels to 2.7 shekels, resulting in a greater yield in production and profit.



Palestinian women from different ages and backgrounds working together in dates sorting and packaging in Jericho, the West Bank

For Aysha, the intervention cut irrigation costs in half and doubled production, allowing her to add another dunum of greenhouse to her farm and widen her scope of production to include a variety of parsley, cucumber, grapes and peas. Her farm also benefitted from the intervention by becoming more resilient to hazards. For example, in 2020, Aysha was capacitated by COVID-19 and could not work. Nonetheless, she and her family were able to sustain this shock, thanks to the savings from increased production she had put aside months before.

<sup>2</sup> It is a measuring unit



Dates after the sorting process in one of the dates packing houses in Jericho, the West Bank

Today, Aysha is in better health and spends her days working on her farm alongside her sons Khaled and Khair. Khaled shared his hopes of following his mother's footsteps and becoming more involved in the agricultural sector one day. "I am studying at the university and majoring in manufacturing and production engineering now, and I intend to delve more into farming and food processing after I am done with school," he said.

In addition to Aysha, 1 328 other women have benefited from interventions under the project that empowered their roles in the community and enabled them to improve their livelihoods. Tens of other farmers in Tammoun have also been able to improve their livelihoods and expand their business due to enhanced irrigation. Their enhanced income and resilience have kept their optimism flowing, just like the water that nourishes their crops.

**Contribution by:** Hend Younis and Piccinini, Jessica Piccinini: Communication unit and Intissar Eshtayah, Accountability and Monitoring Associate and Gender focal Point, FAO Palestine.

## Fighting Fall Armyworm for family food security in Yemen

***"Now, I do not have to worry anymore about my family food security because my crops are protected and safer. I can't afford to lose any of my crops to insect pests as I need them to feed my family."***

Like many elderly Yemeni people with no birth certificates, Haliyah could not tell us her exact date of birth, but she seems in her 60s. She had to take care of her five children since their childhood and even more after her husband passed away. Haliyah has been working hard on her 88.88 square feet of farmland to make her children's life decent. She rented the farm, located in Qa'a Jahran, Dhamar governorate, thirty years ago to make a living.

Standing tall while holding in her left hand an ear of sorghum, which scented dignity, and a sickle in the other one reflected dogged determination to keep the painstaking work to provide all needs for her children and grandchildren.

Haliyah conveyed farming know-how and expertise as she talked about working the land properly, taking care of the plants, cultivating the crops, and what insects and pests to watch. She explained, "Two years ago when my crops started growing up, I noticed a strange worm in the stem of my maize and sorghum, and fast spread in my field which I have no idea about it. To protect my crop, I resorted to spray chemical pesticides without any significant result; most of my crops were damaged, it was like a nightmare for me."



Haliyah has a trap in her hand, which helps monitoring the population of Fall Armyworm in the field

Lack of knowledge was one of the main reasons behind Fall Armyworm (FAW) wildly spread in big geographical areas of the country, using chemical pesticides is the common action taken by most of the farmers who faced such insect worm. Only a few farmers used traditional methods to control this insect, and Haliyah is one of them. "On the second season, I was prepared well with chemical pesticides, hot pepper and I applied agricultural crop rotation in some parts of my farmland. I was surprised when hot pepper impact on crops was better than the chemical ones, but my field was still infested with this worm." She added

The veteran farmer took a sample of some plant roots to the nearby Agriculture and Irrigation Office to have experts look at the insect. It was recognized as FAW. The people of the region were unaware of the danger of insect pests lurking in their crops.

Thanks to Haliyah's alertness and proactivity in reporting the inspection farmers find out about this danger before waking one day to a full-blown disaster laying waste to their farmlands.

Haliyah's discovery of the insect was not a surprise to FAO. Indeed, surveys already conducted in the area highlighted infestation of FAW and a control campaign was about to be launched in infested governorates, including Dhamar, where she is from.

[FAW](#) is an insect pest native to tropical and subtropical regions of the Americas. It prefers maize but can feed on more than 80 additional species of crops, including rice, sorghum, millet, sugarcane, vegetable crops and cotton. In early 2016, FAW was first detected in Central and Western Africa and since then, it has quickly spread across virtually all of Sub-Saharan Africa. In July 2018, it was found in Yemen. FAO supported the national authorities of Yemen to identify, monitor, and manage FAW. FAO has built the capacity of 52 teams and has sent them to different sites throughout the country to conduct surveys and control measurements.

Moreover, FAO has introduced biological pesticides (bio-pesticides) Neem product, which is safer to protect beneficial insects (Farmers friends). It also provided monitoring equipment, including sexual pheromone traps, smartphones and intensive awareness-raising campaigns to guide and advise farmers with the dos and don'ts.

"Thanks to the support provided by FAO, the presence of FAWs has already been reduced, and there is a significant improvement in the plant hearts (buds) into which these insect pests directly eat, thank God, they managed to nip this problem in the bud," Haliyah happily confirmed.



Haliyah Fighting FAW for Family Food Security

FAO is endorsing an integrated pest control approach (IPM) based on implementing more sustainable control practices with very minimum counting on chemical pesticides and regulating the use of chemical pesticides with a consultation with the concerned authorities. FAO advocates with partners for using biological pesticides that are based on natural products.

Since the beginning of 2019, FAO worked on a project aiming to survey, predict and control insects and pests while focusing on providing agricultural extension training

for engineers and technicians to reach all farmers through [Farmer Fields Schools \(FFS\)](#) platforms.

**Contribution by:** FAO, Yemen.

## Strengthening the Resilience of Vulnerable Smallholder Farm Families in Lebanon

The project "Strengthening the Resilience of Vulnerable Smallholder Farm Families" was launched on 30 April 2021. Funded by the Government of Canada, this project is implemented by FAO in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA).



Ambassador of Canada to Lebanon, Ms. Chantal Chastenay discussing the project with a member of the Cooperative Association for Food Processing

The project was launched during a field visit to the Cooperative Association for Food Processing in Karak - Mounit Eyam Zaman in Zahle, where the Minister, the Ambassador, and the FAO Representative met with the women of the Cooperative. During the meeting, they discussed the problems that women face in the agriculture and food processing sectors.

Dr Abbas Mortada, the Minister of Agriculture, said, "I am pleased today with I see about the work of cooperatives in food processing. It comes as a result of the follow-up and training provided by the FAO project supporting women's cooperatives and associations. I am especially pleased that the project has given hope despite the modest opportunities and the difficult circumstances, showing the active role of the Lebanese women in agriculture.

The Minister added: "The project we are launching today is in line with the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) agricultural strategy to improve men and women farmers' livelihoods and increasing their productive capacity, noting the importance of partnerships and efforts to develop and revitalize the agricultural sector in Lebanon."

“To limit the deterioration of food security in Lebanon, the agricultural sector must operate at full capacity and with its two wings: men and women. This is FAO’s objective, to achieved hand in hand with the MoA and in coordination with concerned stakeholders,” said the FAO Representative in Lebanon, Dr Maurice Saade.

The Ambassador of Canada to Lebanon, Ms Chantal Chastenay, stated that “Canada is committed to supporting the Lebanese people and the agriculture sector in Lebanon to ensure the continuity of rural livelihoods and increased food production in the face of the current financial, economic, and health crises.”

The project aims to restore the livelihood and productive capacity of 2 800 vulnerable smallholder farmers, including at least 800 women. This will be done by distributing vouchers for the purchase of key agricultural inputs and livestock feed.

In addition, the project will enhance the access to and control over livelihoods and food security of smallholder farmers through the provision of productive assets for integrated homestead farming and related agri-food processing enterprises to 1 800 vulnerable smallholder farmers, including at least 1 520 women.

The project will also promote the local production of two agricultural inputs having a high potential for domestic

production: organic fertilizers and high quality, environmentally friendly fodder crops, to replace, at least in part, chemical fertilizers and imported animal feed. In particular, the intervention will support activities aiming at developing the supply linkages required of smallholder and female farmers. It will also encourage the participation of women (individually or within women's groups/cooperatives) in the production, processing, and use of organic fertilizers and fodder crops.

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