

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment: A Prerequisite for Food Systems Transformation

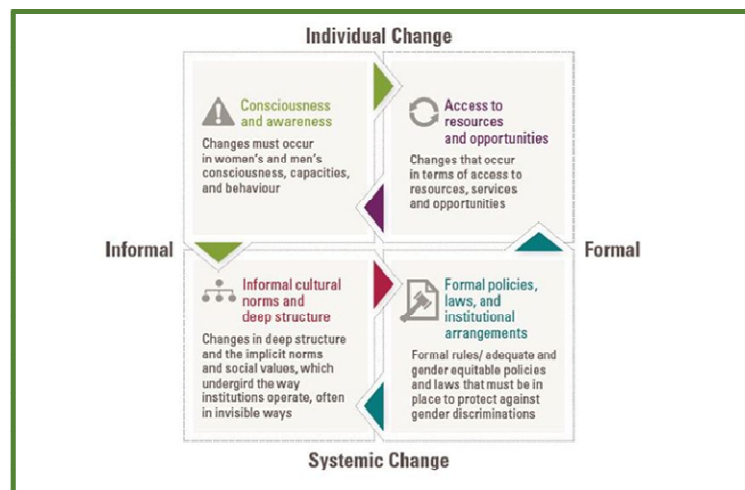
1. Introduction

Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment in food systems can result in greater food security and better nutrition, and in more just, resilient, and sustainable food systems for all. Stark gender inequalities are both a cause and outcome of unsustainable food systems and unjust food access, consumption, and production. Evidence shows unequal access and rights to important resources in food systems, undermine women's empowerment and their productivity. For example, across the world, women have unequal access and, in some cases, unequal rights, to important resources, such as land, water, pasture, seeds, fertilizers, chemical inputs, technology and information, and extension and advisory services, which reduces their potential to be productive in agriculture, become empowered to make strategic decisions and act on those decisions, and realize their rights. Unequal food systems also impact on women and girls, making women more vulnerable to chronic food and nutrition insecurity as well as shock-induced food insecurity.

These constraints and limitations are shaped and reinforced by social and structural inequalities in food systems. Interventions to address gender inequality in food systems require changes which must go beyond just reaching women but facilitates the empowerment process. As food systems transform, it is important to ensure that they transform in ways that are equitable, that ensure meaningful engagement and benefits to all, women, boys, girls, men, indigenous groups amongst others.

Transforming food systems in equitable ways requires changes in gender equality at the individual and systemic levels and at the formal and informal levels.

At the individual level, building capacity of women and girls to engage in food systems in ways that benefit them, raising their consciousness and elevating their aspirations as producers, entrepreneurs and consumers is critical to their empowerment.



This however must go hand in hand with increasing their access to resources, services, and opportunities. Informal cultural norms and deep structure (informal, systemic) shape women's and girls' lives and approaches that engage men and boys, leaders and right holders are critical to achieving gender equality. Finally, formal policies, laws, and institutional arrangements (formal, systemic) need to work for all, and guarantee rights and opportunities for women, as well protect against social and gender

discrimination and advance equality. Experience has shown that changes in only one sphere of equality can often lead to negative changes in other spheres. For example, women's economic empowerment and greater engagement in formal work can lead to backlash in the form of gender-based violence if norms and social relations do not change in tandem. Changes in food systems must therefore go beyond just reaching women through interventions and facilitate the empowerment process so that women can benefit from food system activities (that is, increasing wellbeing, food security, income, and health) and can make and act upon strategic life decisions within food systems.

2. The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Lever of Change

The vision for Gender Lever is to ensure a gender just, transformative and equitable food systems that guarantee a world without hunger for all and where roles, responsibilities, opportunities and choices are available to women and men, boys and girls and other groups and are not predetermined by restrictive gender roles, and where countries, communities and households, individuals are equipped to produce enough food for their own populations or can participate in local, global and regional food trading systems and other food systems activities in a meaningful, dignified and equitable way. While we know women and girls play a critical role in food systems, as producers, traders, processors and consumers, a gender just food system shifts focus not only to these roles but also "how food and agricultural systems can contribute to the process of women's empowerment". The goal is to ensure that as food systems transform, these transformations occur in ways that are equitable, and that meaningfully engage and benefit all, women, boys, girls, men, indigenous peoples amongst others.

The Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment has four key objectives:

1. Work with Action Track Leadership teams and the secretariat to ensure that solutions for transforming food systems are gender transformational, and respond to the needs, priorities and constraints of women and girls.
2. Mobilize the voices of women, men, and other groups from across the globe to meaningfully engage with the UN Food Systems Summit.
3. Keep the gender agenda as a top priority across the UN Food Systems Summit processes including the game changing propositions, dialogues and champion's network.
4. Develop the evidence base for game changing solutions for addressing gender inequality in food systems.

3. Game changing solutions for addressing gender inequality in food systems

3.1. Women's Agency (Nutrition, Leadership and Empowerment)

This set of solutions focus on 3 key interrelated areas of nutrition, women's leadership, and their economic empowerment. The disproportionate burden of malnutrition in all its forms on women causes, and is caused by, gender inequality; improving women's nutrition not just addresses one of the most inequitable outcomes of food systems but ensures women are healthy to participate in food systems transformation. It is well-established that women's economic empowerment benefits gender equality, nutrition, and economy; finding ways to ensure the world's most vulnerable women can benefit from, and contribute to, food systems economic activity, brings multiple benefits. Women's voices are typically missing from decision-making processes in the food system, reducing the

opportunity to pay greater attention to gender equality as well and to benefit from the wider diversity of leadership styles needed in what is a complex decision-making space.

Solution 1: Alliance for Anemia Actions will drive a global investment and action agenda and accelerate country-specific and country-led action to reduce anemia, taking a strong food systems perspective in addition to health system interventions, including infection and inflammation control. The Alliance will be transformative in that it proposes a coordinated, multisectoral response to the multi-factorial causes of anemia. The Alliance may act *as an entry point to other forms of malnutrition experienced by women*, including obesity, and diet-related noncommunicable diseases (anemia is a unifier since it's found in women across the under to overweight spectrum). The Alliance will identify and drive forward the most critical food system interventions needed to improve access and affordability of nutritious foods, concurrent with health, environment, and social protection interventions, an integrated implementation research and diagnostics agenda, behavior and social change communication, disease and vector control, and targeted supplementation for the most vulnerable, where and when needed.

Solution 2: Innovation hubs (e.g. regional- level incubators, challenge funds) to empower community-level leaders of women's food system enterprises. Increased income and decision-making about that income is one of the most important interventions for improving women's diets. Enterprises focused on profitable, nutritious foods (including indigenous crops) enable women to generate income, feed themselves and families, and increase local access to nutritious foods. They also aim to be transformative by *changing social norms and mindsets* (if women gain agency in making decisions, acquire feelings of self-respect/self-efficacy, demand greater respect from families/communities) and by *catalysing further changes* (e.g. land ownership laws; self-help groups for women's savings, receiving the needed extension services and support, financial services, mobile money apps etc).

Solution 3: Global Food 50/50 accountability mechanism will work with organizations in food systems, producing an annual report, highlighting best practices, lessons learnt and progress stories for achieving gender equality, and an accompanying gender equity index which will review performance and catalyze change in policy and practice across at least 200 organizations active in food systems including research, private sector, non-profits, producer, and government. The rationale emerges from the existing Global Health 50/50 initiative, an accountability report highlighting the lack of gender equality in leadership of global health organizations, stimulating organisational leaders to take note and alter their gender balance, their policies and outcomes. The initiative has the potential to be transformative through achieving similar impact in food systems and as an entry point for a cascade of changes throughout food systems. It will focus on gender equality in food systems organizations on four key elements: (i) Commitment to redistribute power (ii) Policies to tackle power & privilege imbalances at work (iii) Gender and geography of global food systems leadership, and (iv) Addressing the gendered power dynamics of inequalities in food systems outcomes.

3.2. Increasing Access to Resources, Services and Opportunities

Women's access to, use of and control over land and other productive resources are essential to ensuring their right to equality and to an adequate standard of living. Throughout the world, gender inequality when it comes to land and other productive resources is related to women's poverty and exclusion.

Solution 4: Blended financing mechanism to small initiatives locally owned by women and youth: This proposed solution aims to design and implement funding mechanism structured as a blended financemechanism providing a customized mix of Business Development Services, project development andfinance structuring services, and financial products offering seed capital in the form of concessional loans,grants and reimbursable grants etc....to locally owned gender and youth sensitive incubation projectsalong agricultural value chain to increase local food production and diversification to strengthen the LFSin the LDCs and graduated countries.The aim is to connect women and youth to the food value chains through small and medium agribusinesses by ensuring i) access to financial products in the form of grants, reimbursable grants and guarantees to top up a financial requirement of women and youth led food security investments that contribute to resilience building and adaptation to climate change and ii) access to customized project development Business Development Services support, including post-investment support. It will also reinforce and strengthen local financial institutions and agricultural/ SMEs finance facilities by i) structuring targeted pipeline of de-risked project proposals properly prepared and developed to address a broader agribusiness including women and youth farmers' associations, cooperatives and firms. It will also improve the capacity of Local governments i) to engage with the private sector and create a local business-friendly environment for the most important part of the community (Women and youth) for better fiscal space expansion, ii) to improve their capacity to align public investments with gender sensitive and youth led private food production investments to improve complementarities and synergies for resilient food system and iii) connecting this most important part of the population to the food value chain in order to improve their own source revenue collection for better basic social service delivery and enhance food security.

Solution 5: Equitable community-based decision-making mechanisms & information systems on land rights & access & control over essential food-producing resources: This initiative will focus on contributing solutions to addressing the vulnerability of the communities to the effects of climate change and economic shocks brought by the pandemic - as the landless and people who do not have access to land and resource rights are amongst the most affected.

3.3. Gender Transformative Policies and Institutions

There is widespread and systematic institutional and legislative discrimination and bias against women in access to resources, assets, services, and freedoms such as land, water, finance, markets, education, extension, employment, mobility, inputs, social protection, leadership, and more.

Solution 6: Integrate GTAs in relevant policies, programmes, and systems -This investment and initiative will drive the realization and of women's agency, voice, and aspirations through the intentional integration of GTAs in national and sub national food systems programs, extension systems, data management systems and other existing platforms. In doing so it will increase women's confidence and decision-making roles in community, sub-national and national legal, policy, institutional, and business development processes. This investment will also unite learning and expertise on gender-transformative approaches to increasing services (including business services) and technology access and scaling of innovative and traditional extension and learning practices. It will promote gender transformative approaches that address land tenure, labour, and care burden challenges; that drive sustainable, local, and territorial production of nutritious foods; that support on-farm and off-farm processing and that support entrepreneurship. Ultimately, this solution will increase women's access to better nutrition, markets, decent work and living incomes.

Solution 7: Creation of an Alliance of 50+ global and national financial institutions to implement gender- transformative finance mechanisms. This investment aims to design and deliver financial products that meet the needs and priorities of women and support their empowerment, thus closing the gender gap in financial inclusion of women in food systems by 2030. It will crowd-source expertise and innovation across industries and sectors and will engage directly with women working in food systems, in primary production and in micro, small and medium enterprise in designing and delivering support and innovative investment mechanisms. It will support informal and formal models for financial inclusion thus strengthening existing social and economic capital among women's groups; and incentivizing women's wage employment and SMEs and larger companies to introduce measures to recruit and retain female employees through enabling workplace practices.

Solution 8: An Alliance of countries adopting feminist food systems policies : This ground-breaking initiative essentially establishes governance commitment on gender equality and women's empowerment in food systems. It will include commitment to the adoption of policies that require 50% women in leadership roles in local, sub-national and national level, the adoption of gender-responsive principles in the allocation of national and sub-national budgets related to food security and nutrition (e.g. gender responsive budgeting) and improved gender-relevant data management to drive decision-making as an operational principle. It will see the inclusion of indicators and targets for measuring progress through generation of high-quality, sufficiently disaggregated outcome (benefit) and impact (empowerment) data for use in policy and program design. It will establish a capacity strengthening programme of work on the project-level Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index that leads to collection of data on women's empowerment as part of food systems surveys (agriculture, trade, nutrition surveys) at national level and it will promote the use of citizen-driven data for improved accountability and better policy development and programming.

3.4. Address harmful gender and social norms

Closing gender gaps will not be realized without addressing the underlying causes of inequality. Harmful social and gender norms and practices shape the gendered distribution of paid and unpaid work, limit women's access to and control of productive resources, assets, and access to services, and undermine women's leadership potential from local to global scales. They also facilitate exploitation and violence. This is compounded through the denial of rights and through formal and informal institutions and laws. Approaches to gender in food systems to date have tended to focus on women and on building women's agency—and these have proven to be limited in effectiveness. GTAs address the limits by explicitly re-orienting to address the *underlying* structural barriers identified above. In particular, GTAs engage men and women – together as agents of change at all levels – in shifting constraining norms and policies (informal and formal structural barriers, respectively). Building on this foundation, GTAs address the interconnected layers of inequity and discrimination in food systems, including the inequalities in labour, assets (including financial), and leadership, as described above. In doing so, GTAs aim to be fit-for-context, intersectional (i.e. understanding gender and class, ethnicity, caste, age, ability, and other factors that intersect gender), and human-rights based.

Solution 9: A curriculum and campaign to tackle harmful social and gender norms, customs, and values. This investment will result in the availability and rollout of context-specific didactic and educational materials that challenge and eliminate harmful gender and social norms and cultural practices that limit women's engagement in production and consumption of healthy and diverse foods.

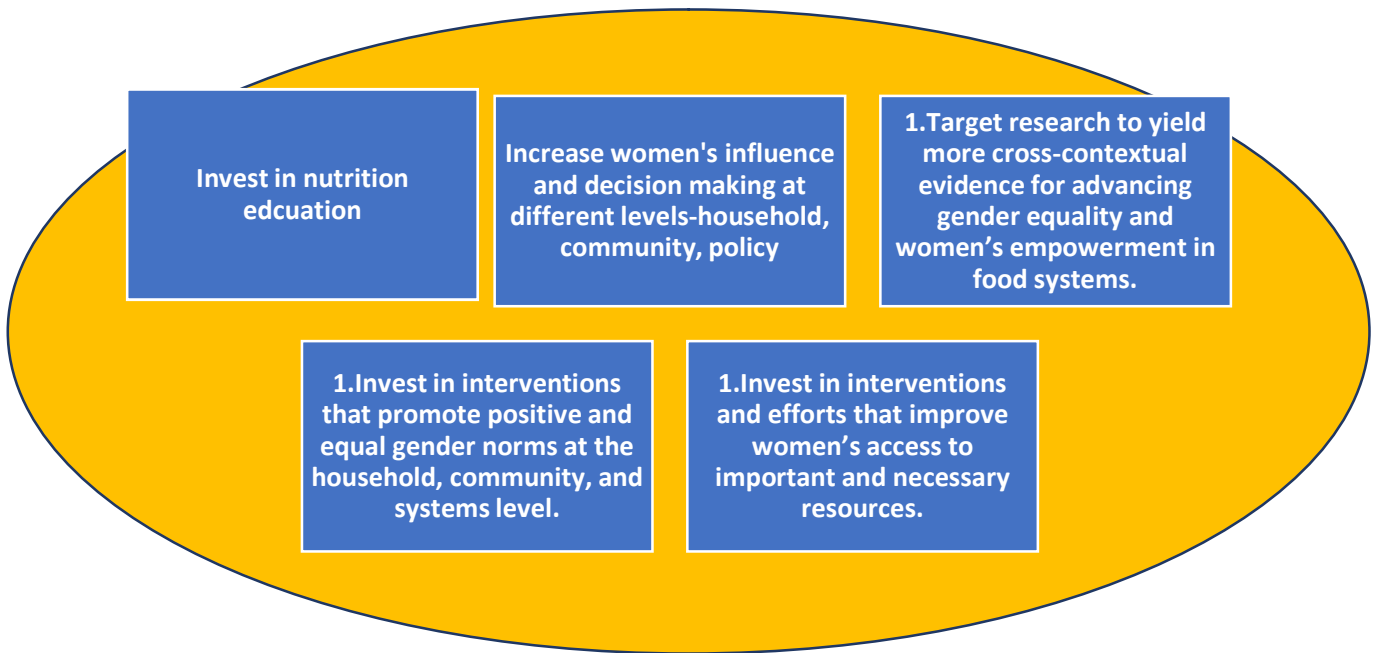
It will provide resources for local women's groups, schools and other public, private and voluntary sector bodies on how to engage men, boys, or religious and traditional leaders, together with women and girls, for example, in reversing harmful social and gender norms, assuming positive masculinities, and adopting care burden roles and household responsibilities and it will aim specifically at the prevention and elimination of all forms of gender-based violence and exploitation in food systems. It will provide direct capacity strengthening support to women's groups and social movements on policy advocacy, peer-to-peer learning, mentorships and network and coalition building to enable their leadership and individual and collective agency.

4. Generating Evidence for gender and food systems transformation

A scoping review for the Science group aimed to elucidate evidence and identify evidence gaps for advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in food systems. The review found evidence that women have differing access to resources compared with men, such as essential services, knowledge and information, technology dissemination, land, credit options, time, and markets. This differing level of access is shaped and reinforced by contextual social gender norms.

Existing evidence also shows that context-specific pathways link women's empowerment to important outcomes, such as household nutrition and dietary diversity, noting that these pathways may vary between and within contexts. The review found substantial agreement about pathways to improve women's empowerment and gender equality in food systems, but the actual evidence to support these pathways, specifically cross-contextual evidence, is limited. Existing evidence is extremely localized and context-specific, limiting its application beyond the focus area of the study. The review found less evidence on practices and effective pathways for engaging men in the process of women's empowerment in food systems, addressing issues of migration, crises, or indigenous food systems and on food systems for women in urban areas and aquaculture value chains.

The review recommended several priorities for research investments, all of which are aligned with the solutions above.



5. Conclusion

There is substantial agreement about the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment for food systems transformation and on the need to ensure that food systems work for women, girls, boys, men and other groups to guarantee a world free of hunger and dignified lives. The work of the Gender Lever provides important evidence-based priority investment areas around which the global community must come together to make food systems just and equitable.