

2.17 Women empowerment

Women's Economic Empowerment for Sustainable and Healthy Consumption Patterns: 50 countries create, finance, and implement national plans for the economic empowerment of women to achieve sustainable and healthy consumption patterns by 2030

What problem is your solution addressing?

Unsustainable and unhealthy food production systems are creating long lasting environmental damage, which are having a disproportional effect on women. Sixty percent of the 821 million people that are currently food insecure are women and girls, and environmental degradation is increasingly a major driver for gender-based violence against rural women due to conflict over limited resources. Entrenched social norms largely limit women's full participation across food value chains, and often ignores women's traditional knowledge on food production and healthy consumption patterns. At the same time, women around the globe play an important role in shaping food consumption systems, as traditional division of household responsibilities leaves them largely in charge of growing and buying food for the household, and of cooking. Compared to men, they have different nutrition knowledge, preferences and tendencies when adhering healthier patterns of food consumption.

Women are in this way largely affected by unsustainable and healthy food systems but can also play an important role in nudging these systems towards more sustainable and healthy paths. Their role is crucial throughout the food chains, for example, from production to food preparation, to distribution within the household, as traders in the markets, as food processors, and as laborers in food systems, as well as consumers. As such, any successful transition to more sustainable and healthy consumption patterns will need to put women's needs and priorities at the center and will need to apply gender transformative approaches to address the root causes of gender inequalities in food systems.

How does your solution address the problem?

Gender transformative approaches in food systems are increasingly recognized as one of the most effective strategies for achieving improved nutrition and development outcomes. The combination of concurrently tackling women's strategic needs while addressing underlying social norms, attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate gender inequalities is a proven powerful drive for change. Applying gender transformative approaches is thus paramount for an effective change towards sustainable production and healthy consumption patterns.

Our solution aims at incentivizing a paradigm shift in the way governments and development actors address changes towards healthy consumption patterns, by placing a strong focus on women's economic empowerment. Countries will create, finance, and implement national plans for women's economic empowerment in transitions towards sustainable production and healthy consumption patterns. The plans will focus on women's empowerment across the value chain from production to consumption:

- Enhancing women's decision making in framing legal frameworks, policy design, programs, businesses governing food systems and shifts towards sustainable production and healthy consumption patterns.
- Ensuring access and affordability of quality food for rural women and the poor, valuing indigenous food and women's traditional knowledge including growing traditional and highly nutritious products, dual-purpose plots, as well as traditional recipes.
- Addressing social norms and cultural practices that limit women's healthy food consumption and promoting positive practices.
- Empowering women in value chains to increase production of nutritious food and productivity, speeding up the adoption of innovations, raising household incomes, and ensure significant improvements in consumption patterns that can benefit child health and improve nutrition outcomes.
- Enhancing women's access to, and control over, means of food production to reach markets, including education, training and skills development to enhance their ability to make decisions and seize emerging employment and entrepreneurial opportunities.
- Incentivizing gender-responsive research food loss reduction, behavioral change, gender equitable consumption practices, food labeling, and technology that responds to women's needs and preferences.
- Strengthen women's knowledge and voice as educated consumers to counteract the movement for processed foods and to advocate for easily available, healthy and sustainably produced food.

Is this a new solution or an existing solution that needs scaling?

Existing solution in need of scaling

Which organization/s, institution/s or group of individuals are associated with the solution?

FAO, IFAD, WFP, World Bank, National governments, women's producer organizations, female consumers, civil society.

If selected as a game-changing solution, how will you leverage the UN Food Systems Summit to scale your solution?

FAO has gained solid expertise in developing transformative and inclusive approaches for women's economic empowerment, and has a wide portfolio of field projects at country level. FAO, together with other UN Agencies International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD) and World Food Programme (WFP) have developed a solid package of knowledge, tools, methods and capacity development materials to strengthen the capacities and the involvement of women in agri-food value chains and consumption domains; build institutional capacity at different levels for promoting gender-responsive food systems; incentivize equitable nutrition and consumption patterns; tools and knowledge products for policy formulation and advocacy; and engage with the private sector.

We will leverage the UN Food Systems Summit to scale the solution by:

- Creating momentum for gender transformative change in transitions towards sustainable and healthy consumption patterns.
- Publicly launching the game changing solution and inviting countries to join and create national plans for gender transformative approaches.
- Invite donors to finance the design and implementations of the plans at country level

Is this idea applicable to a particular geography, demography, landscape or other type of setting (e.g. high- or low-income countries, aquaculture)? If so, please specify.

Medium and low income countries, with partnerships created between governments, producer and consumers organizations, rural and indigenous communities, women's organizations, multilateral development (e.g. FAO, IFAD, WFP), and research (e.g. CGIAR, universities)

Who are the main actors that would put this action into place?

National governments (policymakers and legislators), rural communities, civil society, women's and indigenous organizations, multilateral development organizations, and research institutions.

Source and process:

Susan Kaaria, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), AT2 Gender Lead, building on public feedback on Action Track 2 during the event: "Making Food systems Equitable: An African Dialogue on Gender & Food Systems" on February 9th, 2021.