

145 Promote Women's Leadership in Food Systems

The Solution: By 2022, put in place a charter for all organisations over a certain size working in food systems to promote the leadership of women, with a scorecard clear targets of 50% women in leadership and decision-making levels across the food system (in government, private sector, civil society organisations, farmer organisations, and research organisations in food systems).

Source(s) of the Solution: The FSS Gender and Women's Empowerment Lever.

Problem addressed within food systems: Women represent on average 43% of the agricultural labour force globally and are essential change-agents to ensure the shift to more nutrition-promoting, efficient, and climate-resilient food systems. However, their socio-economic contributions and entrepreneurial potential often remain unrecognised and untapped. Women's voices are not often heard in processes related to food systems. Their leadership in food systems organisations and policies mirror those in other sectors, including politics. The concerns and issues of women farmers are barely heard at local, national, and global levels.

A major reason for this silence is that there are too few women in leadership positions to represent the interests of women across the food system. The lack of women's representation has negative consequences that are evident at various levels: in farmer organisations, in local, national, and global food companies, in government and national-level policy-making bodies, and even in international decision-making bodies on food systems. This has various consequences, including limited presence and voice of women in public affairs, which results in policies, investments, and legal frameworks that are less sensitive to their specific needs and constraints. While seeming to be gender-neutral, these frameworks may be detrimental to women, thus failing to achieve the intended development outcomes.

How this solution will address that problem: Ensuring that women have a greater voice is not only a matter of gender equality. Food systems transformation will require that women be in leadership positions and be part of decision making. To strengthen the participation of women in food systems initiatives and to provide avenues for inclusion of their skills and knowledge, women must be equally represented in food systems decision-making bodies. Governments, private sector, civil society, and producers and consumer organisations need to enforce gender mainstreaming in governance at local, regional, and national levels. Women's participation can be enhanced at various levels and in different sectors through the promotion of inclusive planning, decision-making, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, including of climate change-related measures and initiatives. For example, governments should ensure the inclusion of women in ministries and in teams engaged in the development of National Adaptation Plans, Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions, and National Food Systems Investment Plans, and in local governments and other decision-making and implementation bodies. In research, women must be represented as researchers and research leaders. Recognising women's needs and priorities in the early stages of research and facilitating their engagement in political processes as well as in other contexts in which food systems are embedded, are important steps toward ensuring that women benefit from the results.

While some countries have provisions for the representation of women in constitutional bodies (usually 30%), the mechanisms for enforcement and accountability are not clear. Signing a charter that has clear guidelines and targets for women's leadership, with an annual scorecard, will provide much-needed accountability among the different actors in food systems.

Solution's alignment to the 'game changing and systemic solution' criteria: Gender and leadership charters exist in other sectors. For example, Australian Science Organisations have the Athena SWAN Charter, which is based on 10 key principles. By being part of Athena SWAN, institutions commit to a progressive charter and adopt the principles within their policies, practices, action plans, and culture.

Existing evidence: While there is no evidence specifically from companies and organisations working in food systems, evidence shows that Fortune 500 companies with representation of three or more women on their boards significantly outperformed those with low representation by 84% on return on sales, by 60% on return on invested capital, and by 46% on return on equity.¹

Current/likely political support: SEWA, IFPRI, RECOTFC, FAO are associated with this solution.

¹ Catalyst, (2011). The Bottom Line: Corporate Performance and Women's Representation on Boards (2004-2008)