



Food and Agriculture Organization
of the United Nations



PROMOTING PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK IN RURAL AREAS

Lesson 4

Rural women's empowerment in the context of the decent work agenda

Text-only version

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Learning Objectives

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

- describe the most common women's working arrangements and status;
- describe the main decent work constraints faced by rural women;
- explain the importance of rural women's participation in productive and decent jobs ;
- promotion of rural women's empowerment in the context of the decent work agenda.

Introduction

On average, women make up 40 percent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, ranging from 20 percent in Latin America to 50 percent or more in parts of Africa and Asia.

Women's employment share in agriculture, by selected region (%)	
Latin America and the Caribbean	9%
Middle East	26%
East Asia	34%
South-East Asia and the Pacific	40%
North Africa	40%
Sub-Saharan Africa	62%
South Asia	67%

Source: ILO, 2014. *Global employment trends (2011 data)*

Rural women are **crucial** for achieving the economic, social and environmental changes needed **for the sustainable development of agriculture and the rural economy**.

Yet in most cases, **they have to face very difficult and unfair situations**: working long hours in poor conditions. Badly paid activities consume most of their time and energy, with little gain in terms of income, satisfaction or social status.

This lesson aims to improve your knowledge of rural women's situation within the world of work in general, the major obstacles they are facing in their daily lives and the approaches and interventions needed to counter these gender-based inequalities related to work (i.e. the enabling environment).

The world of work for rural women: the context

Let's start by examining the **most common women's working arrangements and status**.

We can identify two main categories:

1. SELF-EMPLOYED

In developing countries, **the self-employed face a much greater risk of informality**, partly because the legal framework pertaining to this type of employment is weak or non-existent. Also, very often women engage in **low-productivity subsistence food production**, and are therefore not even considered in employment work.

Rural women often engage in self-employment because it **permits them to multi-task**, i.e. combine their household and reproductive work with income-generating activities.

2. WAGE WORKERS

Wage employment is also **an important source of income generation for rural women**, who often engage in seasonal and casual wage work to complement their household's income and secure their livelihoods.

The self-employed is a heterogeneous category. The **most relevant forms of self-employment** for rural women are:

SELF-EMPLOYED

Own-account producers

In many regions, rural women are still working more frequently than men as **small-scale producers or subsistence farmers**. As an example, let's look at the case of Patience, to analyse the characteristics of these workers.

Example

Patience is a 24-year-old mother of four young children living in rural Malawi. She works as a subsistence farmer (*mlimi*), like 93 percent of rural working women in her country.

Patience is illiterate. She dropped out of school in third grade and has worked on her parents' family farm since she was a child. Her husband also works as a *mlimi*, with occasional wage work in the city.

Besides her responsibilities on their plot of land, Patience is mainly in charge of day-to-day domestic and reproductive activities. She has no help with child care and has to walk 3 kilometres from the village to fetch wood and water.

- ✓ When women participate in commercial farming, they often do so within a rigid division of tasks, which provides them with lower remuneration or fewer employment development prospects than men. However, the majority of own-account women producers engage in non-commercial subsistence food production for own final use by their household, and are therefore not considered in employment work.
- ✓ Women small-scale agricultural producers suffer from lack of time, due to women's work burden. This is because women are often among the poorest and cannot afford, or do not have access to labour-saving technologies and support services, such as quality child care or hired help.

➡ This can have also **detrimental consequences on women producers' children, particularly girls**, who may be asked to help them in their daily routine and, consequently, miss out on compulsory education. This in turn perpetuates the circle of women's subordination at all levels, and their poor livelihoods.

Entrepreneurs and employers

Entrepreneurship is a fundamental driver of economic growth and a substantial **source of empowerment for women**, particularly in agrarian economies, where wage employment opportunities for women tend to be scarce and seasonal. Let's look at the story of Wamusheke.

Example

Wamusheke runs a honey-making business. She started her business with her family's support and a modest capital base of US\$30.

Today, Wamusheke employs four workers and has plans for further expansion. Her membership of the Zambia Federation of Associations of Women in Business and the Women Entrepreneurship Development Association of Zambia has enabled her to access management and marketing training opportunities, giving her recognition, confidence and self-esteem.

Rural entrepreneurship can cover a wide range of women's economic activities, from income-generating work that women undertake in their homes, selling produce on the street/local markets, to owning and managing a business with one or more employees.

- ✓ Rural women tend to be **over-represented in micro-and small-scale enterprises that often operate in the informal economy**. This can leave them outside the realm of labour-related laws and regulatory mechanisms aimed at providing basic health and safety standards, and workers' rights.

- ✓ Research indicates that women are often "**necessity entrepreneurs**" rather than "opportunity entrepreneurs".
- ✓ Rural women are **often subjected to gender-biased obstacles in starting and developing their businesses. This includes:**
 - discriminatory laws and/or cultural practices regarding property, inheritance and matrimonial affairs;
 - lack of access to formal finance mechanisms and productive resources (including land), especially in Africa and about half the countries of Asia;
 - limited spatial mobility and access to information and networks;
 - an unequal share of family and household responsibilities and lack of maternity protection.

Members of producers' organizations and cooperatives

Social capital, such as social networks and relationships, plays an important role for women's livelihood activities in the rural economy, particularly in segments with high levels of informality, including agriculture. **Membership of producers' groups and cooperatives** is an important **means of accessing agricultural resources and market channels** for poor rural women, who cannot access these as individuals.

Example: A women's collective in India.

In Tamil Nadu, India, a women's collective both grows and harvests seaweed, and also makes value added products, such as seaweed flour. Cultivation is in shallow water, using stakes and lines, so the women are able to conduct all the work without relying on (male) support from boats, as is required with other types of seaweed culture.

The mostly young women working for the collective feel it is their only opportunity for paid employment outside the home. Women collect seaweed with their hands, using goggles to protect their eyes. The women spend eight hours in the water, with backs bent, collecting seaweed with their hands. In the past, women seaweed collectors earned about US\$1 per day. However, since they formed a cooperative, they've managed to negotiate better prices with the middlemen. Their daily earnings have now nearly tripled, an achievement that has had a positive effect on the sustainability of their livelihoods.

Access to both formal and informal groups and networks enables rural women to gain power, influence and valuable information, as well as access to other resources, which can potentially stimulate their human, physical and natural resources, as well as their financial and/or political capital.

- ✓ But **access to social capital is determined by gendered socio-cultural norms** and, in some cases, also by legal regulations. Various studies have found that women are often excluded from leadership roles, decision-making processes and the services that producers' organizations can provide, even if they are represented in sufficient numbers.
- ✓ **Unequal access to assets, benefits and income** may further weaken rural women's self-confidence, discouraging them from striving for prominent positions in mixed cooperatives and producers' organizations.
- ✓ **Gender neutral approaches** to group organization result in **male predominance**, which can negatively affect rural women's participation, and thus their long-term social and economic empowerment.

Contributing family workers

According to the definition of the International Labour Organization (ILO), contributing family workers are those workers who hold a "self-employed" job in a market-oriented establishment operated by a related person living in the same household, who cannot be regarded as partners, because their degree of commitment to the operation of the establishment, in terms of working time or other key factors, is not at a comparable level to that of the head of the establishment. This kind of work is **a widespread form of employment in agriculture, especially for women and girls**, and among the working poor.

Example: a 37-year-old indigenous woman from rural Bolivia

Carolina has been working on her family farm since she was a young child, helping her parents produce quinoa and other produce on their small plot of land. She never went to school. At age 17, she married, and has been working on her husband's small farm for no pay. Since she married, Carolina has had no say in when, how and where they sell the little produce they have generated, nor did she have any say in how the income will be spent. She has had to rely entirely on the decisions made by her husband, even when her own market choices would have been different.



Data on contributing family workers

ILO data from 2007 reveal particularly high participation levels of women in this self-employment sub-category, with 59 percent in South Asia, 36 percent in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, 35 percent in sub-Saharan Africa and 25 percent in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries and South Asia. Compared with this, the highest levels of participation of men as contributing family workers were in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia at 18 percent (ILO, 2008).

WAGE WORKERS

Let's now analyse the other "status in employment" macro category.

Wage rural workers can be classified in **two sub-categories**:

- a. workers employed by farmers, farming or plantation companies, or agricultural contractors;
- b. workers employed by rural non-farm enterprises/public actors in the secondary sector (including agribusiness and agro-industries) and the tertiary sector.

Wage employment can be permanent, temporary, casual, seasonal or piece-rate.

Example: Prisha, a 51-year-old widow living in rural India

Prisha is a 51-year-old widow living in rural India. She had two daughters, one of whom died, leaving her three young children in Prisha's primary care. Prisha has worked on her small plot of land her whole life. Sometimes, when opportunities arose (during the harvest season), she worked for some extra cash on the tea plantation 12 km away from her village. With the responsibility of taking care of her grandchildren, the demand for additional income has become more pressing.

Being illiterate and without ownership of the land she cultivated, Prisha could not use it as collateral for seed funding to start a small business. She had no other choice but to seek occasional work in the fields, which paid some cash or provided her with in-kind donations of food that she could take home. She was hired under a verbal and informal contractual arrangement, giving her very little, if any, security. The wage was minimal, less than the established poverty line per day (US\$1.90/day), for which she had to work long hours, as well as travelling for two hours each day on foot. Prisha did not accumulate any social benefits or pension.

Decently paid wage labour outside the home can empower women, especially very poor women who can often rely exclusively on their own physical labour as an asset.

- ✓ However, the reality of occupational sex segregation and gender discrimination in the labour markets means that women tend to be **clustered in lower remunerated occupations**, with higher incidences of disguised or unclear employment relationships. Often, they are paid less than men within the same occupational category. There is a wage gap in the rural economy.



The wage gap in rural areas

Although data documenting the wage gap in rural settings is limited, evidence from the FAO [RIGA Database](http://www.fao.org/economic/riga/riga-database/en/) (www.fao.org/economic/riga/riga-database/en/) sample comprising 14 countries indicates **that on average, rural women are paid 28 percent less than rural men**, with the notable exception of women in rural Panama, who are paid 11 percent more than men.

These **wage gaps** tend to be **higher in rural than in urban areas** for half the countries sampled.

The wage gap in rural areas is frequently associated with gendered differences in the endowment of assets (such as education, age, years of experience and industry of employment) and gender-biased differences in remuneration practices received for those assets.

However, the RIGA findings reveal that the differences in asset ownership explain a much lower fraction of the wage inequalities, since in some countries (i.e. in Latin America, except Panama), rural women are better endowed with assets but are still paid less than rural men. Thus, **wage inequalities are typically perpetuated by gender-biased** differences in contractual arrangements for men and women, with women usually subjected to worse working conditions, and the almost universally representative practice of lower remuneration of women for the same work.

Source: FAO, 2010 and 2011b, and RIGA Database.

A rural woman...	A rural man...
Often engages in productive work ¹ as an agricultural producer, rural entrepreneur, wage worker or unpaid contributing family worker. As well as in community management ² work. BUT she has also the burden of reproductive work ³ .	Is often employed as a self-employed or wage worker in productive and economically viable activities and does NOT have many (if any) unpaid reproductive, domestic and community work responsibilities. This enables men to engage mostly or exclusively in productive activities.



Women's **triple work burden** of productive, reproductive and community management work poses a significant impediment to their ability to access decent work opportunities.

Major constraints of rural women in accessing decent work opportunities

Rural women tend to face more restricted access to productive resources and assets, financial services and social protection, education, skills development and labour market opportunities. Furthermore, gender-biased social norms, laws and practices limit women's involvement in gainful work and their participation in producers' organizations, especially in formal institutions such as trade unions. So despite their significant contribution to the agricultural sector, **rural women often find themselves in disadvantaged positions**.

In the developing world, they are overrepresented among the working poor and face a higher risk of decent work deficits.

¹ Activities carried out in order to produce goods and services either for sale, exchange, or to meet the subsistence needs of the family.

² Activities undertaken primarily by women at community level to ensure the provision and maintenance of scarce resources of collective consumption, such as water, health care and education. These activities are seen as women's extension of their reproductive roles, and are undertaken by women on a voluntary, unpaid basis during their "free" time.

³ Reproductive work includes primarily women's responsibilities associated with childbearing/rearing, as well as domestic tasks carried out by women and girls that are required to guarantee the maintenance and reproduction of the labour force. It includes not only biological reproduction, but also the care and maintenance of the workforce (male partner and working children) and the future workforce (infants and schoolchildren).



The nexus of gender, poverty and employment

Rural women continue to be over-represented among those working in vulnerable employment, making up a large **majority of the world's working poor in the developing world**. Very often, they work as unpaid contributing family workers or subsistence farmers, earn less income and are more often affected by long-term unemployment than men. The table shows regional data.

Region	Labour force participation (percent)			Percentage of working poor (US\$2 or less/ day)	Vulnerable employment (percent)		
	Women	Men	Total		Women	Men	Total
Central and South-Eastern Europe (non-EU) and CIS	50.1	70.3	59.5	4.1	19.9	19.6	19.7
East Asia	63.0	77.5	70.4	17.7	52.5	43.7	47.6
South-East Asia and the Pacific	59.1	82.0	70.4	33.3	64.4	57.1	60.2
South Asia	31.0	81.0	56.6	64.1	82.4	75.5	77.3
Latin America and the Caribbean	53.1	79.5	65.9	7.2	32.0	31.5	31.7
Middle East	18.5	74.3	48.4	7.6	32.9	24.1	25.4
North Africa	23.7	74.1	48.4	14.9	55.3	30.5	36.0
Sub-Saharan Africa	64.8	76.3	70.5	65.0	85.6	70.8	77.6
World	50.3	76.5	63.4	28.7	49.9	47.5	48.5

Elaborated from ILO 2014 (data 2011).

Let's analyse the constraints facing rural working women in greater depth by looking at the story of Asha, a 23-year-old woman and mother of three young children, who lives in rural Tanzania.

I am an unpaid worker on the family farm. Occasionally, I also work as a wage worker during the maize harvesting season to earn some extra cash; I am paid very little for this work. I take care of my three children, the household and some works for the community needs. Since I was born, I have been surrounded by poverty and food scarcity. My parents did not send me to school, unlike my brothers who finished at least a few years of elementary school. That's because there was no money, and because they thought that educating a girl would not bring her much in later life, nor to the household. So I stayed at home and had to work from an early age: helping with domestic chores, and later also caring for my younger siblings. I got married early and became pregnant with my first child when I was 14. My husband made all the decisions regarding the small farm, as well as the household.

I did not have any say or financial means that would allow me to be independent and have decision-making freedom.

Asha's life has been influenced by the unfortunate circumstances in which she was born.

Circumstance	Consequence
Poverty	Led to her being deprived of education and obliged to engage in child labour
Cultural, social and religious norms and practices	Determined her underprivileged and subordinate position in the household, but also in society
Early marriage and child pregnancy	Blocked her access to decent work opportunities, since she had to start taking care of her children when she was a child herself
Triple work burden	Caused time poverty and prevented her from accessing more profitable and decent forms of work, as well as training

How would Asha's story be in a different world without gender bias?

If Asha had enjoyed a better start in life, with at least access to quality schooling, nutritious food and an empowering environment, in which she was valued for her qualities as a human being, she could have developed skills and capacities to overcome the poverty trap.

What's more, her future dependents (i.e. children) would have benefited if she had been in a position to have them at a more mature age, when she had her own means to support them.

Unfortunately, unless circumstances change, Asha's story will be repeated in the case of her children, especially the daughters. This is how the vicious cycle of poverty and gender discrimination is often perpetuated.

Let's continue to analyse the major decent work constraints that affect rural women, based on the decent work agenda:

DECENT WORK CONSTRAINTS	
Employment creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High prevalence of rural women employed in the informal economy, in unpaid (family) work, in low-paid and precarious jobs; • Women's time burden: triple work burden and long working hours; • Limited technical and business skills development, including on-job training opportunities and Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) available to rural women.
Social protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited access of rural women to health and unemployment insurance; • Limited or non-existing maternity coverage; • Limited or inadequate access to and coverage of rural women by occupational safety and health measures.
Rights at work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited or non-existent enforcement of labour standards in terms of equality; • Discriminatory or gender-blind policies and legal provisions/regulations; • High child labour occurrence in agriculture with rural girls' labour often hidden and/or underreported in the domestic sphere.
Social dialogue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural women's limited freedom or ability of association and weakness of rural women's voices in existing associations, cooperatives and producers' organizations; • Poor existing mechanisms for policy dialogue and rural women's participation in decision-making processes.

Some of the major constraints that rural women are confronted with are their limited access to, control over and ownership of productive resources and assets, different views on femininity and masculinity and a tendency to assign higher values and qualities to men rather than women, triple work burden, and limited human development.

Age is a significant **discriminatory** determinant **for constraints of rural women in accessing decent work opportunities**. For example, young and old rural women (aged 15-24 and over 65 years) may be worse off than adult working age rural women (25-64 years). This is because young, adolescent rural women face additional disadvantages, given the overall constraints faced by youth globally in entering the labour markets. This also applies to girls (aged 5-17 years).

Let's look at the specific decent work related disadvantages and constraints faced by rural women of different age groups.

DECENT WORK RELATED DISADVANTAGES AND CONSTRAINTS	
Children (5 – 17 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child labourers (5-17) lack access to full education and/or are engaged in work that disrupts their mental and/or physical development. Rural children, particularly girls, tend to begin work at a very young age, sometimes between 5-7 years; • Gender roles, age, birth order and cultural norms distinguish the type of work performed by girls and boys, the number of hours worked, as well as who works and who gets an education. Gender differences in child labour increase with age; • In many societies, girls work more hours than boys when domestic chores are taken into account, but this work is often invisible or under-valued. On average, 92 percent of girl child labourers in the 5-14 age group also perform household chores, compared with 67 percent of boys.
Children/Youth (15 - 17 years)	<p>This age group is an overlapping age range within the "children" and "youth" age groups. It is often referred as the "grey area". Depending on the context, those within this group can be viewed as children or youth: they meet the minimum age of employment (i.e. considered as youth employment), but still need to be protected from hazardous work (considered as child labour).</p> <p>Girls within this age range face constraints symptomatic of both contributing age groups. These are:</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High risk of child pregnancies, which has serious consequences on schooling of the mothers-to-be and can have damaging health impacts for themselves and their children. This has, among others, long-term adverse impacts on their subsequent productivity (income generation and access to decent work opportunities), as well as on their own and their children's wealth status. Child pregnancies affect nearly 20 percent of adolescent girls in developing countries, or about 7 million girls below 18 each year. • High risk of child marriage: one in three girls in developing countries is likely to be married before she reaches 18 (predominantly in this age range). Girls who marry before they turn 18 are less likely to remain in school and more likely to experience domestic violence; • Risk of exclusion from accessing productive resources (i.e. land, credit) if they opt for eligible employment rather than schooling; • Risk of exclusion from representative organizations (e.g. youth associations).
Youth (15 – 24 years)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School to work transition in developing countries is disadvantageous for rural girls and young women, compared with rural boys and young men; • Rural youth in general, and young rural adult women in particular, face limited job and career development prospects, especially in non-agricultural sectors, often due to inadequate access to job relevant skills needed, or the productive resources necessary to start their own enterprises; • They may have few market opportunities, lack of broader institutional support and limited access to representative organizations, which further disadvantages their efforts in development as businesswomen and entrepreneurs;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence suggests that young adult women in this age group are more likely to accept employment in the informal economy.
Adults Age 25 – 64	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Face general gender-biased discrimination at work in the rural economy, including high incidence of informality, underemployment, temporality and seasonality of work, job segregation channelling women into low value added jobs, vulnerable employment, time and resource poverty, triple work burden, lack of voice and representation, etc.
Age 65 +	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduced capacity to work, often combined with limited or no savings to draw on; Weak social protection coverage throughout their lives has left them with little or no pension prospects; Increased likelihood of widowhood, poor health, disability; Evidence suggests that they are more likely to accept employment in the informal economy.

The importance of rural women's participation in productive and decent jobs

Empowerment of rural women through access to productive employment and decent work can contribute to gender equality⁴ in the world of work, as well as to more sustainable development of agriculture and the rural economy.

Comprising half the labour force, rural women are essential for the achievement of better livelihoods for their families, as well as the prosperity of their communities and society at large. In fact, when rural women have access to productive employment and decent work opportunities, their productivity and earning power improve, which in turn raises family incomes and food security.

⁴ Gender equality refers to the state in which **women and men enjoy equal rights, opportunities and entitlements in civil and political life**, including equal access to, ownership of and control over resources and decision-making. It also means that women and men are equally valued and have the freedom to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by rigid gender roles, prejudices and discrimination. *Source: FAO TERM website (2009). Esplen.*



Addressing the gender gap in the world of work should be a fundamental component of sustainable development strategies.

The commitment of the United Nations

The importance of women's economic empowerment through access to productive employment and decent work is firmly anchored in the work of the United Nations:

➤ Sustainable Development Goals (2016-2030)

Both productive employment and decent work for all, including women and youth, as well as gender equality and women's economic empowerment, are objectives that form part of a set of 17 goals adopted in 2015. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5) aims to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls", while SDG 8 seeks to "promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all".

For more information: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/>

➤ Millennium Development Goals (2000 - 2015)

The UN MDG 1 aimed to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, including through the achievement of full and productive employment and decent work for all, especially women and young people (MDG 1, Target 1B). Millennium Development Goal (MDG 3) aimed to promote gender equality and empower women also including tough interventions (and a specific indicator) to increase the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector.

For more information: www.un.org/millenniumgoals/

➤ Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees everyone "the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work, to protection against unemployment, to equal pay for equal work, to just and favourable remuneration and to form and to join trade unions" (Article 23). For more information: www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html

➤ International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966)

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), recognizes the right to work and the related rights at work such as the right to just and favourable conditions of work and the right to form and join a trade union of one's choice, through its articles 6 to 8.

For more information: www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx

➤ **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979)**

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is a major international instrument protecting the rights of women, and the only legally binding international human rights treaty that gives specific attention to rural women. Article 11 of CEDAW recognizes the right to work as a right of all men and women, and requires State Parties to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment. Article 14 of CEDAW refers specifically to rural women. It requires States to take into account the specific problems faced by rural women and ensure their participation in and benefits from the development of agriculture and the rural economy. *For more information:* www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/

➤ **The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA, 1995)**

The landmark Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing, 1995) substantially advanced the discourse on women's empowerment in the global arena, through the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA). The BPfA aims to contribute to rural women's empowerment through employment, with a focus on poverty reduction, economic growth, power and decision-making, education and vocational training, and health. It recognizes the interconnectedness of rural poverty, gender discrimination and rural women's greater difficulty to advance economically, particularly in the agricultural sector. *For more information:*

www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/

➤ **The ILO Decent Work Agenda (DWA, 1999)**

The Decent Work Agenda is a balanced and integrated programmatic approach developed by the ILO and endorsed by the international community to pursue the objectives of full and productive employment and decent work for all at global, regional, national, sectoral and local levels.

It comprises four pillars, namely:

- Pillar I: employment creation and enterprise development;
- Pillar II: social protection;
- Pillar III: standards and rights at work;
- Pillar IV: governance and social dialogue.

For more information: www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm

The FAO contribution

To contribute to these broader development efforts for the achievement of rural women's empowerment and gender equality in the world of work, **FAO** developed a **conceptual framework** on the importance of **productive employment and decent work in rural areas as a key driver of rural women's economic empowerment**. This rests on three interdependent and mutually reinforcing objectives:



Stimulation of women's social and economic advancement

When empowered to make decisions and act upon them, and to exercise control over resources and returns, women can fully benefit from their economic and social activities.



Increase of women's individual and collective power and agency

Skills and resources to compete in the markets, along with a fair access to social and economic institutions on an equal basis with men, enable women to succeed and improve economically and socially.



Enhancement of women's dignity and value of themselves and the work they do

Individual women associate important social and psychological benefits with the respect and value deriving from the work they do and their work environment.



These three empowering components address specific gender needs and women's human rights through the scope of decent work pillars. This stimulates the transformational change that ultimately leads to gender equality in the world of work. The empowerment process is carried out on both individual and collective levels.

The enabling environment for ensuring productive employment and decent work of rural women

Fostering women's empowerment requires a supportive environment in order to achieve equitable, inclusive and sustainable conditions for productive employment and decent work in rural areas.

There are numerous favourable factors and strategic approaches that can foster an enabling environment for the empowerment of rural women. Let's have a look at the most important ones:



Conducive and targeted policy and legal frameworks

Policies and laws influence lives. They can influence the economic incentives and social norms that determine whether women work, the types of work women perform and whether it is considered an economic activity, the stock of human capital women accumulate and the levels of pay they receive. They also determine rules of inheritance and matrimonial property, can ensure non-discriminatory access to productive resources and provide for social security, working hours and leave issues. Below an example that shows how policies and laws can play a crucial role in changing women's conditions.

Ethiopia's reform of family law

In 2000, Ethiopia reformed its family law by eliminating the husband's ability to deny permission for his wife to work outside the home and requiring both spouses to agree on administering family property.

This shifted women's economic activities towards work outside the home, in paid and full-time jobs, and in higher-paid occupations.

How to create a conducive and targeted policy and legal framework?

Carefully designed policies, strategies and legal provisions should:

- ✓ address gender-biased cultural norms and practices that obstruct rural women's active participation in productive work and income-generating activities;
- ✓ ensure that rural labour markets provide decent employment opportunities to women to the same degree as men;
- ✓ extend social protection measures to rural areas, particularly to disadvantaged rural women who are engaged in vulnerable employment and work in the informal economy. Such social protection could include: paid maternity leave, quality child care facilities, access to health and unemployment insurance.

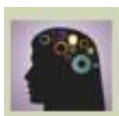


Non-discriminatory institutions and organizations

Capacitated organizations and institutions can function as empowering engines for rural women in their social and economic emancipation through decent work and productive employment.

How can institutions and organizations empower rural women?

- ✓ Rural women should be integrated within both the membership and leadership of organizations. Gender equality will not be achieved by an increased women's presence alone, given that the existing institutions (i.e. producers' organizations, cooperatives, workers' unions, outgrower schemes) are mostly governed by men;
- ✓ Relevant institutions, both private and public, should promote and adopt decent work standards, voluntary standards for responsible business conduct and responsible agricultural investments, as well as corporate social responsibility, all with a strong focus on gender equality;
- ✓ Cooperatives and other enterprises should complement legislation and control of working conditions, and should facilitate women's collective bargaining.



Enhancement of rural women's human capital

Household poverty often confines rural girls to supporting their family's activities instead of pursuing an education. Building the human capital of rural women and girls is an essential prerequisite, not only for their personal empowerment, but also for their integration into existing labour markets under more fair and decent conditions.

The case of Dana

Dana is a 19-year-old woman from rural Kazakhstan. She grew up on a family farm and she would like to engage more in cash crop production.

However, rural women - especially of her age - are often excluded from such activities. This is partly due to prevailing gender-biased norms, but also because such activities require a higher level of technology adoption and greater ability of producers to process relevant new knowledge in order to access cash crop markets.

To stimulate the entrepreneurial awareness of Dana, investment in her (higher) education, as well as skills development through vocational and business management training, are necessary.

How to enhance rural women's human capital?

- ✓ Policies, legal provisions and practices should promote and ensure that rural women and girls receive quality education on equal terms with their male counterparts;
- ✓ It is important to reduce vulnerability to work related ill health for rural women, especially those working in the informal economy and in vulnerable employment. This is an important step towards the enhancement of their health, and therefore human capital.



Increased access to, control over and ownership of productive assets and resources

Access to, ownership of and control over productive assets and resources, including land, is vital for rural women's autonomous inclusion in the productive labour force, especially labour markets that may not be traditionally favourable towards women.

The Peruvian Special Land Titling and Cadastre Project

In 1992, the Peruvian government launched a Special Land Titling and Cadastre Project (PETT) to increase land tenure security and enhance agricultural productivity and production.

The **project** has been **categorized as gender neutral** because it did not adopt any gender specific regulations for implementation. The government's rationale was that no extra measures were needed, because there was no overt discrimination against women.

But rural women suffer from higher illiteracy rates and are more likely to be monolingual than men. Women in consensual unions were also vulnerable to exclusion. A lack of identification papers was another obstacle, because proof of identification was necessary for land registration.

The NGO *Red Nacional de la Mujer Rural*, organized by the Peruvian Women's Center Flora Tristán, led a nationwide **awareness campaign to support women's rights**, reinforcing government efforts. It drafted widely circulated administrative guidelines with a gender perspective. It also conducted gender sensitivity training for PETT officials.

After this intervention, PETT improved the distribution of land ownership: 56 percent of plots in male-headed households were jointly titled in 2004, up from 49 percent of households in a control group that had not received PETT titles. More remarkably, joint ownership rates jumped from 13 percent of households in 2000 to 43 percent in 2004.

How to increase access to productive assets and resources?

- ✓ Gender sensitive policies and laws need to be put in place in order to grant equal rights to women and men on land ownership or tenure;

- ✓ Local actors, including local governance structures, communities and household members, with a particular emphasis on men, need to be capacitated and sensitized on the established policy and legal provisions in order to change the socially embedded gender-biased norms and practices.



Increased access to basic infrastructure and rural public services

Access to basic infrastructure and public services, such as electricity and potable running water or day care facilities, is far more limited in rural areas, compared with urban areas.

Improvements in basic infrastructure services, especially water and electricity provision, have shown to **free up women's time** spent on domestic and care work. Equal access to basic infrastructure and support services can improve rural women's access to economic opportunities and better employment, while increasing their human and social capital.

How electricity improved women's lives in Zanzibar

In rural Zanzibar, having access to electricity in a village means that the water pumps are running steadily, the schools and health centres are connected to electricity and that there is street lighting at night time.

Women have benefited tremendously from these improvements in public services. Following the introduction of **village water pumps**, households - primarily women and girls - **saved about 25 hours per week on water collection**. As a result, girls could attend school to the same extent as boys, and women had more time for productive activities (e.g. seaweed production) and even some time to relax in the evenings.

However, two important female institutions remained unconnected to the electricity grid, namely, the village mill and the kindergarten, while male institutions, such as mosques and the fish market were connected. This discrepancy in representation of interests is linked to rural women's exclusion from the planning process when introducing major infrastructure and services, and has long-term effects on women's and girl's lives.

How to increase access to rural public services?

- ✓ Rural services, new technologies and infrastructure should explicitly target women and be adapted to their needs and requirements;
- ✓ Women should be integrated into the service delivery processes. For example, women could be included in decision-making positions at the Ministry of Agriculture to strengthen

adequate delivery of agricultural extension to rural women, along with the participation of women's producers' organizations as sounding boards.



Improved access to output markets and marketing channels

Inclusive market systems development can lead to wide-ranging development **benefits for both rural women** and men and their families.

Access to output markets and marketing channels is more challenging for poor agricultural producers. Additionally, rural women are constrained more than men due to social restrictions on their mobility (they rarely own transport means, such as a bicycle, or may have fewer resources to pay for hired transport).

Women also have more limited access to storage and processing facilities, are more likely to produce perishable products that are less easy to transport (e.g. dairy products and eggs) and have less access to and say in agricultural cooperatives and producers' associations through which they could access markets.

The case of Micheline

Micheline works as a self-employed fish processor. Early in the morning, she buys part of the catch from local fishers and starts smoking fish at around 7 am, continuing until 8 in the evening. At the same time, she sells her produce throughout the day from her stall, sometimes until late at night. For many years, Micheline has smoked fish in the traditional way, using wood from rubber tree and a smoking facility that exposes both eyes and the respiratory system to large quantities of smoke. The direct handling of the smoking process and the unimproved ovens also lead to regular skin burns. Now, an **international project has helped to install an improved oven for fish smoking** in Micheline's community. The oven has reduced the wood consumption and the time needed for fish smoking, as well as the quantity of smoke that women are exposed to when operating it.

As a result, **the risk to their health is reduced and the workload for women has declined.**

Besides, the smoking process is of higher quality. As a consequence, the women now have the confidence to process more expensive fish species and the vending stall attracts more people who are willing to pay higher prices. Overall, the improved technique has allowed Micheline to

spend less money on processing costs, reduce the danger of constant exposure to smoke and other health risks, while increasing her income from fish sales.

How to improve access to markets?

- ✓ gender responsive market systems analysis;
- ✓ promotion of favourable gender sensitive macro level policies; and
- ✓ strengthening women's negotiating power within markets and value chains.



Improved access to financial services

Women's **access to financial services** is often **subject** to their **legal, social and economic position** within society, their communities and households.

This is also closely linked to women's lack of ownership of resources and assets that can be used as collateral to leverage loans and credits, as well as women's scarcer human capacity development (i.e. lack of financial literacy and business training).

The Self Employed Women's Association in India

The Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is a **trade union** in India, registered in 1972, which aims to organize poor rural self-employed women **to achieve full employment and self-reliance**, including work security, income security, food security and social security.

Self-reliance refers to women's autonomy as individuals and groups, both in economic and decision-making terms. In order to achieve this, SEWA sets up small self-help groups which meet monthly. Women producers choose to join these groups to share mutual interests and concerns and to solve their problems collectively. SEWA's facilitation approach includes **capacity-building of managerial and leadership skills**. SEWA also offers functional **literacy** group-based **training**, which focuses on reading skills and is designed around women's specific needs.

SEWA's **village resource centres** help women farmers, through the self-help groups, to identify the potential benefits of new technologies, evaluate their appropriateness and participate in technology development processes. The resource centres also provide farmers with quality inputs, market information and technical advice and enable market access for small-scale farmers. The 2 140 SEWA self-help groups often radically improve women's lives by increasing their income and food security, and by enabling them to seize new opportunities.

How to foster women's access to financial services?

To foster women's access to financial services, it is crucial to ensure:

- ✓ promotion of women's equal rights to enter into financial contracts;
- ✓ direct provision of credit, loans and insurance to women, without their husbands' or other male guarantees;
- ✓ promotion of financial literacy among rural women;
- ✓ enhanced access of rural women to microfinance programmes and gender sensitive agricultural insurance schemes;
- ✓ that existing socio-cultural norms which prevent rural women from accessing finance and financial services are challenged and changed.



Changed socio-cultural norms in favour of gender equality

Often, discriminatory gender norms, religious values and cultural practices determine women's and men's roles, as well as influencing their opportunities to engage in various types of work and income-generating activities.

- Age, marital and socio-economic status and ethnicity, as well as the number and gender of children, are among the major determinants of women's capacity to make independent decisions about their private and professional life and engage in the public and political domain.
- Freedom of mobility, the right to inherit and own property and land as well as the ability to exercise their occupation freely are all prerequisites for rural women's active participation in decent employment and contribute significantly to their social and economic empowerment.

Example

You are a policy-maker and have the task of reducing gender-based inequalities in rural labour markets and enhancing rural women's empowerment through decent work in your country. The following are the key strategies to accomplish your task:

- ✓ Provide literacy lessons and vocational training to rural women, especially the poorest and most disadvantaged;
- ✓ Encourage rural men to assist women in accomplishing duties related to domestic and reproductive work.

- ✓ Stimulate wage employment for rural women, including in the non-agricultural sector of the rural economy;
- ✓ Provide quality child day care facilities to rural women, especially the most disadvantaged.

Conclusion

Why it is so important to close the gender gap in productive employment and decent work in rural areas?

First and foremost, because it is a human right and it could contribute to many socio-economic improvements, such as:

- US\$28 trillion to global annual GDP in 2025;
- 20-30% increase of productivity on women's farms;
- 12 to 17% reduction in the number of hungry, or 100 to 150 million people lifted out of hunger;
- better health, nutrition and education outcomes for children (i.e. investment in future generations of workers);
- women's higher decision-making power at all levels.

Summary

Decent work and full and productive employment are important for the long-term empowerment of rural women. Women are overloaded by a triple work burden that causes time poverty and prevents them from engaging in more profitable forms of employment and income-generating activities.

There are also gender-based disadvantages, which hinder rural women's equal access to decent work. Empowerment of rural women through access to productive employment and decent work can contribute to gender equality in the world of work, as well as to more sustainable development of agriculture and the rural economy.

There are eight key strategies that contribute to an efficient enabling environment for the sustainable empowerment of rural women through productive employment and decent work:

1. conducive and targeted policy and legal frameworks;
2. non-discriminatory institutions and organizations;
3. enhancement of rural women's human capital;

4. increased access to, control over and ownership of productive assets and resources;
5. increased access to basic infrastructure and rural public services;
6. improved access to output markets and marketing channels;
7. improved access to financial services;
8. changed socio-cultural norms in favour of gender equality.