



Background paper WG 3: Women's Empowerment

Global situation

Women constitute the majority of the agricultural workforce in developing countries and emerging economies. At the same time they often bear most or even the entire responsibility for feeding children and their families. Due to their various tasks in respect of nutrition and agriculture, women suffer from a high workload. These tasks are accompanied by cultural, political and traditional structures that combine to make it harder to have a good nutritional status. Women's roles are deeply rooted in society and are therefore not easy to change. The structural discrimination of women and children affects them at family, local and communal level, e.g. by means of patriarchal inheritance structures, lower investments in the education of girls and reduced access to productive agricultural land and other natural and productive resources. Another factor that is key to the malnutrition of women is the widespread violation of their sexual and reproductive rights (e.g. child marriage and teenage pregnancies) and violence against women.

In many societies, national legislation does not pay sufficient regard to safeguard equal and secure access for women and men to resources, education or health care. But it is paramount to anchor equal rights for women and men to support societal change. Even if women play a major role in earning income for the family, they do not automatically have control over how it is used. Often the necessary framework to allow women to make informed decisions lacks. This is the case with regard to their sexual and reproductive health, the diet of their infants and young children and in particular in respect of breast-feeding. This includes, for example, the possibility of breast-feeding during work or of overcoming food-related taboos (no meat/ no milk for breast-feeding mothers).

Social change and the adjustment of consumption habits take a long time and require a good framework. WG 3 focuses on identifying ways in which women can gain more control over resources but also achieve a better nutritional status for themselves and their families.

Priority issues:

I. Care and reduction of the workload

Women in developing countries and emerging economies are often exposed to the double burden of earning income, particularly in agriculture, and of care giving. Women are key players in food produc-



tion, particularly in subsistence farming and in the global South. Correspondingly, they suffer from constant time poverty.

Reducing their workload and combating structural discrimination at various levels are important steps in improving the situation for women. They must be granted access to, and control over, monetary resources in order to acquire food for balanced nutrition and other essential products and services, e.g. in the fields of education, hygiene, (drinking) water and medical care. Women invest more frequently than men in nutritious foods, health services and nutrition education.

The focus must therefore be on identifying the structures that must be created in order to offer women and girls the opportunity to optimise their own nutrition and that of their families, without losing access to monetary resources and without being forced to an excessive workload.

II. Access of women to resources in the food system

Access to balanced nutrition is difficult for many women in developing countries and emerging economies. There are many reasons for this. One important reason is that women are granted inadequate access to, and control over, land and other natural resources. Women also often have fewer and smaller plots of land than men do. Given these conditions, common land and common woodland is particularly important to women. This land provides them with access to water, fuel wood, herbs, medicinal plants and forest fruits. However, they often lose this land as a result of large-scale investment projects. The consequences of climate change are also exacerbating the competition for access to natural resources, particularly for women.

It is indispensable to have a legal environment that aims to realise the rights of women and provides for women to have access to, and control over, resources.

Guiding questions:

1. What technical and social innovations could help to reduce considerably the workload of women? What studies and experiences exist in this regard?
2. How is it possible to safeguard women's access to, and control over, natural resources and income?
3. What synergies and challenges exist in respect of diversification, processing and nutrition education?
4. What policy framework is required in order to strengthen women's rights and support women in their many different roles?



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