

# Advancing towards gender equality and women's empowerment in agri-food systems and rural areas

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## 2026 International Year of the Woman Farmer

- Women working across agri-food systems remain essential yet undervalued actors, often facing persistent legal and structural barriers that limit their access to decent work, land, finance, and social protection
- Advancing gender equality requires not only removing discriminatory laws, but also ensuring that women can fully exercise their rights at work and in society.



## ▶ Women are the backbone of many agri-food systems and rural economies



Women represent over half of the agricultural labour force in many regions, contributing to farming, wage labour, and entrepreneurship.



Many women work in agriculture as contributing family workers and own-account workers.

▶ Agrifood systems are central to women's employment in developing regions: 66% (SSA) | 71% (Southern Asia)

## ▶ **Women in agri-food systems: decent work deficits and structural barriers**

- ▶ Despite their contribution, women's socioeconomic roles remain largely unrecognized and undervalued.
- ▶ Women farmers face barriers like:
  - lack of access to resources,
  - informality, low wages, poor working conditions, exposure to violence and harassment, and
  - Lack of voice and limited influence in decision-making and collective representation.
- ▶ Women shoulder the majority of unpaid household and care work, including food provision and resource collection, limiting their access to paid and decent work.
- ▶ Demographic shifts, new technology, and climate change are changing the gender dynamics of work in rural economies.

## ▶ Shaking the status quo to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in agri-food systems and rural areas

**Advancing towards gender equality and women's empowerment in agri-food systems**

To harness their potential for driving a sustainable, inclusive, and resilient transformation of agri-food systems.

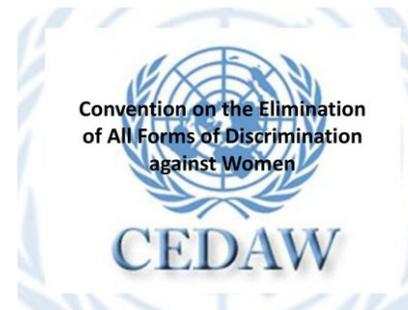
To create the space for women to voice their needs and priorities.

To address discrimination, with a focus on social norms, power dynamics, and institutions.

**Policy frameworks and approaches underpinned by international labour standards, employment promotion, social dialogue, and social protection**

## International labour standards and women's rights – FPRW, Sectoral technical standards and tools

The fundamental rights of equality and non-discrimination in employment and occupation for all workers in the agri-food sector should be at the heart of policies for poverty reduction, food security and sustainable food systems, sustainable development and the promotion of fairer and more equitable societies



Seventy-third session  
Agenda item 74 (b)

**Resolution adopted by the General Assembly  
on 17 December 2018**

[on the report of the Third Committee (A/73/589/Add.2)]

73/165. **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas**



## ▶ Boosting rural's women's empowerment in the world of work



Gender-inclusive sectoral policies and investments in strategic sectors to promote decent jobs for women and leveraging women's entrepreneurial activities in rural economies



Investing in training and business development for women agro-entrepreneurs.



Harnessing the potential in sectors that support the economic diversification of rural areas.

## ▶ Extending social protection to rural women, and tapping into the potential of the care economy



Adopting a gender policy approach to extend the coverage of social protection in rural areas, building on R202 - evaluating the particular needs of rural women and to what extent these are addressed by existing schemes, and ensuring participation of rural women's representatives



Care policy packages that also account for the importance of the care economy in rural areas - devising effective and tailored childcare solutions and creating quality jobs in the care economy in rural areas

## ► Realizing rights at work for gender equality in agri-food systems and the rural economy



Promoting the effective implementation of international labour standards on labour protection, occupational safety and health, violence and harassment, and gender equality in rural areas.



Ensuring full application of the principle of equal pay for work of equal value in law and practice.



Eliminating legal and structural barriers that restrict women's access to certain occupations and sectors.



Strengthening labour administration and inspection systems, including gender-responsive grievance and dispute resolution mechanisms.



Developing collective bargaining agendas that address gender-based violence and harassment, pay equity, parental leave and childcare.

## ▶ Giving a stronger voice to rural women

-  Promoting programmes that enhance the participation and leadership of rural women in economic and community life in line with R 149 on rural workers' organisations
-  Closing representation and leadership gaps
-  Changing stereotypes and social norms
-  Enhancing the visibility and recognition of women farmers and rural women entrepreneurs, especially young women, as drivers of food systems transformation and inclusive rural development

## ▶ Concluding remarks

- ▶ The realization of women farmers' rights at work is not optional — it is a matter of social justice.
- ▶ Advancing gender equality and women farmers' empowerment demands ensuring that women can fully realize their rights at work, access resources, and participate equally in society.
- ▶ The international labour standards and the Decent Work Agenda provide us with a global foundation for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in agri-food systems



► **Thanks!**

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