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Evaluation of FAO's work on gender

Summary report

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1. Introduction

1. In May 2016, the Programme Committee of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) requested an evaluation of its work on gender. This request was approved by the FAO Council a year later, with a mandate to submit the report to the Conference for consideration in 2019.
2. The resulting evaluation covers FAO's work to implement its Gender Equality Policy at the organizational, regional and country levels from the time of its endorsement in March 2012 to December 2017.
3. Its main objectives centred on five broad questions:
 - To what extent has FAO effectively incorporated the key elements of the Gender Equality Policy into its programmes and projects?
 - How has FAO's work on gender contributed to the achievement of equality in sustainable agricultural production and rural development for the elimination of hunger?
 - How has FAO leveraged partnerships to realize its gender-equality objectives and to empower rural women?
 - What is FAO's comparative advantage when it comes to promoting gender equality?
 - What are the key lessons learned, enabling factors and challenges that need to be addressed to support Members in better achieving the gender-equality targets of internationally agreed development goals and international agreements, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)?

2. Summary of conclusions and recommendations

1. Conclusions

4. FAO has not only contributed to the development of gender-sensitive policies and rural-sector strategies, but also played a key role in advocating for gender equality in high-level forums and policy processes. At community level, FAO has contributed to gender equality and women's empowerment, as set out in the Gender Equality Policy objectives.
5. FAO's proximity to rural communities and work in rural settings puts it in an ideal position to play a key role in addressing rural gender issues. FAO is viewed as a neutral adviser by national and international partners. Still, more needs to be done to ensure FAO is seen as having the potential to promote rural gender equality. Many partners still see FAO as a technical agricultural agency, limiting its efforts to engage in social and normative issues.
6. FAO has established useful ad hoc partnerships, mainly for project implementation. It has not systematically leveraged its knowledge of the agricultural/rural sector to build strategic and long-term partnerships with key gender actors. While efforts have been made to ensure adequate support for Members in their pursuit of gender-equality objectives, major gaps and challenges persist, which need to be addressed through collective action.
7. FAO has taken important action at all levels to operationalize the Gender Equality Policy. Key actions include the commitment of human and financial resources to support the gender-mainstreaming structure. Implementation has not been smooth, however. Recent developments, such as the SDGs, highlight the need for reflection on the Policy's relevance.

2. Recommendations

8. FAO should update the Gender Equality Policy to take into account the internal changes that have occurred within the organization, as well as external developments relevant to FAO's mandate, for example, the SDGs. In addition to updating the policy, it is important to develop an action plan, including short- to medium-term gender-equality targets, to ensure the solid operationalization and monitoring of progress towards high-level policy objectives.
9. FAO should expand on and learn from its partnerships with those key actors working to address gender issues in agriculture, including the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UN Women, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP). These partnerships should also recognize FAO's comparative advantage in rural areas. FAO could replicate partners' best practices on gender mainstreaming, such as UNDP's gender-equality Seal Certification, which incentivizes country offices to integrate gender equality into all aspects of development work. WFP and UNICEF have similar schemes.

10. FAO needs to strengthen the capacity of technical officers to mainstream gender in their work, especially through customized advice and support from Gender Officers and Gender Focal Points in decentralized offices. FAO needs to ensure that these focal points are equipped and available to provide this support. Strategic Programme teams and technical departments need to advise on how to mainstream gender in their specialized areas.
11. FAO should map and review the existing mechanisms to monitor and report on gender-related achievements, particularly at country level, to enhance its capacity to track progress towards the Gender Equality Policy objectives. Effective monitoring and reporting is essential to identify gaps and obstacles that need to be addressed, as well as lessons learned and success stories to be shared between countries and technical divisions.

3. Methodology

12. The evaluation was conducted by the FAO Office of Evaluation, with the support of a team of external geographic and thematic experts, and input from FAO's Social Policies and Rural Institutions Division and regional Gender Teams.
13. The evaluation drew on mixed-method approach to ensure rigorous and far-reaching analysis. The Evaluation Team interviewed almost 700 people and reviewed over 500 documents. Evaluators conducted a meta-synthesis of evidence from previous evaluations and a survey of 200 Gender Focal Points and FAO Representatives.
14. The evaluation was informed by a benchmarking study of the Rome-based agencies – WFP and IFAD – and two specialized agencies – the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) – to see how FAO's Gender Equality Policy measured up to those of its peers.
15. The Evaluation Team visited FAO Regional Offices and 13 countries to conduct in-depth studies. These countries offered information-rich cases to illustrate the type, quality and results of FAO's gender-related work. They also provided an in-depth understanding of the reasons for the success and/or failure of certain interventions and evidence of FAO's comparative advantage in gender-related areas.
16. The assessment of FAO's Gender Equality Policy included a review of its relevance to the Organization's mandate and its effectiveness in the context of major institutional change, such as the revision of FAO's Strategic Framework and ongoing decentralization efforts.

4. Relevance of FAO's work on gender equality

17. The evaluation found that the Gender Equality Policy was still relevant to FAO's mandate and that it remained a valid guiding document for FAO's gender work.
18. However, it also identified key gaps on the operational side, for example, the absence of a roadmap or action plan to communicate how the Gender Equality Policy should be implemented at global, regional and country level. Such gaps hampered staff's understanding of what results were expected and why, and how they would be achieved. This made intervention planning, monitoring and accountability more challenging.
19. FAO undertook a series of stocktaking exercises at headquarters to build understanding of gender mainstreaming in its Strategic Programmes and technical divisions, as well as for its five Strategic Objectives.¹ It developed regional strategies to support gender mainstreaming through Regional Initiatives and selected programmes and projects. An important work is underway with regional and sub-regional organizations in Africa, which has proved effective in advancing and promoting gender issues at decision-making level.
20. Some technical experts understood gender as "targeting women", suggesting inadequate awareness of the Gender Equality Policy, which aims to shift the focus of interventions from "women" to "gender". Because of such a lack of clear and common understanding, field offices often face challenges in mainstreaming gender in the planning and monitoring of interventions, as well as in the allocation of accountability.
21. Many factors influenced the quality of support provided by the Gender Focal Points at country level, including high turnover, technical background and experience, interest in the topic and time available. In some countries, such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan and Paraguay, the focal point was a full-time gender expert with substantial experience, well versed in national gender issues. In those cases, they were able to provide adequate support to the country offices and actively participate in the work of the Country Gender Thematic Group. Elsewhere, focal points had no relevant experience of gender work, were too busy with other responsibilities, or were sometimes appointed without prior consultation.
22. The survey of Gender Focal Points (with a response rate of 65 percent) confirmed that the aforementioned factors influenced the quality of support. The survey showed that only 52 percent of focal points managed to dedicate 20 percent or more of their time to gender-related activities. When the focal point was someone with decision-making authority, the office was more likely to mainstream gender in a systematic manner.
23. To help the staff mainstream gender in their work, FAO created a number of knowledge products and guidance materials, but these were little used by staff and their national counterparts at the decentralized level.
24. FAO regional and country staff were either not aware of these products, or viewed them as theoretical and often not applicable to the actual contexts in which they operated. Some staff cited guidance material from donors as being more appropriate to their specific situations. Exceptions to this finding were flagship publications, such as The State

¹ <http://www.fao.org/3/I8580EN/i8580en.pdf>

of Food Security and Nutrition in the World and the State of Food and Agriculture reports, which were generally known by FAO technical staff and development partners in the respective regions.

5. Effectiveness of FAO's work on gender

25. Gender-equality results vary from country to country and require national ownership for uptake and sustainability. In some countries, gender issues are not accorded requisite political and financial priority by government counterparts and the concept of mainstreaming gender equality in agriculture is little understood despite the awareness-raising efforts.
26. Where regional and national counterparts were keen to address gender issues, FAO's work on gender has seen its most significant results at the policy and strategy level. In most countries, FAO's interventions have addressed gender gaps at community level, mainly through women's economic empowerment.
27. Capacity has been a decisive factor in the success or failure of FAO's gender initiatives. FAO's gender network comprises more than 200 staff globally and the Organization has been making efforts to strengthen it. This is particularly relevant in light of the variations observed in Gender Focal Point capacity. While some focal points are gender experts, the majority are technical officers with limited or no previous experience of working on gender issues. Their capacities have been reinforced by direct technical support from gender experts at headquarters and the regions, as well as a series of webinars and seminars to prepare them for their role.
28. Since the introduction of the Gender Focal Points, every Regional Office has organized at least one training workshop for its focal points, to give them the knowledge and tools they need to execute their role effectively. These training sessions and workshops were highly appreciated by the staff who attended them. However, the relatively high turnover of the focal points poses a challenge in terms of training efficacy, suggesting that the training should be provided more regularly.
29. FAO has also helped to build the capacity of its technical officers and their national counterparts in all five regions to increase awareness and understanding of gender issues in their respective thematic areas. For example, the Regional Office for Africa has conducted extensive training on gender mainstreaming in regional and national agricultural investment plans as part of developing the second generation of such plans in the region.
30. In the Near East and North Africa, the Gender Officer, in collaboration with the University of Cordoba, conducted a training session in Spain for government officials from Algeria, Egypt, Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia working in the water sector. It focused on gender analysis, gender and value chains, and the application of related methodologies developed by FAO.
31. However, while training has taken place, its frequency and targeting need some rethinking. Benchmarked agencies, for example, undertake regular capacity assessments (WFP, for instance, completes an assessment once every three years) and have made gender-related training compulsory for staff, particularly for senior management.
32. FAO has been supporting the integration of gender-equality dimensions into national and international policy processes related to food security and nutrition. A key

achievement was the endorsement of CEDAW Article 14, Recommendation 34, in 2016² – an initiative orchestrated by FAO, WFP, IFAD and UN Women – which provided an important entry point for advocacy in national policy dialogue.

33. FAO now provides technical assistance to implement CEDAW Article 14, Recommendation 34, in Botswana, Guatemala, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Rwanda, Sri Lanka and Tanzania and is supporting several countries in their yearly CEDAW reporting on Article 14.

² CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women), Article 17 outlined the formulation of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in 3 September 1981. The Committee role is to oversee the CEDAW. In its report of 22 March 2016, the Committee made General recommendation No. 34 on the right of rural women to **focus** on Article 14, that provides protections for rural women and their special problems, ensuring the right of women to participate in development programs, "to have access to adequate health care facilities," "to participate in all community activities," "to have access to agricultural credit" and "to enjoy adequate living conditions (...)".

6. Partnerships

34. FAO works with a diverse group of traditional and new partners to deliver gender-related work at both the coordination and implementation levels. FAO traditionally works with national agriculture ministries, sometimes in cooperation with ministries of irrigation and water, or rural affairs. It has been expanding its collaborations to include ministries of the environment, labour, social security, family and women's affairs, as well as other government bodies dealing with gender equality issues, though more needs to be done in this regard.
35. FAO's country offices have encouraged better political and technical support, dissemination and uptake of knowledge products among national partners and counterparts, making sure they are informed of policy processes.
36. FAO's Country Gender Assessments have the potential to inform regional and national programmes and policies, not just FAO initiatives, projects and programmes. A good example is Ghana, where the finalization of a second-generation National Agriculture Investment Plan is underway. The Ghanaian Ministry of Agriculture's Gender Unit has indicated its interest in drawing on FAO's gender assessment to inform its own projects.
37. At the coordination level, in most of the countries visited by the Evaluation Team, the FAO country office was a member of a Country Gender Thematic Group. These gender groups often had broader membership than UN agencies in the country. The degree of FAO's participation in these groups varied from country to country, depending on the FAO Representative's interest and the Gender Focal Point's availability and motivation.
38. FAO works with many development organizations and resource partners to advocate for and implement gender-specific interventions and to mainstream gender in agricultural and rural development interventions. At the global level, FAO has been implementing the Rural Women's Economic Empowerment programme together with UN Women, IFAD and WFP. Since 2012, the programme had joint and targeted activities in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda. It supports rural women's economic empowerment in four main ways: (1) improved food and nutrition security; (2) increased income to sustain livelihoods; (3) enhanced participation in decision making; and (4) a more gender-responsive policy environment for rural women in agriculture.
39. FAO's partners include the World Bank (with which it is conducting a study on women's empowerment and male out-migration), the International Food Policy Research Institute (with which it is compiling an index to measure women's empowerment in agriculture), the KIT Royal Tropical Institute and the CGIAR³ global partnership.
40. FAO is currently implementing six gender-focused projects funded by Canada, Japan, Italy and the UN Peacebuilding Fund in various countries and territories, including Egypt, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and Yemen. In addition, seven FAO-implemented projects funded by the European Union, Sweden and Canada have a gender-specific component and/or are mainstreaming gender in project activities in the Near East and North Africa.

³ Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research

41. Furthermore, FAO has been working through letters of agreement with local non-governmental organizations to promote gender equality in different agricultural subsectors (for example, fisheries in Mauritania, access to land in Tunisia and livelihood support in Syria). FAO also partners with donors, including Australian Aid and USAID in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the European Union in Sri Lanka, and the UN Peacebuilding Fund in Myanmar and Pakistan.

7. Comparative advantages

42. FAO's overall comparative advantage lies in its recognized technical expertise within the broad agriculture sector. National partners consider FAO to be a trusted neutral adviser with a proven track record in rural development. This perceived neutrality gives FAO "a seat at the table" at the political level when governments are addressing sensitive national issues, such as land-tenure reforms and labour-law revisions.
43. Policy formulation and analysis, capacity building and FAO's expertise in agricultural statistics are all strong entry points for gender work. In the Europe and Central Asia region, for example, FAO has significant expertise in producing sex-disaggregated data in different subsectors. Stakeholders also value FAO's global resources on gender and rural women. The Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia has made great efforts to prepare and share publications from the region and European Union member countries on best practices and insights into gender mainstreaming.
44. FAO's global footprint and highly diversified workforce make it an ideal platform for learning and knowledge-sharing between regions. In many countries in Africa, for example, this added value is furthered by the presence of FAO field offices in rural areas – in some cases, as the only UN presence. The mix of FAO's personnel (international and national) is also appreciated, as it ensures the quality of FAO technical advice provided, as well as its suitability to local contexts. Local staff contribute to FAO's understanding of the socio-cultural and political context, while international staff bring experience from around the world.
45. FAO is also considered a valuable financial resource partner, especially by local non-governmental organizations, which are sometimes able to access their first source of external funding through FAO projects. FAO's funding, in the form of technical cooperation programmes⁴, is greatly appreciated by government institutions, as it allows them to finance pilot initiatives they cannot fund with their own resources.
46. When it comes to promoting gender equality, FAO has the potential to leverage these advantages, especially its expert knowledge of rural issues as they relate to rural women. FAO's privileged relationship with national ministries of agriculture puts it in an excellent position to advocate for gender mainstreaming in agriculture and to provide capacity-building support to government staff. It also gives FAO the opportunity to mobilize funds with various resource partners to tackle gender gaps in rural areas.
47. In Latin America and the Caribbean, FAO is perceived as having strong technical capacity to integrate gender into its policy support and overall interventions. Often, FAO is the only agency with the track record and knowledge to work with rural women and is well placed to leverage its partnerships with ministries of women and UN Women to provide better-targeted interventions.
48. In addition, FAO's convening power to bring together different actors and sectors to discuss gender-related issues in agriculture has been evident in its support for inter-institutional committees within the ministries of agriculture of countries such as Paraguay

⁴ This refers to projects financed by FAO regular budget at the country level, known as TCP.

and Guatemala. Similarly, involving civil-society groups and parliamentarians in the approval of laws and institutional policies is an important landmark.

8. Lessons learned

49. Having an institutional gender policy with a clear vision and gender-equality objectives, in addition to underlying implementation arrangements, is paramount to promoting and guiding FAO's gender work. The Gender Equality Policy needs to be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect the internal and external changes affecting FAO.
50. For a technical organization like FAO, it is important to acknowledge that gender mainstreaming is the responsibility of all staff and not just Gender Officers. It is, therefore, crucial to make sure that technical officers and FAO Representatives leading the country-level work are fully capable of ensuring, together with the Gender Team, that gender is adequately mainstreamed in their respective areas of work.
51. There have been many efforts to produce gender-sensitive knowledge products in the various areas of FAO's work. However, more effort is needed to ensure these knowledge products are properly contextualized and disseminated, so as to guarantee optimal use at the field level.
52. The best results in the field are achieved when an accurate analysis is carried out of the different gender roles at intervention sites and when both women and men are involved in the intervention from the beginning.
53. Crucially, to effectively mainstream gender in FAO's work at country level, there needs to be strong political commitment, an understanding of gender issues in rural settings by FAO staff and their national counterparts, and adequate capacity and resources for these actors to address the issues identified in their respective technical areas.
54. Sharing successful experiences of gender mainstreaming in FAO's work across communities, countries and regions is good practice for promoting gender equality and advocating for the development of gender-sensitive policies and programmes for rural and agricultural sectors.