

FAO - Global launch of the FAO report «The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems»

Intervention by Wenche Westberg, State Secretary, Ministry of Food and Agriculture, Norway. Ambassador of Norway, Morten Aasland.

- Mme Chair, FAO Director General, AU Commissioner Josefa Sacko, Excellencies, Colleagues.
- I present this statement on behalf of State Secretary Wenche Westberg, who unfortunately was prevented from being with us on short notice.
- Congratulations to FAO for launching this very important report.
- A hallmark at FAO, when at its best, is the production of high quality, science, and knowledge-based reports – that can drive change, the change we need. This report is an example of that.
- We need knowledge about women’s opportunities and constraints in agrifood systems - in order to close gender gaps.
- Women are food producers, traders, consumers, decision-makers, and negotiators.
- One finding in this report is that during the COVID 19 pandemic, women’s food insecurity rose faster than men’s, with major job losses in both primary agricultural production and in off-farm segments of the food system. As much as 22 percent of women lost their jobs in the off-farm segment of food systems in the first year of the COVID- 19 pandemic, compared with only 2 percent for men. This means a major negative impact on women’s earnings and livelihoods.
- We know that women are more impacted by crisis, and women are more likely to work in vulnerable positions in the food sector. In view of the increasing pressure on global food systems, and scarcity of natural resources and inputs, this means that we need to do more, and better, to ensure women’s empowerment.
- The empowerment of women and mainstreaming of gender perspectives is central to Norway’s new strategy for promoting food security in development policy.
- The strategy is targeted at small scale food producers, as the backbone of local food security systems, including measures that strengthen women as producers and elsewhere in the value chains and food systems.
- We are conscious that not all measures directed at small-scale food producers automatically benefit women. Therefore, we need to ensure that women are consulted and participate fully and on an equal footing with men in the planning and implementation of projects. We will work to ensure that all our partners have insight into how various measures affect both women and men and take necessary steps to ensure women’s participation.

- The very comprehensive analysis in the report on all aspects of food systems will be an important tool, including related to tenure rights, access to inputs, finance, education, and technology.
- Data and reporting on gender impacts is fundamental to achieve targeted policies. Therefore, we are particularly pleased to see that the report highlights the increase in gender disaggregated data and measurement of empowerment as key to effective programming and policy.
- It is our own experience, in strengthening women in our agri-food systems, that disaggregated data have been essential for policy development and achieving gender equality in the agricultural and fisheries sectors.
- In particular, it has been important to track and ensure that policy measures directed at entrepreneurship, recruitment and value creation also benefit women. We know that women play a crucial role in entrepreneurship related to off- farm activities and value creation on the farm. This is crucial for agricultural development, rural livelihoods and maintaining agriculture throughout the country.
- In this sense, we see the empowerment of women in the agricultural sector as a key to achieving both social, economic, and environmental goals in agriculture. I am pleased to say that this perspective is very much in line with the interventions we have heard today.
- Finally, I would like to welcome the food sectors own initiatives in this area – they are key agents of change. In Norway, strategies and programs directed at increasing women’s leadership positions in the private sector and agricultural cooperatives have brought very good results.
- We congratulate the FAO on this very timely report, on an issue essential for accelerating necessary change in agri-food systems.
- We are heartened to see FAO keeping gender equality high on the agenda. We expect this report to be put to good use.
- We subscribe fully to the report’s Call to Action: ‘Put gender equality and women’s empowerment at the heart of every aid and policy decision’.
- This will also help achieve our overarching – and increasingly urgent – aims with regard to food and climate, preserving biodiversity and transforming food systems.

Thank you.