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THE LINK OF GENDER EQUALITY, WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT & HUMAN SECURITY

Explained with Examples from the Agricultural Sector



1 What is gender equality and women's empowerment?

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Where gender inequalities exist, it is typically women who are disadvantaged with regards to access to social resources (e.g., education and training) and economic resources (e.g., financial loans and grants) and decision-making. Therefore a critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives.¹

Therefore, gender equality:

- Is a human right
- Is a sustainable development goal in itself (SDG 5)
- Is a pre-condition for achieving all other SDGs
- Is indispensable for sustainable, human-centered development
- Concerns women and men

Examples for gender equality:

- Women and men enjoy equal access to agricultural extension services
- Women and men have the right to own and access land
- Women and men have equal control over crop and livestock production

2 What is human security?

Human security focuses on people and seeks to protect the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and human fulfillment. The three basic elements of human security are freedom from fear, freedom from deprivation, and freedom to live in dignity.

The concept of human security can also be understood through its **seven dimensions** and common threats to these:

- **Economic security** – unemployment, homelessness, inflation
- **Food security** – limited access to food due to shortages
- **Health security** – inadequate access to health services
- **Environmental security** – pollution of soil, air, and water
- **Personal security** – war, intimate partner violence, child abuse
- **Community security** – ethnic and religious tensions
- **Political security** – violations of human rights²



3 How are gender equality, women's empowerment, and human security linked?

As noted above, women's empowerment is a critical aspect to achieving gender equality. If gender equality is not fully achieved and inequalities between men and women, boys and girls persist, important opportunities that contribute to human security are lost. For example, women's exclusion from the labour market leads to reduced household incomes which in turn threatens economic security, food security, and perhaps also health security.

**Thus, without gender equality,
human security cannot be achieved!**



¹ UN Women Training Center, Glossary: Gender equality; UNFPA (2005): Frequently asked questions about gender equality.

² Martin, M & Human Security Research Center (n.d.), UN Approach to Human Security. Watson, H, Wadhwa, K. <https://www.trilateralresearch.com/why-is-human-security-important/>.

4 What are typical scenarios where gender equality is not adequately considered and human security therefore threatened?

Gender inequalities are widespread, and it is usually women who are disadvantaged. Typical scenarios at the national and community levels observed in the agricultural sector in countries across the globe include:

- Women are underrepresented in national parliaments and environment ministries, especially in leadership positions, and local decision-making bodies, such as water committees.
- Women are seen by society as being responsible for care work and household related tasks and face barriers in taking up paid jobs and in combining formal employment with duties at home (e.g., lack of time).
- Women face barriers in taking on jobs that are perceived by society as 'men's tasks', for example fish farming, and oftentimes hold lower-paid jobs in the informal sector.
- Women face restrictions to own or access land based on statutory or customary law.
- Women face restrictions in opening bank accounts which are a precondition for accessing loans to establish agribusinesses.
- Women are at risk of harassment and violence at work in case of persisting stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes, for example when working on remote plantations.
- Women face barriers in accessing education, training, and information, for example on climate smart agriculture and sustainable farming practices.

The adverse consequences on women and also their families and entire communities are numerous, typically interrelated, and threaten human security. Examples for typical consequences are increased poverty; food insecurity and malnutrition; compromised physical and mental health; and tensions between household and communities.



5 How can gender equality, women's empowerment, and human security be integrated and translated into action?

Here are some practical actions you can take that support gender equality and women's empowerment:

- Understand your local situation with regards to the typical division of labour (what tasks are performed by women/men), and challenge/question the situation: What if women and men worked on these tasks unimpeded by harmful gender stereotyped barriers? Discuss the findings with community members and identify options that lead to greater equality between women and men in the labour market, if need be with support from a professional working on gender equality.
- Ensure women and men are represented in and actively contribute to decision-making, for example in agribusinesses and local water committees.
- If you establish statistics, for example on the number of people employed in your agribusiness, make sure you count women and men separately so that you have sex-disaggregated data to identify inequalities and address these.
- Advocate for the provision of child care options, flexible working hours, and maternity and paternity leave by agribusinesses so that women can more easily choose to pursue formal employment.
- Promote and invest in labour-saving technologies in homes, such as energy-efficient stoves – in addition to health benefits these help free up time for women to engage in income-generating activities.
- Encourage women to formalize their businesses as this will come with certain benefits, such as networking opportunities and easier access to credit.
- Enhance your knowledge on gender equality and women's empowerment through further self-study, for example with support from the useful resources listed below.
- Ask local non-governmental organisations and women's groups for information, specific advice, and support in working towards gender equality and women's empowerment as part of your daily tasks.
- Raise awareness among other community members, including youth as important stakeholders, about the importance of working towards greater gender equality and women's empowerment, including through social media platforms.
- Speak up when you witness inequalities and propose solutions to address these.

6 Links to useful resources and references

- [SDG 5](#)
- [Human security](#)
- [The role of women in agriculture](#)
- [How to improve gender equality in agriculture](#)
- [Why gender equality matters in fisheries and aquaculture](#)
- [Trainings on gender equality and women's empowerment](#)