Women are the backbone of the rural economy, especially in the developing world. Yet they receive only a fraction of the land, credit, inputs (such as improved seeds and fertilizers), resources and agricultural training and information compared to men.

Empowering and investing in rural women has been shown to significantly increase productivity, reduce hunger and malnutrition and improving rural livelihoods. And not only for women, but for everyone.

Let’s take a closer look at the story of women and agriculture.
Why are women so important to agriculture?
Women, on average, comprise 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries and account for an estimated two-thirds of the world’s 600 million poor livestock keepers.

Of those women in the least developed countries who report being economically active, 79% report agriculture as their primary source of livelihood (48% of economically active women worldwide).

### FEMALE SHARE OF POPULATION ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE IN AGRICULTURE (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>1980</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Latin America &amp; the Caribbean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East &amp; North Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East &amp; Southeast Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PERCENTAGE OF MALE AND FEMALE EMPLOYMENT (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing Countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern &amp; Southeastern Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America &amp; the Caribbean</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Near East &amp; North Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Asia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: FAOSTAT, FAO
Female-headed Households
A significant share of households in all regions are headed by women, yet their access to productive resources and services are limited.

SHARE OF RURAL HOUSEHOLDS THAT ARE FEMALE HEADED (%)
Source: FAO

AFRICA

25.5%

Eastern Africa 29.9
- Comoros 31.9
- Eritrea 43.2
- Ethiopia 20.1
- Kenya 33.8
- Madagascar 20.6
- Malawi 26.3
- Mozambique 26.3
- Rwanda 34.0
- Uganda 29.3
- Tanzania 25.0
- Zambia 25.4
- Zimbabwe 42.6

Middle Africa 21.6
- Angola 21.8
- Cameroon 22.9
- Centra Af. Rep. 18.8
- Chad 19.1
- Congo 23.4
- Gabon 25.4

Rural Working Hours
Rural women typically work longer hours than men, when one takes into account both paid productive and unpaid reproductive or domestic and care responsibilities. When these tasks are taken into account, women’s total work hours are longer than men’s in all regions.

WOMEN EMPLOYED IN AGRICULTURE & ENGAGED IN UNPAID FAMILY WORK, 2007 (%)
Source: UN, FAO

For the full infographic visit: www.farmingfirst.org/women www.fao.org/gender/Infographic
Women tend to be employed for labour-intensive tasks, generally earn lower wages than men and are more likely to be paid at piece rate. For example, in the casual agricultural labour market in Africa, women’s casual wages (whether in cash or in kind) are usually half of men’s wages.
As farming alone often cannot sustain rural families, the off-farm economy is an increasingly important source of household income. Yet rural women do not have equal access to these employment opportunities.

**RURAL WAGE EMPLOYMENT, ADULT POPULATION BY GENDER (%)**

For the full infographic visit: www.farmingfirst.org/women www.fao.org/gender/Infographic
Women wage workers dominate employment in areas of export-oriented high-value agriculture in the developing world. For instance, women represent half or more of employees in countries such as Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Kenya and South Africa.

### Employment in Selected High-value Agro-industries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country, Year of Survey</th>
<th>Commodity</th>
<th># of Employees in the Agro-Industry</th>
<th>Share of Female Employees (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kenya</strong> 2002</td>
<td>Banana</td>
<td>40-70,000</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Senegal</strong> 2006</td>
<td>Cherry Tomatoes</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Uganda</strong> 1998</td>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>3,300</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>S Africa</strong> 1994</td>
<td>Deciduous Fruit</td>
<td>283,000</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zambia</strong> 2002/3</td>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chile</strong> 1990s</td>
<td>Fruits</td>
<td>300,000</td>
<td>circa 46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Colombia</strong> mid-90s</td>
<td>Flowers</td>
<td>75,000</td>
<td>60-80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dominican Republic</strong> 1989-90</td>
<td>Fruits, veg, flowers, plants</td>
<td>16,955</td>
<td>circa 41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mexico</strong> 1990s</td>
<td>Vegetables</td>
<td>950,000</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: FAO
Where does a gender gap in agriculture exist?
Land Rights: Share of Male and Female Agricultural Holders in Main Developing Regions

In many societies, laws, tradition and access bar women from owning and inheriting land.

**SHARE OF MALE & FEMALE AGRICULTURAL HOLDERS IN MAIN DEVELOPING REGIONS (%)**  
Source: FAO

- **Women**
- **Men**

### Regions
- **Latin America & the Caribbean**
- **Sub-Saharan Africa**
- **Southern Asia & Southeastern Asia**
- **North Africa & West Asia**
- **Oceania**
Moreover, where women hold land, their plots are generally smaller, of an inferior quality, and with less secure rights than those held by men.

**Land Rights: Size of Plots**

**RURAL HOUSEHOLD ASSETS, AVERAGE FARM SIZE (HA)**

Source: FAO
The vast majority of studies have found that differences in yields between men and women exist not because women are less skilled but because they have less access to inputs such as improved seeds, fertilizers and equipment.

Source: FAO

**FERTILIZER USE BY FEMALE- AND MALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS, BY HOUSEHOLD (%)**

Source: FAO
Handweeding

Many fields are not planted to crops because farmers do not have sufficient labour for weeding, nor can they access herbicides.

- **75%** of the 250m tons of crops grown in Sub-Saharan Africa are on smallholder farms.
- **75%** of those farms are weeded by hand.
- **50-70%** of total labour time is spent on this handweeding.
- **90%** of this handweeding is done by women.
- **70%** of farm children between the ages of 5 and 14 are forced to leave school and work in the agricultural sector at the peak period of weeding.

Source: Croplife Foundation ILO

Access to Extension Services

Because of cultural attitudes, discrimination and a lack of recognition for their role in food production, women enjoy limited to no benefits from extension and training in new crop varieties and technologies.

- Female farmers receive only **5%** of all agricultural extension services from 97 countries.
- Only **15%** of the world's extension agents are women.
- Only **10%** of total aid for agriculture, forestry and fishing goes to women.

Source: FAO

For the full infographic visit: [www.farmingfirst.org/women](http://www.farmingfirst.org/women) [www.fao.org/gender/infographic](http://www.fao.org/gender/infographic)
Girls who stay in school are more likely to be able to feed themselves and their families when they become adults. One study showed that women’s education contributed 43% of the reduction in child malnutrition over time compared to just 26% for improvements in food availability (Smith and Haddad 2000).
Opportunities in Higher Education and Research

Gender differences in education reflect a significant and widespread history of bias against girls in education. Women are less represented in higher level research, management and decision-making positions compared with their male colleagues.

Only 24% of African agricultural researchers are female, up from 18% in 2000/1

Only 14% of these researchers hold leadership positions

Source: ASTI/FAWARD

Access to Credit

In most countries, there is a 5%-10% disparity in the percentage of female-headed households who access credit compared to their male-led counterparts. Without access to credit, women often cannot buy essential inputs, such as seeds, tools and fertilizers, or invest in irrigation and land improvements.

For the full infographic visit: www.farmingfirst.org/women  www.fao.org/gender/Infographic
Increasing women’s share of household income has broad benefits to improved rural livelihoods. Improving transportation and infrastructure constraints and encouraging rural women’s participation in farmer organisations and cooperatives can help both to achieve economies of scale in access to markets as well as reducing isolation and building confidence, leadership and security.

An increase to a **woman’s income** of $10 achieves the same improvements in children’s nutrition and health as an increase to a **man’s income** of $110.

Source: FAO CFS
What are the impacts of the gender gap in agriculture?

Gender Yield Gap

Women farmers typically achieve yields that are 20-30% lower than men. However, the vast majority of studies suggest that women are just as efficient as men and would achieve the same yields if they had equal access to productive resources and services. Bridging this gender yield gap would boost food and nutrition security globally.

The yield gap between men and women farmers averages around 20-30% mostly due to differences in resource use.

Given equal access to resources as men, women would achieve the same yield levels, boosting total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4%.

This additional yield could reduce the number of undernourished people in the world by 100-150m or 12-17%.

Source: FAO

Photos courtesy of Farming First, Self Help Africa, Cristina Gomez Dubois and Neil Palmer, CIAT