



On International Women's Day, Celebrate and Empower the Female Face of Farming

Today, on International Women's Day, women around the world are coming together to celebrate women, raise awareness of women's rights and to make positive steps towards greater empowerment of women.

This year mounting apace and of increasing focus on the development agenda is addressing the rising levels of violence against women. This year's UN Commission on the Status of Women ([CSW57](#)), taking place this week, from March 4 until March 15, holds as its priority theme the elimination and prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls.

Addressing women's rights, violence against women and moving towards greater equality is pertinent all over the world and spans across different areas of social, economic and political life. One area that is often overlooked and one where a great (if not one of the greatest) gender gaps persists -- and where we are increasingly understanding the interlay and implications of violence against women -- is in agriculture.

Existing as one of the world's biggest misconceptions, agriculture has traditionally been viewed as a male-dominated industry. In fact, women make up the backbone of the rural economy, where on average they [comprise](#) roughly 43 percent of the agricultural labor force and account for an estimated two-thirds of the world's 600 million poor livestock keepers. In the world's least developed countries, 79 percent of women who [report being economically active](#) say that their primary source of livelihood is agriculture.

Not only do women make up such a significant share of the agricultural labor force, they also often carry added responsibility of caring for families. A significant share of rural households in all regions are headed by women and women are engaged in unpaid family work, meaning rural women on average work much longer hours than men.

The global coalition Farming First -- which exists to advocate and endorse practical solutions to sustainable agriculture worldwide -- has campaigned for more understanding around the "[Female Face of Farming](#)": women as farmers, workers, entrepreneurs, care-givers, bread-makers, mothers, wives, daughters. A quick look through the [infographic](#) developed jointly by Farming First and the FAO highlights the stark statistics that reveal the gender gap in agriculture, in terms of women's contribution to global economic output and the disparity in their ownership of and access to land, credit and inputs.

In many societies, laws, tradition and access continue to prevent women from owning and inheriting land. In the main developing regions, the share of male and female agricultural holders is huge. In North Africa and West Asia, this is around 5 percent for example, and even lower in Oceania. What is more, studies [continue to show](#) 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. Women also continue to receive limited agricultural training, education and access to credit and markets compared to men.



Addressing these disparities will be central to moving towards women's empowerment and greater equality. Not only is reducing the inequality that exists paramount to enhancing women's rights, translated into facts and figures, it is estimated that this will also increase economic and agricultural output. If women are 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 percent. This additional yield could reduce the number of undernourished people in the world by 100-150 million (12-17 percent).

As the world moves focus to tackling all forms of violence against women and incorporating these aims into the post-2015 development agenda, there is an emerging understanding of the issue of violence against women in the context of agriculture and the challenges of food security that must be addressed alongside the challenges of ensuring equal access to inputs. Statistics increasingly reveal the link between lower food security and violence against women. For example, in Bangladesh, women in households with lower food security are more at risk from physical and emotional abuse.

Today, as we celebrate women all over the world, the FAO, WFP, IFAD and IDLO have taken the first steps in understanding the interlay between women, violence and food security at a jointly held conference in Rome. Panelists from around the world came together for the first time in such a setting to discuss the interconnectedness of two of the world's greatest challenges: feeding a growing population and tackling violence against women.

Farmers, workers, entrepreneurs, care-givers, bread-winners, bread-makers, mothers, wives, daughters -- women are at the heart of agriculture and will be at the heart of providing solutions to the world's greatest challenges. We must act now to ensure they are able to play this role in a just and secure setting. Empowering women will not only ensure we create a more equitable society, but in so doing, we are likely to see profound improvement in agriculture, agricultural output and as a consequence contribute to ending the cycles of violence that we are only just beginning to understand and that comes with such disparity.

Written by

Anette Engelund Friis

Manager, Climate Change Policy,
Danish Agriculture & Food Council

Anette Engelund Friis works internationally in the agriculture and climate change sectors. She is responsible for climate change issues for the World Farmers' Organization and is part of the Farming First Steering Committee. She manages the climate policy file for the Danish Agriculture and Food Council, formulating climate change and sustainable development policies at the national, European and global level. She also leads participation in the United Nations climate change negotiation process, whilst doing advocacy and communications work for both DAFC and WFO.

This blog [published originally by the Huffington Post](#) (08/03/2013).