

**International Conference:
“From Research to Impact: Towards Just and Resilient Agri-food Systems”
9-12 October 2023
Organised by CGIAR and ICAR
NASC Complex, New Delhi**



Subhashree Sahu, Sweety Mukherjee, Renjini VR, Asha Devi SS and Satyapriya recently participated in the international conference “From Research to Impact: Towards Just and Resilient Agri-food Systems”. Their learnings are shared here.



International Agricultural Gender Research Conference ©PIB

CONTEXT

Women are emerging as powerful change agents in the intricately intertwined world of agri-food systems, weaving a complicated tapestry of resilience, leadership, and unwavering perseverance even under the most challenging circumstances. Their dogged presence and active participation in decision making, business endeavours, and labour in the agri-food industry have increasingly drawn attention, becoming the very heart of transformative dialogues in recent years. In this context, the conference – “From Research to Impact: Towards Just and Resilient Agri-Food Systems” – stood out as a beacon for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and transformative ideation. Aiming to shape the future of agri-food systems, the event promised a rich nexus of perspectives, experiences, and creative solutions with over 1,000 attendees from more than 60 countries. The conference was conducted in offline mode; however, all the sessions were telecasted on YouTube and other social media platforms, thereby seamlessly blending physical and virtual participation. The speciality of the conference was its multifaceted approach, which encapsulated four distinct themes, each one of which explored a

different aspect of agri-food systems. The confluence of the themes – as discussed below – ranging from entrepreneurship and leadership to gender equality and climate resilience, converged upon the central idea of women's empowerment. A clear imperative to empower women in agri-food systems emerged from this conference. This imperative transcended a mere goal; it will serve as the cornerstone for achieving inclusivity and sustainability.

Theme 1: Empowering Women in Agri-Food Systems: Bridging Gaps and Fostering Resilience

Under this theme, the presentations focused on the challenges faced by the agri-food systems, to build climate resilience, sustainably manage dwindling natural resources, and protect biodiversity by integrating traditional and scientific knowledge at farm and community level. As gender determines disparity in livelihood roles, control over resources, and influence over livelihood decisions, men and women have different preferences and requirements that shape the agri-food system. Women's empowerment was found to influence various developmental outcomes, especially on nutrition and well-being. Some studies have highlighted that women play critical roles in improving crop productivity, crop diversity, forest restoration, soil fertility improvement, and dietary diversity. However, despite their contributions women face various constraints in terms of accessing productive resources such as land and productive assets, availing of services including finance and extension services, and having a limited role in decision making on crop production and use of resources. Thus, transformation towards more resilient and sustainable agri-food systems needs gendered training, equal access to resources and services, and promotion of women's participation in decision-making processes.

Further, the participants noted the existence of differential perceptions by men and women about climate change and its consequences. Women's low access to information and extension services and the lack of targeted extension services among women farmers reduce their ability to adopt new technologies and practices effectively. Some studies revealed differential gendered outcomes of climate-smart interventions that suggest the importance of contextual socio-cultural factors in shaping the nature and extent of women's empowerment. Thus, there is need for gender-sensitive information dissemination and implementation of inclusive innovation practices, including participatory approaches, capacity building, and context-specific solutions to bridge gender gaps in climate change adaptation and resilience, and to promote sustainable agricultural practices.



Inaugural session of the conference © Renjini V R

Theme 2: Inclusive Agri-Food Systems: Nurturing Empowerment and Innovation

Here the participants discussed ways of promoting inclusive agri-food systems and the need for questioning gender norms and inequalities. Women play a vital role in agriculture, yet their contributions are often ignored. Why? It is essential to recognize their involvement in agricultural policies and programs to ensure that their voices are heard. The theme highlighted the importance of identifying and overcoming gender biases and aspirations within agri-food value chains while acknowledging the diversity of women's experiences. Female farmers face gender disparities in access to land, inputs, labour, information, mobility, and support from family, all of which impact their technical and managerial efficiency.

In developing countries, women make up more than 43% of the agricultural workforce. But they only receive 5% of available training and advisory services. It is, therefore, crucial to provide continuous support to women in terms of training and capacity building to empower them and enable them to remain in the agriculture sector. The social context of farming highlights the dominant role of men in decision making, leaving women with hardly any say in decisions. So, it is necessary to make efforts to reduce the information gap and incorporate women's technological preferences and needs in future promotional activities to improve their participation in decision making. The participants discussed innovative solutions and transformative strategies, such as gender-specific breeding and gender-inclusive agricultural advisory services, to promote equity and empowerment. The discussions pointed to the need for a collaborative approach in making decisions with participation from all stakeholders, including researchers, farmers, consumers, women, and men who are engaged in the breeding process and its value chain.

USAID's Product Lifecycle:
From Lifecycle to Adaptive Management

Framework that analysis **different stages of an agricultural product's life**, to guide the design, development and delivery of an innovation.

Product Life Cycle Stages	Stage 1 Product Profile	Stage 2 Discovery	Stage 3 Proof of Concept	Stage 4 Validation	Stage 5 Selection	Stage 6 Release	Stage 7 Commercial Introduction	Stage 8 Growth
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Figure 3: Product Lifecycle Framework (Goldsmith, 2023).

- **Gate-keeper** of innovations that identifies processes for product development.
- **Continuous adaptation** required of the process from the market actors.

PRODUCT LIFE CYCLE

The diagram shows a circular flow with stages: Discovery, Validation, Selection, Release, Commercial Introduction, and Growth. A smartphone icon is in the center of the cycle.

Session in progress ©Asha Devi S S

Theme 3: Transformative Pathways: Reimagining Gender Dynamics and Cultivating Leadership and Learning

This session examined how women can be change agents and leaders, focusing on their collective agency under common governance. The participants explored the gendered aspects of innovations in agri-food systems, taking into consideration the digital revolution, mechanization, and post-harvest

processing. In many developing countries, men tend to have greater control over these resources, impacting the choices made on agricultural production, processing, and marketing. Joint decision making, awareness programs, and support for women's access to resources is essential in order to encourage more equitable decision making between men and women within households; this is a critical aspect of promoting gender equity in the agricultural value chain. Strategies to promote women's economic empowerment, such as enhancing their employment prospects and fostering entrepreneurship in agri-food systems, were explored under this theme.

The participants noted that a problem must not be considered in a segmented manner but should follow an inter-sectional approach to find solutions to the various research questions. Intersectionality – a concept developed by Kimberle Crenshaw – recognizes that individuals can experience multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination or disadvantage based on their various identities. These identities include but are not limited to race, gender, sexuality, disability, socioeconomic status, and more. Recognizing intersectionality helps to understand that one-size-fits-all solutions are often inadequate because individuals' experiences are influenced by a combination of these factors. At present, policies or solutions are developed keeping a segmented approach in mind, but the solutions developed are neither inclusive nor adequate. Thus, there is an evident gap between applying the inter-sectional approach to finding solutions and the various research questions.



Plenary session on 'Looking forward: Reflections and learnings for inspiring change'

Theme 4: Policy, Data, and Institutional Measures

Under this theme, the participants discussed a wide range of opportunities and challenges or inequalities that are firmly ingrained in institutions and policies. The discussions focussed on initiatives that are driven by policy to close gender disparities in agri-food systems, and thus lay the foundation for a more just and sustainable future. Participants highlighted the significance of data and policy in promoting gender equality and resilience, and also explored the intersectionality of gender with social equity. Participants also explored how data are used to quantify women's empowerment, pinpoint gender norms, and evaluate the effectiveness of agricultural programs.

Measuring women's empowerment and gender equality in national agri-food policy processes and statistical systems is a complex endeavour that requires a commitment of national statistical agencies, policymakers, and agricultural institutions while conducting gender-sensitive data collection, analysis, and policy implementation. The representation of women in advisory and decision-making bodies should be tracked and monitored. At present, there is insufficient inclusion of the perspectives and

feedback of civil society organizations, women's groups, and other stakeholders who advocate for women's empowerment in the policymaking process.

The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index for Market Inclusion (PRO-WEAI+MI) is an index developed by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), to measure and assess women's empowerment in the context of agriculture and market inclusion, which was presented in this session. It is designed to provide a comprehensive picture of women's empowerment within the agricultural sector, particularly focusing on their participation in markets and income-generating activities. This index takes into account various dimensions of empowerment, such as decision-making power, access to and control over productive resources, time allocation, leadership, and access to financial services. Data is collected both at the baseline (before the project's implementation) and at the end (after project completion). These scores are then analysed to assess changes in women's empowerment deriving from the project's interventions. The results of pro-WEAI+MI assessments can inform the design and implementation of future agricultural and rural development projects. It helps in identifying those areas where interventions can be targeted to enhance women's empowerment and improve their economic participation in agricultural value chains.

OUR KEY LEARNINGS

We realised the importance of dealing with the community problems by adopting an intersectionality approach, instead of the segmented approach. The segmented approach can reduce the complex issues to a single category, which can lead to inaccurate and misleading conclusions. An intersectional approach is more comprehensive and nuanced; it recognizes that people's experiences are shaped by a variety of factors, and these factors can intersect to create unique forms of oppression. Climate change is a global problem, but it does not affect everyone equally. People who are already marginalized, such as people of colour and people living in poverty, are often the most vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Therefore, an intersectional approach can help to ensure that these communities are not left behind in the fight against climate change. Intersectionality helps to make the experiences and various identities of marginalized people visible, and thus, it can help develop more effective solutions to social problems. Hence, the intersectional approach can serve as a valuable tool for extension workers in understanding and addressing social inequalities.

We could understand the urgency of the need for incorporating equity principles into policies by the policymakers and development practitioners, so as to create a more inclusive, sustainable and productive society for everyone. By addressing the root causes of disparities and ensuring that everyone has equal access to resources and opportunities, we can build a better future for all. Our appreciation grew for the remarkable resilience demonstrated by women time and again in the face of adversity. Throughout history, women have adapted to changing environments, and broken down barriers, organised themselves as a collective force that has driven social progress and empowered them worldwide. They have embraced new technologies, adapted to evolving social norms, and navigated the challenges of globalization. Empowering women has a positive social and economic impact, creating a ripple effect that benefits families, communities, and the agri-food sector as a whole. So, the extension programs developed to ensure the livelihood security of rural households should target women beneficiaries, impart leadership skills to them, ensure inclusive access to resources, enable them to make decisions and mobilise them for group action.

The collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data holds the key to these endeavours. We need to collect data on aspects such as women's control over productive resources, income, decision making, and access to markets, that will expose gender disparities in the agriculture sector. The policymakers also need to incorporate gender-responsive budgeting and gender impact assessment of agri-food policies to understand how they affect men and women differently. We need to equip our

extension professionals and development workers to build their capacities on gender-responsive methodologies and tools. We learnt about the PRO-WEAI+MI index, recently developed by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), to measure and assess women's empowerment in the context of agriculture and market inclusion. We will surely use the index in our studies to understand what level of access – to resources and decision-making power for women in agriculture and also in market-related aspects – is present. We want to try and establish collaboration with IFPRI and carry out some meaningful gender-related studies in the implementation of various national agricultural policies. The participants plan to organise training on the gender methodologies for their students so that it can be incorporated into the student theses too.



Participants at the CGIAR Gender Conference 2023

ENDNOTE

Agri-food systems – encompassing the entire food chain from production to consumption – hold immense potential to drive not only economic prosperity but also social justice and gender equality. By fostering an inclusive and continuous learning environment, these systems can empower women to play a more prominent role in agriculture, leading to enhanced productivity, improved food security, and greater societal well-being. Empowering women in agri-food systems is a critical prerequisite for ensuring long-term sustainability.

Women play a critical role in food production, processing, and distribution, yet they often face significant barriers to accessing resources, making decisions, and participating in leadership roles. By providing women with equal access to agricultural resources, including land, financing, and technology, we can unlock their immense potential to transform the agricultural sector. Equipping women with the necessary skills and knowledge through continuous training and education will enable them to adopt innovative practices, increase productivity, and contribute to sustainable agricultural practices. By encouraging women to take on leadership positions in agricultural cooperatives, farmer organizations, and government bodies, we can ensure that their voices are heard and their perspectives are integrated into agricultural policies and programs.

Empowering women in agri-food systems has a profound impact on household nutritional security. With greater control over agricultural decisions and financial resources, women can make informed choices about food production and consumption, ensuring that their families have access to nutritious and diverse diets. This, in turn, leads to improved health outcomes, particularly for children, and contributes to the overall well-being of communities, and eventually the entire world.

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