



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



International Women's Day

8 March 2021

Women in leadership:
Achieving an equal future
in a COVID-19 world

Concept Note

Background

The International Women's Day (IWD) is a global day to celebrate the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women, while also making a call to action for strengthening gender equality and accelerating women's empowerment.

The United Nations theme for the observance of the IWD 2021 is "*Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world.*" This theme celebrates the remarkable efforts by women and girls around the globe in shaping a more equitable future and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also aligned with the priority theme of the 65th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, "[Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls](#)". It echoes the [Generation Equality campaign](#), launched last year, which demands equal pay, equal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work, an end to all forms of violence against women and girls, health-care services that respond to their needs and women's right to decision-making in all areas of life.

In support of Action Track 4 of the Food Systems Summit, "*Advance equitable livelihoods*", the Rome-based agencies (RBAs) wish to highlight the work of female leaders, often hidden, who work at different levels institutionally and within programmes, within and outside their households, to eliminate poverty, enhance productivity, improve food security and nutrition and enable sustainable routes of empowerment.

To contribute to the United Nations system campaign, the RBAs are organizing two events: (i) Women's leadership within international organizations with special attention on the institutional challenges faced by women to reach senior management positions; and (ii) Women's leadership in a COVID-19 world for a better future.

COVID-19 context

The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded vulnerabilities, exacerbated existing gender inequalities, and has affected women and men differently. Women stand at the front line of this crisis, as health care workers, community organizers, innovators, and national leaders who combat the pandemic and its various effects. However, the epidemic is also having a devastating impact on women's lives. The COVID-induced increase in gender-based violence has been referred to as the "shadow pandemic" and has disproportionately affected women and girls. Furthermore, school closures and the disruption of services have massively increased women's workloads. Assessments of COVID-19 responses have indicated that women's concerns are rarely prioritized, which highlights the need to include women at all levels, from decision making to evaluation.

On IWD, we want to celebrate female leaders of all ages and socio-economic backgrounds who work to lead the change, build back equitably, strengthen resilience and improve decision-making processes for the benefit of all.

Women's leadership in International Organizations

Ensuring that women enjoy full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life (Sustainable Development Goal 5.5) also implies that efforts are made within the international organizations to achieve gender parity at all levels, including in leadership and senior management positions. Through strong leadership and engagement, it is possible to change organizational culture towards a working environment composed of women and men who are equally empowered and have equal chances throughout their careers. IWD 2021 will also provide the opportunity to stimulate a discussion on women's leadership within international organizations, the challenges they face, and the solutions to improve their participation in leadership and senior management roles.

Objectives

With IWD 2021's celebrations, the RBAs aim to:

- Recognize and celebrate the powerful force of women and girls to lead changes and global progress in agriculture, food and nutrition security, and inclusive rural development;
- Discuss how to advance women's empowerment and promote sustainable and inclusive social and economic transformation through gender transformative approaches;
- Highlight what prevents women from attaining leadership levels, and discuss possible solutions;
- Call for the RBAs renewed commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment.

Format

The celebration will include two main virtual events (via Zoom) and a daylong social media campaign on different platforms (e.g. Twitter, Instagram and other social media). Quotes, photos, key messages on women and girls will be converted in e-cards and other contents for social media.

Key messages

- Women are agents of change, resourceful and innovative.
- 2021 is the year to celebrate all women whose roles, leadership and efforts have been overlooked and neglected.
- Women leaders and women's organizations have demonstrated their skills, knowledge and networks to effectively lead in COVID-19 response and recovery efforts.
- Investing in women's leadership and involving them more in the COVID-19 response and recovery efforts is critical to ensure their perspectives and needs are adequately considered.
- Women bring different experiences, perspectives and skills to the table and the perspectives of women in all of their diversity must be integrated in all spheres and at all stages of pandemic response and recovery.