



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



MARCH

International Women's Day

Invest in women: Accelerate progress

Concept note

International Women's Day 2024

Invest in women: Accelerate progress

11.00 AM- 12.30 PM CET

Welcome coffee will be available from 10:30 to 11:00

IFAD HQ, Italian Conference Room

LIVE ON ZOOM

Background

International Women's Day (IWD) is a global celebration of the social, economic, cultural and political achievements made by women, and also an opportunity for making a call to action for strengthening gender equality and accelerating women's empowerment worldwide.

The United Nations theme for the observance of IWD 2024 is "*Invest in women: Accelerate progress*", which recognizes that investing in women is a human rights imperative and cornerstone for building inclusive and equitable societies. Progress towards women's empowerment benefits us all. It is also aligned with the priority theme of the 68th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, "*Accelerating the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls by addressing poverty and strengthening institutions and financing with a gender perspective*".

Every year the Rome-based Agencies (RBAs) come together for the IWD event as a way of demonstrating the joint commitment towards women's empowerment and the advancement of gender equality. We all know that eliminating gender inequalities is crucial to tackle poverty and food insecurity, and that empowering rural women is critical to build inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems.

2024 Theme: Invest in women: Accelerate progress

In a world facing multiple crises that are putting high pressure on communities and economic sectors, achieving gender equality is more vital than ever. Ensuring women's and girls' rights in all areas of their life is the only way to secure prosperous and just economies, and build a healthy planet for future generations.

One of the key challenges in achieving gender equality by 2030 is an alarming lack of financing, with a staggering **USD 360 billion annual deficit in spending on gender-equality measures**¹. To overcome

¹<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2023-en.pdf>

this situation, urgent action is required to mobilise resources and advocate for increased investment in gender equality and women's empowerment to address this critical shortfall and accelerate progress.

Since 2020, the COVID pandemic, accompanied by conflicts, climate disasters and economic turmoil have pushed an extra 75 million people into severe poverty. This could lead to more than **342 million women and girls living below the poverty line by 2030**. Immediate action is therefore crucial. Due to conflicts and rising fuel and food prices, recent estimates suggest that 75 percent of countries will be forced to curb public spending by 2025. Austerity negatively impacts women and crowds out public spending on essential public services and social protection.

The current economic system focusing on productivity, efficiency and markets may exacerbate poverty, inequality and environmental degradation, disproportionately affecting women and marginalised groups.

The FAO Report, "The status of women in agrifood systems"² shows that closing the gender gaps in farm productivity and wages within agrifood systems could boost the global gross domestic product by 1 percent and decrease global food insecurity by at least 2 percent, leading to a reduction of 45 million food-insecure people. In line with proposed alternative economic models that shift towards a green economy and care society that amplifies women's voices, FAO estimates that if development programming more intentionally focused on women's empowerment as an objective of multi-faceted interventions in agrifood systems, incomes and resilience could increase for 58 and resilience for 235 million families respectively.

Call to Action

In a world facing numerous crises, achieving gender equality and women's empowerment is more crucial than ever. Rural women are more affected by climate change, depletion of natural resources, poor infrastructure, limited access to productive resources, services and financial opportunities. In addition, they are affected by restrictive cultural roles and rigid social norms, multiple forms of discrimination and they bear a disproportionate load in reproductive and household work, constraining their access to economic opportunities and decent employment. This gender disparity is starkly evident in rural areas, where women face barriers to access education, training and financial inclusion, struggle to own land and are often paid less than men, with part-time, irregular and labour-intensive work.

The solutions lie in empowering rural women and girls, investing in their capacity through education and leadership skills development, for example through home-grown school feeding initiatives, or by addressing discriminatory social norms that limit their opportunities. Strengthening land rights for women in rural areas is also essential. Implementing gender-responsive policies and investments in agriculture, ensuring equal access to resources, financial and extension services can bridge productivity gaps. In particular, digital financial inclusion and women's economic empowerment initiatives not only benefit women but also their households, entire communities and society in general. However, this is possible only when adequate financial investment and strong political commitment are made towards women's empowerment and gender equality, underscoring the urgency of the IWD theme.

In October 2023, the Member States of the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) collectively endorsed the "Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment in Food Security and Nutrition" that provides concrete guidance to boost gender equality and women's empowerment. This landmark endorsement represents a pivotal step towards addressing the

² <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en?details=cc5060en>

systemic barriers that hinder women's participation and empowerment in food security and nutrition, providing a roadmap for action at national and global levels.

The RBAs are working together to secure global commitments from governments, UN organisations, foundations, the private sector and other relevant partners for increased financing, partnership and action on gender equality in agrifood systems. A global initiative will be launched at the 68th session of the CSW in New York, which aims to call for collective action and mobilise resources towards advancing gender equality and women's empowerment, harnessing the momentum generated by the CFS Voluntary Guidelines and FAO's SWAF report to drive tangible progress on the ground.

As a call to action, the RBAs are committed to increased investment in programs specifically designed to empower rural women, addressing their unique challenges and providing them with new economic opportunities. The RBAs aim to advocate for policy changes at national and international levels to dismantle systemic barriers hindering rural women's progress, as well as to promote financial inclusion for rural women by facilitating their equal access to credit, resources and markets and ensuring their full engagement in economic activities.

Objectives

- Increase awareness about the importance of investing in proven solutions which reduce gender inequalities and increase women's empowerment, thereby transforming agrifood systems, growing economies and reducing food insecurity
- Draw attention to the importance of leveraging resources for development, including, climate finance to focus on women's empowerment – an important determinant of households' resilience to climatic and other shocks
- Encourage investments, partnerships, and policies that go beyond surface-level interventions to challenge and transform existing gender norms and power dynamics.

Key messages

- **Empowerment through Investment:** The RBAs recognize the transformative power of investing in women as a catalyst for sustainable development. By directing financial resources towards gender equality and women's empowerment, we can unlock the full potential of women and girls, creating a ripple effect that benefits entire societies.
- **Investing in Women for building Climate Resilience:** The RBAs emphasise that investing in women is not only a crucial element of funding climate change resilience, but also a strategic imperative for sustainable development and food security. By directing financial resources towards empowering women to actively participate in climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts, we not only enhance the resilience of communities but also accelerate progress towards achieving gender equality and inclusive development.
- **Measurable Impact and Accountability:** The RBAs commit to measurable outcomes and accountability in their interventions. By closely tracking the impact of mainstreaming gender issues through their operations, the RBAs want to show tangible progress made in empowering women and fostering inclusive and sustainable development at both local and global scales.