

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY



Union for the Mediterranean
Union pour la Méditerranée
الاتحاد من أجل المتوسط



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Agrifood systems facing climate change in the
MENA region: gender equality for better resilience

7 MARCH 2022 / 11:00-13:00 CET

Online event co-organised by the UfM, FAO and CIHEAM



REPORT

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Social & Civil Affairs

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FOREWORD

This webinar was held, among other objectives, to commemorate the International Women's Day.

In the context of the 2022 International Women's Day, recognizing this year the contribution of women and girls to build a more sustainable future, the UfM organised, in partnership with the **Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa of FAO** and the **CIHEAM**, an online event on "**Agri-food systems facing climate change in the MENA region: gender equality for better resilience**". The overall objective was to identify challenges faced by women as change drivers for a more resilient agri-food systems facing climate change.

Possible solutions were put forward in terms of policies, strategies and governance at regional and country levels. It was highlighted that harnessing women's skills and knowledge to effectively manage and preserve natural resources remains critical in promoting greener, healthier and more resilient agri-food systems, ultimately contributing to achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

In the MENA region, otherwise more affected by the effects of climate change and the scarcity of natural resources such as water than elsewhere, women provide critical contributions to agri-food systems in the **multiple roles** they play as producers, processors, and traders. Women also have a **wealth of knowledge** on natural resources, such as land, water, and forests, as they are often

in charge of their management, not only in their role as farmers, foresters or fisherfolk, but also as primary **providers of water, food and energy** at household and community level.

The potential of women and girls, however, remains constrained by the **persisting inequalities** that limit their access to assets, quality inputs, innovative technologies as well as agricultural support services.

As a result of these inequalities and lack of visibility, women tend to face **greater vulnerability** and exposure to disasters and the impacts of climate change on the natural resources in the region. Besides, they continue to have limited opportunities to influence **recovery and response policies and programs**.

Ultimately, the main objectives of this event were: i) to identify key challenges for women, otherwise identified as change drivers for a more resilient agri-food system facing climate change, ii) propose solutions in terms of policies and strategies at regional/country levels to share good practices from the civil society organizations.

OPENING REMARKS



Mr. Abdulhakim Elwaer,
Assistant Director
General and Regional
Representative, FAO
Regional Office for the Near
East and North Africa

Mr. Abdulhakim Elwaer, Assistant Director General and Regional Representative, FAO Regional Office for the Near East and North Africa,

celebrated those women and girls who are leading the way for climate change adaptation and risk reduction with a special focus in the agri-food systems, in their role of farmers, livestock keepers, fisher folk, foresters and water users. He stressed the need to include women in all measures aimed at fighting water scarcity and climate change. As witnessed in the field, rural women are powerful agents that help build resilient communities; women are keen in making decisions on resource use and investment in the interest of their communities and families, ensuring food security and nutrition. He acknowledged the fact that the contribution of women is restricted through persisting gender biases and discrimination. Across the MENA region, women have, systematically, limited access to key agricultural assets, inputs, financing, technologies and services. Only 5% of women are landowners, it being one of the lowest percentages in the world. These inequalities make women and girls disproportionately affected by the impact of climate change. The impact of climate change is not gender neutral, but amplifies existing gender inequalities. The engagement of FAO to eliminate gender inequalities in order to build the climate resilience of the agri-food systems in the region, was recalled. FAO projects work to support rural women in MENA region in acquiring climate-smart practices. At policy level, FAO invests in knowledge to eliminate gender gap in the agriculture and

rural sector and to promote gender-responsive policies.

Ms. Elen Lemaitre-Curri, Deputy Director of the CIHEAM Montpellier Institute,

reminded that climate change is aggravating the situation of the agri-food system in the Mediterranean region. Recent studies show that the MENA region is a hot-spot for climate change, while its increasing fragility and vulnerability for access to water and soil have repercussions on its accentuated imports and population growth. Unemployment remains a concern whilst the agri-food system is not attractive for the younger population and for women since it offers lowly remunerated jobs. The rural areas are particularly affected and if we consider also the negative impact of Covid-19, it becomes clear that rural women remain the social group which suffered most. Women remain “invisible” since they engage in informal jobs and do not have access to funds, technology and other resources. A related aspect refers to food imbalance and its health repercussions. In the MENA region a high rate of women affected by obesity has been identified. CIHEAM is currently organizing trainings, research, studies as well as institutional dialogue to foster the perception of the agri-food system as a key sector for development which will benefit from a wider participation of women in the decision-making process. It was also recalled that gender equality is a fundamental principle for the CIHEAM as it remains fully supportive of regional cooperation with other stakeholders.



Ms. Elen Lemaitre-Curri, Deputy Director of
the CIHEAM Montpellier
Institute

ROUND TABLE

Ms. Dina Najjar, Gender Scientist, ICARDA, stated that gender remains important for climate change and resilience, since it allows one to address policy blind spots which reproduce gender inequality and marginalisation. Gender is also important since it fosters men's involvement. Despite efforts to the contrary, still nowadays women in the MENA region need to be validated by men for what they do, particularly in the agri-food sector. With respect to technology, it was noted that this is not gender neutral. Moreover, research shows that women are paid less than men for the same job and that wage discrimination remains very common. Only quality jobs offered to women shall enable the promotion of women empowerment. This can be achieved by supporting social protection measures and investing in the training for women in specialized jobs, such as pruning. Referring to the correlation between climate change and migration, the argument was made that women are under-represented in irrigation or farming associations. This was also reflected at the policy level. Another crucial topic is land ownership. As previously highlighted, the MENA region suffers the lowest percentage of women landowners, worldwide. In Egypt, a resettlement plan was put in place to alleviate population pressure and land was handed over to women. It transpires that the same women were not happy to hand over their land to their own daughters for fear that, upon marriage, such land could be taken over by their husbands. Moreover, the social perception of a woman working as a farmer has negative connotations. It is considered preferable that women receive formal education instead of being a player in the agri-food sector. It was mentioned that policies empowering women in this regard shall be supported by wide awareness campaigns.

Ms. Wafaa El Dikah Hamze, CIHEAM Governing Board, Senior Agriculture Advisor at the Ministry of Agriculture of Lebanon, focused on the policy and governance challenges in Lebanon related to climate

change. Despite the trials Lebanon is currently facing, the country has put greenhouse gas emission reduction as a key goal to achieve and, as a consequence, climate change actions are a crucial part of the country recovery plan. For example, the 2020 National Determined Contribution (NDC) includes the gender dimension as well as support to marginalised groups. In addition, agriculture sector resilience and sustainable use of national resources are identified as adaptation priorities. These commitments are welcome, particularly in the region, but there remains the challenge of linking these priorities to national institutional capacities (funds, implementing mechanisms, etc.). In actual fact, the link between climate change and gender is not clearly established, while gender is not mainstreamed into climate change policies and, therefore, the gender responsiveness to climate change remains rather vague. Despite all this, the latest agriculture strategy (2020-2025) was identified as the most gender responsive and addressing climate change. The National Strategy for Women does refer to climate change mitigation measures. Those identified for women, however, are limited to the household situation, thereby confining women, whilst failing to consider their involvement as potential leaders and agents of change.

Another challenge is the lack of sex disaggregated data related to climate change and gender. Men and women are affected differently by climate change. In this respect, policies must take this into account with a view to promote a fair and social representation.

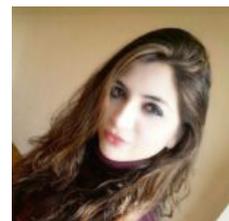
Ms. Saira Ahmed, Regional Program Officer, UNDRR Regional Office for the Arab States, highlighted that men cannot be excluded from the overall gender perspective as this is a perspective which addresses the whole society. With reference to post-disaster scenarios, it is noted that women's needs are not prioritized as well as the needs of other marginal-



Ms. Dina Najjar, Gender Scientist, ICARDA



Ms. Wafaa El Dikah Hamze, CIHEAM Governing Board, Senior Agriculture Advisor at the Ministry of Agriculture of Lebanon



Ms. Saira Ahmed, Regional Program Officer, UNDRR Regional Office for the Arab States



Ms. Alaa Jayab, Community Activities & Relations Coordinator, Gaza Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture Platform

ised groups, such as persons with disabilities. The UNDRR is currently developing a gender strategy, whereby women need to be prioritized and included at policy level, especially where they are still underrepresented. The UNDRR published the report "Women's leadership". This collection seeks to recognize and celebrate amazing women leading disaster risk reduction efforts across Asia and the Pacific. Women remain excellent leaders, yet they are still underrepresented in decision-making and leadership in disaster risk reduction. Women's equal participation and leadership in public life, including in disaster risk reduction, is both an important goal in itself as well as essential for reducing disaster risk and achieving a broad range of sustainable development goals. Gender based violence (GBV) is also targeted in disaster response mechanisms.

Ms. Alaa Jayab, Community Activities & Relations Coordinator, Gaza Urban and Peri-Urban Agriculture Platform, shared her experiences of airborne agriculture in Gaza which was introduced to strengthen resilience and ensure food safety. Unfortunately, Gaza finds itself in a very critical situation when it comes to the economic and social domains. The pandemic has exacerbated inequalities and poverty, otherwise already severely problematic in the region and determined by the embargo. The agri-food sector is crucial for the development of Gaza. However, because of these constraints, its sustainability is not guaranteed (also referring to the limited introduction of sustainable farming techniques). Despite all this, since 2020, awareness campaigns on airborne agriculture have been organised. The project started with the involvement of 100 farmers (land-owners) who organized themselves in a forum, collecting also the experience from fishermen and other agri-food actors. The forum foresaw also the creation of an initiative for women involved in the agri-food sector. This included trainings on best practices in order to ensure that products respect quality parameters, providing by doing so, a win-win approach both for the producers and the consumers alike. The forum also fostered cooperation with other organisations to support the women in the agri-food sector, both in terms of financial as well as technical support. Ms. Al Jayab also referred to a study drafted in partnership with the Red Cross, which surveyed the effects of climate change on small scale farming in Gaza. She proposed to share this document with the audience.



Ms. Amel M. Azab, SDG Climate Facility Project Coordinator, Arab Water Council (AWC)

Ms. Amel M. Azab, SDG Climate Facility Project Coordinator, Arab Water Council (AWC), discussed climate change from the perspective of the management of water resources. She stated that climate change is affecting the MENA region and this is reflected in the change of rain patterns, in the extended drought periods or, on the contrary, in the more frequent events of floods. The connection between climate change and gender is particularly very visible. Nonetheless, she remarked that studies on the nexus between migration-gender-climate change, indicates that this does not include a comprehensive gender approach. She added that this needs to change since women play a crucial role in the agri-food sector, especially when they still lack access to ownership of their own land or salaries. Moreover, the effects of climate change on the migration of men, women, children, elderly persons remain different, thereby calling for the urgent need to promote sex disaggregated data. Such data will allow the introduction of specific policies to protect and support the most vulnerable groups. The Green Climate Fund remains an important tool. However, there still exists the need to promote access to it with reference to gender. Jordan is the first country in the region having mainstreamed gender into climate change policy and this best practice shall be shared as much as possible.

She also referred to ecosystem management and the applicable gender perspective. She referred, in particular, to a case-study performed in Egyptian wetlands where women are active economic players. The gender approach applied to this study allowed to gather information on women's access to tools (financial tools, training, etc.) and highlighted that discriminatory social norms, results in marginalizing women.

Finally, mention was made to the existing collaboration between the Arab Water Council and UN Women being twofold: i) studies on the nexus migration-gender-climate change; ii) through the GB group to collect gender data related to different aspects of water resources.

Q&A

Several comments and questions were raised by the participants.

Ms. Dina Najjar, enquiring about a definition of “decent job”, reminded of a report developed with FAO on rural women empowerment. Women continue to be involved in wage works, meaning jobs whose income is used for basic needs, such as food. In this regard, efforts should be made to allow women to step up and become entrepreneurs. In addition, policies should be promoted to ensure that women’s property is preserved in case of family disputes or divorce.

All the speakers intervened to address the question related to social norms acting as barriers to women empowerment.

Ms. Dina Najjar stressed the need for a gender-neutral language to be promoted in the agri-food sector. To this end, one would not be referring to farmers as “brother farmer”. It was also revealed that a critical aspect hinges also with the inheritance law, which, it was observed, needs to be revised to foster women’s rights.

Ms. Wafaa El Dikah Hamze pointed out that cultural barriers can be addressed both in a bottom-up, but also in a top-down approach. She remarked that in both approaches, gender awareness remains one of the most powerful tools to address discriminating social norms. She further remarked that it remains important to involve men and let them become agents of change in order to embed gender equality in the civil society - starting at the household level - and in the policy framework.

Ms. Saira Ahmed referred to cultural barriers women in leadership roles have to face. She stressed the importance of women empowerment as seen through female employment. In this regard, it was stressed that society cannot change and become gender aware, if women are not allowed to work.

Ms. Alaa Jayab stated that changing social norms remains a long process which should involve men and young generations. Women prove to be fully committed, engaged economic actors and their role should be protected by norms which allow them to exploit their abilities.

Ms. Amel M. Azab reminded that women are stepping up in technical leadership roles. However, very often, they are not the final decision-makers. She suggested that technical trainings should include gender modules given that it is not enough to have women as trainees to qualify as gender awareness raising. She also suggested that research should be gender sensitive. In this regard, papers on water management should take into consideration the repercussions on men, women and other social groups.

Ambassador John Paul Grech, Deputy Secretary General of Social and Civil Affairs Division, Union for the Mediterranean, thanked the panellists, FAO and CIHEAM for their contribution to the event. He reminded that gender-equality and the empowerment of women and girls remains essential for a sustainable natural resources management, for mitigating and adapting to climate change, for protecting ecosystems and conserving biodiversity. He underscored that women are key actors in the agri-food sector but continue to be discriminated in terms of access to resources while remaining among the most vulnerable groups exposed to climate-related agricultural risks. He stressed the fundamental importance of active participation of women in discussions and decisions on climate-change mitigation and adaptation, as well as other related issues, given that women have a unique set of skills and knowledge which help respond to climate change, effectively and sustainably. He confirmed that the UfM remains committed to maintain women empowerment at the heart of its Agenda, adding that during 2022, the nexus between Gender Equality and Climate Change will be further explored, in cooperation with national governments as well as our regional partners, such as FAO and CIHEAM.



Ambassador John Paul Grech, Deputy Secretary General of Social and Civil Affairs Division, Union for the Mediterranean

USEFUL LINKS



Women's Leadership in Disaster Risk Reduction: examples from the Arab States <https://www.undrr.org/publication/womens-leadership-disaster-risk-reduction-examples-arab-states>

Success & Resilience stories-Gaza, Palestine: <https://gupap.org/en/success-and-resilience-stories/>

Promo-GUPAP/DRSOS Project: <https://gupap.org/en/videos-en/enhance-resilience-of-women-agripreneurs-in-the-gaza-strip/>

Promo-GUPAP/MECA Project: <https://gupap.org/en/videos-en/enhancing-resilience-of-gaza-women-agripreneurs-in-crisis-project-film>

Women, Decent Work and Empowerment in Rural Egypt: <https://repo.mel.cgiar.org/handle/20.500.11766/7449>

You can watch the full online event here <https://ufmsecretariat.org/event/iwd2022/>



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