

## Global Food Security Strategy Technical Guidance Advancing Gender Equality and Female Empowerment

*This is one of 18 technical guidance documents for implementing the U.S. Government's Global Food Security Strategy. The entire set of documents can be found at [www.feedthefuture.gov](http://www.feedthefuture.gov) and [www.agrilinks.org](http://www.agrilinks.org).*

Feed the Future, guided by the U.S. Government's Global Food Security Strategy (GFSS), advances gender equality and empowering women and girls as a Cross-Cutting Intermediate Result (CC IR 3). Women's multiple roles in agriculture and food systems place them at a critical nexus in food security. This guidance describes how to design and implement food security and nutrition programming that is both effective and gender-sensitive/-transformative.

Understanding the following terms is fundamental to effective design and implementation.

Term	Definition <sup>1</sup>
<b>Female Empowerment</b>	Women and girls gain the power to act freely, exercise their rights, and fulfill their potential as full and equal members of society. While empowerment often comes from within and individuals empower themselves, cultures, societies, and institutions create conditions that facilitate or undermine empowerment.
<b>Gender Equality</b>	Concerns fundamental social transformation, working with men and boys, women and girls, to bring about changes in attitudes, behaviors, roles, and responsibilities at home, in the workplace, and in the community. Genuine equality means expanding freedoms and improving overall quality of life so that equality is achieved without sacrificing gains for males or females.
<b>Gender Integration</b>	Identifying and addressing gender inequalities during design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Since the roles and power relations between men and women affect how an activity is implemented, it is essential that project managers practice gender integration on an ongoing basis.
<b>Gender-sensitive</b>	Addresses gender norms, roles, and access to resources to achieve project goals.
<b>Gender-transformative</b>	Changes gender roles, relations, and social norms to promote shared power, control of resources, decision-making, and support for women's empowerment.

### Gender Pathways in the GFSS Results Framework

Gender equality and women's empowerment are critical to each of the three GFSS objectives.

**Objective 1: Inclusive and sustainable agricultural-led growth** requires closing systemic barriers that have disadvantaged women, who are estimated to be 43% of the agricultural labor force in developing countries. If women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase their yields by 20-30%, potentially raising developing countries' agricultural output by 2.5-4% and reducing the number of hungry people in the world by 12-17%.<sup>2</sup>

Evidence from the literature suggests that empowering women in the following seven domains improves

household agricultural productivity: decision-making, access to and control over productive resources, control over income, leadership, time allocation and workload, human capital, and access to technology.<sup>3</sup> The seven domains and other aspects of women's empowerment (such as agency, mobility, or freedom from violence) are also relevant for women's participation in and ability to benefit from employment, processing, marketing, and entrepreneurship in agricultural and food systems.<sup>4</sup>

As women become more empowered in agriculture, their contribution to and benefit from the agriculture and food system grows. The resulting increases in agricultural productivity can increase incomes as well as the quantity, and potentially quality, of available food. Evidence indicates that as incomes rise and as women have greater control over expenditures, child nutrition improves through improved diets and health care.<sup>5</sup>

**Objective 2: Resilient systems are composed of resilient people and institutions.** Gendered roles and access to resources mean that women, men, girls, and boys face different exposure to shocks and have different capacities to reduce, mitigate, and manage risk and stresses. Women's empowerment is also a critical source of resilience and essential to building the institutional, political, and systemic factors necessary for resilience. For example, data on poverty dynamics in Bangladesh demonstrate that women's empowerment is a powerful predictor of whether a household escapes poverty and remains out of poverty versus remaining or falling back into poverty.<sup>6</sup> Fostering gender-equitable agricultural-led growth and improving nutrition also build resilience capacities of people, households, communities, and systems.

**Objective 3: Increased income and women's control over expenditures are not enough to ensure a well-nourished household or population.** Two additional pathways between women's empowerment and nutrition are women's ability to care for themselves and their families and women's energy expenditure. Because primarily women perform child care and feeding, their work can interfere with healthy feeding practices. Strenuous labor can place potentially harmful physical demands on women during pregnancy and may put unborn children at risk.<sup>7</sup> Interventions in agriculture are more likely to improve nutrition when they target women and promote women's empowerment, for example, through increasing control over income or improving knowledge and skills.<sup>8</sup>

Gender equality and women's empowerment are also critical to progress in **GFSS Cross-Cutting Intermediate Results**. For example, low inclusion of women in government and decision-making bodies hampers efficient use of public and natural resources (Cross-Cutting Intermediate Results 2, 5 – Improved climate risk, land marine, and other natural resources and More effective governance, policy, and institutions).

## **Gender Integration in Program Design: Guiding Principles**

Advancing gender equality and female empowerment begins with gender-sensitive/-transformative program design.

**1. Engage both women and men in each of agriculture, resilience, and nutrition programming.** In nearly every setting, women and men have roles and capacities, whether recognized or not, in agriculture, resilience, and nutrition. Segregated programming has tended to engage women as the primary participants in nutrition programming and men as the primary participants in agricultural programming.<sup>9</sup> This limits opportunities for women's economic contributions to their households and rural economies, men's contributions to well-nourished families, and movement towards more equitable societies.

**2. For all projects and activities, conduct a gender analysis and *apply its findings* in design.** Identify women's and men's needs, constraints, and opportunities with respect to agriculture, food systems,

resilience capacities, and nutrition. Ask, “Who does what? With what resources? When? Who benefits? Who decides?” Because neither women nor men are homogeneous, account for potential mediating factors, such as location, religion, age, ethnicity, partnership status and type, parental status, education, literacy, asset ownership, and households’ composition and hierarchies. As needed, design for or target different “categories” of women, men, girls, and boys. The intersection of gender and age is crucial for empowerment, and activities may need to engage adolescents, young women and men, or young parents.

**3. Articulate the relevance of gender equality and women’s empowerment throughout the design and especially in the theory of change.** Critical gender issues should be articulated in the problem statement, reflected in project design, tracked by indicators in performance monitoring, and addressed in the evaluation plan and reporting requirements. Expertise in gender integration should be included in descriptions of staffing requirements. Tips and examples for integrating gender into solicitations can be found in USAID University’s Gender 103’s resource library and in [Tips for Integrating Gender into USAID Agriculture Sector Solicitations](#),<sup>10</sup> and [USAID’s ADS 205](#).<sup>11</sup>

**4. Use the [Feed the Future Gender Integration Framework \(GIF\)](#)<sup>12</sup> to identify and prioritize gender issues, especially for agriculture-focused programming.** Using the lens of the seven domains of empowerment related to agricultural productivity, the GIF organizes information about gender, including the [Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index \(WEAI\)](#),<sup>13</sup> Feed the Future indicators, evaluations, gender analyses, national surveys, and more. The GIF then guides a conversation to identify priority domains, how current activities address priority domains, and actions to take to make a coherent impact on gender equality and women’s empowerment in priority domains.

**5. Identify and address gender differentiated needs and roles in income-generating activities, in risk reduction, mitigation and management activities, and in adaptation and recovery.** Apply a gender lens to the analysis of and programming on adaptive, absorptive, and transformative capacities at all levels — people, households, communities, and systems. Consider how gendered roles and norms influence people’s abilities to manage shocks and stresses in the short-term and to make proactive, informed choices in response to long-term social, economic, or environmental changes. Consider how shocks and stresses may affect women, men, girls, and boys differently and may reinforce or change gender roles. Consider how gender norms or roles may influence systemic changes. For example, expanding women’s mobility can improve their access to services, infrastructure, and markets. The GFSS Technical Guidance on Resilience (Objective 2) discusses entry points for gender integration in resilience-oriented programming.

**6. Reserve working with only women (or only men) for extremely sensitive contexts.** Do not assume that norms cannot be worked around or bent but rather use gender analysis, participatory design, and local expertise to discern degrees of flexibility. Some approaches may require “safe spaces” for one gender to grapple with norms or gain experience in new roles, such as fathers groups for men to build care skills or business training for women entrepreneurs to break into nontraditional roles. Even while focusing on one gender, simultaneously encourage the other to examine gendered roles in order to create a more supportive environment for new norms and practices.

## **Practice: Implementation Principles**

Gender-sensitive designs do not advance empowerment and equality without good implementation.

**1. Regularly collect, examine, and apply gendered information,** including sex-disaggregated data, the WEAI, and other relevant quantitative and qualitative information (including potentially relevant characteristics like age, location, and other mediating factors) to adjust programming in response to levels and changes in women’s and men’s:

- Participation in GFSS-facilitated activities
- Access to resources — training, financial services, loans, business skills, etc.
- Application of technologies and/or uptake of nutrition messages and actions
- Yields, profit, and other benefits
- Empowerment

**2. Promote gender-sensitive consultative processes.** Civil society, including organizations not directly working in agriculture, health, or nutrition, can be helpful in connecting with women and men in different socioeconomic categories. Participatory design and application of gender-sensitive technologies, financial and extension services, and marketing support directly engage women and men in creating solutions.

**3. Be proactive about addressing gender norms.** Engage women, men, communities, and leaders in building upon positive norms and changing inequitable norms. This could include promoting joint decisions or joint land ownership, employing a household planning approach encouraging men to take a larger role in care responsibilities, practicing [more equitable resource allocation](#),<sup>14</sup> or [reducing gender-based violence](#).<sup>15</sup>

**4. Monitor for, respond to, and learn from unintended consequences.** Unintended consequences, either negative or positive, are learning opportunities. Create opportunities for feedback and discovery as part of monitoring and management. A good gender analysis can signal which negative unintended consequences might arise — for example, men’s appropriation of a commodity controlled by women when its profitability increases, increased [gender-based violence](#)<sup>16</sup> as power relations shift — so that monitoring, prevention, and mitigation can be built into implementation.

## **Practice: Common Gendered Challenges and Ways to Address Them**

Feed the Future’s experience,<sup>17</sup> as well as the larger agriculture and food security literature,<sup>18</sup> have identified several themes that need attention in programming.

The [Intervention Guide for the Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index \(WEAI\)](#)<sup>19</sup> provides market-oriented strategies and examples of technical approaches to address: **decision-making in agricultural production, access to land, access to finance, control over use of income and expenditures, participation and leadership in groups, and time dedicated to paid and unpaid labor.**

**Women’s disproportionately lower access to agricultural inputs, technology, and information** can arise when women have lower literacy or education, limited mobility, or limited membership in associations. Agricultural business, technology, and extension partners may miss engaging with women who often produce at a smaller scale, are involved in less visible portions of the value chain, and have less formal information networks than partners are accustomed to working with. Private sector partners can expand commercial market opportunities by ensuring that technologies are accessible and relevant to women’s needs as customers of agricultural inputs and services. Partnerships and programs can facilitate access to technologies or inputs through channels that women use through more affordable volumes and varieties.<sup>20</sup> [Extension services](#)<sup>21</sup> can incorporate the crops or animals women raise and meet at times or locations that are more compatible with limitations on women’s time and mobility.

Even as mobile phones are increasingly used to connect to information, radio and informal social networks remain important communication channels among women. Agriculture extension and training institutions can promote gender-sensitive curricula, highlight the diversity of professional opportunities in agriculture and food systems, recognize women’s existing roles in agriculture, and create mentorship

opportunities for women in agricultural sciences, in addition to contributing to broader efforts in the education sector to increase girls' education, literacy, and engagement in the sciences.<sup>22</sup>

**Greater limitations on access to markets** for women can arise from many of the same reasons described for inputs, technology, and information. Higher and home-centric workloads, limited access to aggregation or transport services, lower capital holdings or credit access, and norms that limit women's public roles may diminish women's status in markets. Building women's business and negotiation skills, increasing aggregation infrastructure and collective marketing, and creating entry opportunities for high-value agricultural products can improve women's market access. For example, in Honduras, the Feed the Future [ACCESO](#)<sup>23</sup> project provided a suite of trainings to women-owned enterprises in post-production areas of the value chain, in manufacturing practices, marketing, and business skills.

**Inequitable decision-making in households, communities, and institutions** can result in natural resources, finances, and labor being allocated without accounting for how women, men, girls, and boys use those resources. At the community-level, programs can encourage greater representation of women's interests through extension services designed for women, collective action including formation of associations, minimum levels of women's representation in local institutions like land or water management boards, and combining leadership training for women with engaging male leaders as champions for gender equality. At the household- and individual-levels, increasing women's incomes and financial management skills, promoting joint decisions, or using a [household planning methodology](#)<sup>24</sup> may foster more equitable or transparent decisions.

**Policies, governance, and institutions** can either exacerbate barriers to women's and men's full participation in resilient agriculture and food systems or catalyze fundamental improvements in women's status. Feed the Future efforts, guided by the GFSS, can encourage partners to develop objectives and actions to reduce gender disparities through policy and governance, encourage gender-responsive budgeting in institutions, and identify aspects of policies relevant to agriculture, resilience, and nutrition that have different implications for women and men. National food security policy processes should be inclusive of women and organizations representing women. Feed the Future efforts can work with civil society and government to raise women's representation and leadership in policy development and implementation at either local or national levels.

**To build resilience capacities**, programs can diversify livelihood risk profiles by preparing men, women, and youth to take up new, different, and profitable income opportunities in and outside of agriculture. Fostering [collaboration](#)<sup>25</sup> and more [joint decision-making](#)<sup>26</sup> between women and men in a household may also help households to avoid negative coping strategies and sustain escapes from poverty. These approaches and efforts described above to enhance women's roles in decision-making and access to inputs, technology, information, and markets also build resilience capacities.<sup>27</sup>

**To leverage the women's empowerment pathway to improve nutrition**, programs can more directly engage *both women and men* to promote positive nutrition behaviors, women's education, and more equitable roles in caregiving, workloads, and decision-making over household and community resources. Group-based savings or income-generating interventions may be layered with training on infant and child feeding practices, WASH, and health, or combined with financial training that promotes budgeting for health or nutrition needs. Nutrition education and messaging may be incorporated into farmer field schools or extension services. Household planning approaches may encourage a re-balancing of responsibilities and workloads that benefit women's, children's, and households' welfare.<sup>28</sup>

**Conflict can create shifts** in women's, men's, girls', and boys' livelihood opportunities; access to land, social, and human capital; roles in families and communities; and exposure to violence. It is critical to identify gendered constraints in conflict-affected contexts and ensure women have access to key resources

for livelihoods<sup>29</sup> and leadership roles in conflict management and mitigation. Feed the Future efforts, guided by the GFSS may mitigate drivers of violent extremism by promoting economic stability and gainful livelihoods and empowering women, men, boys, and girls through entrepreneurial skills, leadership, and community-based approaches.<sup>30</sup>

## Additional Resources and Tools

- U.S. Government Global Food Security Strategy and Results Framework. <https://feedthefuture.gov/resource/us-government-global-food-security-strategy-fy-2017-2021>
- *Women's Economic Empowerment Briefs Suite*. Markel, Erin, Emilie Getliffe, Brian Heilman, and Lis Meyers. 2016. USAID. <https://www.microlinks.org/library/womens-economic-empowerment-briefs-suite-0>. Briefs address unpaid care work, engaging men, and working beyond agricultural production.
- *Promoting Gender Equitable Opportunities in Agricultural Value Chains: A Handbook*. Rubin, Deborah, Cristina Manfre, and Kara Nichols Barrett. 2009. USAID. <http://www.culturalpractice.com/wp-content/downloads/4-2009-16.pdf>
- *Catalogue of Innovations and Good Practices on Gender and Resilience*. 2016. UN Women. <http://africa.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2016/11/catalogue-of-innovations-and-good-practices-on-gender-and-resilience>
- WEAI Training Materials. <https://www.ifpri.org/weai-training-materials>
- Minimum Standards for Mainstreaming Gender Equality. Gender Practitioners Collaborative. <http://genderstandards.org/>

***For further assistance related to this Technical Guidance, please contact [ffguidance@usaid.gov](mailto:ffguidance@usaid.gov).***

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<https://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/200/205>; UN Women. Gender Equality Glossary.

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7 Ibid.

8 Ruel, Marie and Harold Alderman. 2013. "Nutrition-sensitive Interventions and Programmes: How Can They Help to Accelerate Progress in Improving Maternal and Child Nutrition?" *The Lancet*, Vol. 382, No. 9891, pp. 536-551. [http://thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(13\)60843-0/fulltext](http://thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(13)60843-0/fulltext)

9 USAID. *Feed the Future Global Performance Evaluation Report*. 2016. <https://feedthefuture.gov/resource/feed-future-global-performance-evaluation-report>

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<https://www.usaid.gov/ads/policy/200/205>

12 Agrilinks. Gender Integration Framework (GIF) 101: <https://agrilinks.org/gender-training/GIF101>



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- 22 Innovation for Agricultural Training and Education, Virginia Institute of Technology: <http://www.oired.vt.edu/innovate/about/our-approach/gender-in-aet/>
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