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DEVELOPMENT WORKS



Laura Elizabeth Pohl/Bread for the World

Martha Togdbba of Kpaytno, Liberia, grows vegetables, including tomatoes and chili peppers. She irrigates her small farm by carrying a watering can to and from a nearby stream.

Farmers: The Key to Ending Global Hunger

Every year, U.S. humanitarian assistance, such as food aid, eases the hunger of millions of people who have fled natural disaster or conflict. These are clearly emergencies. But worldwide, most hungry people are hungry or malnourished as a fact of their everyday lives. Chronic hunger and malnutrition sap the strength of adults trying to earn a living and the potential of children trying to learn.

The 2012 *Africa Human Development Report* identifies two areas of bias as “principal factors in explaining Africa’s food insecurity”—a bias toward towns rather than rural areas and a bias toward men rather than women.

After decades of neglect in favor of developing manufacturing or extractive industries, agriculture in developing countries has begun to receive much-needed attention. A big part of solving chronic hunger is enabling and equipping small-scale farmers to be as effective as possible. It’s true that the world produces

Bread for the World Institute provides policy analysis on hunger and strategies to end it. The Institute educates its network, opinion leaders, policy makers and the public about hunger in the United States and abroad.

Snapshot

- Local farmers, most with less than five acres of land and little or no animal or mechanical power, bear most of the responsibility for feeding people in developing countries. Enabling small-scale farmers to increase their productivity is essential to reducing hunger or even maintaining recent progress.
- More than 75 percent of the world’s hungry people are small-scale farmers or landless laborers. Fortunately, growth in the agriculture sector is very effective in reducing poverty.
- Gender bias is a principal cause of hunger since women produce well over half of the global food supply and are more likely to spend additional income on food.
- Nonetheless, few female farmers own the land they work, have the authority to make decisions about crops and livestock, or control their own incomes. New tools such as the Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index help track progress toward gender equity.

enough food for everyone—but that truth doesn't make dinner appear on everyone's plate. Local farmers, most with less than five acres of land and little or no animal or mechanical power, bear most of the responsibility for making food available to their communities and nations.

Producing the grains, protein sources, and vegetables people need clearly requires a very practical understanding of local agricultural conditions. Development efforts should focus on increasing small farmers' access to information and tools and on building their resilience, particularly given the uncertainties inherent in agriculture. For at least the next several decades, most developing countries will need productive small farmers to feed their increasing, and increasingly urban, populations. Ensuring that even the most remote farm communities and the poorest farmers have the supplies and techniques they need will be essential to making further progress on global hunger.

There's a second reason farmers must be fully engaged in efforts to end global hunger: ironically, most of the world's hungry people, more than three-fourths, are smallholder farmers, landless farm laborers, and their families.

Fortunately, boosting agricultural productivity has proven to be one of the best ways of reducing global poverty. Feed the Future, the U.S. global hunger initiative, reports that growth in the agriculture sector is at least twice as effective in reducing poverty as growth in other sectors. In fact, improvements in agriculture deserve the credit for much of the recent significant progress against hunger—which



Laura Elizabeth Pohl/Bread for the World

Ensuring that small-scale producers, such as this Mexican farmer, are able to grow enough food to meet their families' needs must be a key part of the effort to end hunger and malnutrition.

was at 14.9 percent of the world population in 2010-2012, down from 23.2 percent in 1990-1992.

Needs That Are Literally Down to Earth

In developing countries, most obstacles to producing enough nutritious food are rooted in poverty. Anti-hunger leader Nana Ayim Poakwah of Ghana explains that about 40 percent of what is grown goes to waste because farmers cannot get crops to market before they spoil. Farm families eat some of the food they grow, sell some locally—and then have no option but to abandon the rest in the field.

Poakwah and others at Ghana's Food Aid Network developed ways of providing farmers with simple storage facilities and arranging transportation to bring their crops to market. In return, farmers donate 10 percent of their harvests. "It works for both sides," Poakwah says. "Without the program, farmers would lose much more of their harvest. And we get the food to vulnerable people, especially children."

Philanthropist Bill Gates, discussing the importance of helping small farmers become more productive, identifies another need: "The question is, how do we continue to do the research needed to develop these new tools? Poor countries are investing more in their own agricultural sectors, but they don't have the resources to lead on research and development... and right now the entire research budget of the group responsible for agricultural science for the poorest people is just \$300 million per year."

Feed the Future has made reducing hunger and poverty an explicit goal. "We are focused on measuring results—as opposed to inputs—so we better understand what works,"

A Rural Focus

People affected by hunger are already working as hard as they can to find ways to feed their children and themselves. And, as Gates noted, the governments of developing countries are committing more national resources to food production efforts. Increasingly, decision makers in the United States are aiding these efforts.

The U.S. Feed the Future program is part of an American-led global initiative to invest a higher percentage of foreign assistance in small farmers' productivity and nutrition.

90 percent the share of rice cultivation work done by women in India, Nepal, and Thailand.

10 percent: share of female farmers who own land in India, Nepal, and Thailand.

noted its 2012 progress report, *Boosting Harvests, Fighting Poverty*. “What we have now are steps in the right direction.” Feed the Future has specific five-year targets that include reducing poverty by 20 percent in the countries where it works, and reducing stunting—which indicates chronic malnutrition—by 20 percent as well.

A Gender “Lens”

The effects of gender bias go beyond not respecting the rights of individual women, important as that is. The 2012 Africa Development Report identifies gender bias as a principal cause of hunger in Africa.

Why? The short answer is that worldwide, the major responsibility for providing for families falls to women. Female farmers produce well over half of all the food grown in the world, including up to 80 percent in Africa and 60 percent in Asia. Thus, barriers to women’s full participation in farming contribute to lower agricultural growth rates, smaller harvests, and more malnutrition among children.

As the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation notes, “Expansive literature suggests that women are much more likely than men to spend additional income on food and health care.” Increasing women’s income, in other words, is likely to be an important part of a strategy to improve children’s nutrition, health, and lifelong potential.

These are two good reasons to prioritize the needs of female farmers—they do much of the actual farming, and they are likely to put any additional resources to good use, creating a multiplier effect that strengthens families and communities and helps them build resilience over time.

Yet, as the American organization Women Thrive Worldwide points out in “Women and Agriculture: Growing More Than Just Food,” women tend to lack access to tools, animals, and machines that would increase their productivity. The assumption that farmers are men is pervasive, extending, for example, to the many tools best suited to use by men. Hoes are a case in point: women work more effectively with hoes that are not only lighter weight, but have longer handles than those intended for “everyone.”

“Knowledge is power,” in agriculture as in anything else, but women receive only about 5 percent of all agricultural



ACDI/VOCA’s Kenya Maize Development Program nearly tripled maize yields for small-scale farmers in Kenya, about a third of whom are women. New technologies like improved seeds helped farmers realize these gains.

extension services. Legally recognized rights to land and water increase a woman’s influence in the family, enabling her to ensure that more of the household resources benefit children. Yet women hold title to only about 2 percent of the world’s land.

The United States and other donors have become increasingly aware of gender-based barriers to productive farming—and their cost in hunger and poverty. Evidence has been coming in from all over: In Burkina Faso, shifting existing resources between men’s and women’s plots *within the same household* could increase output by up to 20 percent. If Kenyan women had the same agricultural supplies and instruction as men, they could increase their yields by more than 20 percent. In the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, sustained access to credit for female and male smallholder farmers led to a tripling of family assets between 2000 and 2006.

New “women in agriculture” development projects began to appear as these findings became widely known. Some efforts were criticized as providing more lip service to equal opportunity than actual resources, but this has begun to change as local priorities play a more significant role in shaping projects. Including men and women not just in theory, but in reality, requires a careful look at when and



30 minutes.

Minimum walking time to an all-weather road for 70 percent of Africa’s rural farmers.

22 PERCENT.

Median return on Feed the Future’s investments in agriculture (so half had an even higher rate of return).

how programs need to support women's leadership and full participation—plus a plan to provide this support.

Empowerment and Reducing Hunger

The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index was launched in 2012 by Feed the Future in cooperation with the U.S.-based International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the U.K.-based Oxford University Poverty and Human Development Initiative. The Index evaluates the effectiveness of agriculture programs by tracking changes in different aspects of female farmers' decision-making power. Examples of what goes into "empowerment" scores include influence in decisions as to what to plant, if and when to buy or sell assets, and how to organize work schedules.

Women's empowerment scores are compared to those of men in the household, since there are situations where no one has a particularly high empowerment score and other cases where there is a sharp "empowerment gap" between men and women. The Index was piloted in Guatemala, Uganda, and Bangladesh. They were chosen so data from three continents could help verify that the idea of measuring something called "empowerment in agriculture" made sense.

Americans rarely hear much about Bangladesh beyond the occasional news story about widespread flooding. But while it's a poor country already coping with climate change, Bangladesh has also achieved steady economic growth, become self-sufficient in rice production, and is on track to lower child mortality by two-thirds by 2015, as called for in the U.N. Millennium Development Goals.

Aysha, Seema, and Naju are three young Bangladeshi farmers, ages 25-35, who participated in the pilot phase of the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index. Aysha had an arranged marriage at the age of 13 and has two children. She says that although she and her husband discuss matters related to their land or livestock, he makes the final decisions on all issues. Seema left school at 12 because her mother died. She considers empowerment the ability to work, gain assets, and send her three children to school; she does not believe that women should aspire to influential positions. Aysha's and Seema's scores on the Index indicated that they are disempowered overall and also less empowered than their husbands.

Naju, who is divorced with one child, says that ideally, both husband and wife should be involved in making decisions. Naju has a high school diploma, but her father-in-law did not allow her to continue in college after she married. She says that men make the important decisions in Bangladeshi society, but also believes that women who work and make decisions as farmers are powerful because they themselves grow crops. Naju's score was high enough

to put her in the "empowered" category on the Index.

As these women, their neighbors, and thousands of others participate in Feed the Future programs intended to reduce hunger in rural areas, they will be scored again on the Index to help determine whether and how changes occur—and how their empowerment status influences their success in farming and their children's nutritional status.

Bread for the World Institute staff visited Bangladesh in April 2012 to see how U.S. development assistance is enabling rural communities to improve nutrition, especially among young children. For all the country's progress, malnutrition is still its major development challenge. While nutrition programs have interlocking components designed to bring change over time, two examples of activities that visitors can show up and watch are "courtyard talks" and monthly growth monitoring sessions.

Young women accompanied by babies and toddlers come



Tohomina Akter, 18 and part of an effort to help prevent stunting by cultivating vegetables, picks amaranth in Barisal, Bangladesh.

Laura Elizabeth Pohl/Bread for the World

to courtyard talks to learn, from facilitators and each other, about the nutrients people need and ways of making sure their children get foods that contain them. Every participant in one such meeting could name local foods that are rich in vitamin A, for example. (If anyone forgot, she could turn to the group's set of laminated nutrition cards, which are labeled by nutrient and show photos of good sources). Growth monitoring sessions—familiar to many American parents as well—verify that a baby is gaining enough weight to stay on his or her growth curve. Fortunately, mild to moderate malnutrition generally shows up on the curve before it is clearly visible to parents or health professionals, so it can be detected and treated earlier.

Long-term investments in agricultural productivity, with a particular focus on female farmers, will have a transformative impact in developing countries, helping them to achieve the Millennium Development Goals and build more resilient and empowered communities.

Myths & Realities

Myth: Agricultural productivity receives a large enough share of U.S. development assistance. It is not important to make it a higher priority; investing in industries like mining or manufacturing clothing is just as useful.

Reality: Until recently, donors had neglected agriculture for decades. But smallholder farmers and laborers are vital to feeding a growing population, and they are also the majority of the world's hungry people.

Given the limited development funding available, investments that make agriculture more productive—and farmers' livelihoods more resilient in the face of crises such as drought—should be a top priority. Productive use of available land is essential to making further progress on global hunger and poverty.

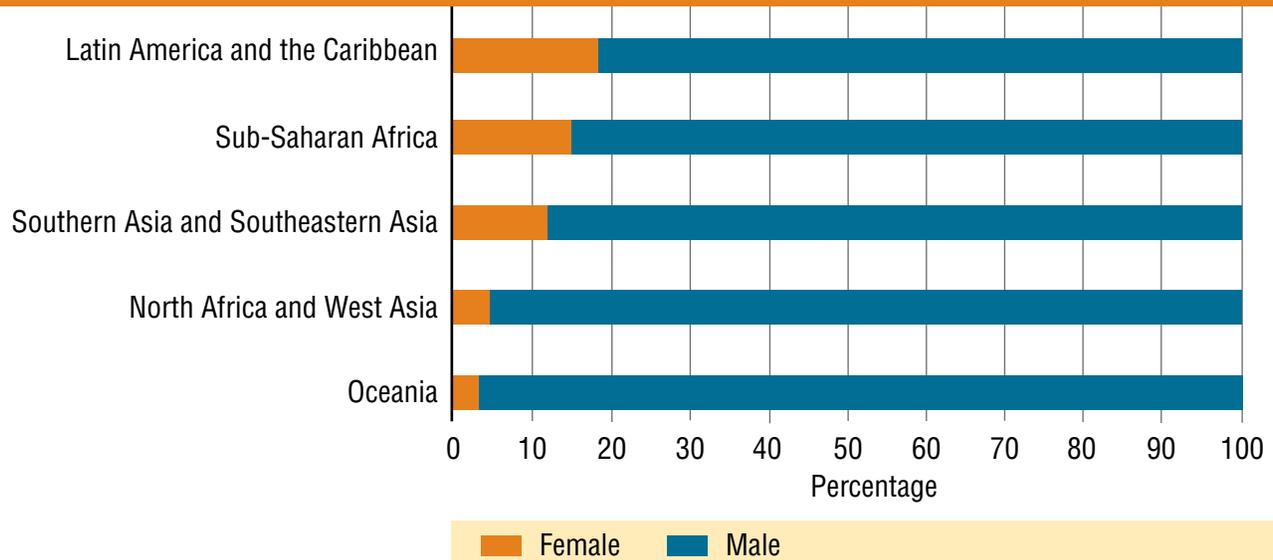
Myth: Opening an agricultural development program to both male and female farmers is enough to ensure that it is successful.

Reality: Many societies have a “separate and unequal” system of allocating work, family responsibilities, and access to resources based on gender. Simply indicating that women are eligible to participate in programs will not necessarily ensure that they actually participate.

Identifying factors that reduce women's likelihood of benefiting from programs—and strategies to ease those barriers—is essential to effective agricultural development.

Barriers can be powerful whether they are practical (tools, supplies, the authority to make decisions, time to spare from work and children) or cultural (perhaps women generally do not attend classes with men, or it is seen as a husband's role to interact with outsiders and pass along to his wife the information she needs).

Share of Male and Female Agricultural Holders in Main Developing Regions



The “agricultural holder” is the person who has management authority over a particular piece of land.

Within each continent average, women’s land holdings can vary widely by country. For example, Africa’s average (15 percent of agricultural holders are women) includes data from Mali (where less than 5 percent are women), and from Botswana and Malawi (where more than 30 percent are women).

Source: The State of Food and Agriculture 2010—Women and Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap for Development. Data: FAO Gender and Land Rights Database, FAO, 2010.

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