

# 4 Ways Gender Inequality Increases Food Insecurity

## 1 Lowers agricultural productivity, so less food is produced

Women smallholder farmers are often excluded from programs that support farmers and boost agricultural productivity. They have less access to training, fertilizer, good seeds, and other critical resources. As a result of this unequal access, the FAO estimates that women farmers' productivity is reduced by 30%. This translates to less food for themselves, their families, and their communities.

**Excluding women farmers from support and resources reduces productivity by 30%.**

## 2 Redirects agricultural subsidies to cash crops, rather than food

Numerous studies by the World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization show that very often, due to gender inequality and norms, male farmers grow cash crops, such as tobacco or coffee, while women farmers bear the responsibility of growing food for their families. Also due to gender inequality, most agricultural support and subsidies are directed to men. As a result, resources are disproportionately directed to the cash crops grown by men – that's where the fertilizer, fuel and labor gets invested – while very little is left for women farmers, or the food crops they grow. This is damaging under any circumstances, but particularly in a food crisis. Resources largely flow to crops that families can't eat.

## 3 Disincentivizes innovation

While women provide much of the labor on major crops such as cocoa, coffee, corn, and rice, they rarely share in the profits of the sale of crops because men typically control the land, marketing and finances. For example, in the cocoa industry in Cote d'Ivoire, women make up 68% of the farming workforce, yet only 25% of farms are owned by women. As a result, women farmers have no incentive to apply new methods that will increase return on investment through higher yields, better quality, and other improvements. In fact, they are often disincentivized because much of the extra work of

applying new methods would fall directly on their shoulders without seeing any of the benefits. Or because they have no capacity to employ new innovations because they are required to do all or most of the childcare, cooking, laundry, cleaning, and other unpaid household work. Or because they simply have been shut out of the training on how to employ new methods.

## 4 Leads to bad household decisions

Women do 80% of the work that puts food on the table, including shopping and cooking. But men almost always make decisions about how much money women in the family should spend. Because of gender inequality, the decision makers aren't the ones with the expertise – so they often make uninformed decisions. They don't know how much food is needed, or which foods are most nutritious. Compounding the problem, these power imbalances often mean that women are afraid to ask for more. As a result, families eat less and lower quality food.

**Putting gender inequality at the center of agricultural support programs showed a return of \$5 for every \$1 invested.**

## This is a solvable problem: Investing in gender equality raises food security

CARE's evidence from the field shows over and over that **combatting gender inequality improves food security**. In Burundi, helping women access the support they need for gender equality and to change discriminatory social and gender norms showed a return of **\$5 for every \$1 invested**. Women who were given more opportunities and support to address gender inequality increased their rice production 2.7 times. In Papua New Guinea, CARE helped farmers increase earnings by almost 5-fold through training programs that made gender equality the cornerstone. And in Bangladesh, by focusing on gender inequality, dairy farmers raised their productivity by 22% and more than doubled monthly income. **There can be no effective solution to this historic food crisis without women at the center.**