

**Did you miss the EDDs? Or perhaps miss some of the sessions on rural women and girls? C1 was there and is reporting back with some of the main take-away messages to improve gender-responsive actions in rural economies.**

Although women represent an average of 43% of the agricultural labour force in developing countries, they continue to experience discrimination in all their activities, from taking care of households to their role as farmers and producers in the agricultural sector. This is mainly due to the persistence of social, institutional and cultural norms as well as personal conditions that impede their equal access to resources and equal say in agricultural decisions. This has a negative impact on their livelihoods as well as on their families. For example, rural women may have access to land but may not have the decision-making ability to control or manage its use and/or to decide how to use gains from this land. Women are largely responsible for unpaid care work, which often goes undocumented and limits their ability to engage in skills development such as training or economic activities. Women's role as subsistence producers is not always recognised beyond being an 'add on' to their domestic tasks, so they may be overlooked in service provision such as rural extension and advisory services. More broadly, women's multiple roles, coupled with their low education levels, mean they are more likely to be employed in the informal agrarian sector with low wages, poor conditions and insecure seasonal contracts. As smallholder agriculture becomes increasingly market-oriented, women may be displaced from producing food crops for home consumption as men take control of producing for the market. Women's access to rural finance may be restricted because they lack the collateral (particularly secured land), the autonomy to travel, or the literacy level required to apply to a financial institution.

At the 2018 EDDs, various events and panel sessions underlined the opportunities and benefits of investing in women and debated the challenges that women continue to face in their different roles as family caregivers, paid workers, farmers, producers and entrepreneurs.

During the panel "*Towards Optimal Nutrition for all Women and Adolescent girls: The Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women (MDDW) in Reproductive Age indicator*", it was recalled that the role of women is fundamental for the well-being of families as gatekeepers of nutrition within the household. Their nutritional status is associated both with their own health outcomes and the nutrition and health of their infants. Insufficient nutrient intakes before, during pregnancy & lactation can affect both women and their infants. Indeed, the period from pregnancy to the second birthday of a child - the first 1,000 days - is the most critical in preventing undernutrition and its consequences throughout adulthood. An important part of child growth retardation occurs during pregnancy, which underscores the critical importance of better nutrition for women and girls of reproductive age. Therefore, as underlined by Madeleine Onclin, Head of the Nutrition Sector in DEVCO C1, the Commission works towards improving nutrition in particular of mothers and children to contribute in curbing the stunting line. The panel was a first opportunity to take the work on the MDD-W - *Minimum Dietary Diversity for Women (MDDW)*, financially supported by the EU since 2014, out of the hand of technicians and promote it with a wider public and to advocate for nutrition-sensitive intervention. The Chadian representative (Dr. Himeda and Sarah Bernarhdt from the EU Delegation), GIZ and FAO colleagues joined the panel. GIZ presented some results of the "One world, No Hunger" mid-term evaluation, illustrating the "likely" positive impact of their nutrition-sensitive agriculture programme on diet diversity (measured among other through MDD-W). MDDW reflects the view that women consuming foods from five or more out of 10 defined food groups are more likely to meet their micronutrient requirements than women consuming foods from fewer food groups. The food groups are: grains, white roots and tubers, and plantains; pulses; nuts and seeds; dairy; meat, poultry and fish; eggs; green leafy vegetables; and other vitamin A-rich fruit and vegetables; other vegetables and fruit.

As underlined during the panel, the MDD-W has proved to be the most promising global tool to assess the dietary quality of women. It captures gender dimensions and dietary diversity, which are both central considerations for nutrition-sensitive interventions.

The MDDW was praised as a standardized and reliable indicator that is easy to communicate, for both beneficiaries and programme workers but capacity building is essential for its use, for example

through training of practitioners, and local recipes must be sampled before inclusion in the programme.

During the panel “*Hidden hunger: Produce more or empower more?*”, it was also recalled that women are key actors in the production, processing and marketing of food, in preparing food for the family, and in maintaining household nutrition security. This happens either directly by producing food for home consumption, or indirectly, through the income that women earn from sale of agricultural produce. It was affirmed that one should not oversimplify the story of rural women's lives but that is important to stress and reinforce the message that women are at the heart of the fight against malnutrition. No improvement in nutrition will happen without women. Their role in achieving this is, however, challenged by different factors, which vary from one context to another: geographic, socio-economic status, age, education, religion, ethnicity, etc. On top of socio-economic and cultural barriers, current global challenges such as climate change, urbanisation, conflicts, price volatility, droughts and floods, insecurity, add further burden on the position of women as they are those more affected than men by these phenomena. DEVCO C1 participated to this panel to underline the important role of women for agriculture and nutrition and to stress the fact that this role is made complex by a series of persisting inequalities that need to be urgently addressed.

The need to tackle root causes of gender inequalities in FNSS&SA was particularly recalled and discussed during a panel directly organized by DEVCO C1 jointly with Finland, Germany and the Netherlands, *Changing Women's Lives in the Rural World - Strengthening the voice and participation of women and girls in the rural economy*, on the 6<sup>th</sup> of June. The objective of the panel was to share with partners diverse experiences on how to promote a gender transformative approach for addressing the barriers to gender equality mentioned above. In her intervention, the *EU DEVCO's Deputy Director-General Marjeta Jager* explained that whilst there is no blueprint approach to GTA, we need *holistic and innovative solutions in all areas: from agriculture to education to health*. Particularly, a transformation approach must trigger social change and for this to happen, it is fundamental to invest more on some specific elements of women's lives. First of all, it is fundamental to continue raise awareness about the rights and opportunities that women have through sensitization initiatives which *bring* women and men together in a process of dynamic self-reflection, as pointed out by Marguerite Belobo Mbia, Country Program Coordinator at SNV in Cameroon. When men are encouraged to think critically and appraise their own behavior and attitudes towards women, this is the critical point at which transformation happens.

*Education and training* of women was pointed out as another key aspect to inspire women as leaders and entrepreneurs. Hazel Malapit, Senior Research Coordinator at the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) explained that the gender transformative approaches (GTA) go beyond providing rural women with access to resources and they need to concentrate on strengthening women's ability to control these resources and make profitable use of them. For this reason, beyond improving the knowledge of women's rights, it is fundamental to provide women with the skills to use different tools and instruments at their disposal. She stressed particularly the importance of *knowing the situation* where women work, using tools such as for example the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) that go beyond tracking numbers of women reached, to assessing effective changes in their power and control over resources fundamental for their work.

*Last but not least, participation and networking* were other two important elements which came out from this panel. Knowledge about personal rights and opportunities is not enough if this does not lead women to express their voices and contribute to decisions taken in the communities where women live. Speaking from her experience working on Finnish-funded projects in Nepal, Pamela White described the changes that take place when women find their voices, through small groups, to influence municipal government planning. Shoab Khan, Chairman of Pakistan's Rural Support Network (RSP), explained how a community development model that helps women organise and discuss, offers them the skills to unleash their potential and be effectively empowered.

The critical importance of increasing women's participation and representation in rural decisions was also at the centre of the panel "**Women's leadership in African farmers' and rural producers' organizations**", organized by the EU and IFAD to present the SFOAP work. Since 2008, the EU is co-funding, together with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the *Agence Française de Développement* (AFD), the Supporting Farmers' Organisations in Africa Programme (SFOAP) which aims to increase the skills of and opportunities for farmers' organisations in Africa, working also on the empowerment of women farmers. During the panel, Fatma Ben Rejeb, the CEO of the PAFO (Pan-African farmers organization) stressed that much progress has been made to increase women's voices at continental, regional and national levels. A testimony of this is that the first president of the PAFO, was Elisabeth Atangana, between 2010 and 2012. Fatma Ben Rejeb and Annick Sézibera (CAPAD), however, also stated that these changes struggle to be accepted in rural areas, where the role of women as decision makers in the agricultural sector is still limited by many cultural and social barriers and by a male-driven agricultural management. Not surprisingly, the need to change perceptions and to fight against prejudice at household and community level was again at the centre of the debate. It was stressed how, notwithstanding progresses in women's engagement within farmers organisations, very few women are leaders and the majority of them suffers from a lack of recognition. Even when they belong to farmers organizations and bring opportunities to the community where they live, such as, for example, by proposing projects to improve agricultural work, their engagement is still too often perceived as a menace rather than an opportunity. These barriers require time to be tackled and often projects might fail to address the root causes favouring the persistence of these obstacles because projects have time constraints and need to produce results. Recognizing women's leadership in farmers' organisations implies a social change which requires much more time: donors should pay more attention to this aspect which is still pervasive, even in those scenarios where women seem to have more of a voice. In particular, it was underlined that even when women are more respected and they can act effectively as leaders within such structures, their activities might be limited by many other factors, such as a lack of time, a lack of skills and a lack of funding. For women to have effective voices and become leaders in farmers' organisations, it is fundamental, among other things, to provide them with "compensation mechanisms" that can facilitate their ongoing engagement in FO bodies (thus taking into account the burden women have as family caregivers at the household level). Most importantly, it is critical that more investment is devoted to educate women to manage and lead farmers' organisations and to deal with projects and/or initiatives promoted by these organisations.

*Awareness, engagement and participation, but once again, education of women, have been recurrent elements across the diverse panels included in the one dedicated to **Women's' empowerment in pastoralists societies - How pastoralist women are key actors in developing value chains, dealing with climate change and fighting for land rights**. The audience were reminded that the majority of the more 500 million pastoral workers worldwide live nowadays in the harshest environments – for example, in the Horn of Africa or in the Arctic. They are disproportionately affected by climate change and extreme weather conditions, as well as by conflict and adverse policies, including those favouring industrialised agriculture which contribute to expropriate land from pastoralists. Women are suffering more acutely than men from these pressures. They are doubly marginalised, as pastoralists within wider societies and as women in pastoralist communities. Conflict and climate change, in particular, are having a different impact on men and women, who often also have different priorities in managing their livestock –milk production versus meat production or sale in the market – and different assessments of threats to their way of life. Women's voices are rarely heard and this despite the fact that increasingly they are taking a stand and developing innovative approaches to address the multiple challenges they are confronted with due to external shocks. Indeed, women hold an invaluable local knowledge about, for example, weather conditions, enabling them to predict the availability of firewood and similar issues. This local knowledge should be used to inform climate change policies and interventions. Education is key to transform this knowledge into solutions. However, due to the nomadic or semi-nomadic way of life of pastoralist communities, innovative solutions must be found for education. Boarding school is one way to meet the challenge, but is not always the best or most viable solution. There is also a need for government-to-government*

cooperation to ensure that people who regularly cross international boundaries are included in the policies affecting them.

The EU presented its development cooperation activities on pastoralism and livestock, recalling how these have an important component dedicated to education and training, for example, through the promotion of pastoralism field schools. Most importantly, the EU is engaging also to increase women's voices in collective decision making on rangeland areas. For example, the EU is currently supporting a programme in Kenya and Tanzania specifically focusing on improving women's capacity in decision-making not only in terms of participation but also in terms of influencing investments and planning in community-based rangeland management.

In the panel **Going Digital: Sustainable development in agriculture for women Supporting women's access to ICTs for agriculture and promoting participation**, it was once again stressed that **knowledge is power for women but female farmers** (more so than men), particularly in rural areas, still experience huge difficulties in accessing relevant information, financial products and services and markets, largely due to a persistent digital gender gap in agriculture. Women are 14% less likely than men to own a mobile phone and 25 % fewer women and girls use the internet. Women have significantly less access to effective mobile technology to be more efficient farmers, mainly due to a lack of available funds and a lack of sharing by men. During the panel it was particularly stressed that there is a temptation to use high-tech possibilities like drones and big data to "connect the unconnected". Yet many basic small business computer skills such as creating a financial spreadsheet and doing basic no-cost internet searches that tap websites for local market opportunities should also not be overlooked. Indeed, bridging the digital gender gap in agriculture should require first of all greater emphasis on financial and logistical literacy requirements particularly for rural-based women, starting from access to the internet. It was also underlined how the private sector is trying to support this effort, such as in the case of telecommunication companies spreading connectivity in rural areas. However, these efforts are still not enough; they must be improved and above all guided by the public sector which must guarantee that they are also more gender-focused.

Strengthening the relationship between the public and private sector and clarifying their role in the promotion of gender-responsive agriculture has been another fundamental message, which came across the different panels. This issue was also highlighted during the panel **Innovation & Sustainable agriculture - tools to bridge the gender gap - Promoting African sustainability through tech entrepreneurship, e-agriculture and smallholder farming**. During the discussion, panellists recalled that education is essential for women in order to make them more active contributors to diverse activities across the value chain, and to avoid being confined to the lower end of the chain as farmers (women can and should also be producers and commercial actors). Women farmers must be provided the same opportunities as men in learning, for example, how to make the most efficient use of seeds, fertilisers and other technologies in order to boost output. Across Africa, such as in Uganda and Cameroon, knowledge platforms and apps have been developed in order link farmers to alternative sources of financing such as crowdfunding initiatives. More efforts however must be made to ensure that these technologies are gender-friendly so they can be used by women farmers and that innovation which also includes women is widely accepted. The biggest challenge continues in fact to be the need to change the mentality about women's role and women's contribution to agriculture and the rural economy. Here, the public sector has a fundamental role to play in facilitating an enabling environment for this change to happen. Women's access to and control over land, which is still highly influenced by cultural barriers and depends mostly on male's decision, was raised as it remains the main barrier for women in setting up a long-lasting business. The public sector can help accelerate the implementation of gender-sensitive laws (for example a gender-equal land law) and policies in order to help women fight power imbalances in access to fundamental productive resources. Moreover, the public sector needs to be more engaged in providing eventual safeguards against potential losses from agricultural investments. This is needed especially because the private sector continues to be reluctant to invest in risky activities if there is no guarantee. Women small-farmers, more so than men, are risky actors to invest in, because they have fewer opportunities to secure their resources (particularly land) for bank loans, for example. The public sector needs to encourage the private sector to take the

risk. To that end, the EU emphasised, through the voice of *Henriette Geiger, Director for People and Peace at DEVCO*, that these efforts have already started, for example with the launching of the AgriFI initiative in 2015. AgriFI aims to address this situation by providing greater risk-bearing capacity through public money, in order to encourage project promoters and attract private finance to viable investments which would not have happened otherwise. And this is the case particularly for small-scale farming, and more specifically for female small-farmers.

In line with the objectives of the GAP II (Gender Action Plan II), the EU is engaged to use these and other tools in a more gender-responsive way by contributing to the policy dialogue at global and country level. Furthermore, by [guiding delegations](#) in gender analysis and in the definition of gender sensitive indicators related to different issues, such as [women's land rights](#), nutrition and value chain development. The messages above are taken carefully into account to improve these efforts as well as to further nourish the ongoing debate about the definition of the [post 2020 EU budget](#).

You can find more information as well as the recording of these and other FNSSA-related discussions (on women's land rights, farmers' organisations, etc.) during the EDDs 2018 on the PAEPARD page - Platform for African – European Partnership in Agricultural Research for Development at this link: <http://paepard.blogspot.com/2018/06/agriculture-related-sessions-at.html>

If you want to know more about C1's work to engender FNS&SA projects and programmes do not hesitate to leave a comment at the bottom of the blog and DEVCO C1 will reply as soon as possible.

Thank you!