



منظمة المرأة العربية  
ARAB WOMEN ORGANIZATION

# **Gender Equality in Agricultural Policies in the Arab Region**

**Policy Paper**

**2021**



# Gender Equality in Agricultural Policies in the Arab Region

**Policy Paper**

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**2021**

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Printed in the Arab Republic of Egypt. First edition 2021

Submission Number: 22521/2021

ISBN: 978-977

**This Paper has been prepared within a comprehensive program  
implemented in collaboration between**

**Arab Women Organization (AWO)**

**&**

**The Food & Agriculture Organization of the United Nations  
(FAO)**

**with an aim of supporting the empowerment of rural women in the  
Arab region through capacity development at the community and  
policy levels.**



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## SUMMARY

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) calls for a fundamental transformative change. This is not intended to meet the set of 17 SDGs in different sectors or every development dimension at a time. Instead, it seeks to protect human rights of all, promote gender equality, and foster the empowerment of women and girls. Such are universal goals and targets which are integrated, indivisible and strike a balance between the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, social and environmental. It seems, however, that the world is not on track to achieve Zero Hunger related goal where food is safe, sufficient, and nutritious for all people all year round.

With these targets in mind, an estimated 840 million people are expected to be severely food-insecure by 2030, let alone the adverse effects brought about by COVID-19 pandemic. Grounded on the global economic prospects, current data show that approximately 690 million people or 9.8% of world population will be suffering from poverty. Data further indicate that the situation is set to get much worse. Many More people will go hungry with a potential increase in poverty where another 83 million people, and as many as 123 million people being undernourished. (The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World, 2020)

With respect to the Arab Region, it relies heavily on food imports accounting for the highest rate of food imports worldwide and among food-importing regions. The Arab region imports more than (25%) of the wheat traded on world markets making it vulnerable to the volatility and inequities of global trade. Besides, agricultural productivity is starkly reduced and stunted across many countries with persistent unsustainable agricultural practices affecting food availability and affordability in the medium and long term. Water scarcity, climate change and increasing urbanization have further exacerbated the situation. Compelling evidence indicates the rise in hunger and undernutrition ratios, mainly spurred by the rampant conflicts and the steep spread of deep chronic hunger hovering throughout swaths of the region. Progress in SDG2 (Zero Hunger) remains subject to the wide promotion of sustainable agriculture through customized and structured investment in sustainable agriculture. Concern is expressed against this context thereby capacities required to sustainably address gender disparity hinges on the broad utilization of knowledge and technologies as an essential determinant to bolster agricultural productivity. Accordingly, the sought SDGs transformative change will further require exerting all efforts to end conflicts and build synergies of regional cooperation. (Arab Sustainable Development Report, 2020, p.25). Equally, International Focus (IF) has



revealed that SDG2 targets could by no means be achieved amidst gender inequality. IF has further pointed out that the limitations on women's mobility are impediments to their access to justice, land tenure rights and economic resources, which would result in their exclusion from productive labor forces, undermine their potential, and entail further impoverishment. Notwithstanding, rural women can seize the opportunities and fully participate in the agricultural development process by establishing an enabling viable environment grounded in a gender perspective towards promotion of gender equality in the agricultural sector. This, thus, reflects the genuine pathway that will contribute to extreme poverty reduction. If we are to alleviate the peril of those risks, synergies grounded on gender equality could rid the world of the scourges of hunger, induce access to decent employment, and reduce aspects of rural women socio-economic vulnerability towards the achievement of many objectives of 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

**For the purpose of this study, the present paper intends** to expound the way gender can be integrated into agricultural policies towards achieving SDG 1 (No poverty) and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals with a commitment ahead to promote gender equality in the agricultural sector. Viable solutions towards the empowerment of rural women could be taken by identifying challenges and ways to overcome obstacles through a variety of specific mechanisms targeted for several ministries.

**Then the paper addresses** agricultural development indicators in the Arab region: indicators constituting one of the essential components that shape the extent to which the availability of an enabling environment is defined towards the achievement of gender equality. Further, indicators help identify the features of the food security axes in the Arab region in terms of food supply, stability, food availability, and food security policies, rounded up by identification of gender integration aspects in agricultural policies, and gender integration mechanisms in the agricultural sector. Taken together, such mechanisms would be carried out through a focus on gender equality and the empowerment of rural women between reality and expectations in the Arab region. The sought objective lies in determining the challenges of empowering rural women in the agricultural sector in the Arab region, aiming at laying out a set of recommendations that would enhance gender equality in agriculture towards the achievement of SDG1 (No Poverty) and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) in an endeavor sustain agriculture and food systems.








**For the methodology** of the present paper, **an inductive approach** drawing on international and national reports, data and research material through desk research and desk review of relevant published literature, has been adopted. Besides, the material further includes the ministries of agriculture official documents on strategy, access to available rural development and food security. Data are also drawn from websites of several international organizations engaging in agricultural development and food security issues through mainstreaming gender equality in the agricultural sector. Included are websites of the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Bank, ESCWA, Arab Women Organization (AWO), Arab Organization for Agricultural Development (AOAD), UNICEF and others.

Hereinafter summarized the set of findings that have so far been drawn:

- ◆ The Arab region imports more than 25 per cent of the wheat traded on world markets. Inadequate access to food for the poor and the displaced is often compounded by inadequate services for health care and water. Findings show that undernutrition is most centred in rural areas where the general investment rate in agriculture in the Arab region stands at 0.28% as the second lowest indicator of all regions. Nevertheless, the average population growth rate of the Arab countries averaged 1.9% per year, over the period 2015- 2020, constituting the second fastest rate in the world. Rapid population growth also spurs demand for food and exacerbates pressures on natural resources. (Arab Sustainable Development Report, 2020, p.27)
- ◆ Considering agriculture substantial role in food security, its share of gross domestic product (GDP) hovers in the single digit of 7% in the Arab region. Large-scale food GDP constitutes a fundamental guarantee for the stability of food availability. More importantly, agriculture is an essential pillar to food access as approximately 40% of the population, particularly the poorest, depend on agriculture for their livelihood. (Arab Region Outlook Report 2030, 2017: 7)
- ◆ Some 33 million people in the Arab region are currently undernourished. This figure is projected to scale up in the next years and decades due to protracted conflicts, long drought periods, high population growth rate, climate change, and scarcity of resources. Achieving SDG2 (Zero hunger) is a crucial political exigency for many reasons, the most important of which is serving as vehicle for social peace in the Arab world. However, it poses one of the most daunting challenges in the region due to the severe restrictions on the land and water availability for food production. (Governance and Cooperation over Food 2019: 2)

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- ◆ The participation of women has been mostly limited to their being water resources final users. Women enjoy no participation as stakeholders at the level of planning or decision-making and water resources management, in terms of both quantity and quality. They therefore bear the brunt of providing water for final use which takes a significantly large amount of time and exerted effort. This, thus, hinders them from engaging in other productive activities that would enable them to generate an economic income for themselves. The integration of women in water resources management requires tearing off social, economic and institutional impediments (ESCWA, 2019: 14)
  - ◆ Enjoying no freedom to be actively involved in decision-making processes and adequate access to and control over resources, rural women endure additional responsibilities and shoulder the burden of workload and duties. Global evidence supports the fact that rural women participation in the agriculture, in many parts of the region, is substantially increasing, yet mostly concentrated in seasonal or unpaid work. Women are denied opportunities to engage in equal pay to men aside from enduring appalling working conditions. (Global Food Policy Report, 2020: 41)
  - ◆ Considering the wage gap between men and women in agricultural work, rural women are reported to be disadvantaged as they suffer from less paid jobs than men. This can be interpreted under the so-called (Gender Discrimination) in which social roles and values are divided or distributed on ground of prevalent values and norms in society rather than on quality-driven competences. (Women and Arab Food Security, 2010)
  - ◆ Food discrimination: In many Arab societies and at the household level, women have reduced or insufficient food intakes. Men and children are served first and only then can women sit down to eat. Thereby, they solely cope with leftovers intake that leads to undernutrition and ill-health. (Women and Arab Food Security, 2010)

The policy paper concludes with a set of recommendations for the promotion of gender equality in the agricultural sector.

Achieving SDG1 (No poverty) and SDG2 (Zero Hunger) of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab Region rests on gender mainstreaming in policies through the inclusion of research for the adoption of new practices, capacity building, equal access to resources and services, elimination of food discrimination, rural women empowerment, in line with the elevation of the social status of rural people.



# INTRODUCTION

Food security and food availability issues constitute one of the major problems of global food insecurity. Adverse issues of undernutrition, global poverty, food deficits, the steadily-growing world population along with environmental degradation and pollution remain serious pressing challenges placing a heavy burden on food security and nutrition. The world experienced a serious food crisis in the early 1970's. In the aftermath of such crisis, deep concern over the issue of food security was given due attention while much focus was laid on damaging impact and how to contain risks and overcome challenges of global food insecurity towards a food-secure world without hunger and malnutrition.

In view of this global concern, the pursuit of Arab countries to achieve food security for their people and provide them with healthy food, while mitigating food imports risks, has been notable - for more than three decades. At the turn of the new millennium, most Arab countries introduced a package of agricultural policies and strategies that leverage reducing the magnitude of the food gap and achieving an adequate level of food security.

Nonetheless, the food gap in Arab countries remains proportionately high which reflects the deep imbalance between food demand and production. Presently, about 33 million people in the region are undernourished. This number is more likely to rise in the coming years and decades due to endemic features of enduring conflict, prolonged drought, climate change, resource sparsity and the rising population growth rate, which have taken a heavy toll on food security across the region. Given the persistence of major concerns, achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2 SDG 2 (Zero hunger) is therefore a political imperative across the region for many reasons. Not least because it serves as a pivotal basis for social peace in the Arab world. Yet, it is also one of the most daunting challenges the region faces due to severe land and water constraints to achieve gains in food productivity. (Governance and Cooperation over Food, 2019: 2)

Food security is of paramount importance which cannot be overstated in the light of the growing world's population and arable land depletion, coupled with negative implications of urban/peri-urban expansion and economic development. Also, it constitutes a key component of agricultural development and one of the main tools having a considerable positive impact on the areas of poverty reduction, education, health, employment and the environment. Both agriculture and agricultural development play a substantial role in reducing poverty and in improving living standards. Cognizant of the substantial value of agriculture, the 8 Millennium Development Goals, agreed upon by UN Member States in 2000, further underscored its role in reducing hunger, promoting gender equality and maintaining a sustainable environment management. (Food Security and Food Sovereignty in the Middle East, 2013: 13)

UN Member states have renewed their commitments ahead to fighting poverty and malnutrition broadening the fight's scope through the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The relationship between SDG2 (Zero Hunger) and other goals notably SDG5 (gender equality and empower women and girls) brings into prominence the essential role of agriculture, food security and nutrition thus, opening up opportunities to allow for a more inclusive approach towards combating hunger and malnutrition (Agricultural Development, Food Security and Nutrition, 2016: 2). The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda calls on various stakeholders globally to take measures across all regions to eradicate hunger, provide food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. In this vein, it is essential that the promotion of gender equality and the social and economic empowerment of women be at the heart of any intervention towards promoting sustainable agriculture integral to effectively attain food security and eradicate poverty.

The international community has drawn attention to the significance of investment in agriculture for attainment of food security while pointing out that food security goal could not be attained without mainstreaming gender equality. Noting that rural women are the most influential and affected individuals. They are a backbone in the fight against hunger. Still, they are the nexus of rural development and constitute the key players to attaining food security amidst poverty as the most complex issue. The lack of investment in women and girls' endeavors and in their potential impedes their capacity of personal development and the development of their communities. It further hinders their efforts to end poverty and weakens socio-economic growth which would entail failure to attain food security through the promotion of sustainable agriculture.

Rehabilitation of rural women competences, developing their skillsets, and providing employment and decent work opportunities is, to a larger extent, a determinant for success of exerted efforts in achieving sustainable agricultural development. In this vision, this will unlock opportunities conducive to the enhancement of their living standards as well as their families. Furthermore, advancing rural women status, in a variety of areas, is essential for their social and economic stability which could be carried out through protection of their rights pursuant to the principle of justice and equity. And thus, protection-oriented policies in the agricultural sector should be put forward through the attainment of gender equality. In the context of the attempt to mainstream gender into gender-oriented agricultural and rural development policies alongside empowering rural women in the agricultural sector; this paper addresses the following points:





- ◆ **First:** Agricultural Development Indicators in the Arab Region.
- ◆ **Second:** Food security Axes in the Arab Region.
- ◆ **Third:** Food Security Policies in the Arab Region.
- ◆ **Fourth:** Challenges for Rural Women Empowerment in the agricultural sector in the Arab Region.
- ◆ **Fifth:** Gender Mainstreaming into Agricultural Policies in the Arab Region.
- ◆ **Sixth:** Mechanism for Mainstreaming of gender in the agricultural sector.
- ◆ **Seventh:** Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women (GEWE) and Girls in the Arab Region: between reality and expectations.
- ◆ **Recommendations**

### **First: Agricultural Development Indicators (ADIs) in the Arab Region**

Contribution of agriculture to the gross domestic product (GDP) hovers around merely 7% of the gross domestic product in the Arab region. However, agriculture certainly plays a role in food security as large-scale local food production is critical to stable food availability. Most importantly, agriculture is the backbone to food security as almost 40% of the population, notably the poorest, live on agriculture for their livelihood. (Arab Horizon 2030: Prospects for Enhancing Food Security in the Arab Region, 2017:7)

In the Arab Region, Natural constraints and hazards pose challenges for food production as reflected in the sparsity of land quality and limited access to water resources. Data indicate that less than 1% of the total agricultural land area is rated as highly productive or even medium-productive with little room for sown land expansion. Albeit with variations across the region, sown land remains obvious differing from one country to another. In Sudan, quality land averages 17% of highly productive land in contrast to Djibouti that makes up higher proportion of almost 80% of barren non-arable land. The issue of land quality is aggravated by the rapid urbanization of fertile farmlands intertwined with speedy and ongoing depletion of soil and land degradation in the region. Global update features the Arab region as the most water-sparse region ranking high in water resources. In the aggregate, the region's economic and demographic pressures exacerbate such a relative sparsity. (Arab Horizon 2030: Prospects for Enhancing Food Security in the Arab Region, 2017:7)

The geographical area of the Arab region amounted to about 1343 million hectares (million ha) in 2018, while arable land area takes up about 233.24 million ha, or 17.37%, with a slight cultivated area around 74.12 million ha or averaging 31.78% of the total area of arable land.

The Arab region is characterized by water resources scarcity, a destabilizing factor leaving the region with challenges set to obstruct implementation of agricultural development programs towards improving the Arab food security situation. whilst the area of the Arab world constitutes about 9% of the world's area, the Arab world's share and volume of freshwater resources does not overreach 2%.

Being the most water-scarce region globally, as shown in the figures above, the Arab region's share of water use in agriculture is estimated at 83.8%, compared to a global average of 71.6%. The regional annual average across many Arab countries is below 500 cubic meters per capita per year (500m<sup>3</sup>/inhabitant/year). It ranges between 400.8 and 400.2 cubic meters per year in Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Bahrain, Jordan, Libya, Palestine, Algeria, Oman, Djibouti and Tunisia. Nonetheless, the ratio ranges between 589.4 to 997.1 cubic meters per year in Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, Sudan, and Somalia; further rising to over 1,000 cubic meters in Comoros, Iraq and Mauritania. (The State of Arab Food Security Report, 2018: 7-8).

Rarely do stakeholders consider the nexus between water management and food security through a gender-based perspective. Further, initiatives designed with women's needs and perspectives in mind on water management are left out. Wherefore, agricultural water-related legislation and policies were often not gender-responsive and cared little about women's multiple water uses (i.e. irrigation, home and orchard gardening, livestock, personal and domestic use). When it comes to decision-making about water use, allocation and governance, women remain underrepresented despite the key role they play in food security through their knowledge of crop production, developing sustainable practices and building systems aimed at ensuring food security. Rural women have a unique perspective and knowledge of farm methods. Gendering water uses efficiency, for instance, women farmers are likely to be endowed with different needs in terms of irrigation technology, as carriers of knowledge such as rainwater harvesting skillsets. Hence, action in response to women best practices as partners in addressing some of the water and food security challenges amidst climate change hazards, population growth and the increasing demand for water is critically substantial and should not be overlooked. (HLPF, 2015)

Women's participation is confined to mere water resources end-users with insignificant engagement in planning and decision-making, though they are key stakeholder in water management both quantitatively and qualitatively. The main burden tends to fall on







women for water supply and provision which takes up most of their time and requires an arduous effort thus impeding other productive activities that could enable them to generate an economic income for themselves. To reduce the gender inequity burden, impetus to integrating rural women in water resource management hinges on breaking down socio-economic and institutional barriers. (ESCWA, 2019 :34)

Regarding female small farmers in rain-fed areas, they are less likely to fare water use for food crops than their male counterparts who are familiar with agricultural systems producing one or several crops that often include “water thirsty” ones (i.e. sugarcane and rice). Additionally, other factors determine the crop type, specifically during severe persistent drought periods. In their pursuit of employment opportunities, rural men seek migration impelling women to reconcile between their domestic household chores and irrigation tasks, a seemingly toiling activity at nighttime mainly for single rural women. This is due to social norms governing transportation and security which makes it more difficult to take stock. (Resource GUIDE: Mainstreaming Gender in Water Management, 2006: 93)

A further major challenge facing the Arab region lies in the difficulty of measuring SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) given the lack of gender-disaggregated data. (The Arab Sustainable Development Report, 2020, 87) (ASDR 2020)

Taken together, the afore-mentioned facts and data reveal that the agricultural sector is highly determined by several natural, technical and institutional barriers which pose challenges. Exerted efforts towards overcoming such challenges towards achieving food security are critical. However, the Arab region, being the most water-scarce region globally, bears the brunt of the economic and demographic pressures brought about by such a relative sparsity and resulting in lower agricultural productivity and lower incomes. Hence, the severe widespread of hunger, food insecurity and a high meme of poverty. When it comes to hardest-hit categories more adversely affected by poverty; rural women prove to be welded to such damage. The (Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, 2019: 17) Report emphasized that global data indicate that more women than men live in poverty with an estimate ratio of 70% and rising of the world’s extreme poor are women out of the 1.2 billion people living in poverty. This implies the cause-and-effect relationships between SDG1 (No poverty) and SDG2 (Zero hunger). Likewise, the (Feminization of Poverty, 2015) report states that poor women enjoy fewer opportunities of adequate access to resources; leading to ever more severe vulnerability to adverse effects of poverty.





## Second: Food Security Axes in the Arab Region

Food security exists when “all people at all times have physical, social and economic access to food, which is safe and consumed in sufficient quantity and quality to meet their dietary needs and food preferences, and is supported by an environment of adequate sanitation, health services and care allowing for a healthy and active life”. Numerous dimensions overlap the concept of food security that is four-thronged and involve: 1) Availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, 2) food access ensuring people an assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways, 3) optimal and effective food utilization for a proper health status, 4) stability and sustainability of food security. Such axes will be reviewed in consistency with the (The State of Food Security in The Arab States Report, 2018 :39-49) as follows:

### 2.1: Food Availability Dimension

Considering the dimension of food availability, it draws on the supply side with a core focus on the food provision and is thus measured by the degree of society and the state's capacity in providing its population with sufficient food through either domestic production and/or imports from foreign markets. The following section will hereunder review food availability that comprises products of plant and animal staple food commodities, foreign trade, food relief and allocations, besides food availability indicators.

#### *2.1.1: Food Availability of Plant and Animal Staple Food Commodities*

Gross product of main cereal group:

The Arab region witnessed a decline in Gross cereal production for the period 2017-2018 averaging a ratio of 5.84%. This was mainly due to the reduced cultivated areas by 12.43% in each of the sorghum harvesting, millet, rice along with maize crops, by 34.15%, 15.89% and 0.94%, respectively. The drop in sorghum and millet production is attributed to the low levels of rainfall and the lack of funding for agriculture in the Republic of Sudan, whereby production shrank to a ratio of (18.28%) compared to 2017.

Nonetheless, the production of wheat, barley and some other grains such as oats and triticale has however increased at the Arab level averaging 2.17%, 4.81%, and 26.45% which constitutes a good indicator of food availability in domestic product and contributes to the fall of food insecurity scale. Mainly as the nutritional contribution of wheat yields constitute a substantial proportion in the value of nutritional gap. The wheat crop cultivation is concentrated in Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Iraq, Syria and Tunisia whereby these countries together contribute to roughly 94.18% of Arab region wheat gross production.



At the national level, five Arab states, namely Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Sudan and Iraq contributed 87.28% of the Arab region's Gross cereal production in 2018. Looking at the Gross grain production figures in the Arab region, it has been visible that the share of Egypt alone contributed by 41.18%, followed by Morocco 19.41%, as Egypt registered high productivity rates averaging 17.7 tons/ha.

Compared with a world cereal productivity averages of about 4.07 tons/ha, figures show that the Arab region's share proved significantly low in 2018 with estimates of 1.70 tons/ha. Productivity varies widely between and within Arab countries according to the following:

◆ The existing irrigation methods: It is an irrigation scheme shaped by the limited use of modern advanced technologies along with Arab farmers' reliance on low-productivity adapted seedling varieties and cultivars, and on insufficient quantities produced from high-productive varieties of drought resistant seeds, water scarcity conditions and diseases. Thus, promotion of irrigation practices and grain crop, and the use of appropriate productivity-driven technical packages hold appeal to the adoption of an Arab strategy implementation for yield crops to be expected.

#### *2.1.2: Food Availability from Foreign Trade/Imports:*

Imports were hinged on cereal and flour with a share ranging from 43% to 52% of the total plant commodities across the period 2015-2018, compared to a tiny fraction of exports ranging between 10% and 13% for the very period. The figure points to a net commodity grain and flour balance deficit. Comparative figures of the vegetable/fruit commodity balance posted a surplus, mainly due to the increase in exports more than doubling the imports.

With regard to animal food commodities across the region, red meat imports ranged between 41%-37% of the total animal commodity imports during the period 2015-2018, compared to a small fraction of export not exceeding 2%-7% of the total animal commodity exports during the same period. Conversely, fish exports figures surpassed imports.

Looking closely at women-to-men participation ratio in the livestock sector, the participation of women of all ages in this sector is quite evident. The ownership of large animals such as cattle and buffaloes is predominantly a man's share while more women are likely to own small stock as poultry and small ruminants such as goats. Evidence of

women's livestock ownership is, however, indicative of continuous gender discrimination excluding women from access to resources, rights and services. Land holder farmers are more likely to make long-term investments and adopt new productive technologies. Inequalities on livestock ownership favor male livestock husbandry farmers' access to training and technology. Furthermore, agricultural extension programs are usually geared towards male-owned livestock given the weak women farmer approach, as agricultural extension agents lack the necessary incentives and communication skills to reach out and accommodate illiterate rural women. (Bridging the Gap, 2009: 16) (State of Food and Agriculture, 2011, 38).

### *2.1.3: Food Gap (Net Imports) in the Arab Region*

The food gap is a complement to food self-sufficiency ratios in the Arab region, whereby the value of staple food commodities gap witnessed a decline in the Arab region from about 34.69 billion dollars in 2017 to around 33.58 billion dollars in 2018, that is a drop of 3.20%. Despite the fall in the food gap value across 2017 and 2018, this by no means implies an improvement in production. This decline is due to the falling world food commodity price over 2018.

### *2.1.4: Food Availability from Donated Food and Food Aid*

Food aid constitutes one way of enhancing food security worldwide. The value of food aid provided by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) to some countries amounted to 140 million dollars in 2017. Contrasted to 2016, development assistance to Arab countries dropped by half (50%). (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, OECD).

## **2.2: Food Access Dimension**

Food access dimension focuses on the demand side and is thus measured by the ability of all individuals in society to manage food that covers their dietary needs grounded on their material capabilities, food commodity prices, population growth, food production growth, and the mainstream dietary pattern. It is further measured by relevant economic and social policies in place.

### *2.2.1: Food Commodities Prices*

Food commodity prices are among the most important variables that have an immediate impact on food access. Plummeting food prices spur the rise in the consumer's purchasing power as to the quantities he is keen on consuming. Even starker, this falls mainly on the poorest categories while hitting harder women who make up the majority. Vice versa, the same would apply in the event of rising food prices whereby the consumed quantities of





the commodity decreases thus pushing the consumer further into seeking other alternatives that meet a similar contentment to cope with soaring food price impacts.

Population growth considerably affects food consumption. Available population censuses point to the rising population growth in the Arab region expanding from roughly 214,767 million people in 2015 up to 422,682 million people in 2018. Overall, the annual regional population growth rate averages 1.92% across the period 2015-2018; compared to world population ratio 1.1%. Such a rate is relatively high and impacts food access. (The Status of Arab Food Security Report, 2018: 41)

### **2.3: Food Utilization Dimension**


The utilization of food products available for consumption: It is measured when accounting for and identifying the amount of production used for seed in the following year, amount fed to livestock, as well as food loss and waste during the production and across post-harvest handling stages (transportation, storage and processing).

### **2.4: Food Stability Dimension**

Food stability (sustainability): It lays the emphasis on two concepts for sustainability. In terms of the initial time horizon, it is shaped by the short-term food sustainability and relies on food price stability, individual income promotion, production increase, food loss and waste reduction, as well as food subsidizing. The second horizon is yet shaped by long-term food sustainability through economic growth, sustainable production, and natural resources preservation. Further along such dynamics, the empowerment of small-scale producers, including rural women will be anchored through the creation of income-generation small and medium enterprises which entails livelihoods' food security.

The Arab Sustainable Development Report, 2019-2020: 27 (ASDR:2019, 2020) illustrates, upon situation analysis of food security in the Arab World; a set of facts highlighting the present and future situation while underscoring the difficulty of achieving some of the 2030 SDGs Agenda target reflected in SDG2 (Zero Hunger). Those facts are hereunder stated:

- ◆ The Arab region imports more than 25% of the wheat traded on world markets.
- ◆ Food insecurity: limited access to adequate food for the poor and IDPs most exacerbated by the scale of lack of appropriate medical care services and poor access to water resources.
- ◆ Prevalence of undernourishment: Most of the undernourished live in rural areas.

- 
- ◆ Public investment in agriculture in the Arab region is the second lowest indicator among all regions averaging 0.28.
  - ◆ The annual average population growth rate in Arab countries amounted to 1.9% during 2015 and 2020, being the second fastest rate in the world. Rapid population growth entails rising demand for food and exacerbating pressures on natural resources.

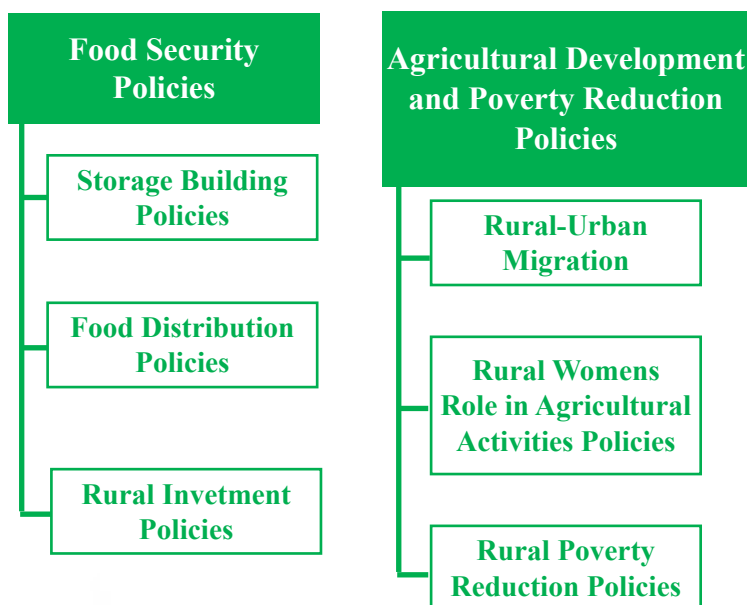
### Third: Axis of Food Security Policies in the Arab Region

Agricultural policies are reflected in an integrated set of administrative, legislative and executive measures through program design and implementation channeled by the state public authorities. For such measure to be effective, it is essential to involve some private entities to gear efforts ahead of meeting specific goals contained in the agricultural development actions; towards fostering production and attaining sustained food security.

In the past few decades, productivity, which measures the amount of food produced from inputs used; i.e. available land and water resources, nutritional value of crop yields, and the return on investment in various crops, has so far fallen off, compared to other regions. Mapping the depth of productive inputs, the region has borne the brunt of water scarcity and climate change which have had a negative impact, with variance across countries. This has been exacerbated by poor infrastructure and little public and private investment in agriculture and related technology. Further, low-efficiency agricultural practices have set up natural resources depletion and resulted in greater food losses, a proven indicator that agricultural strategies have not yet achieved significant improvement in productivity.

The lack of investment in rural development has generally been sharpened by migration to urban areas. Urban expansion spurs reduction in agricultural land and prompts demand for food products. The population of the Arab region is projected to reach 520 million people by 2030 and 676 million by 2050. Such a steadily growing population constitutes one of the major factors of food insecurity in the light of high demand and reduced supply as per the (Arab Development Report 2020, 2019: 29).

In their pursuit of attaining food security, Arab states have developed economic and agricultural policies. Such policies involve the following:



### **3.1: Food Security Policies**

#### ***Storage Building of Staple Food Commodities Group Policies***

Seeking the flow of commodity supply management, meet customers' demand and shielding food security against the threat in times of crisis on the global or domestic market, throughout the year; Arab states have sought to build storage of staple food commodities which helps stabilize agricultural commodities' prices through the supply/demand balance dynamics secured by strategic food stocks. Distribution networks and access to credit and markets are pivotal in MENA.

#### ***Food Distribution Policies and Agricultural Commodities Trade Policies***

Such policies help access to food and ensure its flow to all geographical areas, thus stabilizing food prices. In this context, Arab countries pursue to establish central markets to smooth the path of agricultural products' sale in major cities, to handle modern methods to logistics infrastructure towards easier transfer of agricultural goods between all regions, to offer loans for the purchase of refrigerated food transport vehicles, to sustain the cold food chain and to encourage the private sector to participate in the distribution of food in some Arab countries through public institutions.

#### ***Investment Policies in Agriculture and Food Security***

Some countries encourage investment in the fields of agriculture and food security. Most Arab countries follow suit in exerting investment improving efforts in the agricultural sector. Sectors involved in investments include the plant, fish and animal



production sectors as well as infrastructure projects in the areas of irrigation and land reclamation. Targeted interventions to create incentives for investment in the areas of food security marketing and service projects has also been put forward. Most visible, some Arab countries' focus on foreign direct agricultural investment has been laid beyond their frontiers in some countries with agricultural productive potential inside and outside the Arab world. (Documentation of Agricultural Policies in the Arab States, 2009: 83)

The (Status of Arab Food Security Report, 2018: 55-56) illustrates the implementation of short, medium, and long-term policies by some Arab states to attain food security across its various dimensions.

### 3.1.1: Food Availability Dimension Policies

#### Short-Term Policies:

Pricing policy for agricultural inputs and products: such policy seeks the stabilization of agricultural production inputs markets (seeds-fertilizers-pesticides). Procedures differ from one country to another as hereunder indicated:

- ❖ Throughout 2017 and 2018, **Tunisia** developed an incentive action for farmers to use improved seeds and raise production. It fostered subsidies on improved cereal seeds with around 6.5 million dinars and 7.7 million dinars respectively. The state's subsidies included the prices of water used for irrigation of cereals by a ratio of 50%.
- ❖ However, **Oman** inaugurated the agricultural insurance system for vegetable crops producers and greenhouse vegetable production in October 2017. This was responsive of covering risks engendered by unpredictable climatic changes and biological epidemic pests.
- ❖ **Palestine** undertook an insurance risk scheme through the compensation of natural disaster affected farmers, and assistance of farmers affected by Israeli occupation procedures, as well as farmers' tax recovery (value-added tax) on agricultural production inputs.
- ❖ **Lebanon** undertook the distribution of some pesticides, medicines, fisheries, pheromones and fertilizers to farmers. The state also provided farmers with improved wheat and barley seeds at reduced prices.
- ❖ **Egypt**, however, managed the distribution of fertilizer rations among farmers and provided them with soft loans.

#### Medium-Term Policies:

Medium-term policies are reflected in pricing policies and strategic stock policies designed to stabilize agricultural products' prices and hold a secure strategic stockpile of domestic products. Procedures differ from one country to another as hereunder indicated:







- ◆ **Lebanon** navigates a common practice through a program aimed at ensuring stock of grain. The intervention is reflected in the state's permanent purchases of Lebanon's whole-domestically produced wheat from local wheat farmers at premium prices that achieve a certain profit ratio then. Wheat is then delivered by the state to the mill for processing at reduced prices. The state also purchases the entire amount of produced barley, compounded with sporadically purchased sugar beet and tobacco.
- ◆ Regarding **Egypt**, the state posts import prices for strategic crops such as wheat, corn, rice, sugar cane and sugar beet. Wheat is purchased only from wheat farmers at quoted prices, while corn and rice are traded within the limits of the posted prices. There is no involvement or influence of the state to obligate any category to buy in terms of the quoted price. The purchase of sugar cane and sugar beet is undertaken in terms of the obligated contract price governing sugar companies pursuant to the contracts concluded with the farmers.

### 3.1.2: The Ability to Food Accessibility Policies

#### Short-term Policies:

**Subsidy policies:** These aim at directing some government-subsidized commodities to meet the content of the food basket depending on potential to achieve food security, maintain citizens' health, and prevent malnutrition diseases. Such are stated as follows:

- ◆ In 2017, **Tunisia** adopted the establishment of a solidarity fund for compensation for agricultural damage and reparation for affected farmers with a view to ensuring major farming crops from the effects of natural disasters on agriculture. The fund set up a system of social insurance for marine fisheries from floods and snow disasters. An alleviating plan on the impact of drought on livestock and olive trees in the center and south has also been implemented with the annual state contribution up to 20 million dinars, along with the farmers' contribution. The fund to be entered into force in 2019.
- ◆ As for **Egypt**, a subsidy policy for food commodities (i.e. subsidized sugar, cooking oils, wheat flour and bread) was instituted through ration card food items. The state food distribution policies targeted the rationalization of food consumption at the family and community level. This was combined with ongoing review of the food support system, prohibition of basic food commodities exports or raising export taxes, along with food aid to families and individuals among target groups.

### 3.1.3: Food Quality and Food Safety Policies

The objective of such a policy consists in safe and sustainable food quality.

#### Short-Term Policies:

- ◆ **Tunisia** held inspection and monitoring of open food stores, foodstuffs at all stages while controlling manufacturing conditions, transportation, storage and display, along with taking the necessary measures to raise food samples, conduct regular laboratory analyses and epidemiological investigations of foodborne diseases (FBDs).
- ◆ As for **Oman**, many awareness-raising interventions and consumer protection programs have been endorsed. They include sensitizing actions in the area of vegetables and fruits purchase, and proper food storage standards. Due emphasis was also laid on good hygienic practices by awareness-raising on cooking oils misuse and health hazards in line with safeguard of meat safety and quality awareness raising.
- ◆ **Egypt** enforced the application of health standards in terms of laws and legislation enactment, citizens' health consciousness and education increase as well as promoting the role of civil society institutions.

#### Long Term policies:

- ◆ **Oman** established a food safety and quality Centre whose mandate is covering all stages of the food chain.
- ◆ Whereas, **Lebanon** has established a sustainable system for monitoring food contamination and ensuring food is fit for consumption. The system seeks the evaluation of food premises according to their degree of exposure to contamination risks and the promotion of inspection procedures to ensure food safety.
- ◆ In **Egypt**, a review and evaluation of the implementation of the National Food and Nutrition Policy issued by the Ministry of Health in 2007, was conducted. Viewing food control and inspection regulatory structures in place have been strengthened along with surveillance of children health status, clean water, sanitation, and the nutritional status of mothers.

### 3.1.4: Food Stability Dimension/Sustainability of Food Supplies Policies

- ◆ **Tunisia** has so far developed several policies. A single silo with a total storage capacity, standing at 16,000 tons, was constructed along with strategic stocks formation. This is implemented through the intermediaries of the Cereal Board for cereals, the Office of Oil, and the Office of Trade for sugar storage. Stockpiles are also formed for other products including potatoes, eggs, milk and meat.
- ◆ In **Algeria**, the construction of 39 silos and refrigerating facilities throughout the years 2017-2018 is most pronounced. Domestically produced cereals, mainly wheat, and milk are stored, while necessary amounts are imported to meet the population needs.





- ◆ As for **Egypt**, state storage policies are reflected in the state support of a Buffer Stocks system of food commodities while raising its efficiency through strategic stock policies, storage size increase, and silos food warehouses building.

### 3.2: Agricultural Development and Poverty Reduction Policies

#### ◆ *Rural-to-Urban Migration*

Rural-to-urban migration has a damaging effect on farmland as it is left unexploited. It is also an impetus for a growing pressure on the labor market in cities, and the spread of marginal activities. Rural-to urban migration has repercussions and induced changes as rural women got engaged in land cultivation. This, thus, highlights that narrowing the gap between the countryside and the city has been a top priority in the Agenda of the Arab countries. Housing, lighting, communication, health and education-related programs have been implemented along with extension programs aimed at raising the agricultural population's nutritional level.

#### ◆ *Rural Women Role in Agricultural Activities*

Rural women's participation in the agricultural sector remains critical as they produce food for household consumption and dietary intake. Being a substantial source of agricultural products, women are actively involved in more than half (50%) of the necessary agricultural labor force. However, they remain at the periphery bearing the brunt of gender inequality, mainly due to limited land access and land ownership rights. Lack of land ownership and access to publicly owned resources hamper their capacity as they are denied training which, in turn, limits the scope of gaining provision of technical and material support. Rural women further experience vulnerability due to their limited access to extension services and agricultural funding and financial resources. Besides, the total female rural population is reported to have lower levels of education.

The status of rural women in Arab states has tangibly improved in the fields of health, education and economic engagement in the labor force. On the other hand, there has been a rise in the rate of female-headed households (family-headed by women): the other side of poverty impeding livelihood sustainability. This is intertwined with the paucity in the assistance to women which is seemingly limited to female-based activities encompassing embroidery and simple processing of plant and animal products. Despite the significance of such activities, fulfilling rural women's roles can be better ensured across integrating them in the agricultural and rural development process needed to enhance their engagement as effective partners.



### *Rural Poverty Reduction Policies*

Settlement of rural poverty in some Arab countries has been the outcome of multiple and interlocking determinants.

Integrated rural development was often not brought to the forefront of programs and projects taken in many Arab countries; which has entailed a deterioration in rural conditions mostly reflected in infrastructures and basic services. This was quite pronounced in the deterioration of not only productive and marketing conditions but also in living standards with an ultimate outcome of an irregular migration of large numbers of rural people swarming into the city. The phenomenon has exacerbated rural poverty while accruing urban poverty. Recent developments engendered the implementation, by some Arab countries, of comprehensive rural development programs towards poverty reduction.

The (FAO Report, 2018: 22) reveals, upon former policy analysis of food safety in the Arab region, that the focus in policies was laid on the issue of food stability and on physical and economic access to staple foods. Two sets of policies were implemented towards initial food stabilization. One is the risk-management strategy and the second is food production strategy. The report further notes the governments' implementation of subsidies to several staple foods.

Rural women in the Arab region are a lynchpin to all agri-food value chains. More significantly, they play a pivotal role in ensuring food security and nutrition in the agricultural sector. They, nonetheless, face many constraints and challenges.

#### **Fourth: Challenges Limiting the Empowerment of Rural Women in Agriculture in the Arab Region**

Empowering women is a process through which women can make their choices, have control over their lives and exert power and influence in society. Empowerment is a highly important end on its own right. To be achieved, empowerment hinges on putting women on equal footing with men to hold the balanced and equal capabilities. This is suggestive of their enjoyment of equal access to resources and opportunities, thus holding the means, knowledge and freedom to use these rights to their best advantage. Enhancing women's access to training and knowledge could therefore enable them to identify their choices and decisions and will make strides in contributing as full-fledged and equal members of society. (Women's Economic Empowerment, 2012: 6)

Although women make substantially larger contributions to agriculture, they are often denied rights to secure land tenure in many countries of the region. Besides, the gender gap



exists for many assets and services, including limited access to resources and production inputs. Available World Bank data indicate that as of 2019, female employment rate in the agricultural sector in the Arab world amounted to 29% compared to 18.2% of men. (Arab Horizon 2030 Report, 2017:29); (World Development Indicators, 2020 (WDI))

Rural women in the Arab region are a lynchpin in all agri-food value chains. Far more important, they play a pivotal role in ensuring food and nutrition security within the household and community. Yet they face many constraints and challenges. Women's role is crucial in natural resources management such as land and water but they are enmeshed in binding strictures, in all regions, more severely than men. Such constraints are shaped as follows:

- ❖ Limited access to resources and basic productive services, to technology and know-how skills, and to information on agricultural marketing. (Gender and ICTS, 2018: 7) report shows that 1.2 out of 2.9 billion women in low-income countries (LICs) own a mobile phone compared to a male ratio of 1.4 per 3.0 billion owning a mobile phone in Low-Income and Medium-Income Countries (LMICs) at 46 per cent, yet, million fewer women own a mobile, thus averaging 41% in medium income countries, (MICs). Gender and ICTs report, 2018 further indicates that 300 million women in Sub-Saharan Africa do not own a mobile phone. As to internet connection globally, 50.9% of men are reported to use the internet versus 44.9% of women who are less likely to use mobile internet than men. In Africa male mobile holders registered 24.9% while women averaged 18.6%, though. Likewise, In the Arab region, men outnumbered women by 47.7% versus 39.4%. Data drawn from Gender and ICTs, 2018 reveal women are underrepresented in local institutions and governance mechanisms and are less likely to have agency in decision-making.
- ❖ The prevalence of discriminatory social norms often implies that women bear a heavy workload indoors and outdoors. They are also burdened by unpaid, invisible and/or often unrecognized labor. Closing the gender gap underpinning inequities allows for an opportunity evolving into empowering women as main stakeholders in the agricultural sector. (Meeting our Goals: 2017:27)
- ❖ The traditional cultural aspect is taking a toll on women's role and responsibilities in agricultural development. This acts as a barrier obstructing women and girls from

ownership and access to cultivated land and the right to inheritance through land title and tenure. Women do not enjoy freedom of decision-making over their lives. It is therefore crucial to put forward a specific program addressing impeding customs and traditional mechanisms towards women's empowerment.

- ❖ Invisibility in respect to ownership and inheritance rights are the root causes of women's reluctance to shoulder risks, to their aversion for innovation and their vulnerability. This has entailed a tepidness in the investment interests which yield long-term benefits such as soil and water conservation measures.
- ❖ The difficulty of agricultural women laborers' access to agricultural information: It is therefore necessary to capitalize information and communication technology via the use of E-agriculture through mobile phone and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Women's use of mobiles and specialized agricultural two-way communication networks is worth considering. E-agriculture is a standalone mechanism encompassing the information and communication society applied to agricultural development for sustainability and food security. Such could be effective through information transfer via modern ICTs and smart agriculture. Agricultural information and knowledge are a lynchpin of development and a tool of intervention breaking off barriers and taking best advantage of opportunities imposed by social, economic and technological changes in society. Therefore, there should be a transfer of accumulated and renewable amount of information through the media as they lie at the very heart of rural development. The media significance lies in reaching out farm laborers and their families, while integrating most up-to-date agricultural technology and knowledge, in the least possible time, to face up to the scourge of disasters and in the event of emergency crises.
- ❖ Limited access to extension services: Rural extension services constitute the initial supply line for agricultural research findings and the nexus between such services and farm laborers' needs in this respect. This could form the basis to meet their needs and interests in the area of research enabling them access to inputs needed for results-oriented performance. Central Extension Departments are divided into horticulture department, the marketing and animal extension department, the department of agricultural councils, the extension units, and the department of rural development. Reaching out to farmers is undertaken through extension seminars held in different centers, and training through audio-visual extension methods. Programs towards improving rural women performance in the field of rural industries is further implemented through practical clarification of tasks and training in training centers and across field days besides conducting land sampling and identification of the problem











in selecting the most appropriate crops to help yields improvement. Extension services span into a monthly-based program for livestock vaccination thus, enabling farmers to acquire relevant knowledge and skills of substantive application of technical recommendations and their motives. This is geared across multi-faceted stages from land preparation (Land Prep) for cultivation up to crop harvesting. The lack of female extension officers, the ill-equipment of current extension agents, and the existence of social and economic restrictions that limit the interaction of rural women to benefit from extension services, albeit remain a barrier to access to extension services. (Agricultural Policy Documentation, 2009: 96)

- ◆ The prevalence of malnutrition-related diseases is more striking among rural women as they are overloaded with agricultural tasks while lacking income, knowledge and know-how knowledge to avoid infection. Data drawn from (FAO, 2018: 47) report indicate a poverty ratio in rural Egypt amounting to 32.3% for the year 2010, while averaging 16.4 in rural Jordan and 4.8% in rural Algeria. The report further reveals that the ratio of undernourished people across 2015-2017 in Algeria amounted to 1.9%, averaged 4.6% in Egypt, and 10.3% in Iraq. Likewise, the (Gender Equality in 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2018: 10) report shows females suffering from undernourishment in Egypt throughout (2014-2015) registering 26.1% compared to 21.24% for men. The same was obvious in Jordan where a share of 31.2% of undernourished women was reported as to 24.9% for men. In Morocco, 25.4% of women are ill-healthy while undernourished men represented 26.7%.
- ◆ Rural women carry out exhausting physical work in relation to land cultivation. To address such a challenge, the move towards introducing modern agricultural mechanization is thus necessary despite the limited tenure safety for rural women. Services channeled through agricultural cooperatives, Agricultural Development banks and Farm Credit Banks through machinery leasing of low value are crucial. Change in the traditional roles of such institutions will be of great assistance to rural women.
- ◆ Hardship endured by women in terms of marketing their agricultural crop is quite visible. This is due to social strictures on rural women's mobility, their limited access to roads and transportation along with other marketing-related hurdles. The Ministries of Agriculture shall adopt modern concepts in the labor system: the electronic marketing, besides opening export outlets for rural women through the ministries' properly reactivated electronic networks. This would necessitate the establishment of new and sophisticated networks responsive to rural women needs.



-  Gender disparity is most pronounced in the rights to agricultural extension services. This would evolve into rural women's handling resources as a public property which would get them into trouble of being indicted of natural resources depletion. Gender equality would help prevent such land degradation.
-  Low educational levels among rural women leaving them and their families enmeshed in vicious circles of poverty and malnutrition. Girls dropouts from school are more likely to exceed boys dropouts particularly at the advanced stages of education. The rate of girls not enrolled in junior high school is higher amounting to 18% as to 12% for boys. When students reach high school, girls are more likely to pursue their education than boys who drop out from school to get a job. While there is a rising likelihood of access of boys and girls from well-off households to secondary education in most countries, the rate of disadvantaged girls drops to 28% in Yemen, 20% in Syria while the proportion in Iraq is up to 12%. Literacy rate among impaired rural women does not exceed 6.7% in Yemen and amounts to 28.4% in the state of Palestine. ESCWA Annual Report 2018; UNICEF Annual Report, 2019; (Assaad et al. 2019)
-  (The Arab Sustainable Development Report, 2020: 60 (ASDR, 2020)) indicates that the literacy rate among young people is 90% in the Arab region, though around one-fifth of adults are illiterate. The literacy rate among young females amounts to 88%. where the rate of food insecurity for women is close to 13%, ranking higher than men. Such a dire status is further convoluted by the factors of education and poverty as the cost of a healthy diet exceeds global poverty line (\$1.90 per person per day to cover the cost): a cost seen quite considerably far beyond the poor capacity. Estimates reveal that 57% of the population or more cannot afford a healthy diet all the time throughout South Africa and Asia. (The State of Food Security and Nutrition, 2020: 205)
-  Rural women are an essential component in the translation of agricultural products into household food and nutritional security. This is obvious as they most often take up a crucial responsibility in growing food crops and home gardens along with their engagement in crop production, small animal husbandry and care, as well as income generating or family food preparation for themselves and their families. Rural women prove to manifest an impressive resilience. Even so, stark gender disparities are unfolded in the area of land tenure across the regions. For instance, female workers make up 37% of the total labor force in Egypt, half the labor population (50%) in Iraq while averaging 60% in Morocco. (Improvement of the Situation of Women and Girls in Rural Areas: Report 2011:7); The Arab Sustainable Development Report, 2020: 30 (ASDR, 2020); and (Arab Women Organization, 2015, 11)





- ❖ **Economic insecurity:** Women hold a significantly smaller share in active economic participation whose level in the Arab region accounts for the lowest with a ratio of 25% in 2015 (The global average is up to 50%). This is quite visible in women's involvement in unstable jobs as the Gender Gap in Land Rights Report; 2018 indicates a ratio of 38%. Regionally, the Arab World has registered a rising female youth unemployment rate, the highest ever equating to 39.3% in 2017. As to women farm labourers, they are denied social security and health insurance systems and do not enjoy retirement entitlements in labour code coverage in some countries. (The Arab Sustainable Development Report. 2020:79 (ASDR, 2020))
- ❖ Women tend to reduce the low living standards by using extreme food-coping strategies. They reduce their intake of food amounts or consume foods less beneficial to their bodies and health. Or else they limit diversity of diets (associated with higher staggering risks, especially for pregnant women and lactating mothers who cannot consume a variety of foods intake of micronutrients). The poor dietary intake lacking micronutrients could negatively impact their health and impair their nutritional status, thereby deteriorating the health conditions of their children. Viewing insecurity, this thus entails migrating in distressing conditions or selling their own assets, or further collecting wild food or taking unsafe jobs to raise their income. (Improving the Status of Women and Girls in Rural Areas Report, 2011: 7)
- ❖ Profiling the gender wage-gap, it is worth mentioning that it is quite pronounced in agricultural work of equal value. This can be interpreted within the prism of the so-called (gender discrimination), whereby social roles and values are divided or distributed on prevalent social-based grounds rather than on working quality basis. This arises the gender-based argument claiming that men deserve higher pay than women just because of their gender. The (Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment, 2010: 5) report reveals that women's employment in the agricultural sector in the Middle East reached 39.6%, whilst the share of men stood at 34% in 2000. As to women engaging in entrepreneurship in any other sector, the ratio amounts to 38.6% compared to 24.6% for men. Likewise, women's earnings equated a rate of 1.0%, for women, men's earnings averaged 9 times as much as women with 9.4%, a figure once again assertive of the wage gap. Women still suffer from such a wide pay disparity be it in the public or private sector. For instance, the wage gap rate in Egypt is around 22%, whilst Morocco and Tunisia are among countries to better address such an issue as they managed to bridge the gender pay gap. As for entrepreneurship,

19% of men hold their own businesses in the Arab countries, compared to only 9% of women with an entrepreneurial capacity (Women and the Achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab Region, 2016: 22)

- ❖ Compulsory unemployment of female employees in the agricultural sector. Also coined force majeure unemployment occurring in the event of male and female employee's layoff by their employer and involuntary loss of their job through no fault of their own and irrespective of their job fit status pursuant to ILO standards. It is argued that women labourers in the production sector endure threats of daily or seasonal layoffs due to their exclusion from social coverage under the labour law. (Mervat Sedky, 2017)
- ❖ The lack of safe means of transportation for women workers in the agricultural sector on their way to and from their workplaces.
- ❖ Lack of Health and social insurance coverage for agricultural women laborers.
- ❖ Time poverty: one of the most common manifestations of gender inequality. Women bear the three-fold brunt of reproductive, productive and social responsibilities which entrap them in a vicious circle of poverty, hunger and ill-health. The burden of unpaid care work is disproportionately taken by women to sustain their households, including cooking, cleaning, raising children, caring for the elderly and the sick, and collecting water and firewood to cook the meal for their household. Such household chores take up a long time and often limit women's opportunities to engage in income-generating activities. Globally, women spend 4.5 hours per day on average doing unpaid work making up twice as much time as spent by men. Closing such a gender gap by 2025 would help increase global GDP by an estimated 23% considering that such a facet of gender inequality is reflective of the violation of fundamental rights of women which imposes a high economic cost. (Equality in the new Global Plan, 2018: 2)

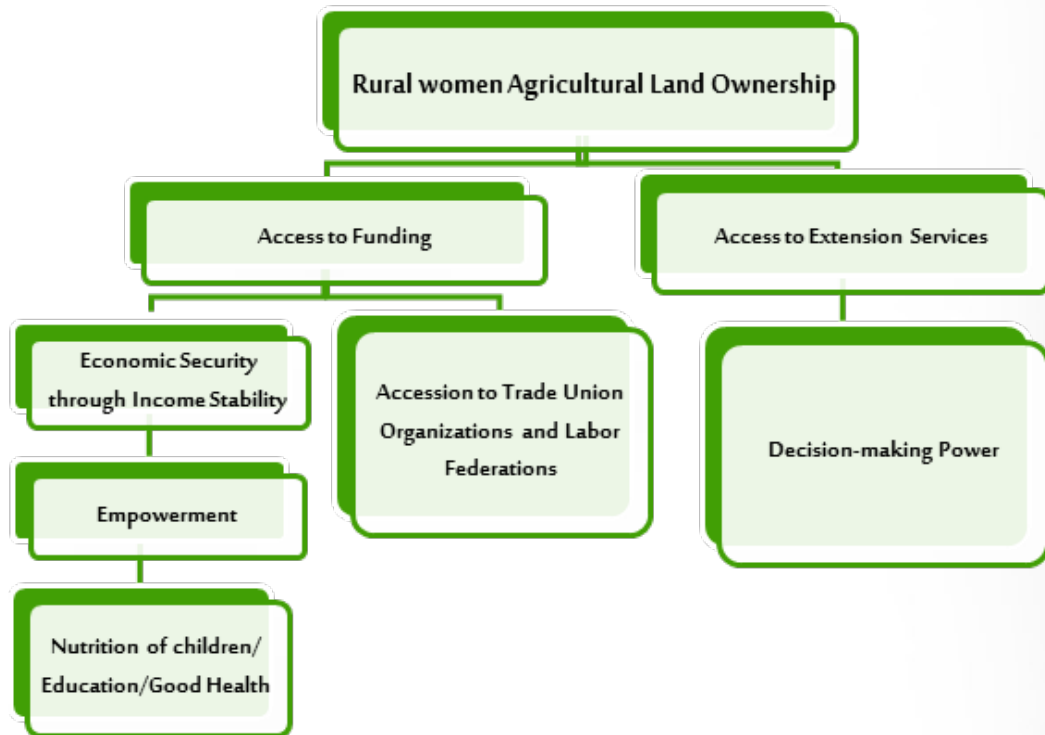
**The following question arises from the afore-mentioned challenges:**

**Why is agricultural land tenure paramount to rural women empowerment and reducing inequalities?**

- ❖ Land tenure for rural women is layered with limitations. Tenure safety unlocks access to agricultural extension services, and credit and subsidies while allowing them agency in decision-making. The fact that rural women have much less opportunity than men in terms of land ownership not only leaves women's farms with de-facto less productivity, but also often excludes women from engaging in farmers' organizations, in workers' unions, and hence contributing to community networks and forums that foster productivity and promoting growth. This induces economic security that leads



to empowerment and allows for better nutrition, education and health for the children. Such farming approach could thereby contribute to attaining some of the set targets of SDG2 (Zero Hunger) SDGs 1, 3, 4, and SDG 5 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.



Despite progress attained in relation to bridging the gap between men and women in many countries in the Arab region ( education), UN Women has indicated that women are reported to severely bear disproportionate effects of pervasive wide gender gaps in the area of influence, power, and in access to and control over resources. In 2017, the Arab region was identified as the farthest from achieving gender parity with around 40% of remaining gender. Such divides are convoluted by the rising poverty rates and inequalities, along with ongoing conflicts impacting both men and women. These gendered imbalances pose many challenges to the agriculture sector.

Arab agriculture faces many developmental hurdles and challenges. Many economists assess the main obstacles constituting developmental issues that could be considered in the short or medium term if national programs were implemented, while they argue that challenges are developmental dilemmas difficult to overcome in the face of shorter-term policies. In this context, addressing these challenges cannot, then be overcome unless a better-fitting national action is implemented through agricultural policy mechanisms.



## **Fifth: Mainstreaming Gender in Agricultural Policies in the Arab Region**

Given sustainable agricultural development strategy of some states and aiming at illustrating how gender was integrated towards gender equality; this gender responsive approach is hereunder stated:

### **The Agricultural Development Strategy in Palestine**

The first strategic goal is centered on building and strengthening resilience and spurring the will to cling to the bond between the Palestinian male and female farmers and their land. Fostering the contribution of the agricultural sector in providing development requirements for the State of Palestine is critical and is thus achieved through the following policy:

Support and protection of marginalized groups, mainly small farmers, the rural poor, women and Bedouins. On average, the rate of both male and female farmland holders who make all their produce their daily consumption stands to around 70% of the total number of landholders. Such implementation policy involves a set of activities that directly contribute to achieving household-level food security. Also, interventions are founded on the rural population towards food security, access to employment opportunities, additional income sources while adopting modern technologies in both plant and animal production. (Palestine Agricultural Sector Strategy, 2016: 21)

### **The Agricultural Development Strategy in Lebanon**

The strategy aims to support small-scale farmers, livestock breeders and producers along with fostering youth and women's engagement in agriculture and entrepreneurship investment. Such hinges on invigorating the agricultural sector by new blood. This intervention is concluded through provision of access to loans for agricultural and rural development. The strategic objectives also include conducting economic feasibility studies featuring several youth and women-reach agricultural projects. (Ministry of Agriculture Strategy 2015-2019 Lebanon, 34)



### Agricultural Development Strategies in Egypt

The vision of Agricultural Development Strategy is reflected in:” The pursuit of a dynamic agricultural sector-based inclusive economic and social growth, capable of rapid and sustainable growth, which particularly means, assisting groups most in need and rural poverty reduction.»

As to the policy towards enhancement of rural women’s role in agricultural development issues, integrated in the strategy; the arguments are associated with legal status and the lack of legal or real estate components for most rural women. Such components enable women’s effective potential to take up their roles in the rural sector development. Besides the prevalence of poverty cycles among rural women and the high illiteracy rate, women bear multiple responsibilities amidst the absence of a significant number of their spouses. With a view to removing such impediments, the policy fundamental goals also include increasing women’s resilience to natural disasters and promoting their investment environment in various agricultural activities. This could be effective through Institutional and financial support, resourcing women with soft credit lines adequate to their economic conditions in terms of loan guarantees and interest rates. Likewise, facilitating collective loan procedures through women’s associations that operate within the framework of economic projects is worth considering. (Sustainable Agricultural Development Strategy 2030, Egypt, 2009: 94)

The (Arab Organization for Agricultural Development) stated that the achievement of food security strategy in the Arab world, conceived within the framework of the future vision towards the attainment of the proposed goals; includes seven main programs covering thirty-four (34) developmental areas. Each area is geared by a sub-program. Analysis of program no.6 on the contribution to development and rural prosperity, concluded that it mainly targeted poverty rates alleviation in the Arab rural areas. This is quite visibly embodied in enhancing rural women role in rural development, generating opportunities for employment and thereby reducing risks in agriculture.

The program targeting rural women covers the following national development components: improving rural women status, supporting female-headed households, and developing small and medium rural enterprises. The program would also seek to enhance rural small and micro credit.





In respect to former policies analysis, questions arise to identify how far rural women gender equality and empowerment related interventions have been forged ahead throughout Arab agricultural policies towards attainment of food security: the questions are stated as follows:

- ◆ Has thinking outside the box on rural women land tenure been attained, through their empowerment, to promote productivity and food security?
- ◆ Has equitable access to natural resources in the form of seeds, fertilizers and pesticides been achieved?
- ◆ Has access to extension services been materialized?
- ◆ Where is gender equity reflected as to access to household food?
- ◆ Have rural women been involved in field and farm-management-decision-making agency?
- ◆ Has health insurance been included within the coverage umbrella of female workers and workers in the agricultural sector?
- ◆ How far has the agricultural labor protection law, which was overlooked, been assured? Has there been a gender-responsive social protection?
- ◆ To what extent have the Occupational Health and Safety Standards (OH&S) considering agricultural workers been ensured?
- ◆ What are the features of (unpaid work) taken up by rural women, which makes them enmeshed in the poverty cycle?
- ◆ How far have rural women and men been considered as to e-agriculture operating mechanisms in the Arab world?
- ◆ Has equal access to marketing information been ensured?
- ◆ How far have men and women been trained on new agricultural technologies? In terms of capacity and skill building towards breaking down barriers to flee income poverty traps and escape skills and abilities poverty to be on-track for SDGs targets.

The objective of the food security strategy in the Arab world can be outlined in enhancing Arab agriculture modernizing efforts and in developing its productive capacity promotion and competitiveness. This is reflected in a quest for safeguarding price stability and building staple commodity stockpile which could evolve into ensuring the smooth supply flow of these commodities to consumers throughout the year. Efforts are undertaken against any potential global or domestic market covariate crises. The stockpile thereby enables agricultural commodities price stabilization through the dynamic supply-demand balance provided by the strategic reserve.





In terms of the advancement of the role of rural women in agricultural development issues policy, it is stated to be most pronounced in financial support and the creation of soft funding lines adequate to rural women economic conditions. This also applies to loan processing facilities. Nonetheless, much rests in a sea change in the training sector, in skills and self-development to achieve gender equality in the agricultural and property sector. A radical change that creates economic security that allows for social stability and safety, with an endeavor to remove deeply ingrained gender bias against agricultural women laborers. An action that transcends mere small enterprise financial support to touch on social justice.

As pointed out in these data, it is obvious that disregard to address and meet the actual needs of women or to reduce gender gap in the agricultural sector through food security policies is most pronounced. This non-observance may be due to a lack of conviction related to women's roles in the agricultural sector. Such conviction might be rooted in the gender-blind awareness about sensitivity to women's status on food security map in as much as women are excluded from agricultural land ownership. The lack of recorded ownership entitlements testifying women are effective food producers is a salient facet of gender discrepancy. An underlying cause of invisibility most likely reflects the fact that women are, by and large, mere daily or seasonal laborers producing food without being quantified in records and data. Gender-based traditions and attitudes also underlie the way towards meeting women's needs. They might affirm women's engagement in agricultural work as a paid or an unpaid worker, but do not hold or support their right to land titles. Limited access to support services also acts as a daunting impediment. For instance, women's access to marketing and extension information, to credits, to training and to self-development is obvious. Likewise, the lack of participation in field management is falling short as to their involvement in workers' organizations and unions in their quality as people engaged in agricultural activities; not as mere unpaid laborers because of their gender.

The (Global Food Policy Report, 2020: 41) states that rural women may bear additional work burden and responsibility with no agency. Or better yet, without freedom of decision-making power, with no access to and control over resources to make best use of new opportunities. The change in social patterns between men and women in agricultural work remains nonetheless unclear? Or the scale of visible impacts of such changes on women and men in terms of work and power relations? Global evidence refers, however, to the rising trend, in scores of countries, in rural women participation in agriculture most

often centered on seasonal or unpaid work. It is reported that women are less paid and endure appalling labor conditions than men doing similar jobs.

Given the previous interpretations, an attempt to expound some mechanisms towards integration of gender perspective into the agricultural sector towards gender equality is henceforth worth-considering in the following section:

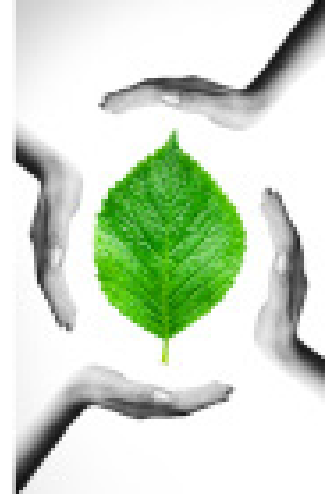
## **Sixth: Mechanisms Needed for Gender Mainstreaming in the Agricultural Sector.**

The goal of Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) policy is to achieve gender equality in sustainable agricultural production and rural development for the elimination of hunger and poverty. This means that FAO “works towards gender equality in all its areas of work—food and nutrition security, agriculture and consumer protection, economic and social development, fisheries and aquaculture, forestry, natural resource management and environment, technical cooperation, knowledge exchange, research and extension”.

Priority will be given to supporting organizations and activities that advance women’s access to nutritious food and women’s access to and control over land and other productive resources; strengthening rural women’s organizations and networks; increasing women’s participation and leadership in rural institutions; incorporating women’s knowledge of agriculture into programs and projects; and ensuring the development of technologies and services that reduce women’s work burden.

FAO seeks to institute mechanisms that ensure gender equality capacity and knowledge building along with the implementation of advocacy mechanisms on gender equality issues. Advocacy and awareness raising strategy on gender equality are developed and implemented in line with developing partnerships with civil society organizations (CSOs), relevant rural women associations and national and regional stakeholders. Considering the cultural change, mechanisms are developed to minimize gender discrimination in the workplace and to promote a gender-friendly work environment. FAO works on monitoring and evaluation of current progress to consider the extent to which such interventions addressed SDG5 (Gender Equality) (FAO, 2013:13-15) Some policies addressing gender integration goals in an endeavor to achieve gender equity have also been put forward. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) seeks to achieve the following goals by 2025:

- 🌿 Ensuring women’s participation, at par with men, in decision-making in rural areas and institutions, with agency in shaping laws, policies and programs.
- 🌿 Achievement of equitable access to decent employment, income, land and other productive resources.





- ❖ Women and men have equal access to goods and services for agricultural development; and to markets.
- ❖ Reduce women's work burden by 20% through improved technologies, services and infrastructure.
- ❖ The share of total agricultural aid committed to projects related to women and gender equality is increased to 30%.

To ensure the implementation of gender mainstreaming, FAO institutes a series of institutional mechanisms, hereunder illustrated:

1. **Capacity building:** through gender mainstreaming into all capacity building activities. The results of capacity development activities in gender equality, from the HQs to the country levels, are tracked annually.
2. **Knowledge Building:** Knowledge on gender equality, especially FAO gender equality results, is systematically documented and publicly shared. Besides, learning platforms and the sharing of best practices on gender equality programming are supported through training for both male and female FAO experts.
3. **Communication:** A FAO communication strategy that includes gender equality is developed as an integral component of the strategy which should be developed and implemented.
4. **Partnerships:** Partnerships for advocacy, technical advice, capacity development, and monitoring and evaluation are developed with gender experts, CSOs – especially rural women's organizations and networks—local authorities and private sector stakeholders at the country and regional levels.
5. **Culture Change:** Processes and mechanisms are developed to minimize gender discrimination in the workplace and to promote a gender-friendly work environment.
6. **Monitoring and Reporting:** All organizational units and regional, sub-regional and country offices report annually on their gender equality results. Departmental heads and regional, sub-regional and country representatives provide oversight for implementation of the policy in their units.
7. **Evaluation:** All processes led and supported by the evaluation function consider the extent to which FAO addresses gender equality issues.
8. **Audit:** The audit mechanism annually assesses FAO's capacity to meet its gender equality mandate, including gender parity in staffing at the HQs. FAO thereby establishes a Steering Committee to monitor progress towards the achievement of its gender equality goal and objectives.

UN World Food Program (WFP) pursuit to integrate gender perspective into the food and nutrition policies, programs and projects, and to implement mechanisms is stated as follows:

1. **Food assistance adapted to different needs:** Women, men, girls and boys benefit from food assistance programs and activities adapted to their different needs and capacities.
2. **Equal participation:** Women and men participate equally in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of gender-transformative food security and nutrition relation in programs and policies.
3. **Decision-making by women and girls:** Women and girls have increased power in decision-making as to food security and nutrition in households, communities and societies.
4. **Gender and protection:** Food assistance does no harm to the safety, dignity and integrity of the women, men, girls and boys receiving it, and is provided in ways that respect their rights.

In an endeavor to implement objective 1 (Food assistance adapted to different needs) and to break down gender inequity, WFP defined a gender-based intervention. Collecting, analyzing and using sex and age-disaggregated data is the first step to identify where effects proved most severe, thereby designing sound food assistance programs and policies. Such an intervention enables the examination of power dynamics and the way these might shape gender roles, access to resources and the relative constraints different people face. Gender and age-analysis is a tool for examining how differences in gender roles, activities, needs, opportunities, rights, participation, access and control affect women, men, girls and boys of different ages in specific contexts. For WFP, this tool ensures that all food assistance is adapted to the different needs and capacities of the women, men, girls and boys whom it serves. When gender and age-analysis indicate that one population group is particularly vulnerable or most risk-prone affected, actions targeting that group can be promoted and focus will be effective. This would enable evaluation of power dynamics and visibly illustrate how disparities in men and women's role, activities, needs, opportunities, participation and control could impact men and women alike. Such mechanisms could ensure that food assistance is adapted to different needs.

Considering WFP objective 2 contained in equal participation, gender transformative food assistance involves designing and implementing policies and programs that recognize the importance of gender equality. This is quite visible in promoting equitable sharing of power, control over resources, decision-making and support of gender equality and women's empowerment. The core goal does not lie in mere addressing of food insecurity but rather touches on enhancement of sustainable impacts.





The third objective: decision-making by women and girls, integrated within the WFP gender policy, constitutes a key controlling variable in improving food security and nutrition. Women and girls are often more affected than men and boys by poverty, discrimination, violence and reduced or lack of access to food assistance. Target 3 also laid the focus on the significance of women and girls' education in strengthening their voice in decision-making at all levels.

As for Gender and Protection objective 4, it is centered on the WFP gender action seeking to minimize gender-based violence (GBV) risks resulting from gender and power inequalities. WFP treats GBV as a life-threatening protection issue, (WFP Gender Policy “2015-2020”).

Reviewing some mechanisms for integrating gender into the agricultural sector, aspects of Gender Equality and Empowerment of Rural Women (GEWE) between reality and expectations in the Arab region are worth propounding.

### **Seventh: Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Rural Women and Girls in the Arab Region between Reality and Expectations**

Women in the Arab region are essential contributors in many areas and continue to break down barriers. Despite their distinct role and self-assuring voice many barriers impede their capabilities. They still fall short in terms of representation within the labor forces and at decision-making levels. The breach of impediments impairing women's potential in full economic, social and political engagement is critical towards the achievements of the entire set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Mapping the level of empowerment of rural women as custodians of the agricultural section, there seems to be a “long way to walk” in removing inequitable gender power relations. Rural women take up substantial roles, yet they face too many challenges. Their role in supporting their households and communities in ensuring food security and nutrition, and in natural resources management, such as land and water, is pivotal. However, they experience more impeding constraints than men, across all regions, in accessing to basic productive resources and services, technology, market information, and financial assets. Still, they are under-represented in local institutions and entities thus falling short in decision-making power. Besides, discriminatory social norms and strictures exacerbate their endurance.



More sustainable efforts in investing in rural women's capacity need be undertaken along with establishing an empowering environment for equitable engagement to make best use of transformations that impact the rural landscape. The dimension of gender equality and women's socio-economic empowerment should be anchored at the heart of any gender responsive social policy towards sustained agriculture, poverty eradication and promotion of food security. Since the interconnectedness between poverty and food security in terms of the scale of gender equality implementation cannot be overlooked. Gender inequality is a determinant to the severity of such problems whose effects would be reduced if a gender perspective were integrated.

The Arab Women Organization has made such a matter explicit indicating that 100 million people could be lifted out of poverty if gender gap were narrowed. Closing the gap will thereby entail extreme poverty reduction and rise in savings by 35%. Women agricultural land tenure held in their names reduces their vulnerability to domestic violence, whose level heightens eightfold in the absence of such a key asset. Social stability is ensured by rural women's access to economic safety threshold. Likewise, addressing women's health that reflects positively on their good health, and their children's will positively contribute to the rise in girls' school enrollment rate to 10%, thus going through the pathway of integrating women in the decision-making process. (Arab Women Organization, 2015).

Available data indicate that the number of people going hungry worldwide has slowly increased throughout 2014-2019. The number of undernourished people today is more than they have been since 2014, with an increase of 60 million people, up to 10 million people across 2018 and 2019. Initial estimates drawn from global economic prospects amidst Covid-19 pandemic indicate that the number of undernourished people is projected to soar from 83 to 132 million in 2020, according to economic growth. (FAO, 2020)

Women are the essential food producers. They produce half (50%) of grown food worldwide, with up to 80% of the food in most developing countries. Yet, statistics indicate that 7 out of 10 hungry people in the world are women and girls. The urge to promote gender equality and empowerment of women (GEWE) in agriculture to win, sustainably, the fight against hunger could be channeled through access to land tenure, other productive resources, inputs, knowledge and financial services (FAO Closing Gender Gap Report 2009: 4). When equal opportunities are unlocked for women in terms of access to land property rights, to seeds and fertilizers, the inroads in agricultural productivity and farm yields will rise to 20-30%. If women had the same access as men to assets and resources, the number of undernourished people in the world would decrease by approximately 12–17% which is equal to 100-150 million people. Likewise, if women had the same access to productive resources as men, farm yields will rise by 20–30 percent.







Land tenure is a significant part of social, political and economic structures and is multidimensional bringing into play social, technical, economic, institutional, legal and political aspects that are often ignored or unrecognized. Limitations on women's access to productive inputs and resources inhibits agricultural productivity and food security promotion in the region. Figures indicate the low share of women landholders with land tenure titles held in their name in Jordan, Tunisia, Lebanon, Egypt and Saudi Arabia whereby the proportion does not exceed 7% of the total agricultural land holders. (Arab Region Outlook Report 2030, 2017: 29).

The proportion of people living below the poverty line globally defined as those living on \$1.90 a day is obviously stated. The share in extreme poverty in the least developed Arab countries approximately stands at 16%. Extreme poverty remains high in low-income countries of the Arab region where figures exceed global average and all averages in other developing regions. (The Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020 (ASDR 2020). The (FAO, 2018: 47) report reveals that the number of the rural extreme poor are much higher than the urban extreme poor arguing that lack of access to education, healthcare and other public services are the main factors widening the rural-urban gap. Compared to urban areas, the figure ranges between three and twenty times less in rural areas.

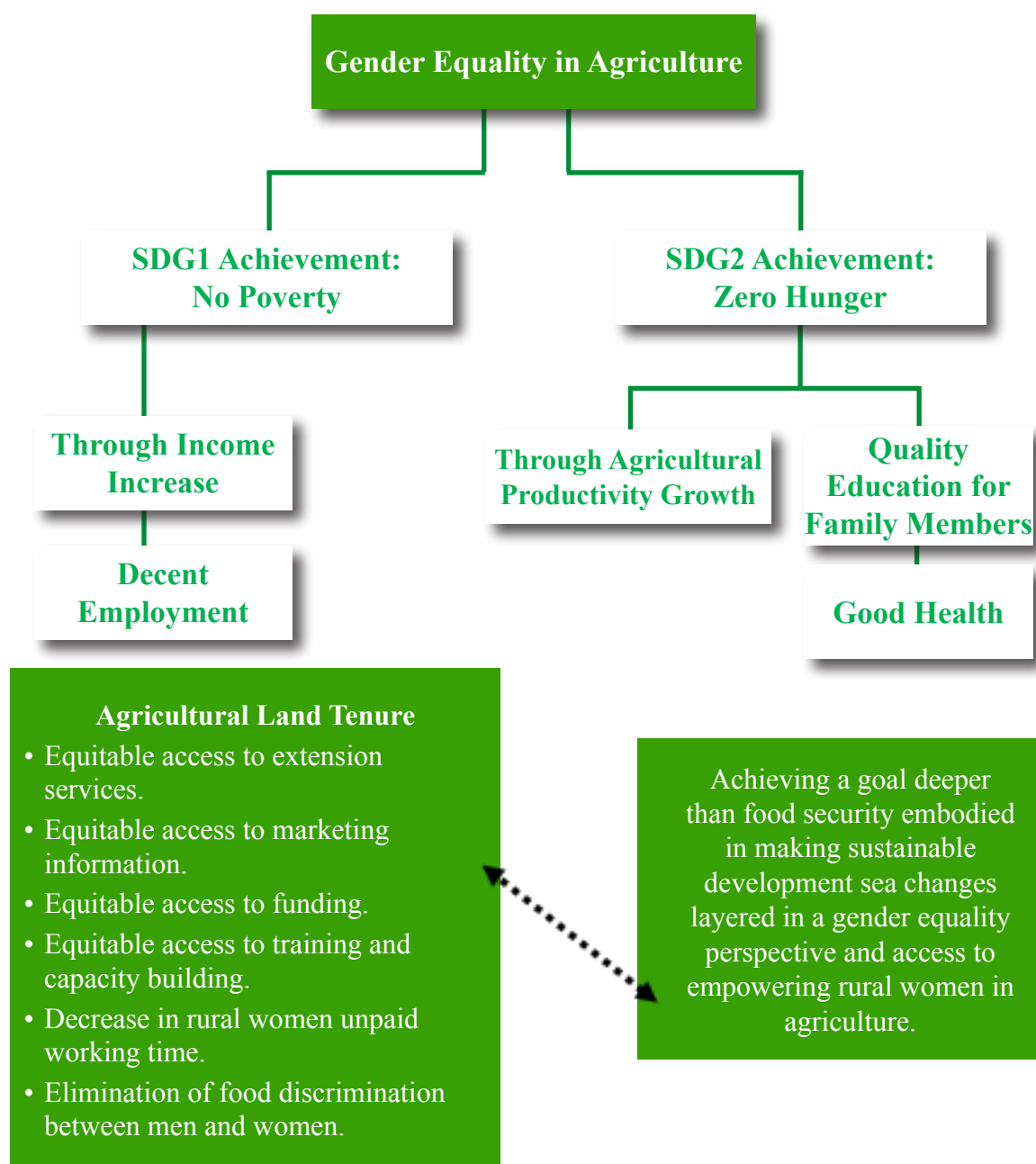
Statistics reported by the (Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, 2019, 17) indicate that women are heavily poorer than men. Estimates worldwide register 70% out of 1.4 billion individuals of the world's extreme poor are women and girls. Inequitable power relation and women's exclusion from participation in decision-making act as structural factors of social and political instability that generate poverty. Data also include that the wage gap stands at 23% globally. Without decisive action to set up measures, it will take another 68 years to achieve pay equity. (Turning Promises into Action: Gender equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, 2018: 5). Regionally, the (Gender Gap in Land Rights: 2018) report and (The Arab Sustainable Development Report 2020 "ASDR 2020") note that the entire Arab countries are ranked least in the Economic Forum report in terms of gender inequity which would take the Arab countries and neighboring countries around 153 years for economic gender gap to be closed.

The empowerment of rural women is the key to achieving Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Agenda. When rural women are empowered in the agricultural sector through the Gender equality perspective, this would induce high levels of food security through productivity rise per feddan (0.42 hectares (ha)). Equally, the phenomenon of (Feminization of Agriculture) proves that women have become the Female Face of Farming in agriculture (Female Face of Farming, FFF). Empowering and investing in



rural women in the agricultural sector will unlock opportunities for significantly high level of productivity, hunger and malnutrition reduction, and foster rural livelihoods that would reach not only women as beneficiaries but favoring all. ([www.fao.org/gender/resources/infographics](http://www.fao.org/gender/resources/infographics)). Empowering rural women in the agricultural sector will further contribute to quality education, good health and decent employment. We conclude that it is not so much a question of mere attainment of food security, it is rather a matter of targets embodied in whole sustainable development sea changes which are layered in a gender equality responsive policy that can mobilize the empowerment of rural women in the agricultural sector, as hereunder shown:

Figure: Gender Mainstreaming and Rural Women Empowerment to Achieve 2030 SDGs





## RECOMMENDATIONS



Achieving SDG 1 (No poverty) and SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in the Arab Region rests on gender mainstreaming in policies through the inclusion of research for the adoption of new practices, capacity building, equal access to resources and services, elimination of food discrimination, rural women empowerment, driven by raising the social status of rural people and ensuring that it is upheld. Such are hereunder stated:

### Focus Area 1: Area of Research

It shall herein include the following:

- ◆ Ensure research, information and use sex and age-disaggregated data whose task is to carry out gender analysis of the real status and socio-economic roles ascribed to both women and men. Such available information could be drawn upon to lay the ground for states to put forward fair programs and policies as well as better understand the dynamics of real gender roles. As such detail data can indicate how mainstreaming gender within agricultural gender policies are essential to achieving gender equity in agriculture in as much as women's socio-political, economic and environmental rights are indivisible and interrelated. Thereby, any failure in one aspect will accordingly impair the other. This would call for institutionally strengthened harmony dwelling between organizations in the endeavour to develop rural women empowerment policies and underpin gender equity. Such equity should also be reflected through monitoring, evaluation, and sustained and participatory measures of equity holding great promise towards a sublime goal: attaining food security.
- ◆ Necessary available statistics on male and female agricultural laborers notably agricultural and rural statistics on seasonal employment.

## Focus Area 2: Capacity Building

It shall herein include the following:


- ❖ In this respect, building rural women's capacity to maximize farm productivity through access to education and training on the way how to introduce E-agriculture concept is critical. To be effective, rural women should be offered expanding opportunities of adopting technologies for sustainable farming systems through access to ICTs. The impact will particularly fruitful if rural women are involved in intensive training which forms the basis of their knowledge limited to the yet high illiteracy rate. This will open opportunities for shared cooperation between the Ministry of Agriculture and ICT and the Ministry of Communication drawing on and adapting e-extension. Such interventions would appeal for the development of a soft infrastructure in the uptake of frontier technologies towards agriculture digitisation.
- ❖ Creating local farming schools and agricultural centres by the Ministry of Education MoE and the Ministry of Agriculture to enhance agricultural education. Implemented in Japan, the "Future Farmer" model's mandate is to foster students graduates thrive their skills and capabilities. Japanese "Future Farm Managers" are provided with more learning opportunities and training acquiring a higher level of skills in agricultural productivity maximizing and knowledgeable of crop marketing. Related education spans over a four-year continuous training in a row which would help imbue highly- educated and qualified labour into the farm sector. The successful experience could in turn be inductive to its adoption on rural girls while setting forth norms that consider customs and traditions responsive to Arab Societies.
- ❖ Designing mechanisms and strategies for engaging young people, especially women, in productive and rural work based on a market-oriented investment in line with vocational training for rural women in small agricultural industries. This will, thus unlock opportunities for access to decent employment and enable them to diversify their access ground. Cooperation between research centres the Ministry of Agriculture and the colleges of Agriculture is a fundamental ingredient for the pursuit of agricultural education.
- ❖ Formulating media programs on agricultural TV channels which operate on conceptual clarification and streamlining on girls' empowerment, gender roles, gender equity mechanisms and highlighting daunting challenges faced by rural girls. Based on specialists' guidance, girls could handle the way such challenges are addressed. Such could be driven by a trend of creating a widespread area for understanding gender issues, thereby lending legitimacy of the noble cause that enhances girls' building of their confidence. Cooperation between the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Communication and Women's Rights Organization is a significant step towards such pursuits.







- ◆ Full use of rural women traditional knowledge in agriculture as studies have proven evidence of their capacity in the conservation of plant and genetic resources which they have thrived through acquisition and farm practices. The maintenance of traditional knowledge can also act as a sharing avenue worth-considering as rural women are reputedly regarded as custodians of knowledge or knowledge Heritage Banks in the agricultural sector.
- ◆ Rural Women equitable access to technology, financial services and training. Undertake efforts to ensure a secure environment for rural women participation in training in agricultural extension activities and help remove some gender ingrained cultural barriers. This entails awareness raising geared by the (Keys of Change): Most trusted rural communities individuals.
- ◆ Societal awareness, notably those targeting men, the elderly and She/He leaders in society as well as clergy, on traditional customs and practices that can nonetheless discriminate against women. Making use of rural media programs on agricultural TV channels geared by the Ministry of Agriculture is critical. This will thereby create a societal awareness of the relevance of women's capacity development and empowering them with the knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to participate fully in the development process. Civil society organizations (CSO) and women's rights organisations would have a share in such sensitization.
- ◆ Focus on developing women's capacities in planning and decision-making with respect to agricultural land management. To support this effort, this implies the engagement of men in women capacity development for good governance training courses. Such participatory approach entails awareness in women's agency as autonomous household decision makers.
- ◆ Further dissemination of rural schools (akin to those in the state of Sudan) and life schools for rural women (implemented in Egypt) through curriculum design of pro women rural extension program and better education in the fields of management and marketing.
- ◆ Combating illiteracy, child marriage and marrying off minors. Tuning in the education of both girls and boys is strengthened through the development of inter-ministry common policies notably the Ministry of Information and the Ministry of Education. Ensuring places of education for women and girls is obvious as education is a channel to poverty eradication and skills and capabilities' development. This would provide an opportunity for women to build a decent employment and would be enhanced for better improved livelihoods.

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- Focus on rural women's acquired knowledge and enhance their productive and leadership skills in line with capacity building to pursue their training in a variety of social, economic and political areas, giving effect to their status as productive yet not marginalized social entities within their surroundings hence equipping them with skills to pursue rural livelihoods.
  - Promotion of women's sustainable participation in the agricultural production food value chain geared by gender-responsive training and facilitate the flow of recent innovations.
  - Sensitization tools fostering agricultural work risk rural women. Awareness raising by means of training sessions for improving the gender sensitivity.
  - Research institution and centres' support to further rural women awareness of knowledge sharing of effective ways of Agriculture and Food Product handling as well as public Health Maintenance.

### Focus Area 3: Equitable Access to Resources and Services

It shall herein include the following:

- Ensure women have equitable access to economic resources and basic services. To further sustain their livelihoods, rural women should enjoy, at their discretion, access to the rights to assets' ownership and disposition. Such shall be premised upon fair enforcement and support of inheritance instruments institutions. Inheritance rights will offer rural women opportunities and build their capacities to ensure their access to land resources and secure land tenure. This entitlement would be consistent with awareness raising of their legal rights. Awareness raising mechanisms are vital to empower women, through appropriate sound means of ensuring training in women's rights. This could be fostered by cooperation of the Arab Women Organization, the Ministry of Agriculture and the state's legislative bodies in tandem.
- Ensure the Ministry of Agriculture assistance of men and women's equitable access to markets and E-commerce through revitalization of farmers' assistance and extension related electronic websites. The Ministry of Communication and Information Technology could initiate dissemination of the culture of digitization enhanced by the agricultural sector and E-extension.
- Equitable Access to extension services that would further increase productivity through the reactivation of agricultural Cooperatives in line with the enhancement and development of extension centres. Reaching out to rural women and providing them with such services is an overriding necessity given the cultural and spatial constraints impeding them.
- Access of rural women most in need to cropland through the channel of women's rights organizations' assistance and backstopping. This could be reflected in the





organizations' commitment to paying yearly lease value of the agricultural land (set at one acre per a woman working in farming). Rural women are thus given freedom of choice between running traditional small enterprises and land ownership, which could be a further new item in rural women empowerment. Such a step could unlock opportunities for rural women and enable them to extend their entrepreneurship off-the farm, beyond traditional enterprises such as food industries and traditional handicrafts. This was reflected in the practice previously implemented in Egypt whereby rural Women Heads of Household Landholders (WHHLs), have had access to reclamation land in the Wadi Al- Nogra, Aswan. Still, daunting challenges are to be addressed in: The difficulty of growing desert land and the dire need for substantial efforts in land cultivation and reclamation. The WHHLs experience is worth expanding if premised upon cooperation between the Ministry of National Solidarity, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Investment and Women's Rights Organizations.

- ❖ Considering agriculture as a fundamental determinant of well-being, agricultural banks and cooperatives serve to provide advanced harvesting machines at a nominal fee to rural women who enjoy agricultural land tenure by spreading the idea of collective harvesting.
- ❖ With a view to fostering farm activities in a gender sensitive way, the Ministry of Agriculture shall provide support material to Women Heads of Household Landholders (WHHLs) who could have access to seeds and fertilizers.
- ❖ Marketing facilitation to better serve rural Women Heads of Household Landholders (WHHLs) should be geared through the Ministry of Agriculture which will thereby spur land title registration in their name for the purpose of tenure security. Such viable solutions break down barriers of land title previously denied to rural women because of some impeding customary factors whose impact on their livelihood is particularly dire.
- ❖ In terms of sustaining local marketing and export solution, fostering partnership agreement between active local agricultural product cooperatives and some markets serving more than one avenue will be critical within and across the rural areas.
- ❖ The establishment of produce assembly, sorting, selection and packaging units in rural areas as a marketing solution to local produce and export.
- ❖ Holding an annual marketing festival for rural women, Bedouin women and coastal women products across all Arab countries in the context of rural women assistance, connecting rural women to markets in marketing their product surplus, promotion of their participation and better product quality.

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- ◆ A review of the co-operative law operating to ensure it is more coherent with the challenges faced by rural women.

#### Focus Area 4: Elimination of Food Discrimination against Rural Women

It shall herein include the following:

- ◆ Building awareness about deep-rooted cultural and gender-biased discriminatory practices and household dynamics impairing women and girls' food security.
- ◆ Conducting research on the correlation between food discrimination against women and food security is critical to respond to such practices in the Arab Region.
- ◆ Continued support of school feeding programmes in the poorest villages.

#### Focus Area 5: The Empowerment of Rural Women

It shall herein include the following:

- ◆ Awareness raising about the importance of women's economic empowerment and equal access to gender opportunities. Institutionally, building awareness about the elimination of existing structural and legislative barriers that pose challenges to women's employment. Such could be geared by amending discriminatory labour laws, building safe transportation networks in rural areas, and extending health and social insurance coverage for female farm labourers.
- ◆ Further support of rural development through the creation of decent rural employment opportunities in rural areas, including revitalizing and development of small and medium-sized agricultural industries as well as rejuvenating industrial supplies to the Agri-food Sector.
- ◆ One of the most glaring aspects of gender inequality is related to the time poverty. To better address this issue and free up rural women time, the adoption of adequate empowering policies remains central to enable them to overcome the challenges that would lead to impoverishment, severely limit their ability to improve their livelihoods and spur high levels of hunger. In this context, consultations of rural women on their technological needs are to be highly considered in studies and research. Also, the move towards saving rural women time and efforts through improving rural infrastructure and services should be given due attention.
- ◆ Rural women empowerment through the establishment of an "integrated agro-industrial complex benefiting small enterprises". Through state support, the integrated agro-industrial complex could jointly be implemented through the Ministries of Agriculture, Social Solidarity and supporting organizations. This would lay the ground for an enabling environment benefiting rural women to raise their income towards a decent employment that would improve their livelihoods, boost their outputs and spare them from low-paid seasonal jobs.



- ◆ Small enterprises social, economic and environmental mapping in the rural areas as an evidence of such enterprises' success. Roadmaps are determined in terms of available resources and agricultural yields consistent with the way to utilize and benefit from those resources.
- ◆ Generating awareness-raising campaigns on bank loans for micro start-ups through revival of Agricultural Co-operatives' roles in the rural villages.
- ◆ Integrating financial education for rural community through holding financial literacy training sessions in cooperation between banks and the Ministry of Agriculture.
- ◆ Working towards marketing rural women products through organizing permanent and seasonal exhibits whereby rural women could seize marketing opportunities free of charge or at a suitable cost. They could as well accrue benefits from the summer season, the return of expats and tourists to facilitate marketing of rural women products as direct sale incentives. The role of the Ministry of Tourism is critical in reactivating and supporting eco-tourism and agri-tourism sectors given their substantially effective role of in the safeguard of Heritage and rural development.
- ◆ Clarifying and valuing women's invisible work in general and rural women via supporting women's relevant organizations active in the field. Hence, promoting the concept of active participation and leadership. This will give agricultural laborers' rights and duties broader visibility in line with conducting professional research that considers the magnitude and significance of rural women's unpaid work.

### Focus Area 6: The Elevation of Rural Population Social Status

It shall hereunder include the following:

- ◆ Extending health and social insurance coverage to female agricultural workers.
- ◆ Attaching agricultural laborers in Labour standards under the umbrella of labour code. Limited enjoyment of labour law constitutes one of the most damaging psychological impacts on agricultural labourers who derive their livelihoods from the agricultural sector and is one major impairment of their mental health. Related socio-economic impairment includes exclusion from Minimum Wage Fixing and Limiting the Hours of Work, absence of a working environment for the protection of workers against occupational hazards, and inadequate access to retirement pensions or health insurance. The outcomes of such damages have taken a heavy toll on labourers and magnified their vulnerability overlooking their potential to realize a notable social status. It is therefore essential to integrate them within the umbrella of labour code and protection standards.

- ❖ Extending social insurance to the rural population and ensuring the integration of social protection to eligible ones is ensured.
- ❖ Operating and promoting the relationship between public and private institutions directly engaged in women's issues towards women's protection and the empowerment of their role, through networking and institutional harmony, in natural resources exploitation and in food security management.





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