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Online Discussion Synthesis Report

TOWARDS A GENDER RESPONSIVE APPROACH TO FOOD & NUTRITION SECURITY
IN THE SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA

BACKGROUND

In the context of compounding food and nutrition, security, climate and health crises, the OECD Development Centre and the Sahel and West Africa Club Secretariat (SWAC) hosted an online discussion on the Wikigender platform in partnership with the Agence française de développement (AFD), the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and the G5 Sahel. The discussion, "Towards a Gender-Responsive Approach to Food and Nutrition Security in the Sahel and West Africa", focused on three key issues: i) the importance of gender in addressing food and nutrition insecurity, ii) best practices around food and nutrition security (FNS) programming, and iii) what is needed to engage decision-makers and amplify women's voices.

CONTEXT

Gender is embedded in food and nutrition security issues. Women and men experience food and nutrition insecurity differently. While women's contributions are not consistently recognised, they play a pivotal role in a wide range of activities supporting food and nutrition security. In fact, two-thirds of all employed women work across the food system, accounting for half of the labour force. Despite this, affordable and nutritious foods continue to be beyond the reach of many women and girls in the Sahel and West Africa.

Without attention to gender, FNS programmes have limited opportunities to have sustainable impact. Gender norms are a critical factor informing the division of resources, roles and responsibilities throughout societies. These norms alongside other social institutions—formal and informal laws—uphold gender inequality and put women at a disadvantage. They have less access to education, land, credit and markets, and face strains on their time due to the demands of unpaid care and domestic work. This in turn has significant implications for women's ability to actively take part in the labour market and the type/quality of employment opportunities available to them.

While there is a growing recognition of the need to truly mainstream gender in all aspects of FNS programming, change is low and uneven.

"Policy responses should consider women's roles in agri-food systems and ensure that their specific needs, as guardians of household food security, food producers, farm managers, processors, traders, wage workers and entrepreneurs, are adequately addressed."

OECD DEVELOPMENT CENTRE | SAHEL AND WEST AFRICA Club Secretariat | OECD BETTER POLICIES FOR BETTER LIVES | AFD AGENCE FRANÇAISE DE DÉVELOPPEMENT | CILSS | G5 Sahel SÉCURITÉ ET DÉVELOPPEMENT

Understanding the issues

GENDER AND FOOD & NUTRITION SECURITY

There are multiple obstacles to systematically mainstreaming gender in FNS policy-making and programming. These barriers include:

HOUSEHOLD DYNAMICS

Gender norms are embedded in household dynamics. For example, the division of labour at home is often drawn along gendered lines with men engaging in paid work and women engaging in unpaid care and domestic work—though often in addition to paid or agricultural work as well. Resource allocation within the household is another piece of this puzzle. While households are often treated as homogenous, there are complex, gendered, power dynamics that inform the way resources are allocated among household members. Cash transfers have emerged as a promising action to improve women's control over household resources. However, the details matter, such as the size of the transfers, their timing and duration as well as the need to adapt cash transfer programming to take into account gender dynamics and ensure they do no harm such as perpetuate discriminatory social norms or drive increasing care burdens for women.

"Many people are not collecting sex- and age- disaggregated data (SADD), not because they do not believe gender inequalities and patterns are important, but because they do not understand how these are important to those they are feeding data to."

UNEQUAL VOICE

Women and men are not equally represented within decision-making bodies, and efforts to allow for participatory approaches to FNS have yet to become the norm. In the Sahel and West Africa, women have little involvement in policy formulation processes. This lack of participation is part of the reason why many projects fail to make a sustainable impact and thus contributes to the persistence of gender inequalities.

A LACK OF DATA

Data on FNS in the Sahel and West Africa is typically collected through traditional household survey methods; however, these methods do not offer a clear picture of the differences in food vulnerability between men and women. Collection tools are a factor; questionnaires and survey methods must focus on gender from the outset. All actors engaged in data collection and analysis must understand why gender and gender analysis is important. Resources must be allocated to review and improve data collection, standardisation and analysis.

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

COVID-19 reveals how fragile food systems are in the Sahel and West Africa. Moreover, women are among those hardest hit by the crisis. Their high participation level across food systems has put them at heightened risk. Indeed 80% of the workers involved in food processing or food-away-from-home are women. These, often informal sectors, have been severely impacted by COVID-19 prevention measures, such as lockdowns or market closures.

IMPACT

WIKIGENDER PLATFORM

80 COMMENTS

5106 VIEWS

TWITTER

198 LIKES

131 RETWEETS

119 TWITTER POLL REPLIES

RESOURCES

- **Publication -** Femmes et réseaux marchands en Afrique de l'Ouest
- **Policy Report** - Left Out and Left Behind: Ignoring Women Will Prevent Us From Solving the Hunger Crisis
- **Audio** - Issoufou Baoua, CILSS, on the challenges around integrating gender analysis into the Cadre harmonisé
- **Video -** Cash Week 2018 - Cash & Gender Montage
- **Audio** - ECOWAS Director Alain Sy Traoré on the ECOWAP agricultural policy
- **Webinar Recording** - Engaging Men and Boys in Food and Nutrition Security: The Hidden Half of Gender Equality Programming
- **Audio -** Holly Radice, Global Cash and Markets Technical Advisor at CARE, on cash transfers
- **Resource Centre** - WEAI RESOURCE CENTER
- **Project Website** - Gender, Agriculture, and Assets Project (GAAP)
- **Project Map** - RPCA Map of Actions with a Gender Component
- **Audio** - Guidio Kouldjim on the G5 Sahel Council of Ministers' meeting on October 5 in Nouakchott
- **Research** - Gender and Cash - WFP Study
- **Publication** - Analyse rapide du genre - COVID-19 Afrique de l'Ouest
- **Publication** - SIGI 2019 Global Report
- **Publication** - Integrating gender analysis into food & nutrition security early warning systems in West Africa

Looking forward
GOOD PRACTICES & RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

"There is much conversation and debate over whether or not gender analysis will improve food security monitoring and how. I believe we are beyond this point of the argument and instead will benefit most from identifying the strongest tools and discussing how to adapt these to function as and be integrated into new standard monitoring frameworks."

Better data may drive a better understanding of the issues. SADD is a first step to enabling analysis of the role gender plays in FNS and improving early warning systems that help prevent food crises. Promoting a better understanding of gender and the importance of gender analysis among all actors engaged in data collection and processing is critical. SADD collection and reporting can allow for richer analysis and provide more opportunities to understand context specific dynamics and problems.

Innovation is required. Traditional project-only approaches have not yielded transformative change. Projects should avoid reinforcing gender inequality, and rather than implementing small, women-only programmes, work in this area should also focus on engaging women in research, large-scale economic development and investment strategies. Innovative approaches to development programming should also provide opportunities for wider consultation and participation throughout project lifecycles, especially from women and girls.

Initiatives must also engage men and boys. There is a growing recognition of the relational dynamics that lead women to bear the brunt of food and nutrition insecurity. There is a need for programmes to go beyond integrating women's roles, and to actually challenge unequal power relations. To do so, initiatives and programmes must engage men and boys in this process and, equally, help them to challenge the harmful norms of masculinities in their communities and the impact these have on gender equality and women's empowerment.

Improve communication on gender-responsive projects. There is a demand for knowledge on gender-responsive approaches, what has worked and why. Efforts to map initiatives and programmes should be scaled-up and communicated widely.

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