



**Horticultural development in Viet Nam.** Doan Thi Out is a harvesting unit team leader at Dalat Hasfarm in Lam Dong, where a horticulture development project is built on climate-controlled greenhouse technology in Asia's tropical highlands and integrated for distribution in domestic and export markets (photo by Gerhard Joren/ADB).

## Accelerating Gender Equality in the Agribusiness Sector

**Purpose:** Identify points of entry for private sector companies operating in the agribusiness sector to accelerate gender equality.

### Supporting Gender Equality along the Agriculture Value Chains

Women play important roles along the supply chain as producers or suppliers, providers of complementary services, distributors, and consumers. Companies can consider multiple points of entry in supporting gender equality across the value chain. These points of entry are matched with relevant result areas in Table 1.

- (i) **Increasing women's access to inputs and financing.** According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), women farmers have 20%–30% lower yield than men farmers due to less access to productive resources and opportunities.<sup>1</sup> An important productivity driver is increasing access to agricultural inputs such as improved seeds, fertilizer, equipment, and energy sources. Finance is often the main constraint for women to obtain these inputs and is therefore critical.<sup>2</sup> The gender gap in agricultural productivity and underlying causes can vary widely from country to country, and even within different value chains in the same country. Accordingly, assessing each value chain separately is necessary.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> FAO. 2011. *The State of Food and Agriculture, 2010-11: Women in Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap for Development*. Rome.

<sup>2</sup> P. Varangis et al. 2021. *Women in Agriculture Using Digital Financial Services: Lessons Learned from Technical Assistance Support to DigiFarm, Fenix, and myAgro*. Equitable Growth, Finance and Institutions Insight. Washington, DC: World Bank.

<sup>3</sup> N. Rao. 2011. *Women's Access to Land: An Asian Perspective*. UN Women.



**Table 1: Example Points of Entry to Support Gender Equality Along the Agriculture Value Chain**

Result Areas	Possible Gender Points of Entry
<p>Women’s economic opportunities in the agriculture sector are increased.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure equal participation of women in contract farming schemes</li> <li>• Ensure a minimum percentage of bank accounts to which companies make direct payments for raw input purchases are held exclusively by women</li> <li>• Purchase products directly from women</li> <li>• Ensure that a minimum percentage of inputs, by value, is purchased from women producers</li> </ul>
<p><b>Output:</b> Access to inputs by women increased</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt agriculture input product and packaging to meet the needs of women producers (e.g., adjust product volume or combination consistent with women’s needs, include pictorial instructions if targeted consumers have low levels of literacy)</li> <li>• Develop targeted marketing and outreach strategies to reach women as customers (e.g., women are featured in all promotional materials; written materials are in the language most spoken by targeted women or with pictographs in low literacy settings)</li> <li>• Create input credit schemes tailored for women producers (e.g., using digital presence or alternative collateral that are accessible by women)</li> <li>• Create and promote adapted finance and insurance products tailored for women</li> <li>• Design technology solutions to facilitate women’s access to inputs</li> <li>• Facilitate women’s access to financial services including savings, credit, and insurance products</li> </ul>
<p><b>Output:</b> Access to knowledge and networks by women increased</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide training on the use of inputs, production, harvest, post-harvest, climate-smart technologies and practices, market information platforms, etc.</li> <li>• Provide training on financial literacy, which can be directly applied to the management and understanding of the relevant farming business</li> <li>• Adapt training content, cadence, and location to meet the needs of women producers</li> <li>• Make trainings child-friendly to accommodate women attending with small children</li> <li>• Support the creation and growth of women’s producer groups as a forum for collective learning and accessing inputs and markets</li> <li>• Ensure that a proportion of field visits by extension agents is to women farmers</li> </ul>
<p><b>Output:</b> Women’s role in the supply chain expanded</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that a proportion of trainers, extension workers, or agro-agent workers are women</li> <li>• Support women to launch agro-dealerships</li> <li>• Include gender sensitization modules in all farmer training programs</li> <li>• Develop a gender strategy in the company’s sustainability program</li> </ul>

Source: Asian Development Bank.



Providing access and support to apply knowledge. Luyen Do Thi, assistant supervisor of Bio Pro. Bio Pro laboratory at Dalat Hasfarm in Daron, Lam Dong, Viet Nam. Regional: High-Value Horticulture Development Project (50243-001) (photo by Gerhard Joren).



Spice value chain development. In India, ADB's nonsovereign project 48901-014 involve investments on private enterprises from Gabbur at Raichur District, Karnataka, where women benefit from rural livelihood and income (photo by ADB).

Coffee production in Tunggul Bute Village, Indonesia. The Rantau Dedap Geothermal Power Project (Phase I) in South Sumatra is associated with a livelihood project on coffee production that benefits the community including women (photo by Gerhard Joren).



- (ii) **Increase women's access to knowledge, networks, and technical assistance.** Access to knowledge and the needed support to apply knowledge are also essential to increase productivity, quality, and price. It is crucial that women can access training, extension services, and input suppliers that offer agronomic advisory services and/or peer farmers. The need for better access to knowledge and support extends beyond production to financial literacy, marketing, and sales.<sup>4</sup>
- (iii) **Expanding the role women play in the supply chain.** Increasing the involvement of women in aggregation, transportation, distribution, marketing, and sale is another key step to promote gender equality. Women's household responsibilities, mobility constraints, lack of formal training, and societal views of women's roles can exclude women from playing a larger role in participating in the most profitable steps of the value chain.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> S. Huyer. 2016. *Closing the Gender Gap in Agriculture*. *Gender, Technology and Development*. 20 (2). pp. 105–116.

<sup>5</sup> FAO. 2017. *Regional Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2017–2019 for Asia and the Pacific*. Bangkok.



**Table 2: Example Points of Entry to Enhance Gender Equality within the Staffing and Workplace of an Agribusiness**

Output Area	Possible Gender Points of Entry
Gender equality in governance and leadership increased	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number or percentage of female board members</li> <li>• Increase the number or percentage of female members of the management team</li> </ul>
Gender equality in the workforce increased	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase the number of female employees</li> <li>• Increase the number of female employees hired in management and supervisory roles</li> <li>• Increase the number of female employees in technical roles</li> <li>• Increase the number of female interns placed in technical roles</li> </ul>
Gender equality in the workplace enhanced	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopt and train on an anti-sexual harassment policy, with a confidential reporting mechanism, confidential investigative procedure, mechanism for redress, and a non-retaliation clause</li> <li>• Develop and implement a gender inclusion policy to support the hiring, retention, and promotion of female staff, informed by the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data</li> <li>• Offer flexible work practices (e.g., flextime, telecommuting, job sharing, part-time with benefits, compressed workweek, etc.)</li> <li>• Offer support to child and elder care (e.g., phased return to work after parental leave, subsidized childcare, paid time and dedicated space for breastfeeding or pumping, paid time off to attend health care appointments with dependents, etc.)</li> <li>• Offer maternity or paternity leave beyond what is required by law</li> <li>• Enact health and safety measures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» Pregnant and lactating women avoiding handling harmful fertilizers or other chemicals, carrying heavy loads, performing tasks that require climbing, etc.</li> <li>» Personal protective equipment appropriately sized to both women and men workers at all company locations</li> <li>» Sanitation and change facilities that are separate and proportionate in number for women and men at all company locations</li> <li>» Safe staff transportation with multiple pickup and drop-off points</li> <li>» Safe lighting in plants and operation sites</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Reserve free housing facilities for women workers who live far away or work late, are single mothers, or are in lowpaying jobs</li> </ul>

Source: Asian Development Bank.

## Enhancing Gender Equality within the Staffing and Workplace of an Agribusiness

An agribusiness may consider the following points of entry to strengthen gender equality within their staffing and workplace, as also presented in Table 2.

- (i) **Increase gender equality in governance, leadership, and the workforce.** In the agribusiness sector, a gender division of labor often places women in low-skilled positions<sup>6</sup> or seasonal and insecure positions.<sup>7</sup> In South Asia, 13% of women are selfemployed in agriculture, compared with 33% of men.<sup>8</sup> Women's

<sup>6</sup> Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), Agri-ProFocus, and International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR). 2012. *Challenging Chains to Change: Gender Equity in Agricultural Value Chain Development*. Amsterdam: KIT Publishers.

<sup>7</sup> K. Sexsmith, C. Smaller, and W. Speller. 2017. *How to Improve Gender Equality in Agriculture*. Policy Brief No. 5. International Institute for Sustainable Development.

<sup>8</sup> FAO. 2010. *Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty: Status, Trends and Gaps*. Rome.



Women's group for livelihood in the community. Markun, village head and coffee farmer of Yayasan village, with wife Sagamit Hidayat head of Family Welfare Organization and a helper. The Rantau Dedap Geothermal Power Project (Phase I) is located in South Sumatra, Indonesia. Phase I constitutes the geothermal resource exploration and drilling phase of project development (photo by Gerhard Joren/ADB).



Agribusiness opportunities and success. Sukamol Jitsamorn, owner of Amazone Organic Farm, presents her finished products (photo by Zen Nuntawinyu/ADB).

participation in leadership increases profitability,<sup>9</sup> and greater gender diversity increases innovation in a company.<sup>10</sup>

(ii) **Enhance gender equality in the workplace.**

Women in the Asia and Pacific region carry a disproportionate burden of domestic tasks, limiting their ability to engage and advance in paid employment.<sup>11</sup> A few workplace policies or practices can address this and other issues that preclude gender parity in the workplace.

Companies can adopt anti-sexual harassment policies; gender inclusion policies for recruiting, hiring, retention, and promotion; workplace safety policies; and other policies and practices that better enable women to access opportunities and advance in the agriculture sector.

<sup>9</sup> M. Noland, T. Moran, and B. Kotschwar. 2016. *Is Gender Diversity Profitable? Evidence from a Global Survey*. Working Paper Series. WP 16-3. Peterson Institute for International Economics.

<sup>10</sup> C. Díaz-García, A. González-Moreno, and F. J. Sáez-Martínez. 2013. *Gender Diversity within R&D Teams: Its Impact on Radicalness of Innovation*. *Innovation: Management Policy & Practice*. 15 (2). pp. 149–160.

<sup>11</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. 2021. *Strengthening Women's Entrepreneurship in Agriculture in ASEAN Countries*. Paris

## The Business Case for Gender Equality in the Agribusiness Sector

**Increase women's income through higher productivity and quality.** Agriculture is the primary provider of employment for women in the Asia and Pacific region. The average participation of women in the agriculture workforce is 40%–50% in East Asia and Southeast Asia, and around 30% in South Asia.<sup>a</sup> Despite the strong presence of women in the agriculture sector, there is a gender gap in access to land, inputs, technology, education, and financial services.<sup>b</sup> For example, women represent on average 10% of all agricultural landholders in Asia.<sup>c</sup>

The gender gap varies from one country to another, and is generally less pronounced in Southeast Asia.<sup>d</sup> The gender gap leads to lower productivity among women producers (footnote b). Increasing women's access to inputs, finance, knowledge, and networks can increase productivity and quality of production and thus increase revenues.<sup>e</sup>

**Decrease costs through higher workforce retention and strengthened supply chains.** The out-migration of men to cities in the Asia and Pacific region plays a role in the feminization of agriculture. For example, in Nepal, the share of women in agricultural employment went from 35% in 1980 to about 50% in 2010.<sup>f</sup> Because women play a large and growing role in the agriculture workforce, it is important to take steps to invest in them to attract and retain the best workers and reduce turnover from one season to the next.

Creating a supportive environment for women workers can positively impact the attendance and retention of all workers, resulting in significant cost savings for companies (footnote e). In the case where women producers are not hired by companies but are selling their production to companies as suppliers, investing in women in the supply chain can generate increased yield and quality and ensure a more stable supply chain, which lowers the cost of procurement.<sup>g</sup>

**Increase sales by accessing broader markets.** Codes of conduct and production standards are increasingly important in global markets, and compliance opens the door to more consumers, especially for high-value fresh products.<sup>h</sup> Investors, buyers, and consumers are placing greater value on environmental, social, and governance factors of a business.

Taking proactive steps to increase gender equality can improve a company's reputation, fostering investment and increased market access. This is especially true when companies weave together gender equality and climate action.<sup>i</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). 2017. *Regional Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2017–2019 for Asia and the Pacific*. Bangkok.

<sup>b</sup> FAO. 2011. *The State of Food and Agriculture 2010–11: Women in Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap for Development*. Rome.

<sup>c</sup> FAO. *Gender and Land Rights Database* (accessed 1 April 2021).

<sup>d</sup> S. Akter et al. 2017. *Women's Empowerment and Gender Equity in Agriculture: A Different Perspective from Southeast Asia*. *Food Policy*. 69. pp. 270–279.

<sup>e</sup> International Finance Corporation (IFC). 2016. *The Business Case for Women's Employment in Agribusiness*. Washington, DC.

<sup>f</sup> V. Slavchevska, S. Kaaria, and S. Taivalmaa. 2016. *Feminization of Agriculture in the Context of Rural Transformations: What is the Evidence? Working Paper*. World Bank.

<sup>g</sup> T.-M. Yeh, F.-Y. Pai, and L.-C. Wu. 2020. *Relationship Stability and Supply Chain Performance for SMEs: From Internal, Supplier, and Customer Integration Perspectives*. *Mathematics*. 8 (11).

<sup>h</sup> IFC. 2016. *Investing in Women along Agribusiness Value Chains*. Washington, DC.

<sup>i</sup> S. Biegel and S. Lambin. 2021. *Gender & Climate Investment: A Strategy for Unlocking a Sustainable Future*. GenderSmart.

Source: Asian Development Bank.



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