



World Food Day and the Sustainable Development Goals

Improving rural women's access to markets

ACWW recently signed up to Ban Ki-Moon's Zero Hunger Challenge. Our pledge obliges us to not only work to eliminate hunger, but also to double smallholder incomes, in a resilient and sustainable way. Sustainable Development Goal 2 calls for an end to hunger and improved food and nutrition security through increased yields.

Rural women are key to achieving these important pledges and goals, however, according to [UN Women](#), gender discrimination means that women have far fewer resources than men to cope with the impacts of hunger and poverty: Women are likely to be the last to eat, the ones least likely to access healthcare and be routinely trapped in time-consuming, unpaid domestic tasks. They have more limited options to work or build businesses, while adequate education may lie out of reach...

[FAO says](#) a gender gap also exists for many assets, inputs and services, including land, livestock, labour, extension and financial services, and technology. If women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20–30 percent.

Although SDG 5 calls for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, any progress that is made towards this goal will be difficult to measure as, so far, there are no official UN indicators of rural women's empowerment. Indicators, such as the provision of gender-based training, the numbers female extension workers, the numbers of rural women involved in the commodity marketing chain or heading rural institutions, or as the owners of key assets, are needed in order to record any progress that results from development efforts, see: <http://unsdsn.org/resources/publications/indicators/>

[Article 14](#) of the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, states that rural women should have access to agricultural credit and loans; also marketing facilities, in order to benefit equally from rural development, alongside men.

These loans should vary in scale and scope from micro-loans to larger land purchase loans, allowing each woman to grow her business in a sustainable self-directed way. Smallholder and rural entrepreneurial women do have traditional knowledge and skills that can if supported; do much to increase production and economic activity within their communities. These loans should consider innovative and regional forms of production and marketing as well as enabling participation in global markets.

Women's access to credit and loans must be accompanied by gender-based training in record-keeping and financial management. They also need to have access to and receive training in using smart technology and other digital tools to build their businesses and target markets. Further training in cooperative marketing and infrastructure development as well as in community leadership will aid the advance of these rural and farm women.

ACWW is supporting local women's organisations who are able to provide training in financial management, thereby improving sustainable access to markets for such diverse products as out of season vegetables in Mongolia, sea fish in Tamil Nadu, India, oyster mushrooms and land snails in Cameroon.

We call upon other agencies, including FAO to scale up this training and to engage rural women in peer and self-directed learning, so that women can make the most of village and regional markets, as well as developing the expertise and sophistication needed to enable them to profit from selling their produce in more lucrative urban and export markets.