



UNFCCC Policy Brief

Cultivating Equality: Just & Sustainable Food Systems in a Changing Climate

OVERVIEW We face a greater challenge than ever before: ending hunger and malnutrition in the face of climate change and natural resource scarcity. Success demands that we tackle inequity and gender inequality as a matter of social justice and human rights.

Introduction

Globally, 795 million people are chronically hungry; 161 million children under five are stunted. Yet we use 1.5 times the planet's resources every year, exhausting resources faster than the planet can naturally regenerate them. At the same time, changes in climate in the last 30 years have already reduced global agricultural production 1 to 5 percent per decade and could reduce it by 2 percent per decade for the rest of the century. Up to 600 million more people could be at risk of hunger by 2080 as a result.

Inequality shapes who has access to food and the resources to grow it and buy it. It governs who eats first and who eats worst. Inequality determines who can adapt to a changing climate. Hunger and poverty are not accidents—they are the result of social and economic injustice and inequality at all levels. The reality of inequality is no truer than for women—half the world's population, with far less than their fair share of the world's resources.

Despite this reality, proposed solutions to end hunger in a changing climate overemphasize increasing food production. While improving yields where there is not enough food or among small-scale food producers is important, it is not sufficient. To end hunger and malnutrition in a changing climate, we must address inequality in food systems.

THE INJUSTICE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change amplifies the risks already poor and marginalized people face, and the impacts are hardest on those least responsible for causing it. Vulnerability to climate change is shaped by an individual's, household's, community's, or country's ability to access information, resources, and support necessary to adapt.

The Paris Agreement sets a goal of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and recognizes the importance of protecting food security and ending hunger. Yet without urgent, ambitious action, the world risks breakdown of food systems, migration, increased food insecurity, particularly for poorer populations, conflict, and the loss of rural livelihoods due to increased water scarcity and desertification. Small-scale food producers—and especially women—deserve a new strategy to support their agricultural efforts in the face of climate change.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that climate change will impact “all aspects of food security.... including food access, utilization, and price stability.”

REALITY FOR SMALL-SCALE FOOD PRODUCERS

Small-scale producers already struggle to grow, catch, or buy enough nutritious food because of degraded soil, small land plots, depleted fish stocks, water scarcity, lack of diverse foods in the market or low incomes. They often lack access to secure land tenure or access to natural resources, financial and extension services, information about weather, post-harvest storage, and markets. Higher temperatures, shifting seasons, and erratic rainfall pose significant challenges for small-scale food producers, who are already often one bad harvest away from crisis. Climate change is a further burden they do not need.



WOMEN'S BURDEN, WOMEN'S POTENTIAL

Women comprise an average of 43 percent of the global agricultural labor force. They make up nearly 50 percent of farmers in Eastern and Southeastern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa and are responsible for almost 90 percent of food preparation in the household. Yet, only 10 to 20 percent of landholders are women, and they receive only five percent of extension services worldwide. Too often, women are not viewed as equal players in the household and community. So when they are not consulted on use of household income or community plans for natural resources, their knowledge is not captured, their priorities are not reflected, their needs are not addressed—and their rights are not respected.

Recommendations

The Paris Agreement marks a new era in the fight against climate change, an era that commits everyone to action and gives hope to people living in poverty. Yet action must follow commitment, and the way forward must be grounded in sustainability and equity. As Parties resume negotiations and consideration of agriculture, CARE shares the following recommendations for UNFCCC Parties.

- **Ensure UNFCCC decisions on agriculture reflect the priorities of food security, human rights, and gender equality.** Agriculture workshops should include explicit discussion of the needs, knowledge, and contribution of small-scale food producers and women.
- **Commit to transition to sustainable, equitable, productive, and resilient agriculture.** Agriculture workshops are a critical opportunity to explore the characteristics of agriculture that best contribute to tackling climate change, hunger, and malnutrition.
- **Develop social and environmental principles and guidelines for mitigation action, especially related to land use. Principles and guidelines should apply to actions taken under recently launched global initiatives on agriculture and climate change.** The special characteristics of land demand that protections be in place to ensure the environmental and social integrity of mitigation actions related to land.
- **In any future work related to agriculture, prioritize efforts to deepen understanding of the impacts of climate change on *all* aspects of food security.** There is a dearth of research related to how climate change will impact access (social and economic) to food and the utilization and stability of food.
- **Develop criteria or guidance to ensure that climate finance for agricultural activities supports approaches that are sustainable, equitable, productive, and resilient.** Scale up climate finance with a clear and predictable roadmap for the annual USD 100B promised by developed countries by 2020, and for post-2020 finance.

A solution to the climate crisis that exacerbates inequality, violates human rights and undermines food and nutrition security is no solution at all. Small-scale food producers and especially women deserve a new strategy to support their agricultural efforts in the face of climate change.

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