

Women play a critical role in global food production and food systems, but they remain disproportionately food insecure compared to men. When women and girls have better access to information, resources, services, decision-making, education and economic opportunities, the result is increased food security and improved nutrition.



## CHANGING LIVES



# Harnessing the power of gender equality to achieve food security

## THE CHALLENGE

Women and girls have been severely affected by the unfolding global food crisis, on top of climate shocks, increased conflict, and food insecurity. Food insecurity and gender inequality are deeply interlinked. According to the 2022 edition of *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World*, [nearly 32 percent of women were moderately or severely food insecure compared to 28 percent of men](#). As of 2021, there were 150 million more food insecure women than men in the world.

Women have fewer opportunities to acquire food production assets, are less connected to food value chains, and own less land. Even when landholders are women, yields for women farmers are 20-30 percent lower than for men. This is not from a lack of skill but due to a combination of factors, including women's lower access to loans and agricultural inputs, barriers to receiving information, mechanized technologies and agricultural extension services, and the marginal nature of the land itself available to them for farming.

COVID-19 has increased food insecurity and widened entrenched gender inequalities, disrupting livelihoods and education with widespread school closures. The longer children are out of school, the less likely they are to return, often increasing negative coping strategies such as early marriages for girls and child labour.

## WHAT CAN WE DO?

The data illustrates that food provision alone cannot reduce or eliminate hunger. There is no prospect of achieving Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) without achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 (Gender Equality).

WFP understands [the power of gender equality for food security](#) and how women's empowerment is central to our mission. WFP's [gender policy](#) ensures that we optimize its presence, role, and capabilities in partnership, to advance gender equality and empower women. WFP's ability to achieve its strategic objectives depends on delivering food and nutrition assistance that addresses the differing needs, priorities and experiences of the women, men, girls, and boys with whom it works. It sets out the following three objectives to address the gender inequalities that continue to exacerbate food insecurity and poor nutrition outcomes:

- I. **Achieve equitable access** to and control over food security and nutrition – by broadening WFP's assessment, implementation, and monitoring activities to better respond to intrahousehold food distribution dynamics.
- II. **Address the root causes** of gender inequalities that affect food security and nutrition – by challenging the barriers that influence the meaningful participation of all household members as agents of change.
- III. **Advance the economic empowerment** of women and girls in food security and nutrition – by using food and nutrition assistance as entry points to livelihood opportunities that increase equitable access to productive assets, financial services, and technologies.

These objectives can only be met through the following foundational priority actions which are essential for success:

## 1 Enhanced and equitable participation

WFP supports the equitable participation of all persons by challenging social norms and structural barriers to ensure that all individuals have their voices heard and can meaningfully engage in dialogue and actions affecting their lives. Working with men and boys alongside women and girls is essential to ensuring equitable and meaningful participation in sustainable and safe access to programmes by all people.

## 2 Strengthened leadership and decision-making

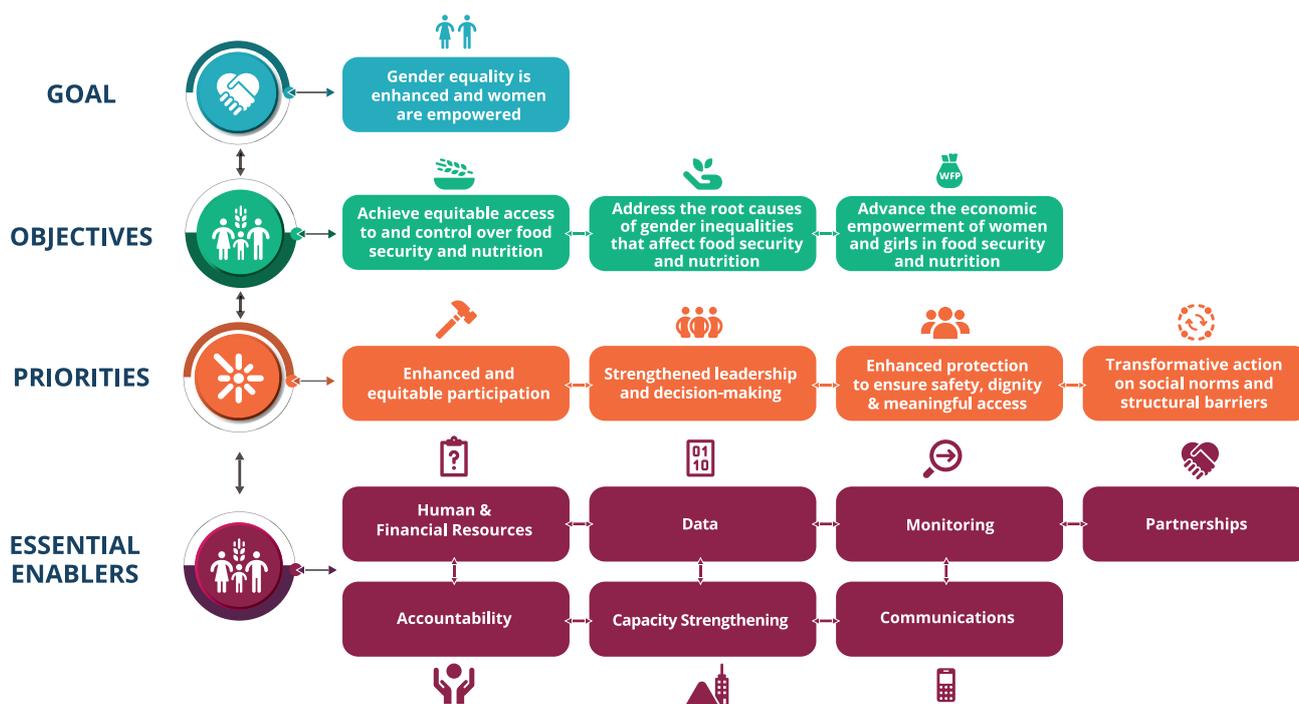
WFP supports self-determination such that all people have increased power to take up leadership roles and make decisions about their personal, household, community and societal food system, food security and nutrition needs. Working with diverse international, national, and local partners, including men and boys, will transform attitudes towards women and girls in leadership and decision-making.

## 3 Enhanced protection to ensure safety, dignity, and meaningful access

WFP acknowledges that structural norms and unequal power dynamics disempower and discriminate against diverse people. Further, they fuel gender-based violence, including sexual exploitation and abuse, as a means of power and control of one person over another, as a weapon of war in unstable environments, as an economic strategy, evident through early child and forced marriage and as a negative coping mechanism in times of heightened crisis.

## 4 Transformative action on social norms and structural barriers

WFP will work with all partners to strengthen diverse beneficiary voices, agency, and



leadership. By dismantling the structural barriers, WFP empowers beneficiaries to assert their voice and agency as equals in their households, communities, and societies.

## WHY WFP?

WFP believes **Zero Hunger is possible when everyone has equal opportunities, access to resources, and a voice in the decisions** that shape their food security. WFP continues to mainstream gender throughout all its programmes through technical assistance and guidance provided by gender officers at headquarters, the regional bureaus and the country offices to employees, partners and counterparts, through the corporate Gender Transformation Programme. Through this approach, **in 2021, WFP assisted 128 million beneficiaries, of which 68 million were women and girls.**

### 1 Empowering Women Through Cash-Based Transfers and Digital Financial Inclusion

Cash-based transfers provided by WFP contribute women's economic empowerment by increasing their decision-making power and ability to invest in livelihood opportunities. In Uganda, WFP and the National Bank of

Uganda jointly looked into the reasons that prevented people from obtaining bank accounts. Subsequent programme adjustments meant that more women became bank agents and more women obtained bank or mobile money accounts. WFP supports women's digital financial inclusion, by which cash transfers are credited directly to women's bank or mobile money accounts, and gives trainings on financial planning and digital tools. As cash alone is simply not enough, this tandem approach is crucial to advance women's access to finance, technology, and labour markets, which ultimately reduces the gender digital divide.

### 2 Focus On Girls' Education and Retention Through School-Based Programmes

WFP's school meals directly contribute to the retention of girls in primary and secondary schools. Partnering with UNFPA and UNICEF on 'Breaking Barriers to Education' initiative, WFP addresses key barriers to schooling for girls by providing fortified school meals and targeted services related to sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence as well as mentoring and coaching.

### 3 Improving Nutritional Intake for Everyone

Gender and nutrition intertwine across WFP programme areas to help women and girls meet their nutrient needs and integrate a gender transformative focus for lasting impact. Through social and behaviour change sessions involving women, men, girls and boys, WFP addresses unequal household task distribution, including men's involvement in childcare, and food preparation and nutrition of household members. It uses nutrition-sensitive programming to support women's livelihood development and leadership.

### 4 Enabling Asset Creation, Resilience and Climate Change Adaptation

WFP's resilience programming supports asset creation, which, when layered with complementary actions, creates opportunities

for women to generate income and reduce their workload. WFP designs and implements programmes that enhance women and girls' resilience and ability to adapt to climate change by focusing on access to productive climate-appropriate assets and technologies.

### 5 Forging Partnerships for Impact, Transformative and Sustainable Change

WFP recognizes and emphasizes the importance of collaboration, coordination and aligned commitment to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment. We develop the capacity of individuals, organizations (particularly local, women-led organisations), and policy systems through global collaborations so that they can effectively address gender and food security issues. Our gender toolkit and learning resources are regularly updated and expanded so that they continue to offer key guidance on gender mainstreaming to WFP and its partners.



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