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# Enhancing Effectiveness of Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration Projects through Gender-Responsive Actions

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This document summarizes outcomes from a series of virtual events on gender equality hosted by the FOLUR Gender Learning Programme, organized in 2023 and 2024 for the Food and Agricultural Commodity Systems Community in the context of the FOLUR Impact Program. The presented issues resulted from discussions between 178 participants from 58 countries—including 17 countries that were hosting FOLUR projects—and 20 speakers and facilitators in these sessions, which shared global experiences and case studies from Asia, Africa, Latin America.<sup>1</sup>

## GENDER LEARNING SERIES

The Gender Learning Programme (GLP) is an initiative of the Gender Working Group of the FOLUR Global Platform (GP) to support FOLUR country projects (CPs). It is complemented by the 2023 Resource Guide on Gender Equality for FOLUR. The GLP supports implementation of gender-responsive interventions within the four areas of concern for FOLUR, which include integrated landscape management (ILM), conservation and restoration of natural habitats, promotion of sustainable commodity value chains, and knowledge and monitoring and evaluation.

<sup>1</sup> Case studies from Mexico, Costa Rica, Honduras, Liberia, Ghana, Burundi, and Indonesia were presented.

## KEY MESSAGES

- Gender-responsive actions can significantly improve the performance of efforts aimed at sustainable land management and food systems transformation.
- Participatory and truly inclusive approaches can address historical power imbalances that limit women's and Indigenous Peoples' participation in, and benefits from, forest landscape restoration (FLR) and integrated landscape management (ILM) planning processes and actions.
- Gender-responsive and climate-resilient value chain project teams understand, seize opportunities and design activities based on the status of different gender roles and relations.
- Practical actions FOLUR country project implementers can take include:
  - Earmarking needs-based training and technical assistance for women
  - Budgeting explicitly for gender-targeted activities
  - Including gender-specific actions and performance indicators
  - Employing new mechanisms to channel funds directly to women
  - Measuring the impacts of gender-responsive activities.

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*The Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration (FOLUR) Impact Program is a \$345 million initiative supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and led by the World Bank. Seeking to transform food and land use systems the program consists of a global knowledge platform and 27 country projects targeting the production landscapes of eight commodities: beef, cocoa, corn, coffee, palm oil, rice, soy, and wheat.*

## INTRODUCTION

Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration (FOLUR) prioritizes gender mainstreaming by integrating gender perspectives and considerations into all policies, programs, and projects. In this context, gender mainstreaming is considered with regard to land access and control, resources, and key decision-making processes. Projects include dedicated gender interventions focused on specific gaps and challenges faced by women, as well as gender-responsive interventions, which integrate gender equality issues into policies and project activities.

Gender inequality arises because different roles between women and men often imbalance power relations and create disparities. Understanding the status of these roles and relations in specific contexts is key to developing effective agricultural technologies, practices, value chains, programs, and policies. As gender roles and relations in agriculture change, recognition grows that traditional norms must also change, and gender equality must be further promoted.

FOLUR projects enhance inclusiveness and participation, empowering not only women, but other historically marginalized communities, including Indigenous Peoples. Issues facing Indigenous Peoples do not necessarily mirror those arising from gender analysis, but they often overlap significantly, as their roots also lie in unequal power relations. In all cases, the solutions must come from local people and cannot be imposed from the outside. Thoughtful, participatory, and truly inclusive processes, including the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent, are vital.

## WHY GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ARE KEY TO FOLUR PROJECTS

Gender equality and women's empowerment in environmental work are linked to higher agricultural production and profits; improved economic outcomes; fairer wealth distribution; better ecosystems conservation, protection, and sustainability outcomes; higher CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reductions; and better resilience outcomes.

Support for women's empowerment is vital to realize the FOLUR Impact Program's environmental and social sustainability aims because gender-neutral projects undermine conservation goals and human rights. Maximum impact requires seizing opportunities to enhance active participation of, and benefits for, women and historically marginalized groups in FLR, commodity value chain, and sustainable food system transformation projects.

FOLUR operates in the context of various international treaties that focus specifically on gender equality and on environment, which include obligations for gender-responsive actions.<sup>2,3</sup> FOLUR activities also contribute toward United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goal targets.<sup>4</sup>

## HOW DOES FOLUR SUPPORT GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT?

FOLUR tackles gender challenges across its focal areas, including ILM, FLR, and sustainable commodity value chains.

### Gender and Integrated Landscape/Land Use Management

Opportunities for gender-responsive project activities feature in all eight components of ILM (figure 1). Inclusive, participatory, multistakeholder engagement processes provide the necessary starting point for collaborative change.

<sup>2</sup>Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women

<sup>3</sup>UN Global Biodiversity Framework; Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought; Framework Convention on Climate Change

<sup>4</sup>UN Sustainable Development Goal 5: One of 17 targets established to alleviate poverty and tackle hunger by 2030

**Figure 1. Key Components of ILM Initiatives**



Source: PROGREEN, A Global Partnership for Sustainable and Resilient Landscapes, 2022.

In the first three years of the project, by June 2024, the FOLUR Indonesia team held 15 inclusive, participatory, national and subnational multistakeholder ILM dialogues—consulting with 3,634 potential beneficiaries, 1,571, or 43 percent, of whom were women—to create ownership in the process, thereby providing a foundation for success.

Another example is the Participatory Informed Landscape Approach (PILA) that is shaping FOLUR country projects in India, Kenya, Nigeria, Nicaragua, and Vietnam. Through multistakeholder workshops, participatory data collection, and analysis, PILA supports collaborative and sustainable landscape management, developing rights-based land-use plans, and transforming governance of productive landscapes. This begins by establishing project landscape boundaries in consultations intended to empower local communities and other stakeholders.

Linking local project planning processes with assessments of existing gender inequalities to understand the roles, experiences, rights, and barriers facing women, men, and

different social groups—and how they shape the social landscape—is key. When inequalities are recognized by community groups, these groups are empowered to create solutions and generate new opportunities.

FOLUR Ghana’s landscape restoration and small-scale mining project involves multiple government bodies, including forestry, wildlife, and agriculture ministries; the Environmental Protection Agency; and Ghana Cocoa Board. Across diverse partners, the project can promote sustainable and gender-sensitive soil, land, and water management practices, including watershed management, soil fertility enhancement, and agroforestry. Local communities have formed community resource management areas (CREMAs) with a participatory tool that brings all land users within the landscape together, guiding them through the preparation of management plans that equitably benefit women, youth, and disadvantaged groups. CREMA governance structures and Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) community groups mandate that women fill leadership and decision-making positions.

## Gender and Forest Landscape Restoration

FLR involves planned processes that aim to regain ecological integrity and enhance wellbeing in deforested and degraded landscapes. FLR includes many potential approaches, practices, and interventions, including natural regeneration, planted forests and woodlands, mangrove restoration, silviculture, improved fallow, agroforestry and watershed protection, and erosion control<sup>5</sup>.

Gender-responsive FLR ensures that women and men at all levels have equal voice and influence in strategic decisions that contribute to substantive equality in outcomes for women and men. An important gender consideration is the fact that power imbalances often limit women's and Indigenous Peoples' participation in—and benefits from—FLR processes and actions<sup>6</sup>. For example, decisions may include what species to introduce in a degraded landscape and what areas to prioritize for restoration. Successful FLR therefore requires inclusive participatory processes that address the different interests of community members who rely on distinct tree species or varieties and use their gender-specific skills to manage and use them.

Gender-responsive FLR actions can be categorized into actions aimed primarily at reaching women and other people that historically have not participated in FLR decision-making. Similar activities are currently being implemented or are planned to be implemented by FOLUR projects. These include:

- Awareness campaigns on women's forest rights and FLR project benefits
- Gender-specific FLR management trainings:
  - In Guatemala, FOLUR will implement training programs on sustainable production and agroforestry systems, including specific modules on gender.
  - In Ethiopia, FOLUR plans to provide gender-responsive training for all development agents and farmers, including on Participatory Forest Management.
- Inclusive, participatory community FLR planning dialogues:
  - FOLUR Guatemala is integrating a gender approach into their action plans for coffee, palm oil, and conservation/restoration.

<sup>5</sup> CGIAR, 2021. Research Program on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry E-learning course on gender and inclusion in forest landscape restoration. [www.foreststreesagroforestry.org/gender-and-inclusion-in-forest-landscape-restoration/](http://www.foreststreesagroforestry.org/gender-and-inclusion-in-forest-landscape-restoration/)

<sup>6</sup> Basnett et al., 2017. CIFOR. Gender matters in Forest Landscape Restoration: A framework for design and evaluation - CIFOR Knowledge.

- Gender-focused review of all forest laws, by-laws, and policies.

Going beyond more equitable participation, project activities can aim to introduce a fair distribution of benefits. These include actions such as the following:

- Direct restoration results-based payments to women:
  - FOLUR Mexico aims to ensure proper payment of women's labor in the agroforestry sector, including by identifying and encouraging mechanisms at the community level that can incentivize the economic independence of women and improve the well-being of their families, as well as promote payment parity.
- A dedicated women's fund for forest-related activities.
- A credit program targeted to female-led forest and agroforestry-related enterprises.

Types of FLR activities that empower women as well as men include:

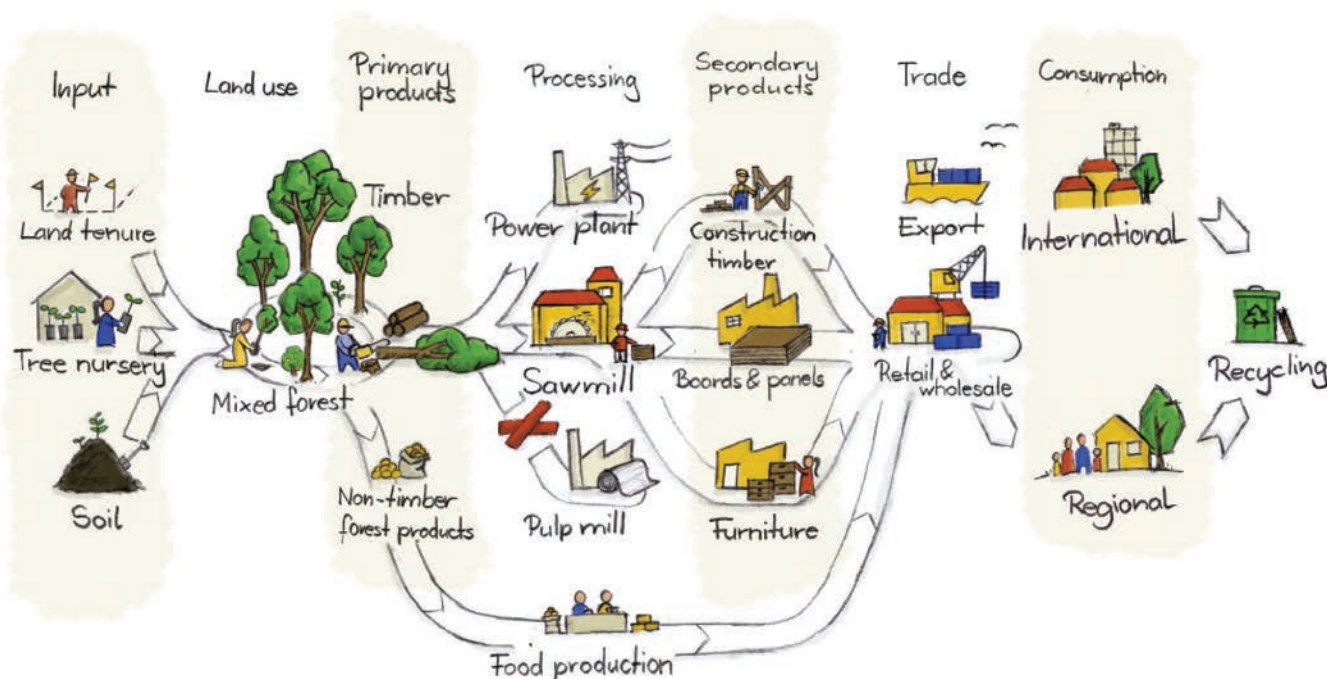
- Forest or land agencies dedicate funds for targeted technical and leadership training to women involved in FLR activities
- Leadership training for women in forest-related associations
- Funds dedicated to innovative communications efforts, which highlight key roles for women and best practices for FLR.

If gender issues in FLR projects are not taken into consideration, women can end up in the position of providing the labor for restoration initiatives or potentially increasing their workload without proper compensation. This can also lead to taking on greater responsibilities without increased rights to benefit equally. Other risks involve limited sustainability and long-term effectiveness of restoration efforts.

## Gender and Sustainable Value Chains

FOLUR supports efforts toward sustainable value chains for coffee, cocoa, palm oil, soy, livestock, maize, rice, and wheat. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations defines a sustainable value chain as "the full range of farms and firms and their successive coordinated value-adding activities that produce particular raw agricultural materials and transform them into particular food products that are sold to final consumers and disposed of after use in a manner that is profitable

Figure 2. Stages of a Forest Landscape Value Chain



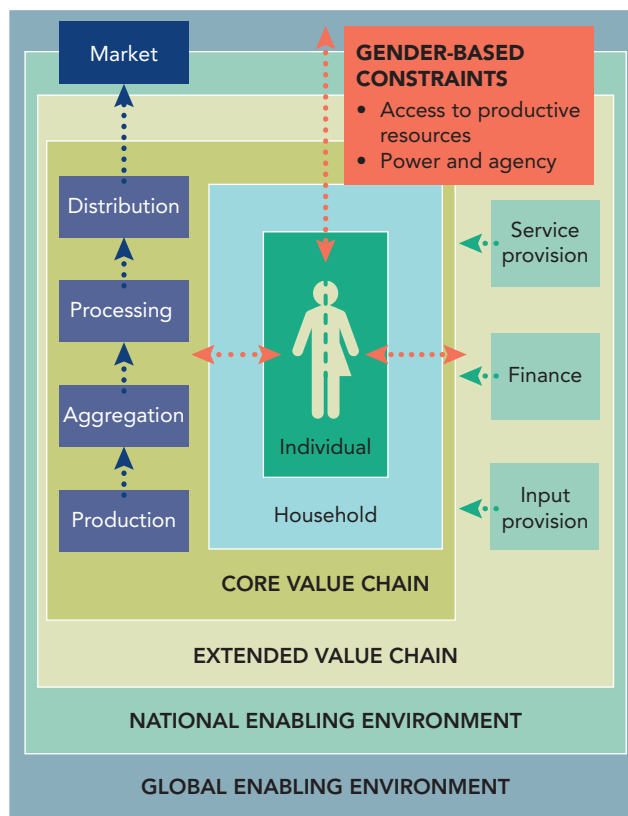
Source: E. Valerio 2024. Presentation for FOLUR Gender Learning Program; FAO 2024.

throughout, has broad-based benefits to society, and does not permanently deplete natural resources.” An example of the stages and related activities that can be found in a forest landscape value chain is shown in figure 2.

### Food and Agriculture Organization: Gender-Sensitive Value Chain Framework

The FAO Gender-Sensitive Value Chain (GSVC) Framework emphasizes the need to assess gender-based constraints (GBCs) as an integral part of value chain analysis (figure 3). These restrictions, resulting from gender-based discrimination, undermine women’s productive and entrepreneurial potential, limiting their opportunities in value chains and causing labor market distortions and inefficiencies. Two main dimensions guide this analysis: (1) access to productive resources, such as land, equipment, networks, agricultural services, technology, information and communication technologies (ICTs), and financial services; and (2) agency and power, which include the ability to make autonomous choices and control resources and profits. Identifying GBCs is essential for understanding value chain underperformance and developing sustainable upgrading strategies. The following sections provide steps for gender-sensitive analysis, from assessing the broader context to investigating GBCs in specific value chain nodes, along with practical tools, guiding questions, and additional resources.

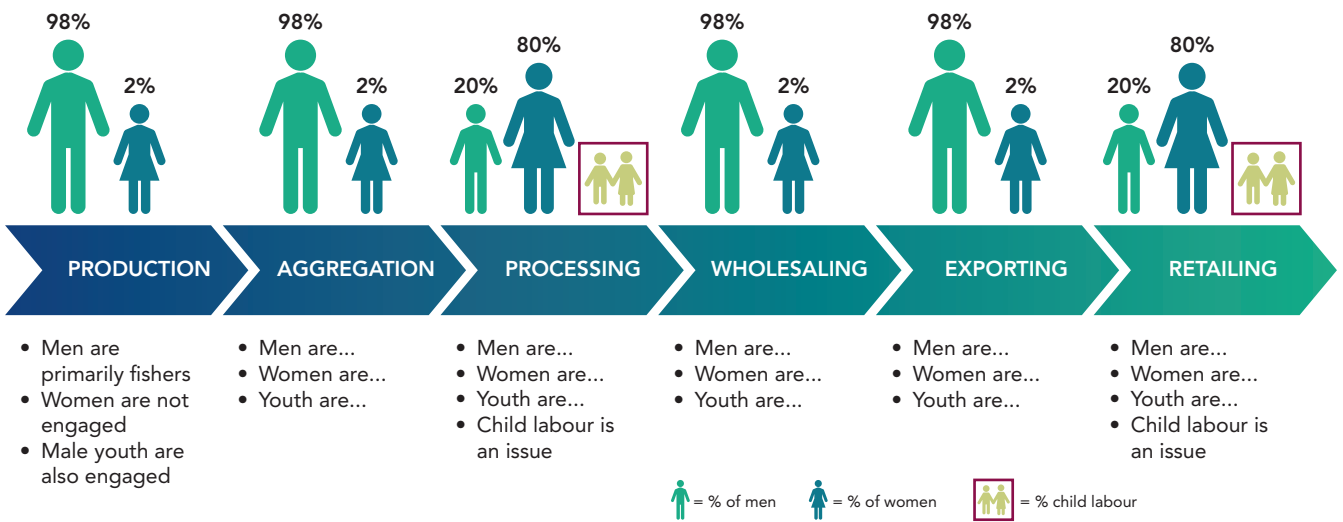
Figure 3. FAO: Gender-Sensitive Value Chain Framework



←.....→ Gender-based constraints (GBC)

Source: FAO 2016. *Developing Gender-Sensitive Value Chains – A Guiding Framework*. Rome. <http://exchange.growasia.org/developing-gender-sensitive-value-chains-guiding-framework>

Figure 4. Example of Value Chain Gender Mapping



Source: FAO and United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) 2024.

Key gender equality issues are found in all of FOLUR’s value chains in most countries, relating to gender roles within the value chain, gendered access to and control over resources and opportunities, gendered control over benefits, and gendered influence over enabling factors.

A helpful early project activity to better understand and address these issues is value chain gender mapping (figure 4).

Some activities or actions that FOLUR projects include, or aspire to include, to address gender issues in supply chains are:

- Processes or engagement that bring together buyers and sellers, especially women
- Women’s agribusiness leadership support:
  - In Paraguay, FOLUR will select farms led by women for pilot trainings and strengthen the existing platform of Women Leaders of the Sustainable Commodity Chain by supporting implementation of an action plan.
- Support for women’s enterprises and finance management training of women’s savings groups:
  - FOLUR in China aims to support women’s enterprises and women-led cooperatives. Under the World Bank–Hubei subproject, the target is designed to ensure that at least 21 of 50 farmer cooperatives are managed by women or have a significant share of women members.
  - FOLUR in Guatemala aims to ensure improved access to credit and incentives for women producers—115 out of the targeted 300 producers must be women.

- Working with financial and private sector actors to design women-targeted instruments, such as instruments that do not require land ownership for collateral.
- Approaches and tools, such as the Gender Action Learning System, that assess intra-household gender dynamics.
- Certifications and standards that measure and independently verify social or women’s progress and benefits, such as the W+ Standard.

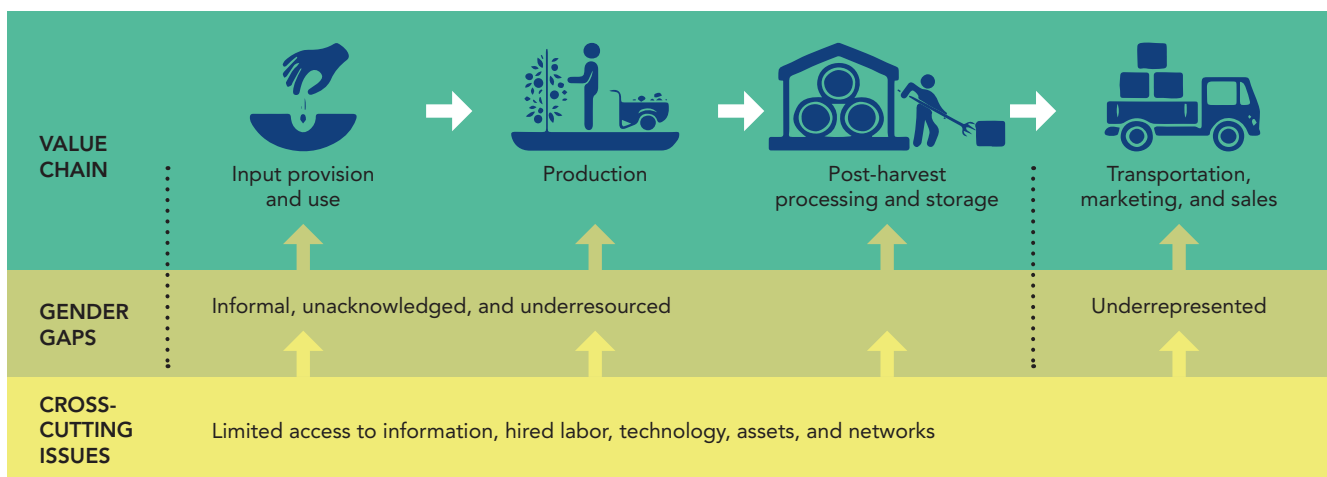
The business case for investing in efforts to increase women’s participation across smallholder value chains is clear (box 1). Yet gender gaps persist throughout

**Box 1. The Business Case for Increasing Women’s Participation in Smallholder Value Chains**

- 40 percent of the global agricultural labor force is comprised of women.
- An estimated 20–30 percent increase in crop yields and a 4 percent increase in total agricultural output have the potential to result from gender parity.
- 61 percent of agribusinesses report that gender-diverse policies contributed to an increase in profits and productivity.

Source: IFC, 2023. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/entities/publication/4bc6b23d-3a14-4d0f-814f-bd876bb5f010>

**Figure 5. Gender Gaps in Agribusiness Value Chains**



Source: Seavey and Dar 2024. "Increasing Women's Participation in Smallholder Value Chains." Presentation for FOLUR Gender Learning Program, March 21, 2024. International Finance Corporation (IFC).w

agribusiness value chains, from input provision and use to production, post-harvest processing, storage and transportation, marketing, and sales stages (figure 5).

Agribusinesses increasingly pursue actions to help close these gaps and address the multiple challenges that female smallholders in particular are facing, including improving access to:

- Technical trainings and extension services
- Financial services and literacy
- Leadership and decision-making positions
- Appropriate technology and inputs
- Childcare
- Resources and training for partners to prevent gender-based violence

### LESSONS LEARNED

The Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration (FOLUR) Impact Program aspires to catalyze the use of the rich resources that have been developed by its diverse partners, which relate to gender and food or agricultural systems, commodity value chains, and forest landscape restoration (FLR), through the implementation of project teams on the ground. By documenting and sharing experiences across many environments, the

aim is to learn what is or is not working and continue to strengthen the evidence base to demonstrate why taking gender actions in integrated landscape management (ILM) projects leads to greater impacts.

Key points include:

- Gender-responsive value chain development pays attention to the gendered division of labor.
- Groups such as producer organizations and cooperatives can support women's empowerment within value chains if governed inclusively and well.
- The increased value of commodities and mechanization often leads men to take over traditionally female-dominated crops and agricultural value chain activities, so including men in value chain development efforts is advised.
- Rural women typically lack collateral to apply for loans, limiting their access to financial services. This can be countered with microfinance lending schemes, utilizing mobile payments, providing financial trainings through village savings and loans associations, cooperatives and self-help groups.
- Context matters: Understanding how and under what conditions participation in commodity value chains can advance or constrain women's empowerment is key.
- Capacity-building efforts aimed at skills development must be targeted to women's needs and constraints, such as training timing and location; the provision of childcare can also lead to empowerment gains.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Project implementers face a myriad of challenges. The idea that tackling gender-related challenges will increase the likelihood of achieving overall outcomes is easy to recognize, yet not so simple to execute. Some practical actions suggested by Food Systems, Land Use and Restoration (FOLUR) project teams include the following:

- Set clear, gender-related objectives and outcomes sought.
- Pay close attention to the project governance structure and ensure that it is inclusive and considers strategies for elevating those less empowered.
- Include a gender/social development expert on the project team.
- Use both qualitative and quantitative methods to understand gender roles and issues, and identify locally appropriate solutions with local buy-in.
- Involve women in monitoring project outcomes.
- Set up a transparent system that allows communication of gender and social inclusion results and use them to adapt.
- Think creatively about communicating and sharing lessons learned along the way, both locally and beyond, such as through the use of mobile phones, videos, social media, radio, and television.

## ADDITIONAL READING

- A Resource Guide on Gender Equality for FOLUR
- Beyond Crops: Towards Gender Equality in Forestry, Fisheries, Aquaculture and Livestock Development
- Developing Gender-Sensitive Value Chains – A Guiding Framework
- Developing Sustainable Food Value Chains – Practical Guidance for Systems-Based Analysis and Design
- Fostering Gender-Transformative Change for Equality in Food Systems: A Review of Methods and Strategies at Multiple Levels
- Gender and Climate-Resilient Agriculture: A Review of Practical Resources in Support of Gender-Transformative Change
- Gender and Inclusion in Forest Landscape Restoration (*Online course*)
- Gender in Forest Landscape Projects: Actions and Indicators
- Gender in Value Chains: Practical Toolkit to Integrate a Gender Perspective in Agricultural Value Chain Development
- Gender Matters in Forest Landscape Restoration: A Framework for Design and Evaluation
- Promise and Contradiction: Value Chain Participation and Women's Empowerment
- Tools and Methods for Gender Research and Integration in Agricultural Value Chain, Market and Entrepreneurship Projects
- Working with Smallholders: A Handbook for Firms Building Sustainable Supply Chains

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## GET INVOLVED

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### The FOLUR Impact Program consists of:

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