

# 2024

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## GLOBAL HUNGER INDEX

HOW GENDER JUSTICE CAN ADVANCE CLIMATE RESILIENCE  
AND ZERO HUNGER

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# GENDER JUSTICE, CLIMATE RESILIENCE, AND FOOD AND NUTRITION SECURITY

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## Key Messages

- **Gender inequality, food insecurity, and climate change converge to place households, communities, and countries under extreme stress.** Women and girls are typically hardest hit by food insecurity and malnutrition. They also suffer disproportionately from the effects of weather extremes and climate emergencies.
- **Gender justice—that is, equity between people in all spheres of life—is critical to a just world and to achieving climate and food justice.** It consists of three interconnected dimensions: recognition, redistribution, and representation.
- **Recognitional justice entails transforming gender discriminatory norms in order to change how households, communities, and the wider culture view gender roles and capacities.** It means acknowledging that different groups of people have different needs, vulnerabilities, and opportunities and that their physical location and social position can intersect to intensify injustices.
- **Redistributional justice involves directing resources and opportunities to redress gender inequalities.** By ensuring women's access to and control over critical productive resources, it can challenge inequitable power dynamics and create an enabling environment for food and nutrition security.
- **Representation refers to closing the gender gap in women's participation in politics and decision-making at multiple levels.** Legal changes and women's political participation and leadership may help push policies toward gender equity, though such outcomes are not assured and can take time.
- **Reforms are needed to incorporate gender justice at all scales and levels, ranging from individuals to entire systems and from formal mechanisms to informal social and cultural norms.** While enabling access to resources for women is essential, structural inequalities—including class dynamics, rising income inequality,

corporate control over production systems, and lack of high-quality basic services—must be addressed for real systemic and social change to happen. Redistribution of power and resources at the household and community levels must be underpinned by universal social protection and macroeconomic measures, such as tax and trade policies, that support the most vulnerable.

**S**ome of the world's poorest countries are now on the front lines of the climate crisis. Madagascar, for example, is facing a prolonged drought, attributed to climate change, that is afflicting the entire southern region (Rigden et al. 2024). The country is also hard hit by hunger and malnutrition as a result of weather extremes and economic shocks. In 2023, 2.2 million people suffered from acute food insecurity (FSIN and GNAFC 2024). Compounding these challenges is widespread gender inequality: in Madagascar girls have limited access to education, women face scarce economic opportunities, and rates of sexual and gender-based violence are high (World Bank 2023b). Malagasy women are more likely than men to face food insecurity, and they appear to be disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of climate change on their labor burden and health (FAO 2024d; World Bank 2023b).

The situation in Madagascar is just one illustration of how gender inequality, food insecurity, and climate change converge to place households, communities, and countries under extreme stress. Gender is intertwined with climate and food security challenges in ways that respective policies and interventions often ignore. Women and girls are typically hardest hit by food insecurity and malnutrition. They also suffer disproportionately from the effects of weather extremes and climate emergencies (Harris-Fry and Grijalva-Eternod 2016; Hlahla 2022; Jain et al. 2023; Rao 2020). Various forms of discrimination—formal and informal, systemic and individual—block them from the resources and opportunities they need to take effective action for the well-being of themselves and others, and to contribute to transformative change across food systems and for climate resilience.

In this essay, we unravel the nexus of gender justice, climate resilience, and food and nutrition security to identify the strategies, both immediate and structural, that can contribute to a gender-just, climate-resilient, and food-secure world.

Note: The views expressed in this chapter are those of the authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of Welthungerhilfe (WHH), Concern Worldwide, or the Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict (IFHV).

## Gender Inequality in Food Systems and Nutrition Is Severe—and Climate Change Is Making It Worse

Despite decades of galvanizing rhetoric about the need to ensure equal rights and opportunities for men and women, severe gender inequality persists. The Global Gender Gap Index,<sup>1</sup> at 68.5 percent, reveals stubborn disparities in men's and women's economic and political participation and empowerment at a global level, and in many countries the gap is much wider (WEF 2024a). The effects of the gender gap cascade throughout women's lives and have stark implications for the world's food security, nutrition, and resilience to a changing climate.

Among the undernourished, women consistently remain the most food insecure. The gap in food security between men and women is as high as 19 percentage points in some countries (Broussard 2019), and the situation for women is especially severe in countries affected by conflict (FSIN and GNAFC 2024). Women who are poor, rural, migrants, refugees, or engaged in informal employment are even more vulnerable (see Box 2.1). Even in peacetime, women and girls around the world sometimes eat last and least, given the inequalities prevalent in cultures, communities, and households.

As a result, women suffer from widespread nutritional deficiencies. The specific nutritional needs of pregnant and lactating women are rarely sufficiently addressed in households or in state interventions. Anemia, for example, affects 30 percent of all women globally

between the ages of 15 and 49 (WHO 2023) and almost half of all women in West Africa and South Asia.

Food systems more broadly also discriminate against women. Agri-food policy approaches and finance policies often fail to respond to the underlying power relations between men and women, such as discriminatory norms, labor burdens, and land inheritance regimes, yet they rely on women's unpaid farm labor and caregiving to sustain an unjust food system (Njuki et al. 2021). Even in countries where women's land rights are enshrined in law, sociocultural norms and practices constrain their land access and ownership.

At the same time, climate change has disproportionate impacts on women. In its report *The Unjust Climate*, the Food and Agriculture Organization notes that heat waves and floods widen the gap not only between the poor and nonpoor but also between male- and female-headed households. A study of 24 low- and middle-income countries finds that if global temperatures rise by another one degree Celsius, female-headed households are projected to lose 34 percent more of their income than male-headed households (FAO 2024d). As climate change and poverty push many men to migrate away from farms in South Asia, for example, women are taking on an increasing share of agricultural labor and are experiencing a rise in their work burdens, without commensurate control over the output and incomes from these farms. These women farmers lack timely agricultural extension information and adequate capital to recover from shocks (FAO 2024d; Leder 2022; Maharjan et al. 2020; Pandey 2019).

To cope with the impacts of climate change, women often face increasing work burdens, including the need to travel farther to fetch water. They are forced to take on multiple livelihoods, worsening

<sup>1</sup> The Global Gender Gap Index measures scores on a percentage scale of 0–100. Scores represent the distance covered toward parity (that is, the percentage of the gender gap that has been closed), so a higher score signifies a smaller gender gap.

### BOX 2.1 HOW GENDER INTERSECTS WITH OTHER IDENTITIES AND EXPERIENCES

Gender refers to the socially determined characteristics of women and men, which are learned, are changeable over time, and vary both within cultures and from culture to culture. While gender relations signify the social relations of power and the roles, responsibilities, opportunities, and expectations facing women and men, these categories are not homogeneous. Rather, the experience of gender is rooted in intersectionality, reflecting the multiple overlapping sources of identity and oppression, whether race, ethnicity, caste, or sexual identity.

Food security is not just about vitamins, minerals, and dietary diversity but is part of a wider system that can affect

women in varied ways depending on their stage of life and social position. As conditions intersect and overlap, they can combine to create cumulative burdens. The women worst affected by food insecurity and nutritional deficiencies are likely to be poor, rural women with little education (HILPE 2023), Indigenous women (Lemke and Delormier 2017), the urban poor (Roy et al. 2023), and the elderly (Assoumou et al. 2023). These intersecting drivers, however, are not systematically documented or considered in policy (Lemke and Delormier 2017; Rao 2020).

their time poverty,<sup>2</sup> with implications for food and nutrition security (Chaudhuri et al. 2021). Women's time poverty is now recognized as a major reason for poor child nutrition outcomes, alongside adverse effects on women's own health (Johnston et al. 2018; Rao and Raju 2019). The resulting deepening poverty and food insecurity also expose women to different forms of gender-based violence, including trafficking (Forsythe 2023; Rao 2020; van Daalen et al. 2022).

## Gender Justice Is a Cornerstone to Achieving Climate Resilience and Food and Nutrition Security

Gender justice—that is, equity between people in all spheres of life—is critical to a just world and to achieving climate and food justice. It consists of three interconnected dimensions: recognition, redistribution, and representation (Fraser 2009). Recognition entails transforming gender discriminatory norms by acknowledging that different groups of people have different needs, vulnerabilities, and opportunities and that their physical location and social position can intersect to intensify injustices. This calls for a nuanced understanding and appropriate responses. Redistribution involves directing resources and opportunities to redress gender inequalities. Representation refers to closing the gender gap in women's participation in politics and decision-making at multiple levels. Together, these three dimensions represent a transformational approach to gender equity (Figure 2.1).

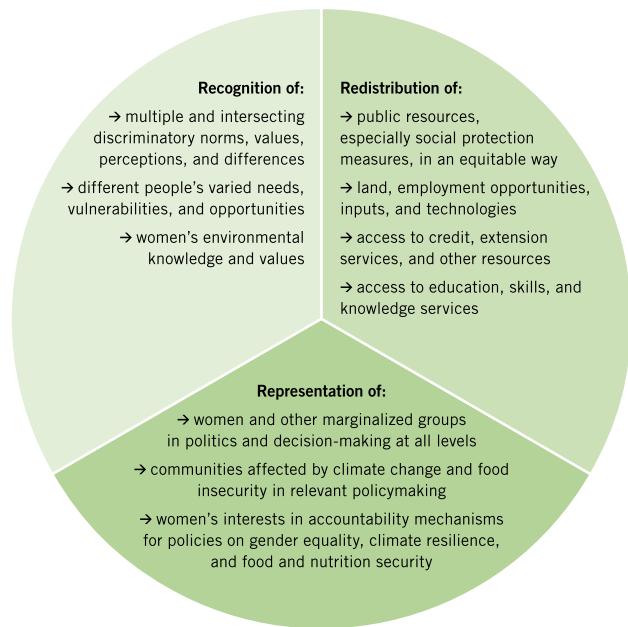
Several examples illustrate the potential for change across the gender-food-climate nexus as well as the challenges to achieving such synergies.

### Recognitional Justice: Transforming Gender-Discriminatory Norms

Exercising recognitional justice means changing how households, communities, and the wider culture view gender roles and capacities. Such initiatives can trigger transformative changes at the micro level, contributing to both food and nutrition security and climate resilience.

In Madagascar's Atsimo-Atsinanana region, as elsewhere in the country, men, often polygamous, have greater entitlement to and control over resources and decision-making than women. In addition to supporting their husbands on farms, women are expected to rear children and manage domestic chores and care work. Women are not allowed to use or inherit land or conduct their own income-generating activities, as this could be perceived as lack of respect for their husbands (ProSAR 2024a, b). The disruptions caused by extreme weather make women's household responsibilities, such as

FIGURE 2.1 DIMENSIONS OF GENDER JUSTICE



Source: Authors, based on framework from Fraser (2009).

providing drinking water, collecting firewood, and producing nutritious food for the family, more difficult to fulfill (Tahirindray 2022).

In this context, a program of gender-equity training has shown the potential for changing household and community norms concerning gender roles. A Welthungerhilfe (WHH) project in the region<sup>3</sup> has carried out a number of activities related to food and nutrition security, with a focus on women's care groups and the promotion of positive masculinity. Farmer field schools and demonstration plots not only provide women with new information and nutrition-sensitive agricultural techniques that make their soils and seeds more resilient to a changing climate but also position them as visible and capable contributors in the public domain of production, thus challenging traditional perceptions of gender roles. Neighborhood care groups provide both education on nutrition and health and much-needed social recognition and support for care work. Workshops on progressive gender roles demonstrate the complementarity and interdependence between men and women.

<sup>2</sup> Time poverty occurs when people, particularly women, have no time to fulfill personal schedules, rest, or hobbies owing to the double burden of productive and reproductive work, which occupies all of their time (Hyde et al. 2020).

<sup>3</sup> This WHH project in the Atsimo-Atsinanana region is part of the German Development Agency's Food Security, Nutrition, and Enhanced Resilience Project (ProSAR). It aims to improve knowledge of nutrition, hygiene, and health to influence the use of food. Additionally, it facilitates access to food through training in financial resource management and support for income-generating activities.

This multi-pronged intervention has set in motion processes of gender transformation. Many participating couples now work together in the fields, jointly invest loan funds, start small businesses, or purchase additional rice fields, helping them meet the family's basic needs, diversify their livelihoods, and invest in their children's education. As implied by a study in Uganda, joint decision-making about sustainable land management, livelihood diversification, and education can make households more resilient to a changing climate and improve household food security (Waiswa and Akullo 2021).

"During training on progressive masculinity and femininity, I promised myself to stop drinking alcohol, to no longer hide money from my wife, and to no longer see other women," said Frédéric, the husband of a care group volunteer. "Now I try to keep my promise, and together me and my wife work hard to have a better life" (ProSAR 2024b).

#### **Redistributional Justice: Access to Resources and Opportunities**

Women are typically held responsible for household food security, yet they often have access to few household, community, and wider resources. Redistributional justice, ensuring women's access to and control over critical productive resources, can challenge inequitable power dynamics and, in turn, create an enabling environment for food and nutrition security.

Access to credit is one example of the power of resource distribution. In South Sudan, as part of an integrated, intersectoral approach,<sup>4</sup> village savings and loan associations have increased women's access to credit and information. Preliminary observations suggest that these resources have led women to invest in vegetable gardening and agroforestry, enabling them to earn incomes; giving them more voice about what to grow, how to use their income, and what to cook; and, in turn, improving the households' food and nutrition security. It is suggested that activities to boost climate adaptation, like tree planting and agroforestry, picked up significantly when both women and men were equally involved in decision-making and ownership of resources. Progress, though, is slow. Despite gradual shifts in gender relations, the patriarchal nature of South Sudanese society has not fully changed, and community resources are still controlled largely by men (interview, WHH South Sudan, May 2024; UNDP 2022).

Elsewhere, efforts have sought to improve women's access to technology. In Nepal, cultivation of finger millet—a climate-resilient

<sup>4</sup> The WHH project, funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), aims to improve food and nutrition security and stabilize the livelihoods of internally displaced persons and small farming families from conflict-affected (host) communities in Rubkona County, Unity State, South Sudan. Activities include training on nutrition, small business management, and climate-sensitive farming techniques, as well as sessions on gender equality, gender stereotypes, and women's participation in decision-making at the household and community levels.

#### CASE STUDY

### **Empowering Women for Nutrition and Climate Resilience in Nepal**

In the conservative Terai region of Nepal, strict patriarchal norms dictate family decisions. Women in the region—especially those from ethnic minorities and with low social status—experience high levels of poverty, social exclusion, and marginalization and are unable to freely exercise their economic, reproductive health, and political rights.

These challenges are evident in the life of Nita Patel, a young mother whose three-year-old daughter was diagnosed with severe acute malnutrition one year ago. Today Nita remains unsure whether her daughter is out of danger, as she could not attend either her child's second screening or the regular nutrition meetings she once eagerly enrolled in. Smita Pal, who works with FORWARD Nepal under the Nutrition Smart CommUNITY program,<sup>5</sup> says health workers often struggle to retain rural women like Nita in such programs. "They cannot go out without permission or without a man's company. They lack the space and opportunity to make their own decisions," Pal explains. Any form of change often meets resistance from in-laws or families, making it essential to advocate for behavior change among both men and women.

The Nutrition Smart CommUNITY approach combines systemic interventions at various levels to address the root causes of chronic hunger and malnutrition through four key strategies: fostering behavior change at the household level, strengthening and supporting community-based institutions, activating and improving nutrition-relevant services, and advocating for a multisectoral, community-based approach to realizing the right to food.

The program aims to build the skills of caregivers to prevent malnutrition in both the family and the wider community. This

<sup>5</sup> This case study was prepared by Welthungerhilfe (WHH). Nutrition Smart CommUNITY is a multisectoral approach designed to help village communities tackle the complex causes of hunger holistically through self-help and sustainable practices. In Nutrition Smart CommUNITIES, people, local organizations, and authorities collaborate to improve nutrition by advancing agriculture, health, natural resource management, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH), integrating best practices from nutrition projects all over the world. Initially starting with two villages, the program has since expanded to 670 model villages in Bangladesh, India, and Nepal. Over a four-year period, the villages have become centers of knowledge and learning, including for neighboring communities. WHH is now extending the concept to Burundi, Ethiopia, Malawi, Sierra Leone, and Tajikistan. The initiative is funded mainly by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and Irish Aid.



WHH's health volunteers Nita and Reshma in conversation with Smita from the Nutrition Smart CommUNITY program in the Terai region of Nepal.

includes training to prepare Super Cereals—a highly nutritious prepared food containing a selection of locally available, climate-resilient food items such as maize, millets, pulses, peas, wheat, soybeans, brown rice, and various seasonal fruits. Nita learned this recipe and has incorporated it into her daughter's daily diet. "I don't have to beg or ask for extra money from my husband or in-laws. These ingredients are readily available at our farm or at home," says Nita. Men migrate for work, often leaving financial control of the family to their own fathers. Women thus frequently lack financial freedom or purchasing power. Promoting low-cost recipes and improving women's access to knowledge on the linkages between agriculture, natural resource management, and water, sanitation, and hygiene is vital to increase women's agency and address malnutrition. To create lasting change, the program also trains men on the importance of nutritious food.

Through farmer field schools, both men and women in the community learn about diversified crops and healthy diets as well as sustainable farming practices that enhance nutrition and climate resilience. These practices include the use of traditional, local,

and climate-resilient crop varieties like millet as well as homemade bio-fertilizers and bio-pesticides known as *jholma*. Nita and her father-in-law practice these techniques together on her farm, contributing to climate resilience. Training is also provided to government entities to institutionalize change sustainably and enhance service delivery in line with community needs. To improve the status of women in the communities and beyond, the program also strengthens women's leadership skills and agency as they take on decision-making roles in local governance, such as micro-planning processes, savings groups, or water committees.

Challenging patriarchy and fostering behavior change takes time, especially in regions like the Terai, where it faces resistance. Yet seeing women like Nita become more conscious of their children's and their own health shows that education, training, listening, timing, and empowerment of families to pick up new behaviors in order to overcome resistance do indeed pay off.

and nutritious crop—is widespread, but it intensifies the labor burden on women. The promotion of small machinery, such as the finger millet pedal thresher and fork weeder, has helped reduce the drudgery of women's work and reduce time poverty (Devkota et al. 2016), with potential positive impacts on community nutrition.<sup>6</sup> In the Indian state of Odisha, research and development on millets has shifted in response to Indigenous women's needs for production and postharvest support. The government has now started testing millet-related tools and technologies for their gender sensitivity when considering state subsidies. Recognition that millets are cultivated mainly by women farmers has led to a reallocation of R&D budgets to build technologies that can improve yields, incomes, and overall well-being (Rao et al. 2022). While microfinance redistributes resources to individual women, the scenario in Odisha is an example of a systemic shift in state priorities.

In some cases, collective action has created demand for resource redistribution. In India, women farmers' groups in the state of Kerala have gained access to government extension services and bank credit through their collectives, not solely to enhance their production but also to help them diversify into climate-resilient, nutrition-rich crops. Incomes have increased, as has diet quality, as these women now grow diverse crops for both consumption and sale (Agarwal 2019). While male farmers are mainly engaged in the production of export-oriented, commercial plantation crops like pepper and rubber, the state here recognizes the contribution of the women's groups to food production and food security and prioritizes this in its planning processes. The success of women farmers' groups in Kerala is now being replicated across the country through the National Rural Livelihood Mission.

#### **Representational Justice: Gender-Equitable Laws and Policies**

In the 1970s, research on women and politics suggested that ensuring a minimum threshold of women in decision-making bodies could contribute to gender-sensitive policies and investments (Dahlerup 1988; Kanter 1977). This work helped to introduce quotas for women's representation in a number of parliaments across the world, increasing from 118 countries in 2013 to 132 in 2021 (International IDEA 2024). Only 6 countries, however, have more than 50 percent women in their parliaments (UN Women 2024). Experiences in some countries suggest that women's leadership and political participation can push policies toward gender equity, and one study shows women's

representation in national parliaments leads to more stringent climate change policies across countries (Mavisakalyan and Tarverdi 2019).

Bangladesh has had women leaders at the helm for the past three decades. It has made major strides in women's status and empowerment, currently ranking first among all South Asian countries in the Global Gender Gap Index (WEF 2024a). In the country's National Adaptation Plan (2023–2050), one of the guiding principles for coping with climate change is gender responsiveness. The plan was formulated through a participatory process involving more than 100 group discussions across the country, including with women and third-gender persons at the local subdistrict (*upazila*) level (MoEFCC 2022).

Women's representation can also make a difference in local governance, enabling demands from local communities to be channeled upward. In 1993, India instituted a 33 percent quota for women in the local government bodies known as Panchayati Raj Institutions. Women elected leaders were found to invest more than men in infrastructure responsive to issues raised by rural women (such as drinking water projects), which reduces women's work and boosts the nutritional status of rural communities (Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004).

Legal changes and women's high-level political leadership, however, do not necessarily lead to advances in gender equity (Childs and Crook 2008). In recent years the government of Pakistan has significantly improved the status of women's rights, centering them within the Constitution and adopting several legislative and policy frameworks focused on women's empowerment and participation. Yet despite legal and policy changes, as well as some redistribution of resources, Pakistan ranks 145th out of 146 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index (WEF 2024a). Training and livelihood opportunities aimed at empowering women entrepreneurs are often unsuccessful at getting women to enroll and participate because they feel unentitled to such resources, are constrained by labor burdens, and face physical restrictions on their movements. During climate-related disasters like the 2022 floods, which affected 33 million people, women lost more of their assets and savings than men. Displaced women, far from their families and male counterparts meant to keep them safe, were housed in shelters, where they faced an increased risk of sexual violence and unsafe living conditions (Soomar et al. 2023).

This contradiction—progressive legal change alongside poor gender equity outcomes—reflects the structural and sociocultural barriers, gender stereotypes, and discrimination women face throughout their lives (Weldon and Htun 2013). Pakistan, though perhaps an extreme example, is not unusual in experiencing persistent unjust gender norms that do not quickly respond to formal changes. Nonetheless, there are some positive signs: Observers of the situation in Pakistan suggest that women are increasingly taking part in

<sup>6</sup> This project is implemented by Aasaman Nepal and Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development (LI-BIRD) through the WHH global program LANN+ (Linking Agriculture and Natural Resource Management towards Nutrition Security), funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The project includes gender, climate change resilience, and nutrition advocacy components.

## CASE STUDY

### Using Livestock Management to Improve Climate Resilience, Nutrition, and Gender Equity in Somalia



**Madiino Sheeq Ahmadeey has a bustling husbandry business that allows her to sell fresh milk in Beledweyne District, Somalia.**

In Somalia, climate change impacts the entire food system, from production to consumption. The increasing frequency of natural disasters and economic crises exacerbates food insecurity, particularly affecting vulnerable populations. Gender inequalities complicate these challenges, limiting women's access to resources and decision-making power. Addressing these intertwined issues is crucial for ushering in sustainable development.

Madiino Sheeq Ahmadeey, a 40-year-old mother of eight in Beledsalaam Village, Beledweyne District, received her main

income from her small husbandry business, which enabled her to sell milk and meat at the local market. However, prolonged droughts caused the death of four goats, and rising food prices left her struggling to feed her children and provide for their education. Just after she had had to sell her last two goats to meet her family's basic needs, a project to advance climate resilience, nutrition, and gender equity provided relief.<sup>7</sup>

"I was very happy when I heard that I was selected to receive five goats, as I had just recently lost my livestock. It took me almost a day to believe that I had been given goats at a time when I was stressed," Madiino recalls.

Since receiving the goats, along with training on sustainable livestock management, Madiino's situation has drastically improved. The goats have reproduced, bringing her herd size to eight. She sold one goat and used the proceeds to buy chickens and expand her husbandry. Now, with seven goats and four chickens, she sells fresh milk and eggs daily, giving her a steady income and boosting her family's food and nutrition security. Her role as a primary income earner in her household also empowers her within her household and community.

<sup>7</sup> This case study was prepared by Welthungerhilfe (WHH). The WHH project, implemented by the Centre for Peace and Democracy (CPD) and Sustainable Development and Peacebuilding Initiatives (SYPD), with funding from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), aims to promote gender equity and increase food security and resilience among small-scale farmers, pastoralists, and agro-pastoralists affected by high food prices and the current drought, as well as vulnerable households at risk of malnutrition. Interventions include, for example, the provision of community assets for climate-resilient agricultural food production, gender equity and inclusion training, and social safety net measures.

development and cultural activities, some women-led civil society organizations are forming and gaining prominence, and it is claimed that women-led businesses have more opportunities (interview with WHH and Concern Pakistan).

Without critical feminist, gender-justice approaches to climate resilience and food security that address intersecting social factors, there is a risk that even those policies and interventions that include or target women with resources to help develop their livelihoods or ways to feed their families can deepen their work burdens or result in a backlash—sometimes violent—to any profits generated (Vercillo 2020, 2022; Vercillo et al. 2023). Where individual women have

been able to make greater profits, this has often resulted in men taking over their livelihoods. Striving for policies that focus narrowly on individual women, such as permitting land ownership, for example, is inadequate for transformation in most contexts where few men own or control land (O'Laughlin 2007). Interventions can offer new opportunities for women, yet if they support women's ability to produce and provide for the household without considering the gendered divisions of labor, relations, and intersecting power dynamics, including class, such interventions can put women at risk of losing control over their harvests and assets, while potentially adding to their work burdens and food responsibilities.

## Implications for Policy and Programming

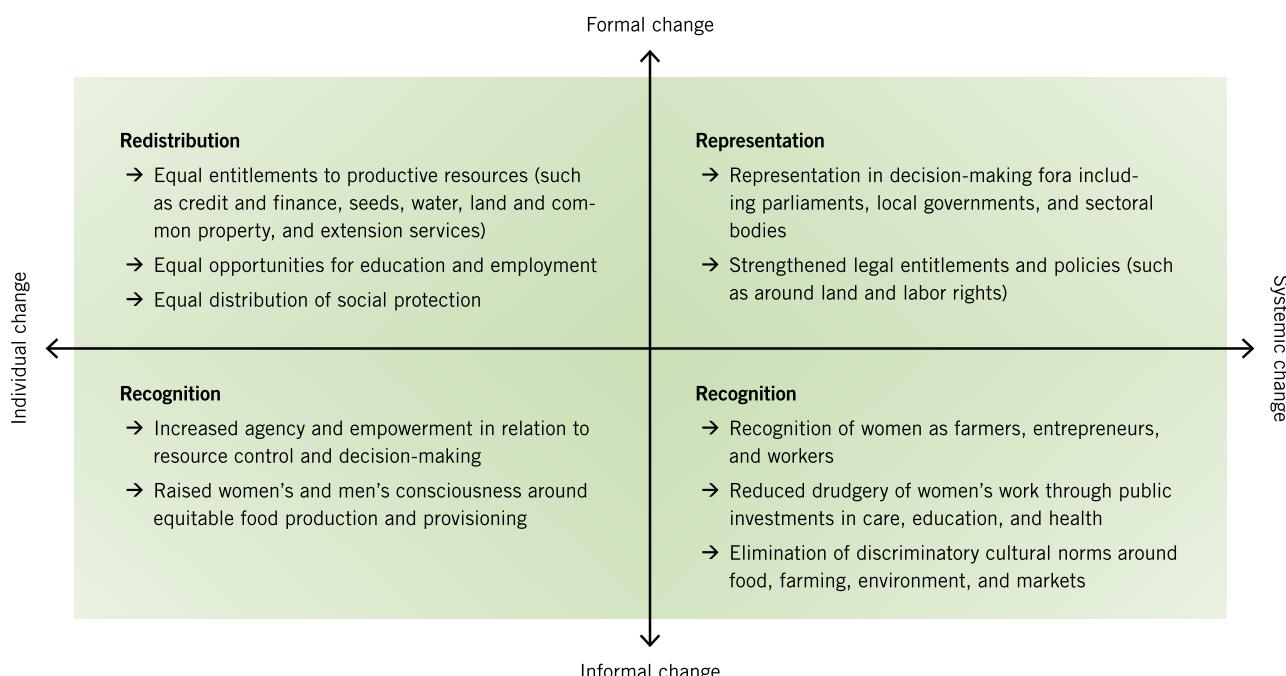
The need for climate action and food systems transformation is evident. Gender equity and equality—a human right in and of itself—is central to such a transformation. Yet achieving gender justice requires change at the various scales and levels at which gender relations operate (Figure 2.2). These range from individuals to entire systems, and from formal conditions like legal rights and material resource claims to more informal social and cultural norms that often conflict with relationships of respect and dignity.

At the level of government action, various international and intergovernmental bodies have developed guidelines to help point the way toward gender equality in both food systems transformation and climate action. In 2023, the Committee on World Food Security adopted Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment, which call for strengthening nondiscriminatory laws and access to legal services alongside targeted health, labor, and social protection measures. The guidelines recommend that governments use affirmative action to draw women into leadership and managerial positions, support women's rights organizations and

networks, empower women through education, and support their land tenure and use rights (Caroli et al. 2022). In fact, educational interventions, including the introduction of relevant gender equality concepts in the content of school curricula and pedagogical practices, have been recognized as an important strategy for changing discriminatory gender norms (UNESCO 2013). These actions are especially important for Indigenous women and those who are nutritionally vulnerable, like pregnant and lactating women, widows, divorced women, and single mothers. Yet civil society activists have noted that the guidelines do not go far enough in recognizing intersectional disadvantages or addressing the prevalence of violence against women, girls, and diverse genders (CSIPM 2024).

Nonetheless, these guidelines can inform a number of processes that are already underway to address climate change and food systems transformation, such as the national food systems transformation pathways, which were initiated following the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit. Over the past three years, 127 countries have developed national food systems transformation pathways and 108 have submitted voluntary country reports. Many of these reports present bold measures to address the complex inequalities faced by

FIGURE 2.2 SCALES AND LEVELS OF CHANGE TO ACHIEVE GENDER JUSTICE FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND FOOD SECURITY



Source: Authors.

## CASE STUDY

### Exploring New Gender Norms in Malawi

Margaret Kamwendo and her husband, Jackson Adam, live in a small rural village in Mangochi District, Malawi, where they are enrolled in Concern Worldwide's Graduation Programme, an anti-poverty program that includes a gender transformation element.

One of the poorest countries in the world, Malawi consistently ranks low on the Human Development Index—it was 172nd out of 193 countries in 2022 (UNDP 2024). Eighty percent of the population relies on agriculture for income, so they are particularly vulnerable to damaging climate shocks. To support a pathway out of poverty and increase resilience to climate change, the Graduation Programme in Malawi offers a package of interventions, such as cash transfers, business training, and climate-smart agriculture training, depending on the needs of the individual.

Part of this program, known as Umodzi (meaning “united”), engages couples to reflect on and discuss issues such as gender norms, power, decision-making, budgeting, violence, positive parenting, and healthy relationships.<sup>8</sup> In individual and joint dialogue sessions, the couples examine stereotypes and challenges. As a result of the sessions, wives report that their husbands now consult them on decisions and have started to

<sup>8</sup> This case study was prepared by Concern Worldwide. Umodzi was a gender-transformative approach in the Graduation Programme that ran in Malawi from 2017 to 2023, with funding from the European Union. It was delivered in partnership with Sonke Gender Justice. The program was the basis for research conducted by Trinity College Dublin, which looked at barriers faced by women pursuing a pathway out of poverty.



**Jackson Adam and his wife, Margaret Kamwendo, of Mangochi District, Malawi, have participated in all 12 sessions of Umodzi, a program designed to shift gender norms.**

share in household duties and childcare and that conflict and violence in the home have declined.

Jackson and Margaret completed all 12 sessions of the Umodzi program. Together, they have seen many benefits, such as shared decision-making. When they receive income, they sit down, discuss it, and agree on how to spend it. Jackson is doing more household chores and childcare than before. They have also shared these lessons with their six children, teaching them about respect and mutual support in relationships. Margaret wishes the whole village could take part in such training: “If the whole village was involved, there would be a great impact.”

women, youth, and other marginalized groups. Since 2021, as part of its own transformation pathway, the government of Fiji, for example, reported that it has designed, developed, and implemented a Gender in Agriculture Policy alongside a Gender Responsive Budget targeted at advancing equitable livelihoods, decent work, and empowered communities in the context of a changing climate (pers. comm. from UNFSS coordination hub, June 7, 2024).

Similarly, the Enhanced Lima Work Programme on Gender seeks to integrate gender considerations into countries' nationally determined contributions and national action plans for climate change (UNFCCC 2024). Still, many climate action plans fail to directly mention the people most directly affected by climate crises, including women (FAO 2024d; Singh et al. 2021). Climate-smart agriculture

interventions and the practices they entail, while contributing to food and nutrition security, often do not address the nexus of gender, climate, and food. Women may continue to lack access to land and other productive assets, while interventions increase demands on their labor and time (World Bank et al. 2015). Like assets and resources, labor needs to be redistributed more equitably within households and communities, alongside the transformation of unequal institutions and social structures.

What is needed is a new model of farming that includes climatic, market, and gender justice factors. Agroecology encourages deliberative dialogue and community-led education on social inequality. Farmers share knowledge among themselves, which encourages experimentation and reduces dependence on global agricultural markets,



Mahadia applies climate-smart agriculture techniques, like crop diversification and conservation agriculture, in Sila region, Chad.

#### CASE STUDY

#### Training on Farming and Nutrition to Boost Climate Resilience in Chad

Mahadia, age 24, is a married mother of three in one of 2,400 households that are part of the Concern Worldwide's Green Graduation Programme in Sila region, Chad.<sup>9</sup> The program offers a number of supporting elements designed to enable individuals and families to meet their basic needs, strengthen their livelihoods, and improve their coping strategies on a sustainable basis.

In Chad, about 80 percent of the population depends on rainfed subsistence farming and livestock for their livelihoods—a way of living that is becoming more challenging as inconsistent rainfall leads to droughts and floods (Bahal'okwibale and Woldegiorgis 2023). For Mahadia and her family, who depend on rainfed crop production, their source of food and income became unreliable. Without an income, Mahadia could not access healthcare or afford to send her children to school.

"Our lives were very difficult," she says. "We would just work on our farms, and we did not have much else to do. We were always dependent on the rains. When there was rainfall,

we would go and plant, and if someone planted well, they would harvest and make some money from selling in the market. When there was no rainfall, we would stay like that. We did not have anything else to do to get money."

Through the Green Graduation Programme, Mahadia received cash transfers, which she used for school fees for her two older children. When a Village Savings and Loans Association was established in the community and members received business training, Mahadia was able to save money and thus afford healthcare.

Mahadia also received training in climate-smart agriculture, learning about techniques such as conservation agriculture, which prevents soil degradation and increases soil fertility, and crop diversification. She now produces food in a way that adapts to the effects of climate change. "[Concern] has also given us a lot of training about hygiene and sanitation, about gardening. In my garden, I have planted watermelons, beans, tomatoes, cucumbers, and peas. I usually sell these crops in the market, and the money I get helps my family," says Mahadia. Finally, nutritional training has shown Mahadia how to provide healthier and more nutritious meals for her family by incorporating fresh vegetables and fruits harvested from their garden.

<sup>9</sup> This case study was prepared by Concern Worldwide. The Green Graduation approach is implemented in programs across Bangladesh, Burundi, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and Somalia. It is estimated that more than 320,000 people will benefit from the programs between 2023 and 2027. The Green Graduation Programme in Chad is funded by Irish Aid, with co-funding from the Whole Planet Foundation.

while still increasing soil quality and food production. According to studies conducted in Malawi, agroecology offers particularly empowering spaces for women. Women experience greater autonomy and authority in household decision-making and labor distribution, and improvements occur in childhood nutrition, dietary diversity, and households' overall reported health status (Bezner Kerr et al. 2021; Nyantakyi-Frimpong et al. 2017).

This situation illustrates the need for reforms to gender relations at a structural scale. While enabling access to resources for women is important, without addressing structural inequalities—including class dynamics, rising income inequality, corporate control over production systems, and lack of high-quality basic services—hunger will persist. Furthermore, redistribution at the household and community levels needs to go hand in hand with macroeconomic measures, such as tax and trade policies and universal social protection, that support the most vulnerable, including women. Indeed, there is a growing recognition that universal social protection measures can play an important part in leveling the playing field, providing much-needed support to the most vulnerable in order to meet the triple challenges of climate change, hunger, and gender inequality. As part of its effort to achieve Zero Hunger, Brazil created the world's largest conditional cash transfer program, the *Bolsa Família*, targeting poor women. The program has empowered women by reducing poverty and enhancing their incomes and employment, while boosting the health and education of their children (Gerard et al. 2021). Variations of this program have emerged, such as the *Bolsa Verde* in the Amazonia region, which provides social assistance to households to conserve the natural environment.

## Conclusion

The problem of gender inequity has been recognized for decades, and a road map toward gender justice has been set out in various fora, policies, and programs. The experiences of many countries in confronting the challenges of the gender-food security-climate change nexus show that it is time for governments, development agencies, and civil society to follow this road map and accelerate progress. Some ongoing global policy frameworks and fora, such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) or the UN Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), should work to integrate gender justice concerns into all their actions.

There is still a long way to go. Despite progressive interventions, it remains true that deep-seated gender norms and the unequal power relations they signify are not easy to change. The scarcity of gender-disaggregated data often becomes an excuse to not address gender concerns. A lack of understanding of the linkages between

gender relations, food systems transformation, and climate policies as well as a scarcity of gender-disaggregated data can mean that policymakers operate in a context of uncertainty, with interventions having unintended, often negative, consequences. Overlapping and intersectional sources of vulnerability add complexity to the design and implementation of interventions and policies, and hence are often included only in general vision statements rather than in specific strategies.

Nonetheless, gender justice holds the promise of transformative change. We can take hope from and build on the many interventions and examples from across the globe that seek to achieve sustainable and equitable outcomes by simultaneously addressing the challenges to gender, food, and climate justice. By recognizing people's diverse needs, contributions, and vulnerabilities; redistributing resources to enable more equitable production and consumption; and, importantly, giving representation in decision-making platforms to those who have been denied, especially women, gender justice will enable all people to bring their voices, knowledge, and skills to the table, with the aim of finding innovative solutions and pathways toward a just, food-secure, and resilient world.

# IMPRINT

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**Recommended citation:** Welthungerhilfe (WHH), Concern Worldwide, and Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict (IFHV). 2024. *2024 Global Hunger Index: How Gender Justice Can Advance Climate Resilience and Zero Hunger*. Bonn/Berlin: WHH; Dublin: Concern Worldwide; Bochum: IFHV.

**Editorial team:** Welthungerhilfe (WHH): Miriam Wiemers, Marilena Bachmeier, Asja Hanano; Concern Worldwide: Réiseal Ní Chéilleachair, Aimée Vaughan, Connell Foley, IFHV: Holger Mann, Daniel Weller, Katrin Radtke

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**Editor:** Heidi Fritschel



**Design:** muehlhausmoers corporate communications gmbh, Cologne, Germany

**Printing:** Kölken Druck+Verlag GmbH, Bonn, Germany

**Ordering number:** 460-9655

**ISBN:** 978-1-7396018-7-4

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Fane Dayton and other female lead farmers use climate-resilient permaculture techniques to cultivate their land in the Mangochi District, Malawi. Their efforts hold promise for improving food and nutrition security and advancing gender justice in a context of increasing droughts and floods. Thoko Chikondi/Welthungerhilfe, Malawi, 2024

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**Acknowledgments:**

We gratefully acknowledge the Statistics Division (ESS) of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) as well as the World Health Organization (WHO) for their invaluable support throughout the data compilation process. We thank the staff of Concern Worldwide and Welthungerhilfe (WHH) for their contributions, and especially Dennis Isaak Lux (WHH) and Patrick Beer (IFHV) for their assistance on the GHI team. We thank Gershon Feder for conducting a peer review of this report. We appreciate Grant Price's careful review of the report. Finally, we gratefully acknowledge Doris Wiesmann and Jill Bernstein for their ongoing support and guidance for the GHI.

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