



Amplifying the Voices of Rural Women in Family Farming

July 22, 2020

Family farmers are key enablers of sustainable food systems and key agents in the fight against poverty and hunger. While almost 50% of farm labour is provided by women, they account for only about 15% of farm ownership globally, receiving less than 10% of available credit. In most cases, women tend to be responsible for food and nutrition security at a household level and about 60%–80% of food production globally. This presents a great food security challenge for women.

During the second virtual dialogue of the Parliamentarians' Actions for Gender Equality and Resilient Food Systems in Response to COVID-19, which took place on July 22, 2020, participants discussed in depth the ways in which rural women family farmers are responding to the COVID-19 crisis. In a panel discussion, Ika Nayan (Asian Farmers Organisation), Julie Cissé (GIPS/WAR), and Tiousso Halima (ROPPA) shared their perspectives on how rural women family farmers are dealing with the pandemic.

Challenges faced by rural women existed pre-COVID-19 but have been aggravated by the pandemic. Low literacy levels, a lack of access to credit, limited access to productive resources such as land and water, and poor access to information are some of the challenges that have hindered rural women's ability to deal with the pandemic.

However, women have demonstrated an incredible sense of leadership and innovation right from the onset of the pandemic. As Nayan underscored, "*if you do not have enough resources, you become creative.*" Some of the creative and innovative responses rural women demonstrated during the pandemic include:

- **Digitalization** – In Indonesia, lockdown and confinement measures led to a significant reduction in sales of farm produce. Farmers came up with virtual solutions to deal with the pandemic, including online trading, online training for rural women on processing fresh produce, and the use of social media for public outreach.

- ***Intercropping and integrated livestock with crop farming*** – using this method, if one plant fails, there is something else to be harvested. As Nayan noted, "when you have a small piece of land, you have to be creative on how you use it."
- ***A barter system of trade*** – women fishers and farmers in Indonesia and the Philippines bartered goods in an effort to avoid food spoilage.
- ***Organized money-saving strategies*** – rural women farmers encouraged and supported each other in groups to save money from the income derived from the sale of farm produce.
- ***Processing of food commodities to avoid wastage*** – examples include drying chilis after harvesting.
- ***Diversifying sources of income*** – rural Indian women farmers made face masks to supplement the dwindling income from farming during confinement measures.

Prioritizing women's voices in family farming is important for understanding the dynamics of gender and family farming but also provides an opportunity and an entry point for policy-makers to build and strengthen some of the innovative responses. Recommendations to address some of the challenges include:

- The state has an important role to play in strengthening public policy that promotes gender equality in family farming.
- Targeted support is urgently needed to support rural women's access to resources and inputs, such as land, improved seeds, and technologies.
- Support is needed for rural women family farmers that have been severely affected by the pandemic. Support could include subsidies for loan repayments, farming equipment, technologies, and training to strengthen skills.