

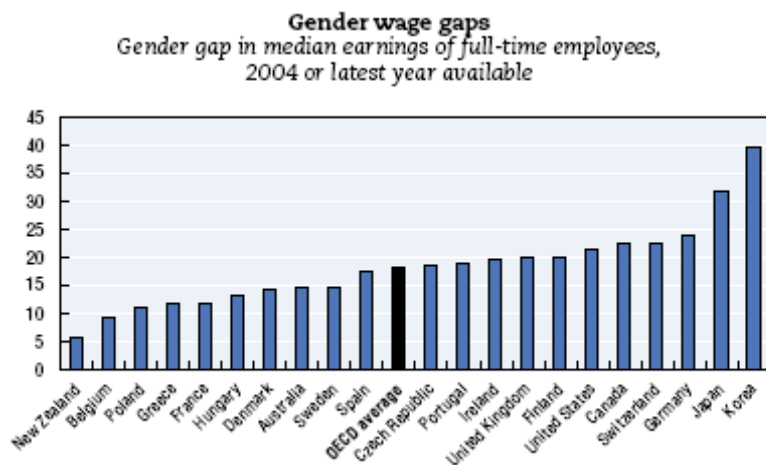
## FAQs / SOME SELECTED ISSUES

- **Why is greater equality for women important?**

Increasing women's access to assets and opportunities is recognised as fundamental by development agencies and international organisations, as a way to develop efficient development programs. Equal opportunities for women boost their labor force participation, productivity, and earnings, reducing current poverty and promoting growth. By improving the well-being of children, gender equality enhances the prospects for the future.

- **Are gender inequalities only a developing country problem?**

No it isn't. If we look at OECD countries, that include 30 developed countries among which Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Korea, UK, USA, and women are 20% less likely than men to have a paid job and they earn on average 17% less than men, according to the latest edition of OECD's *Employment Outlook*. At least 30% of the gap in wages and 8% of the gap in employment rates result from discriminatory practices in the labour market



(Source: OECD Employment Outlook 2008)

- **Why is the role of women in agriculture important?**

Women's role in agriculture is critical (globally they are responsible for at least 50% of food produced) and their work in agriculture is crucial to the provision of an adequate food supply for their household. Rural women are generally concerned with meeting subsistence needs of their families and with the management of scarce household resources, in addition to their role as income earners. These tasks must also be shared with women's child-bearing and caring role, the household/community services they provide, and the community management and political roles they carry out.

According to the World Bank, women tend to focus on crops for household consumption and to sell any excess while men cultivate crops primarily for sale, leading to a disproportionate portion of agricultural income going to men. This may result in a suboptimal situation for the household: studies show that when women control the income, households spend a significant degree more of their

income on food consumption and on children’s health and schooling, which benefits the household greatly in the long run.

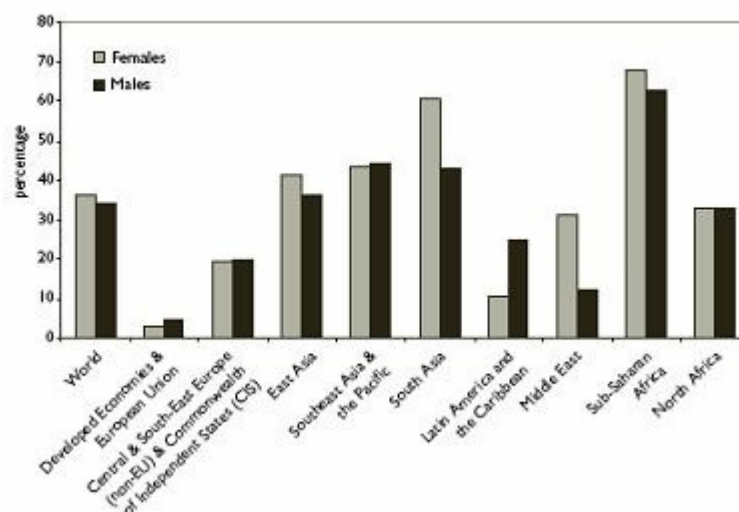
In most farming systems, females participate in all phases of agricultural production, although their roles (including decision-making) and control over resources and incomes varies greatly from place to place. Women and girls are an important source of labour in cash crop production, whether or not they control income, and often also participate in the paid agricultural labour force. They are often responsible for vegetable and tree crops close to their houses, for foraging in forests, and for the care of large and small livestock.

(Sources: OECD Gender Tipsheet - <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/3/8/1896584.pdf> and the World Bank, “Women in Agriculture”, 2008)

- **Are there regional differences in the percentage of women and men in agriculture?**

Total labour in agriculture has declined in most countries, and this trend will continue as countries industrialize. Over half of all labourers worldwide, however, rely on the agricultural sector. In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, 70 percent or more of the labour force works in agriculture. In many regions more women than men are employed in agriculture. In the Middle East more than twice as many women work in agriculture as men, and in South Asia close to one-third more women are working in the sector than men (fig. below).

Percentage of Women and Men in Agriculture by Region, 2007



Source: ILO 2006

(Source: The World Bank, FAO, IFAD, “Gender in agriculture sourcebook”- 2008)

- **How is the division of labour structured in crop productions?**

The division of labour between men and women in crop production varies considerably from region to region and community to community. However, it is usually men who plough the fields and drive draught animals whereas women do the major share of sowing, weeding, applying fertilizer and pesticides, harvesting and threshing.

Similarly, men tend to do the work of large-scale cash cropping, especially when it is highly mechanized, while women take care of household food production and small-scale cultivation of cash crops, requiring low levels of technology.

Women make an essential contribution to producing staple crops (in Southeast Asia, for example, it is women who provide up to 90 percent of the labour for rice cultivation) but they also play a big role in growing secondary crops, such as legumes and vegetables. Grown mainly in home gardens, these crops provide essential nutrients and are often the only food available during the lean seasons or if the main harvest fails.

The table below gives some examples of the proportion of women wage labourers in high-value crop productions.

**Proportion of Women Wage Laborers in High-Value Crops**

Country	Crop	Women as share of workers
Northeast Brazil	Vineyards	65% of field workers
Chile	Fruit	50% of temporary workers
Colombia/ Mexico	Flowers	60–80% of workers
Kenya	Horticulture	70–80% of packing, labeling, and bar coding
Sinaloa, Mexico	Vegetables	40% of field workers 90% of packers
South Africa	Deciduous fruit	69% of temporary workers
Uganda	Flowers	85% of workers

Sources: Dolan and Sorby 2003; ILO 2003.

(Sources: <http://www.fao.org/gender/en/lab-e.htm>  
<http://www.fao.org/gender/en/agri-e.htm>  
 World Bank “Women in agriculture”, 2008)

- **Is the women’s role in agriculture generally well understood?**

Rural women in particular are responsible for half of the world's food production and produce between 60 and 80 percent of the food in most developing countries. Yet, despite their contribution to global food security, women farmers are frequently underestimated and overlooked in development strategies. Farmers are still generally perceived as 'male' by policy-makers, development planners and agricultural service deliverers and there is a lack of available gender disaggregated data meaning that women's contribution to agriculture, is poorly understood and their specific needs ignored in development planning. For this reason, women find it more difficult than men to gain access to valuable resources such as land, credit and agricultural inputs, technology, extension, training and services that would enhance their production capacity. Only by the collection and analysis of gender disaggregated data will development strategies target women as active and equal partners in agricultural development.

(Sources: <http://www.fao.org/gender/en/agri-e.htm>  
 + <http://www.fao.org/gender/en/lab-e.htm>)

- **What are the most common gender-based labour inequalities in the labour market?**

Women are a major presence in the paid labour force in all regions of the world. However, they are generally concentrated in a narrow range of industries and occupations and in all countries there is a significant gap between the average wages of women and men. Women and men tend to do different jobs, and they are differently distributed by industry and within the same industry (with women at the low end of the responsibility and pay ladder). “Women’s work” and “women’s jobs” are undervalued in comparison to those done by men. There is evidence that lower wages for women’s jobs reflect discriminatory attitudes. There are lower rates of unionization among women and thus women are less likely to benefit from union support to upgrade wages and working conditions.

Furthermore, the average levels of education and training of women are lower than men’s in most countries. This reflects gender biases in society, educational and vocational training systems and access to on-the-job training. Finally, unequal allocation of family responsibilities and the lack of support services have to be considered, since women are more likely to have employment breaks to care for family members, or to seek work that is located closer home in order to accommodate family responsibilities.

*(Source: OECD Gender Tipsheet- <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/2/59/1896408.pdf>)*

- **Are new agricultural technologies gender neutral?**

Any changes to agricultural production can have a great impact on women's workload but, often, extension programmes and labour saving technologies have not been designed for women's agricultural tasks (such as weeding or transplanting), and therefore have only reduced the labour input for men. For example, new varieties of grain may increase time needed for food processing work in which women are mostly engaged, reducing time dedicated to the household and community services they usually provide.

*(Source: OECD Gender Tipsheet <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/3/8/1896584.pdf>)*

- **Is there a link between poverty and women’s employment?**

Yes, but the linkages between poverty and women’s employment are complex and require an understanding of how household dynamics and labour market processes interact. The relationship between poverty and employment runs in both directions. Poverty can push women into employment - the so called ‘added worker effect’ (Elson 1999), often in informal and poorly paid jobs (a vicious circle). On the other hand, women’s employment income often makes a critical difference to keeping their households above the poverty threshold.

This does not however necessarily mean that the individual situation of the woman concerned always improves, because household income may not be distributed according to the amount of time each member contributes to its generation. Attention should be given to separating out individual from average household well-being impacts, which may differ because of unequal distribution of rights, resources and time between genders.

*(Source: Marzia Fontana, Draft Overview paper for the Gender and Rural Employment Workshop in Rome, 2009)*

- **Do men have longer working days than women in most developing countries?**

Despite their often complementary roles in agriculture, studies have shown that in almost all societies, women tend to work longer hours than men. The difference in workloads is particularly marked for rural women, the world's principal food producers. Women are often involved in all stages of food production and, although there is a gender-based division of labour, women do tend to shoulder the larger share. In addition to food production activities, women have the responsibility of preparing and processing the food while fulfilling their fundamental role of nurturing and caring for children and tending to elderly members of the household.

(Source: Marzia Fontana, *Draft Overview paper*, 2009  
 +FAO- <http://www.fao.org/gender/en/lab-e.htm>)

- **What is the impact of modern supply chains on the rural labour force, in developing countries?**

In modern supply chains, female farmers are mostly excluded from contracting with agro-industrial firms for the delivery of high-value produce. The reasons for this exclusion of female contractors in high-value contract-farming schemes relate to women's limited access to productive resources such as land, capital, credit, and access to information and technology. The preference of food companies to contract with men is driven by companies' need to secure access to land and labor for a guaranteed supply of primary produce. So, women are excluded because they lack statutory rights over land and because they have less authority over family labor compared to their husband and male siblings.

In sharp contrast to high-value contract-farming, there is no bias in favor of men in the labor market effects of modern supply chains. For example, a large share of the thousands of *employees* in the sub-Saharan Africa horticulture agro-industry is female. The preference of agro-industrial firms to hire female workers has to do with the delicate work in harvesting and handling fresh produce for which women tend to be better capable. In addition, women might be more efficient in certain tasks. For example in the French bean sector in Kenya female farmers were found to do a much better job in harvesting, leading to substantially higher profits (Kimenye, 2005).

(Source: MAERTENS Miet and SWINNEN Johan F.M. *DRAFT- 'Are modern supply chains bearers of gender inequality'* - 2009).

- **Does better access to education mean more job opportunities for women?**

Progress in education is not always matched by higher labour force participation. As shown by the table below, by age 24, women lag far behind men in labour force participation everywhere except Sub-Saharan Africa. The transition from school to work is critical for building on the achievements in women's education and sustaining them in later stages of life, for the benefit of all. In regions for which there is enough data, gender gaps in labour force participation at age 24 are surprisingly high. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the gap is around 30 percentage points. The gap is even larger in South Asia, where 82% of men are active in the labour market, against just 27% of women. The gaps widen as women age. Between ages 25 and 49, women make a greater contribution to care-giving for children, the sick, and the elderly, while men increase their labour supply outside the home.

(Source: World Bank "Equality for women", 2008)

• **What is the role of social institutions in constraining the economic role of women?**

The term “social institutions” usually refers to cultural practices, traditions, customs and social norms. In most countries, social institutions hold the keys to understanding the roots of gender discrimination.

As highlighted in the figure below, social institutions can exert their influence in two ways.

1) Traditions, customs and social norms can constrain women’s activities directly

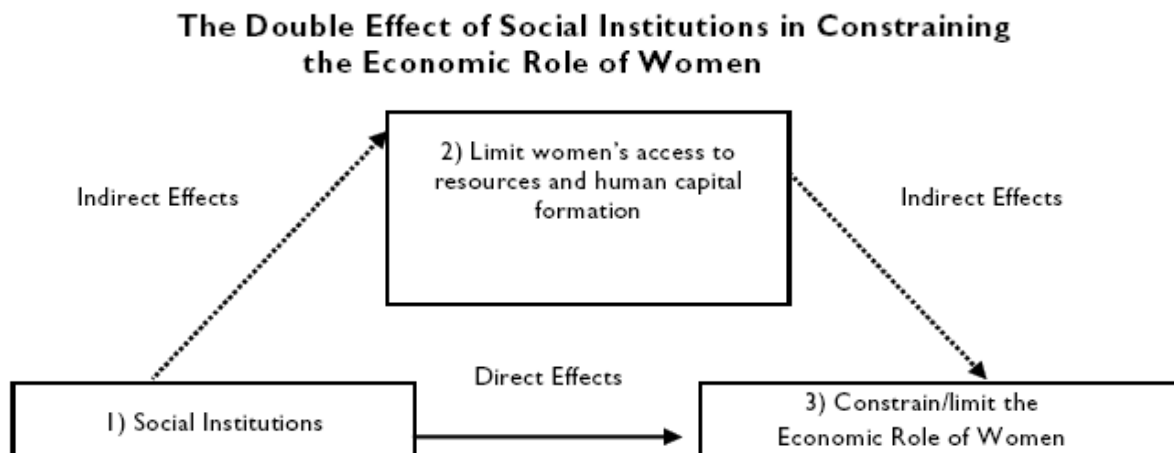
- by not allowing them to start their own businesses,
- by refusing them jobs that involve contact with or managing men,
- or by simply not allowing them to leave the home alone.

All these direct factors can lead to an exclusion of women from entrepreneurial activities that are often the first step towards independence, self-esteem and liberty of choices.

2) Beside these direct effects, social institutions can also impact on the economic role of women indirectly. The access to resources like

- better education
- access to health care
- productive resources (land, credit, capital)

increase women’s chances to participate in the labour market . Traditional institutions can hinder females’ access to these resources and constrain the building of human and social capital.



*(Source: OECD “Changing social institutions to improve the status of women in developing countries”, 2005 + OECD “The impact of social institutions on the economic role of women in developing countries”, 2004)*

• **Why are governments often ineffective in improving women’s conditions, by introducing reforms and new laws?**

When government reforms challenge traditions like polygamy, inheritance rules, males’ authority over women, or other elements of citizens’ private lives, which might contradict religious beliefs and long standing traditions, problems of legitimacy can emerge.

The presence or absence of democracy is an important factor, and it can influence both positively or negatively the chances for the reform of social institutions. But democracy alone is often not sufficient. In fact, discrimination against women still exists in many poor countries with democratic structures (an many OECD countries too), because governments’ influence on family life remains limited or

nonexistent, particularly in rural areas. The chances for successful reforms are highest in middle-income countries that are democratic and where the whole population has access to basic services like education, information and health care. Overcoming long-lasting discriminatory cultural practices depends also heavily on the authority of countries' leaders. Two scenarios are possible:

- 1) In a non-democratic environment — as in countries that have political leaders with exceptional authority — leaders can not only introduce but also enforce reforms that the majority of the population would otherwise reject.
- 2) In a democratic context, top-down or bottom-up development can make a difference in societies generally open to change owing to trade openness, cultural exchanges, tourism development and media freedom.

Moreover, and in addition to the question of legitimacy, reforms can encounter four main obstacles that take on different weights in different country environments:

- Constraints on empowering women;
- Flawed interpretations of religious laws and the depth of traditions;
- Missing drivers of change and the vested interests of men; and
- Limited enforcement of reforms.

*(Source: from OECD ‘‘Changing social institutions to improve the status of women in developing countries’’, 2005)*

- **Are women involved in local and national agricultural decision-making processes?**

In many parts of the world, Ministries of Agriculture and their researchers and policy-makers are dominated by men; for example, women make up just 18 percent of African agricultural scientists. In such a scenario, there is a risk that the important perspective of the rural female agricultural worker and the constraints and opportunities that she faces everyday are simply lost. Ensuring a pipeline of qualified female candidates for senior positions in public and private agricultural organizations could be a way to ensure that women agricultural workers receive the policy and project support they need to raise their households' food security, incomes and welfare.

*(Source: World Bank ‘‘Women and agriculture’’, 2008)*

- **What are the conditions to empower women and to change institutional structures?**

In many societies and for various reasons men often take the decisions that concern the lives of women. There are three important conditions for empowering women and making changed institutional structures possible.

*Improving Females' Access to Education*, especially literacy rates and basic education, is key. Without education, women have no access to paid employment, cannot take over functions in associations and cannot become members of local assemblies or parliaments. Furthermore, they have hardly any consciousness of their rights and often retain their inferior status. Education also allows women to take part in political debates and thereby ensure sustainability of reforms.

*Better Access to Health Services and Family Planning* is also essential for the empowerment of women. The introduction of user fees has proved very damaging to women's use of health services, particularly in societies that discriminate highly against women. The further development of innovative risk-sharing institutions tailored to women, such as the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) health insurance programme in India, would represent a step forward.

*Better Access to Factors of Production: Land, Credit, Technology and Information.* Improved access to factors of production ensures a long-lasting empowerment of women as a pre-condition for overcoming discriminatory traditions and norms of behaviour. Gaining access to information is important too. With telecommunication facilities increasingly accessible to women in rural areas, information circulates more easily and transaction costs fall, leading in turn to more market opportunities for women.

*(Source: from OECD, “Changing social institutions to improve the status of women in developing countries”-2005)*

- **Anti-discrimination laws: are they efficient and what are the problems?**

Successful anti-discrimination legislation requires effective enforcement, which is often difficult to achieve. The main reason for employers not to practice discrimination is the likely cost to them if they are found guilty of breaking anti-discrimination laws. But, in most countries, discrimination can be investigated and proved only if the individuals who have suffered discrimination are willing to take legal action. In this situation:

- the first requirement for the anti-discrimination system to work is that workers know that they have a legal right to equal treatment, so as to demand enforcement of their rights.
- Second, it should be possible for victims of discrimination to successfully bring their case to court. Proving a discrimination claim is inherently difficult, since the elements of proof are generally in the hands of the defendant, i.e. the employer.
- Third, at the very least, the cost of taking legal action should be lower than the benefit if the complainant wins his or her case. Beyond the intrinsic difficulty of proving a discrimination case, victims of discrimination may also become victims of retaliation for having filed a complaint.
- Finally, while costs are likely to be very high, benefits are uncertain in many cases, since legal guidelines covering compensation are often not clearly specified in anti-discrimination laws.

*(Source: OECD “Ending job discrimination”, 2008)*

- **What’s the common donor agencies’ approach to gender inequalities?**

Despite an overall consensus among donors about the need for the advancement of women, the actions of individual donors often fail technically and a critical look at donors’ conceptual documents reveals two important points.

1. First, donors generally acknowledge the roles in gender inequality of informal institutions, social norms and traditions of conduct, but often not prominently and rather as side remarks
2. Second, they often lack concrete targets to empower women economically and politically within in a given time.

*(Source: OECD “The impact of social institutions on the economic role of women in developing countries”, 2004)*