

# Challenges and perspectives for rural women in Brazil under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

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**In Brazil, smallholder farmers account** for around 70 per cent of the food market for some crops.<sup>1</sup> Family farming can contribute to reducing poverty and improving food security. Women are important actors in agriculture and rural development, accounting for 43 per cent of the total workforce in rural areas of developing countries (FAO 2015) and approximately 30 per cent of the total rural workforce in Brazil (IBGE 2006). Women spend an average of 372 hours per year on rural activities versus the 368 spent by men (FAO 2015).

Equity in access to production factors and information could increase agricultural output in the developing world by 2.5–4 per cent (ibid.). These data notwithstanding, women still face structural inequalities, including poor rural infrastructure and services, culturally assigned roles, as well as difficulties such as the volatility of markets, discrimination from institutions, intellectual and property rights constraints, vulnerability to climate change and lack of access to information and social programmes.

Regarding the lack of access to land, credit and financial support, women are vulnerable to economic instabilities. They are also much more likely to be affected by climate change in rural areas. To build resilience to climate change and economic constraints, women's land ownership is crucial, since it facilitates their access to credit and microfinance services. It also encourages collective action, which can be an effective alternative for building social capital and confronting socio-economic difficulties and gender gaps.

Regarding property rights, the Brazilian Federal Constitution establishes the compulsory joint titling of land for couples.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, INCRA Ordinance No. 981/2003 has led to a decrease in submissive practices of men towards women in the private sphere of rural properties since its implementation. The *Bolsa Família* programme also greatly contributes to the empowerment of women, as more than 90 per cent of the recipients of the benefits are women. However, significant challenges regarding the achievement of gender equality in Brazil still remain.

Women are the primary caregivers within households; they spend more time than men caring for the well-being of their family in terms of nutrition, education and health. Global data for 2012 show that women spent, on average, 202 hours per year on household activities, compared to 52 hours per year spent by men (FAO 2015).

Considering these inequalities and the fact that women generally do not get paid for working in the private sphere, climate change may affect them disproportionately. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge the structural aspects that undermine women's role in development at local, regional and national levels, so as to not only overcome gender gaps but also build resilience.

A report by the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on Rural Women (2012) on gender-related progress against the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) reveals that, at the global level, rural women are in a worse situation than rural men and urban women or men for every MDG indicator. To address this situation, it is important to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) comprise an important framework to track social changes related to gender inequalities in rural areas, presenting potential aspects of intervention and policy action in these fields.

It is also essential to include gender-sensitive indicators tracked by sex, race, age, revenue and disability to follow-up the SDGs and their 169 targets. In this sense, SDG targets 2.3<sup>3</sup> and 5.a<sup>4</sup> should necessarily be tracked by indicators with all these levels of disaggregation.<sup>5</sup> They are relevant to better identify the most vulnerable populations, as inequalities are both intersectional and multidimensional. They are also fundamental to policy design processes, which could be much better targeted and adapted to specific social, economic and population contexts.

Such a strategy could diminish disparities in access to production factors, technology, knowledge and economic and social opportunities, as well as enhance women's role in agriculture, with significant benefits towards achieving all the SDGs. This will only be possible through a gender-sensitive approach, enabling a more accurate understanding of the different impacts of public policies on men and women.

#### Notes:

1. By 2006, family farming represented 87 per cent of the national production of manioc, 70 per cent of beans, 46 per cent of corn and 38 per cent of coffee (IBGE 2006).
2. In Brazil, INCRA/MDA has already acknowledged homosexual couples for the purposes of joint titling of land.
3. See <<https://goo.gl/tDMzKd>>.
4. See <<https://goo.gl/SvQsHD>>.
5. The Inter-agency Expert Group on SDG Indicators must present to the UN Statistical Commission in March 2016 an indicator framework to monitor, at the global level, the targets under the 17 SDGs. For more information, see <<http://unstats.un.org/sdgs/iaeg-sdgs/>>.

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