

Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Our work

- ✦ [Food Security and Nutrition](#)
- ✦ [Climate Adaptation and Resilience](#)
- ✦ [Biological Diversity in Agriculture](#)
- ✦ [Management of Natural Resources](#)
- ✦ [Green Credits and Savings and Loan Groups](#)
- ✦ [Women's Rights and Equality](#)
- ✦ [Strengthening Civil Society](#)



Female farmer in Malawi. Photo: Julie Lunde Lillesæter, Differ Media

Zero Tolerance for Discrimination

In 1979, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women was adopted. All member states that have ratified the convention have committed to protecting women from discrimination and ensuring their civil, social, economic, and political rights. With the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, these commitments were further strengthened. They were particularly reinforced through goal number 5, which focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls in society. Several of the other Sustainable Development Goals also include gender-specific targets.

At the global level, progress on women's rights and gender equality has generally been moving in the right direction. However, progress is slow and sometimes faces setbacks. Women are more vulnerable to poverty, more frequently affected by malnutrition, have fewer land rights, and have less power in decision-making,

to name a few. None of the sub-goals for Sustainable Development Goal 5 have been achieved yet, and analyses show that we are generally far from reaching them. Gender disparities are also evident under other Sustainable Development Goals. For example, in 2019, women earned only 51 cents for every dollar earned by men. Furthermore, women are twice as likely to experience gender-based discrimination compared to men (UN Women, 2023, p. 5).

The climate crisis also does not affect men and women in the same way. According to the UN, women and girls experience the greatest consequences of climate change, which exacerbates existing gender inequalities and poses threats to their livelihoods, health, and safety. In many regions, women bear a disproportionately large burden in ensuring food, water, and fuel (UN Women, 2022).



Strong women in Malawi. Photo: Julie Lunde Lillesæter, Differ Media

Without gender equality, no sustainable world

Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls are important for addressing all of the world's interconnected crises: from biodiversity loss and climate change to war and conflict, poverty, and inequality (World Bank, 2023). Without gender equality and recognition of women's rights, we will never be able to combat hunger and injustice, and we will never achieve a sustainable world.

Female farmers have approximately 24% lower yields than men. This is mainly due to unequal access to resources. The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation estimates that if this productivity gap between men and women could be closed, along with closing the wage gaps in the food system as a whole, the number of food-insecure people in the world could be reduced by 45 million (FAO, 2023, p. xxvii).

However, the focus on gender equality and women's rights in agriculture does not "only" affect food security. Strengthening women's rights to own or have secure rights to agricultural land has positive effects on empowerment, investments, natural resource management, resilience, as well as access to services and institutions. This can also reduce gender-based violence and increase women's bargaining power (FAO, 2023, p. xxviii).



Young women are getting organised in Ethiopia. Photo: The Development Fund

How does The Development Fund work on gender equality and women's rights?

The descriptions above are why The Development Fund is committed to addressing gender equality and women's rights. We have conducted our own surveys on women's power over economic decisions in households in the countries where we operate. The surveys are based on a total of 43 focus group discussions and clearly show that men hold more power than women among our target group. The Development Fund believes that economic empowerment of women, including equal rights and increased power over resources, is a fundamental prerequisite for achieving resilient rural communities and sustainable food systems. These are some of the measures we have in place:

Training, awareness-raising, and capacity-building: One measure for increased equality is increased knowledge and awareness. Therefore, together with our partners, we work to provide leadership training for women, disseminate knowledge about women's rights, and provide training in financial management, to name a few. The Development Fund also works to build the knowledge and expertise of local grassroots organisations in this field. This includes workshops and courses but also a focus on the organisations themselves having good gender equality policies to make them more inclusive.



Female farmer taking notes during village group meeting in Nepal. Photo: The Development Fund

Savings and loan groups and opportunities to generate income: An important goal for The Development Fund is for women to increase their capacity to generate income because we believe it will both increase their standard of living, their power in economic decisions, self-esteem, and social status. Together with our partners, we establish and strengthen savings and loan groups and provide women with training on how to engage in income-generating activities. Through savings and loan groups, members contribute deposits themselves and manage loans that can be used to invest in their own farm or start a business. The groups also provide women with their own space to discuss challenges, find common solutions, and they gain a collective, stronger voice in local decision-making processes.

Training in sustainable agriculture and climate adaptation: To reduce the gender gap in agriculture, we work to ensure women have access to training in sustainable agriculture and climate change adaptation, and increase women's access to markets so they can sell their products.

"Young Women Can Do It": Young Women Can Do It is a specific activity that our partner Point of Progress carries out in Malawi. It involves training young women to actively participate and take on leadership roles in local groups and grassroots organisations. It facilitates active participation among women, especially at the leadership level, but also training in other areas to strengthen the position of women and girls in the community.

External studies show that The Development Fund succeeds in supporting women in increasing their influence and recognition within their households, grassroots organisations, and communities. It is also reported that our work has challenged discriminatory norms that weaken food security. We see increased participation from women in local groups (including in leadership positions), higher participation from women in income-generating activities, increased standard of living, autonomy, social status, and self-image. However, there is still a long way to go, and therefore, we continuously strive to strengthen our efforts with women's rights and gender equality.

Would you like to support The Development Fund's work?

- ✦ [Here you can read about how you can get involved in our work against hunger and injustice](#)

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