

GENDER AND FOOD SECURITY

Food security is a multifaceted concept that goes far beyond the number of people that can be sustained by the earth's limited food resources to encompass a broad range of issues: population growth, control and mobility, resource distribution, consumption patterns, agricultural production, climate change, environmental degradation, socio-economic status, development, trade relations, land ownership rights, access to microfinance and access to healthcare services. All of these issues are central to women, yet women's role in food security has remained practically invisible to many policy-makers.

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) disaggregates food security into three pillars; food production, food access and food utilization (1).

FOOD PRODUCTION	FOOD ACCESS	FOOD UTILIZATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women are active food producers. They work on small farms and in urban gardens to produce cash crops. - Women work in other aspects of food production such as resource management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women ensure that each family member receives an adequate share of food. - Women are primarily responsible for purchasing food, to which they devote their time and their income. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women are responsible for nutrition in the majority of homes. They decide what food to buy and how to prepare it. - In many cases, food preparation involves a substantial amount of time for collecting fuel and preparing ingredients.

Women's Contribution to Food Security

- Access to safe and effective contraception and other family planning services are essential components of food security. Whether or not a woman can control the number and timing of her children is crucial in determining both their level of nutrition and the amount of free time that she can devote to food production and preparation.
- Much of women's productive activity is localized in the informal economy and is not represented in official statistics on food supply and movement. Recognition and adequate compensation of women's productive as well as their reproductive labour is essential to maintaining their contribution to global food production and security.
- Legal or social restrictions prevent many women from owning or inheriting land, water rights or livestock, borrowing money or making decisions regarding the use of family assets (2). This has a direct and detrimental impact on their ability to manage food production and security. In comparative studies, households in which income was controlled by women demonstrated better levels of nutrition. Women tend to devote a greater share of their income to food and fuel as opposed to luxury items (4).
- In poor households women and girls are more likely to suffer from malnutrition. The feminization of poverty means that increasing numbers of women are suffering from malnutrition. This is especially true of pregnant and lactating women, whose food intake may not increase when their requirements do.
- A varied nutritious diet is often out of reach the poor, who rely on basic carbohydrates which have little nutritional value. A number of studies have documented the link between poverty, malnutrition and obesity, which disproportionately affects women (6).
- Improving women's access to education will be crucial for maintaining global food security. As well as general education, women should be directly targeted for training on such themes as agricultural production and resource management and conservation (2).
- In the Caribbean, where 2.1 % of the adult population is infected with HIV/AIDS, the implications for food security are severe. Women and girls assume responsibility for the care of sick family members, which not only puts them at risk of contracting the virus themselves but also limits the time available for food production and preparation (5).
- At current levels, the world produces enough to feed all of its inhabitants. However, unequal distribution means that a few consume too much, while many are not getting enough. Women's input into the policy process is vital because they understand both the day-to-day requirements of feeding a family and the realities of agriculture in the developing world.
- Men can have a profound effect on food security by supporting and promoting women's reproductive choices; their access to and control over land and

financial resources; their and their children's education and level of nutrition, their ability to be politically and socially active, and through their own

contributions to securing and preparing food, easing women's double burden of labour.

Country	Population in 1950 (thousands)	Population in 2000	Population by 2025 (estimate)	Fertility Rate (1995-2000)	Average Daily Calories (per capita kcals) (1997)	% of daily requirement (2792 kcals) *
NORTH AMERICA						
CANADA	13,737	31,147	37,896	1.6	3,119	111.7
UNITED STATES	157,813	278,357	325,573	2.0	3,669	131.4
CARRIBEAN						
CUBA	5,850	11,201	11,798	2.8	2,480	88.8
DOMINICAN REP.	2,353	8,495	11,164	2.8	2,288	81.9
HAITI	3,261	8,222	11,988	4.4	1,869	66.9
JAMAICA	1,403	2,583	3,245	2.5	2,553	91.4
TRIN & TOBAGO	636	1,295	1,493	1.7	2,661	95.3
CENTRAL AMERICA						
BELIZE	69	241	370	3.7	2,907	104.1
COSTA RICA	862	4,023	5,929	2.8	2,649	94.9
EL SALVADOR	1,951	6,276	9,062	3.2	2,562	91.9
GUATEMALA	2,969	11,385	19,816	4.9	2,339	83.8
HONDURAS	1,380	6,485	10,656	4.3	2,403	86.0
MEXICO	27,737	98,881	130,196	2.8	3,097	110.9
NICARAGUA	1,134	5,074	8,696	4.4	2,186	78.3
PANAMA	860	2,856	3,779	2.6	2,430	87.0
SOUTH AMERICA						
ARGENTINA	17,150	37,032	47,160	2.6	3,093	110.8
BOLIVIA	2,714	8,329	13,131	2.6	2,174	77.9
BRAZIL	53,975	170,115	217,930	2.3	2,974	106.5
CHILE	6,082	15,211	19,548	2.4	2,796	100.1
COLOMBIA	12,568	42,321	59,758	2.8	2,597	93.0
ECUADOR	3,387	12,646	17,796	3.1	2,679	96.0
GUYANA	423	861	1,045	2.3	2,530	90.6
PARAGUAY	1,488	5,496	9,355	4.2	2,566	91.9
PERU	7,632	25,662	35,518	3.0	2,302	82.4
SURINAME	215	417	525	2.2	2,665	95.5
URUGUAY	2,239	3,337	3,907	2.4	2,816	100.9
VENEZUELA	5,094	24,170	34,775	3.0	2,321	83.1

Table 2 compiled using data from WRI 98-99, Tables AF.3 and HD.1 (see note 3)

* 2792 kcals represents the average of the recommended daily kcals of men (2944) and women (2640). Percentages indicate the average per capita distribution based on available food supplies. Actual food distribution varies by gender, socio-economic status, region and ethnicity.

1. *Women: The Key to Food Security*. International Food Policy Research Institute, 1995. <http://www.ifpri.cgiar.org>
2. *Empowering Women to Achieve Food Security*. IFPRI <http://www.ifpri.cgiar.org/2020/focus/focus06.htm>
3. *World Resources 1998-99*. World Resources Institute, 1999. <http://www.wri.org/wri-98-99/>
4. *Food for the Future: Women, Population and Food Security*. UNFPA, 1995 <http://www.unfpa.org/modules/intercenter/food/index.htm>
5. *The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Food Security*. FAO, June 2001. <http://www.fao.org/docrep/meeting/003/y0310E.htm> Visit the FAO's Gender and Food Security Website at: <http://www.fao.org/gender>
6. Aguirre, P. "Socio-anthropological Aspects of Obesity in Poverty". *Obesity and Poverty: A New Public Health Challenge*. Washington DC; PAHO, 2000. 11-22.

