

5.1 Building Equitable and Sustainable Food Systems: a Gender Perspective

Climate change has disproportionately affected poor, marginalised smallholder farmers in India. Tribal/local practices continue to be devalued and commonly excluded from formal institutions. India was ranked in the bottom five countries (of 156) in terms of health and survival in the 2021 Global Gender Gap Report.

As part of the TIGR²ESS programme, a portfolio of qualitative studies, spanning three flagship projects FP1, FP5 and FP6, tackled these issues; exploring societal needs as a means of balancing the conflict between economic performance and other development goals, including gender equality and social solidarity.

Adopting a gender lens, the researchers used a Participatory Action Research methodology to engage with diverse people and groups. **Areas of focus**, highlighted in their findings, included: Growing vulnerabilities of farming systems to climate change/variability; male migration and the feminisation of agriculture; lack of access to technology, information and resources (especially for women farmers) including in farmer-producer organisation (FPO)-type arrangements.

Action interventions and training initiatives with various groups included:

- Children - using local food stories to illustrate food-related topics in the curriculum
- Youth - participatory film-making and development of creative tools, focussing on local food practices and nutrition issues
- Women's self-help groups - harnessing local knowledge on dietary diversity and recipes
- Front-line workers - translating knowledge into practice, adapting to locally available resources.

A key finding has been **the importance of transdisciplinarity** in research and the need to work in partnership. For example:

- Many FPO-type commodity-based initiatives aim to counter exclusion, but women farmers continue to be marginalised, with just 3% of FPO-type arrangements being female-led.
- Gender research - involving women farmers - provided unique insights on how emerging FPO arrangements in India might play a central role in shaping equity and inclusivity, particularly in rural areas, at different stages of development.

In conclusion

Food security and nutrition are often at odds with people's aspirations for better livelihoods. Innovative thinking about existing tensions is needed, to save time and reduce drudgery (particularly for women), and expand access to knowledge, so that a critical consciousness can be generated, contributing to the development of equitable social institutions.



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