

**Recognizing the Rights of Women Agricultural Workers in South Asia: Policy,
Politics and Impact**
25 October 2018, Bangkok

Joint Recommendations and Call to Action

1. Background

Rural women face significant challenges in fully benefitting from the economy, and accessing education, healthcare, and adequate nutrition. Women agricultural workers are overwhelmingly in informal employment, without social protection, decent working conditions, and reliable employment and income. They often undertake difficult physical labour, working long hours in unsafe conditions and are paid lower wages compared to men, if they are paid at all. Women are much less likely to be in a position to control productive resources necessary for agriculture and are more restricted in access to and control over land, energy, water, pasture, forests, agricultural inputs, credit and insurance services, information, technology and markets.¹ In addition to agricultural work, household work and child and elder care responsibilities remain assigned to women. Women are often not recognized as workers, by their communities, families, or even by themselves.

Within this context, the ***Recognizing the Rights of Women Agricultural Workers in South Asia: Roundtable on Policy, Politics and Impact*** dialogue was convened in Bangkok, Thailand, on 25 October 2018. The Roundtable brought together 30 stakeholders from across five countries in South Asia (Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka), including representatives from governments, universities and research institutions, international organizations, civil society organizations (CSOs) and grassroots activists. Participants included a Member of the National Assembly and a Minister of Sindh Province from Pakistan, chair of the National Commission on Status of Women, Pakistan and former chair of the National Commission for Women, India, among others. The list of participants is in the Annex.

Responding to the need to recognize rights and promote the well-being of women agricultural workers in the region through renewed regional advocacy and action, the Roundtable:

1. Identified shared policy and programme priorities to realize women agricultural workers' rights across the South Asia Sub-Region and in each of the five countries represented.
2. Shared successful strategies and key enablers that can trigger transformative change to protect the rights of women agricultural workers.
3. Generated strategies and actions for moving forward, including proposals for a potential regional mechanism for engagement.

¹<http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2015/un-women-flagship-programmes-booklet-en.pdf?la=en&vs=357>

2. Joint Recommendations

When women are empowered and their rights and contributions are recognized, significant social and economic benefits flow to individual women, their families and communities. To realize these benefits, women agricultural workers' rights and contributions must be addressed at local, national and regional levels – through improved laws and policies; stronger accountability and implementation; more gender-responsive agricultural practices; and through mobilizing, organizing and capacity strengthening of women agricultural workers themselves.

Recognizing the contribution of women agricultural workers across South Asia to sustainable development outcomes, including nutrition, food security, income generation and livelihoods, and acknowledging the important and unique role of agriculture as a primary source of employment and income for women in South Asia, the Roundtable agreed to the following **shared policy and programme priorities from 2019-2021**.

Joint Recommendations

We agree to prioritize the following **policy and legal changes** to recognize women agricultural workers' rights across the region:

- Legally recognize women agricultural workers as workers, in all countries, including ensuring equal and living wages
- Take into account the nature of agricultural work including seasonality; migration to urban centres and overseas, cropping patterns, and other drivers of women's work.
- Ensure social protection including pensions, housing, childcare, free and quality healthcare including sexual reproductive health, education and maternity entitlements.
- Affirmative action and non-discrimination regarding women's land ownership, access, management and control, including ensuring equal entitlements in land distribution, and tenure security, especially by aligning customary land laws with gender equality goals.
- All other resources to be at least equally accessible (or affirmative action quotas) for women especially state resources and subsidies including credit, technology, agricultural inputs, farm machinery, extension and training, membership/participation in workers collectives.
- Ensure that gender-based violence is effectively addressed, with women assured of physical security, freedom of movement and access to markets.
- Production of credible data to give visibility to women workers' contributions and to ensure that policies are responsive to the realities of women agricultural workers.
- Take into account cross-cutting and macro-level challenges including climate change, listening to the voices of women and their strategies for managing and mitigating challenges and barriers, alongside the need for changing gender norms.

- Recognise the importance of unions, organizations and associations of women agricultural workers. These can take different forms, including women only and/or including men and/or sector-specific.

We agree to prioritize the following **programmes and initiatives** to implement policy and legal protections more effectively:

- Promote and protect the rights of women agricultural workers to organize and have their voices heard, including supporting women agricultural workers as leaders.
- Ensure associations, collectives and organizations that support or are comprised of women agricultural workers are sustainably resourced, and are supported (including the right to register as unions and organisations), and enabled to scale up through networks and alliances.
- Ensure representation of women agricultural workers' organisations in policy processes and all other relevant fora, including access to policymakers through dialogue.
- Improve capabilities of all women agricultural workers, especially the most marginalized, to claim their rights and access justice (including legal advice and support).
- Raise awareness of the rights of women agricultural workers targeting especially government officials and service providers, including financial service providers, legal services, counselling services, health services, education services, among others.
- Develop programmes to improve the skills of women workers in agriculture (for example in use of farm machinery), to alleviate drudgery, and transform gender norms and relations.
- Effective investments in the capacities of government officials to implement laws and policies including through increasing their awareness on gender and by establishing gender audits and accountability mechanisms.
- Gender-responsive budgeting, ensuring governments have adequate resources to implement and rollout laws and policies.
- Monitoring and accountability mechanisms to be put in place including budget tracking surveys, amongst others.
- Engage with key stakeholders at different levels, including international organisations (such as UN Women, Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN (FAO), International Labour Organisation (ILO)), regional and global mechanisms, and governments, especially political leaders at all levels from the local to the national parliament.
- Political engagement including targeting women's caucuses across sectors and related campaigns to mainstream concerns of women agricultural workers.

We agree to a focused, collective effort to establish a Regional Forum on Women Agricultural Workers in South Asia for the purposes of:

- Sharing of best practices and data, research, and on-the-ground learning.
- Conduct research and advocacy involving unions, CSOs, researchers and women agricultural workers, to address knowledge and implementation gaps in the region
- CSWs² across countries are recommended to meet annually to monitor progress in implementation of and compliance with key frameworks (Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA)) through participatory processes which include women agricultural workers and their representatives. Use the regional platform to draw from international instruments and norms, focusing on shared priorities.
- Establish a baseline set of indicators by mapping SDGs and other relevant targets, and provide status reports at defined intervals.

In order to facilitate the formation of such a forum, we agree to lead collectively to:

- Establish and strengthen country-level forums in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, to highlight the contributions, and recognize the rights of women agricultural workers.
- Examine the potential of building a regional platform to raise issues concerning women agricultural workers, with their active participation, based on existing regional networks and alliances such as the SAARC Centre for Agriculture.
- Organise programmes to facilitate horizontal learning among women's groups/collectives
- We recommend that UN agencies (including UN Women) work with SAARC Secretariat (Gender policy advisory group) to bring together all relevant stakeholders to operationalize the recommendations above.

The participating researchers, civil society organizations and networks call on Policy makers, UN Women, FAO and SAARC to facilitate taking forward these recommendations

²India has a National Commission for Women; Pakistan has a National Commission on the Status of Women; Bangladesh has a National Women's Association and Sri Lanka has a National Committee on Women.

List of Participants

List	Name	Organization	Country
Researchers, CSOs, NGOs, Networks			
1	Benazir Jatoi	Independent Lawyer	Pakistan
2	Hussain Bux Mallah	Research Associate CSSR, LANSA Pakistan team	Pakistan
3	Damayanthi Sujatha Wijetilleke	Chairperson, NGO Management Development Centre	Sri Lanka
4	Haris Gazdar	Senior Researcher and Director CSSR, LANSA Pakistan team lead	Pakistan
5	Rafia Gul	Sindh Hariyani Union, Sanghar, Sindh	Pakistan
6	Khushi Kabir	Coordinator, Nijera Kori	Bangladesh
7	Lalitha Kumaramangalam	Director, India Foundation & Former Chair, National Commission for Women, India	India
8	Rashid Mehmood	Research Officer CSSR, LANSA Pakistan team	Pakistan
9	Nitya Rao	Professor, Gender & Devp, University of East Anglia & LANSA Gender Cross-cut Lead	India
10	R V Bhavani	Director (i/c) Food Security Programme, MSSRF and Programme Manager, LANSA	India
12	Saba Aslam	Research Assistant CSSR, LANSA Pakistan team	Pakistan
13	Saloni Singh	Executive Chair, Didi Bahini	Nepal
14	Sudha Narayanan	Assoc Professor, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research	India
15	Suneetha Kashyap	Umang Farmer Producer Co	India
16	Varsha Ganguly	Member, Working Group on Women and Land Ownership (WGWLO)	India
17	Vijay Rukmini Rao	Executive Director, Gramya Resource Centre for Women and Member, MAKAAAM National Facilitation Team	India
18	Dr. Yasmin Zaidi	Director, Center of Gender and Policy Studies (CGaPS)	Pakistan
Policy Makers			
19	Dr. Nafisa Shah	Member National Assembly, National Assembly, Pakistan	Pakistan
20	Ismail Rahoo	Minister for Agriculture, Supply & Prices Department, Government of Sindh, Pakistan	Pakistan
21	Khawar Mumtaz	Chairperson National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW)	Pakistan
UN Agencies and SAARC			
22	Mohd Younus Ali	Senior Technical Officer, SAARC Agriculture Centre	Bangladesh
23	Marianna Bicchieri	Land tenure Officer, FAO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific	Bangkok
24	Sanya Seth	Programme Analyst, UN Women MCO for India, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka	India
25	Yasmin Jaswal	Programme Officer, WLSR, UN Women	Pakistan
26	Sarah Schattmann	Joint Programme Management Associate, UN Women	Afghanistan
27	Sally Barber	Programme Coordinator, Migration. UN Women Regional Office	Bangkok
28	Camilla Wedenstam	Migration & Women's Economic Empowerment Intern, UN Women Regional Office	Bangkok
29	Somjai Noohuang	Programme Assistant, UN Women Regional Office	Bangkok
30	Maria Guimaraes	Strategic Partnerships Specialist, UN Women Regional Office	Bangkok
30	Sukanya Thongthumrong	Officer-in-charge, Regional Migration and Women's Economic Empowerment, UN Women Regional Office	Bangkok