Achieving Food Security and Gender Equality

Practical guidance to the implementation of the Brot für die Welt policies

Brot für die Welt has published its Policies on Food Security and Gender in 2018. This paper was elaborated to support the combined implementation of these policies. It aims to provide practical guidance on key strategic issues and intervention priorities to support food security and gender equality by its partner organizations.

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1. Driving Factors for Food Insecurity

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 set a high level of ambition: targets for SDG 2 include ending not only hunger but all forms of malnutrition by 2030. The international community has achieved some notable progress, yet many challenges remain (see figure 1). Among these are the persistent high numbers of undernourished people, the chronic deficiency of essential micronutrients and the impact of violence and destruction, hunger and poverty on food security in countries or regions affected by civil war, armed conflict and fragility.

Food security is affected by different important driving factors (see figure 2). Hunger is mainly a poverty issue. Most people suffering from hunger have little or no income to buy basic foodstuffs and have no way of growing their own food. However, food and nutrition security are not just about calorie intake; they are also heavily influenced by the problems of malnourishment and under- and overnutrition.

Another key factor is the wide-spread accession of large-scale concessions of agricultural land (land grabbing) by major international or national investors that are operating single-crop farms (monocultures). Since the world food crisis, some of the wealthier countries which have limited potential for crop cultivation and depend on food imports, such as the Gulf States and China, have begun to invest heavily in agriculture abroad, in order to secure long-term provision for their own people. Other investors produce foodstuffs or agricultural raw materials for industry with a view to exporting them to the world markets.

Another reason why hunger has continued is the failure to prioritize agricultural policy and rural development in many countries of the Global South in recent decades. There has been a lack of public investment in infrastructure, market access (roads and transport), agricultural extension, research and training, and storage facilities, weather information, veterinary care and legal safeguarding of access to land.

The current problems of the global food system are also major contributing factors to hunger. Dietary habits are changing, with a significant increase in the consumption of high-calorie, industrially produced and processed foods, particularly fats and sugar, while the consumption of micronutrients is decreasing. In addition to lack of access to available foods and the means of producing them, hunger may be caused by wastage, post-harvest losses and the use of crops for purposes other than human nutrition.
Climate change itself threatens to become the greatest obstacle to ending hunger and malnutrition. Unless global warming is held below 2°C, it will become impossible to balance out the negative impacts on agriculture in many regions, even with adaptation measures. Water scarcity also puts food security at risk. Land use is increasingly becoming a key issue in international climate policy as agriculture is perceived as a means of offsetting emissions in other sectors and achieving carbon neutrality, thus creating further potential for conflict.

The risks to food security will not diminish or become less diverse in future. Those affected often lack a political voice, the capacity to implement constructive solutions and the income security needed to break this vicious circle. Economic, social and political marginalization and lack of participation are therefore key factors driving hunger and violations of the right to food. This is specifically the case for women and girls as gender relations worldwide reflect unequal power relations and firmly fixed norms and hierarchies of values that privilege men and boys. In most societies, people are pushed into gender roles and patterns that restrict their decision-making powers and development. Women are often stereotyped as being weak and dependent which prevents them from developing their potential and skills while it can be a burden for men to always have to come across as strong, courageous and invulnerable. Deviations from the norm are seen as a threat to the existing (gender) order. The high extent of gender-based and sexualized violence that women and girls in particular are subject to poses a particular challenge to achieving gender justice, as gender relations and their inherent power structures promote violence of different types and degrees.

2. Core Principles for Brot für die Welt and Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe

The following core principles of church-based development cooperation serve as the normative framework and as guidelines for Bread for the World and Diakonie Katastrophenhilfe in their engagement for global food security.

Justice for the poor and the realization of human rights: In order to end the many forms of hunger and extreme poverty caused by discrimination, marginalization and violations of people’s rights, it is necessary to defend the rights of each and every individual and call those responsible for injustice to account. Development needs the rights of participation, codetermination, access to grievance mechanisms and justice, and appropriate forms of governance.

The interconnectedness of justice, peace and integrity of creation is a main point of orientation. Hunger, injustice and poverty pose a threat to peace, just as war and violence hinder development and constantly reverse the progress made in the fight against hunger and poverty. Given the finite nature of the Earth’s resources and planetary boundaries the equitable distribution and sustainable use of the natural environment within the limits of the Earth’s carrying capacity is also included.

The “do not harm” principle reflects the fact that in the context of development, humanitarian aid and social change, conflicts of interest can frequently arise between individuals or groups within a system. This also applies to gender relations. Outside support always constitutes some form of intervention in a system and thus becomes part of it. Depending on how sensitively the intervention is implemented, it may contribute to peaceful development or it may also unwittingly exacerbate the conflict dynamics.

Efforts to support development must always start with the participation and empowerment of the target groups and build on their ideas on how to improve their lives and end poverty and oppression at the local level. This requires strategies and measures which increase people’s self-determination and agency and enable them to act as their own advocates. Empowerment should therefore be understood as an organized, grassroots process whose purpose is to transform power structures. It is a political and holis-
tic approach which allows disadvantaged individuals to gain a voice and make it heard.

**Safeguarding survival at the local level:** Holistic livelihood security approaches are only sustainable if they equip people with coping strategies that enable them to overcome life challenges (e.g. illness or death) or external crises (floods, famines) while preserving essential resources for future generations, improving preparedness and reducing the time it takes to recover from crises (resilience).

**Gender justice:** Ending gender inequality is a key step towards social justice and sustainable development. Food and nutritional security for women and girls depends on the realization of their human rights, including the right to food. Women must have equal opportunities as men for political participation and decision-making. Gender equality also requires a change in men’s behavior and men engaging for gender justice.

Many women and girls suffer from gender-based and sexualized violence within their families and communities as well as during conflicts or migration. Women experiencing violence cannot develop agency in the fight against hunger and food and nutrition insecurity. This needs to be recognized and addressed in each intervention.

**Humanitarian assistance standards and principles:** The core principles state that the humanitarian imperative comes first and that aid is given regardless of the race, creed or nationality of the recipients. Aid priorities are calculated on the basis of need alone. Culture and custom are to be respected and disaster response built on local capacities. Relief aid must strive to reduce future vulnerabilities to disaster as well as meeting basic needs. There is accountability to those being assisted and those from whom resources are accepted. Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development (LRRD) means that emergency aid provided in the immediate aftermath of a disaster or in an ongoing crisis should not undermine the key factors required for development and should be accompanied by restoring affected communities’ livelihood bases and laying the ground for medium- to long-term development in the rehabilitation phase.

3. **Fundamental Approaches for Improving Food Security and Gender Equality**

**Realizing the right to food**

As a fundamental principle, people must be in a position to grow their own food or have the means to purchase it. If the prevailing conditions make this impossible, the right to food is violated. A rights-based approach starts from the premise that people are not passive recipients of aid but are right holders, able to claim and assert their civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights vis-à-vis government institutions and non-state actors. They also have a right to participate in society and have a say in the political process. A rights-based approach emphasizes the state’s responsibility to ensure the progressive realization of human rights. It analyses not only the needs of disadvantaged groups but also the structural factors which make fulfilment of basic needs difficult or impossible (see figure 3).

**Facilitating food sovereignty**

Food sovereignty is a political concept developed by social movements. It directly challenges the neo-
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liberal model of agricultural development, including the liberalization of agricultural markets, the privatization of rural services, and the appropriation and concentration of productive resources such as land, seed, water, natural assets and fisheries in the hands of a small number of individuals or enterprises. Instead, it offers a vision of small-scale, multifunctional and sustainable agriculture and artisanal fishing. The starting point for food sovereignty is self-determination in food production and consumption. Food sovereignty describes a pathway towards democracy in both these areas. Its core principles are the right to food, with a focus on its production, strengthening of local markets, fair trade and fair prices, decent incomes, freedom to organize, education, debt relief, secure access to fertile land, grazing, fisheries, forests, water and soil – if necessary through agricultural and land reform – and management and maintenance of natural resources (commons) by local communities.

Eradicating gender inequality

The FAO (2011) states that if women had the same access to agricultural resources as men, agricultural production would rise about 20-30%. Increased gender equality in rural households and communities promotes food security, better living conditions and resilience to the impacts of climate change. This can only be achieved if gender roles and power structures are questioned and altered. Brot für die Welt has identified several levers for eradicating gender inequality. The identified key areas are closely linked and often mutually dependent. Of these levers, legal equality, equal access to and control over resources and equal participation and decision-making power are the most commonly addressed. However, equally important is the autonomy to shape one’s own life and freedom from violence as a precondition for a self-determined life. And finally, the development of social values and norms that call into question patriarchal power relations, thought and behavioural patterns means that gender-based discrimination and human rights violations can only be overcome if discriminatory social practices, values and norms are challenged and abolished.

4. Agroecology and Gender Equality

Smallholder farmers, like other food producers such as fishers and pastoralists, play a key role in ending hunger. Agroecology is the best option for supporting smallholder farming: it can be adapted to natural, social, economic and political conditions, protects productive resources in a sustainable manner and supports adaptation to climate change impacts. Agroecology offers clear and robust alternatives to the current agri-business model based on the rediscovery and refinement of a multitude of traditional farming systems. It is based on a holistic approach which considers the needs of farms, communities and ecosystems and aims to satisfy local needs (see figure 4).

Agroecology is based on the development of biomass and nutrient cycles as a means of maintaining and improving soil fertility, reducing the losses caused by wind, water and exposure to solar radiation and maintaining or increasing biodiversity. Agroecology supports biological processes which minimize the use of inputs such as mineral fertilizers, pesticides and fossil fuels. Agricultural intensification based on agroecology aims to increase yields and yield stability (risk avoidance instead of profit maximization), reduces dependency on external inputs (reducing the risk of indebtedness) and strengthens local systems. In the tropics, the lack of farmyard manure is often a cause of declining soil fertility, so the integration of livestock husbandry into farming operations plays a key role in establishing well-performing closed nutrient cycles. Other agroecological principles include seed and breed diversity, crop rotation, mixed cultivation and agro-

In Oicha (DR Congo), the partner organization LWF advises the village community on measures to ensure food security. (Thomas Lohnes, 2013)
forestry, natural plant protection, post-harvest management and ecologically sound plant and animal breeding. The cultivation of a range of varieties and species, combined with animal husbandry and forest use, creates a species-rich system capable of minimizing environmental stress.

Agroecology promotes social justice, equality, political and economic autonomy, respect for the natural environment, and the diversity of local cultures and traditions. Supporting small-scale agroecology is a triple win scenario: it improves the food situation through low-impact, sustainable farming; it reduces poverty; and it minimizes greenhouse gas emissions and mitigates the impacts of climate change.

For agro ecological transition, changes are required in 4 key dimensions:

- in production practices (e.g. package of agro-ecological technologies)
- in knowledge generation and dissemination (e.g. farmer-to-farmer demonstration approaches)
- in social and economic relations (e.g. community building through awards, celebrations and visibility of pioneering farmers; women’s empowerment)
- in institutional frameworks (e.g. alignment with national climate adaptation policy; visits from national policy makers and involvement of local policy makers)

Explicitly mainstreaming gender equality in agroecological approaches

Agroecology can serve as an approach to change gender relations. However, this does not happen automatically and if gender equality is not considered as a goal, agroecological approaches reproduce existing gender roles and stereotypes. It is vital to address the specific barriers, inequalities and discrimination that particularly women and girls face in their context and promote both voice and agency of women and girls and change the roles and perceptions of men and boys.

Agroecology offers many entry points for women’s participation. In agroecology resources are used which women have access to (local seeds, organic fertilizer) and which are not very costly. Women can apply their knowledge in the production and use of crops and medicinal plants and in the processing of agricultural products. By providing food and income agroecology fulfills practical needs of women and their families. Some activities such as trainings or the exchange of experiences often take place at the local level, which allows women to participate.

However, this does not address the structural obstacles regarding the lack of access and control over land, the access to knowledge and technologies and extension for and by women or the lack of decision-making power within the households and soci-
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The violence against women is a bitter reality in many contexts and can take on multiple forms. Women and girls suffer more from hunger and malnutrition due to gender inequality. Sexualized and gender-based violence engenders fear that often prevents victims from actively engaging in any activities geared to improving their position in agriculture.

Gender equality needs to be mainstreamed in agroecological approaches through a comprehensive approach:

- Agroecological interventions need to explicitly challenge the traditional gender roles and highlight the important role of women as farmers to securing food and income in rural households.
- Agroecological interventions also have to address women’s strategic interests and should aim for a better position for women and girls in the family and the society, thus leading to equal participation and decision-making power.
- Agroecology has to address equal access to and control over resources if gender equality and women’s recognition as farmers is to become a reality.
- Demanding legal equality for women within agroecology means that equality is recognised by law and discrimination of women in agriculture is banned.

5. Key Intervention Areas for an Agroecological Approach to Food Security and Gender Equality

5.1 Improving Access to Natural Resources

Secured rights to natural resources are a key prerequisite for production and long-term investment. However, vital resources such as land, water and forests are increasingly being appropriated for infrastructural, speculative or agroindustrial purposes, depriving families whose livelihoods depend on smallholding, animal husbandry and artisanal fishing of their tenure rights. Access to water – a key agricultural production factor – forms part of the right to food. As with land tenure, it is essential to safeguard local communities’ water usage rights. As its availability is limited and the number of water conflicts is increasing, equitable local and transregional water resources management is essential. Seed legislation
is increasingly limiting farmers’ scope to save, use and exchange their own seed. This reduces genetic diversity and causes the loss of local knowledge as farmers are forced to abandon their customary seed production, saving and storage practices. However, small farmers rely on these techniques to ensure their survival when faced with particularly challenging environmental and climatic conditions.

Gender equality through equal access to and control over resources

Women farmers face a multitude of restrictions regarding their access to and control over land, water and other resources. Legal inequality prevents women in many countries from having the right to hold land (legal tenure). Women are also often discriminated in traditional land tenure systems preventing them from owning or inheriting land. It is common that women have to farm less fertile land, thus limiting their agricultural production while men farm the more fertile plots. Access to and control over water is a key challenge for women both for use in the household and in agriculture. Agroecological interventions have to address such challenges. At the same time, there must be a focus on women’s potentials. Thus, farmers’ seed systems often rest on women’s knowledge, and in many context, women’s agricultural knowledge equals that of men.

Intervention paths and priorities

For agroecology:

- In the interests of livelihood security, it is essential to safeguard individual or communal – including informal – land tenure and prevent further evictions. Agricultural reforms and land redistribution, with prioritization of smallholder families, are also necessary in many countries.
- To prevent overexploitation and degradation of water as a natural resource, the scope and efficiency of water utilization in the agricultural sector must be improved and agroecological practices deployed to increase the soil’s water retention capacity.
- National, regional and international seed banks are important. Their work is not sustainable without farmers’ seed practices and traditional knowledge in the context of farmers’ rights. The modern hybrids and genetically modified seed are unsuitable for small-scale farming.

For gender equality:

- Campaigning for legal equality de jure as well as de facto according to the situation in respective countries is a key strategy to support women’s access to and control over natural resources.
- The removal of restrictions within societies on access to resources and control over them on the grounds of gender enables women and girls to become economically independent, as a condition for autonomy and right to shape their own lives.

5.2 Building Climate Resilience

Diversified agroecological farming is an important factor in building ecosystem resilience and increasing food security in the era of climate change. Smallholders have a key role to play in supporting the transition to climate resilient agricultural systems. Not only are smallholders particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change; their traditional knowledge and innovation capacities are important for the development of appropriate adaptation strategies. However, climate resilience requires much more than suitable seed and improved growing methods. It links in with human rights-based approaches which support rural development, gender equality, solidarity-based resource distribution and the reform of agricultural trade. This is the only way to overcome the structural causes of small producers’ high vulnerability to the impacts of climate change.
Equally include women and men as knowledge holders

Both, women and men possess local knowledge that is vital for building climate resilience of local communities. Women have a vast knowledge of traditional practices and coping strategies that they employ in dealing with the impacts of climate change on resources like land and water. At the same time, they lack access to capital, information and new knowledge about climate change adaptation. This makes them extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. In addition, women and men can have different perspectives on climate change as they experience different impacts in their daily life. Both perspectives are necessary to come to a deeper understanding of the challenges posed to small-scale farmers by climate change. However, the knowledge of women is often seen as inferior to men's knowledge resulting in a lack of participation of women e.g. in the analysis of local risks posed by climate change or the development of adaptation measures in agriculture. As long as women are not perceived as active contributors and are prevented from bringing in their perspective climate related activities will not be tailored to women's needs and in some cases can even enhance existing inequalities, thus leading to a higher vulnerability of women.

Intervention paths and priorities

For agroecology:
• Diversified agroecological farming and smallholders have a key role to play in supporting the transition to climate-resilient agricultural systems. Their traditional knowledge and innovation capacities are important for the development of appropriate adaptation strategies.
• They need to be supported by climate risk assessments which help to adapt agroecological practices to current and future climate risks and to increase the awareness and understanding of climate change.
• Climate resilience requires much more than suitable seed and improved growing methods. It also needs advocacy based on human rights-based approaches which support a fundamental change in our societies towards more climate justice.

For gender equality:
• Climate resilience needs to be based on the perspectives of both men and women and their respective needs to increase adaptive capacities in families and communities. A human rights-based approach also needs to demand the equal participation of women in all decision-making processes relating to climate change.

• Enhancing women's access to and control over resources is a key step to increasing their resilience to climate change and enabling them to make better use of their knowledge.

5.3 Strengthening Organizational Development

The provision of a rural infrastructure that is conducive to agriculture, such as paved roads, a local energy supply, access to land and other productive resources, access to credit and financial services, the type and scope of agricultural extension services and access to grievance mechanisms, will generally remain a matter for policy- and decision-making at the national level. For countries to align their agricultural and food policies to the human right to food, organizations which advocate for the rights of smallholders, the landless, women producers, persons affected by food insecurity and civil society must be involved in problem analysis and in policy development, planning and implementation. Young people, as producers, food processing industry workers and consumers, will play an even more important role in achieving food and nutrition security in future. In order to respond to this demographic and economic challenge, it is essential to create attractive long-term livelihood prospects for young people, including rural youth, with a particular focus on agriculture.

Gender equality through enhancing women’s participation

Equal participation of women is not a reality in most societies. Social norms restrict them to the domestic sphere and prevent them from participating in organizations, networks and other civil society spaces. The huge gender-specific workload women and girls have to face on a daily basis prevents participation due to time poverty. Thus, gender-based discrimination prevents women and girls from actively participating in the activities shaping their lives. Agroecological approaches must take the improvement of women’s agency into account in order to increase the degree to which women can influence policies and decisions concerning their lives. Having influence with, over and through people and processes is therefore central to women’s leadership and decision-making power.

Intervention paths and priorities

For agroecology:
• Networking and capacity building for farmers play a key role in self-organization. Small family farms
will only be able to assert their rights against governments, corporations and the international institutions that are driving globalization and forcing the modernization and industrialization of agriculture if they engage in joint advocacy for their political interests and continue to expand their collective capacities at local, national and international level.

- Creating long-term livelihood prospects for young people will require international and national policy frameworks that prioritize rural regions and enable the majority of young people to become farmers and produce food using appropriate agro-ecological technologies and machinery or to find paid work in the artisanal food processing sector.

For gender equality:

- The strengthening of women and girl’s agency is a key task in promoting farmers’ associations and civil society organisations that they can be actors in politics, society and the economy and can realise their human rights.
- It is important to raise awareness about gender-based discriminatory social practices, values and norms among populations, traditional and religious leaders as well as politicians and campaign for a change of consciousness and behaviour in women and girls as well as in men and boys.

5.4 Promoting Education, Agricultural Extension Services and Agricultural Research

Education, knowledge, agricultural training and extension services are prerequisites for sustainable farming and income security. Free exchange of information and experience is a priority here, along with the protection, constructive development and dissemination of traditional knowledge. Agricultural research should mainly target low-income smallholder families with few resources of their own, who have missed out on benefit-sharing. It should address local farming communities’ social, economic and environmental needs and build on their knowledge. It should also consider the growing pressure on natural resources and the impacts of climate change, with agricultural research particularly focused on agro-ecological strategies that make farming more equitable and sustainable.

Investing in women’s access to education and knowledge

In many contexts, women do not have the same access to education as men. Girls leave school at an earlier age than boys. There are very few women in agricultural technical and vocational training (TVET) and university courses. This represents a huge barrier in giving women the same access to agricultural knowledge and research. Agricultural extension services are very often tailored to men’s needs and interest and their ability to move more freely than women. There are very few female extension officers. Thus, women only receive 5% of the consultancy services by agricultural extension services in Africa. Due to a lack of education women do not have access to research opportunities and are not recognized as bearers of agricultural-related knowledge. They are thus often not included in research projects and the research questions do not take their needs into account.

Intervention paths and priorities

For agroecology:

- Agricultural extension methods should be adapted to local conditions and should therefore include advisory services in local languages, farmer-to-farmer advice and information from associations and cooperatives, for example. A sufficient number of agricultural experts should be trained in agro-ecological and participatory methods to ensure that appropriate agricultural advice is available to smallholders.
- Smallholders should be involved in research and development and be given research tools of their own, along with opportunities to share their knowledge through networking.

For gender equality:

- Improving access of women into the education system is a huge task which needs more attention. This includes elaborating strategies for targeting women in TVET, university and other educational programmes.
- Strengthening the awareness and capacity of agricultural extension services to the needs of women is key to enhance access of women to the expertise and support they provide. This includes hiring more women as agricultural extension officers and tailoring the services to the main concerns of women as well as their limited mobility.
- Stepping up the efforts for capacity building and training for women is a key task ahead. In addition, women should be explicitly included in participatory research and field testing. This can increase the acceptance and recognition of women's knowledge within the community and the research community.
5.5 Improving the Rural Economy and Marketing

Smallholder farming must form part of a comprehensive rural development strategy. In parallel to promoting smallholder farming, local and regional processing and marketing of farm produce should be supported; this will increase value added chain opportunities in rural regions, reduce post-harvest losses, create jobs and generate incomes in non-farm sectors. Education for farmers’ organizations and cooperatives has a particularly important role to play, along with savings and credit schemes tailored to the needs of very low-income groups. Better market access can also be achieved through cooperation with private enterprises, provided that smallholders’ interests and bargaining power are considered and the risks they face are minimized during market integration.

Increasing women’s access to financial services and business skills

Diversification of agricultural production can support women’s access to marketing options and higher income that can be invested in better production or alternative livelihood options. However, women lack access to business knowledge and finances. They do not possess sufficient business skills and knowledge of market developments and requirements to effectively build up and manage their own businesses. Less than 10% of the credits in Africa are granted to women as they often lack the collateral banks are asking as guarantee. As a result, they need their husbands to provide collateral and sign the credit documents. Thus, existing credit schemes reproduce patriarchal power structures.

Intervention paths and priorities

For agroecology:
- Local and regional processing and marketing of farm produce should be supported in parallel. This will increase value added chain opportunities in rural regions, reduce post-harvest losses, create jobs and generate incomes in non-farm sectors.
- Agricultural programmes should prioritize food production for domestic markets. Depending on the local and regional conditions, stabilising the rural subsistence economy and/or enhancing it through sustainable market production must be the main focus of attention.

For gender equality:
- Legal equality and the possibilities for women to get access to credit or insurance schemes is a key step to improving their autonomy and self-determination.
- Improving market access and marketing possibilities increases women’s capacity to generate income. Through trainings women must improve their business and financial skills. Savings initiative and credit schemes particularly tailored to women’s needs and possibilities need to be prioritized to grant them access to financial capital.

Women from Mantogera (Ethiopia) on the way to the market. (Christof Krackhardt, 2019)
6. Outlook: Prioritizing Food Security and Gender Equality

Partner organizations of Brot für die Welt all over the world work on food security and gender. This publication aims to serve as a practical guide that can be used when defining priorities and strategies in the project and programme work. It is accompanied by a Powerpoint presentation which can be accessed online.

For further reading, please also refer to Brot für die Welt policies:
• Food Security Policy: What Bread for the World can do to end hunger (July 2018)
• Gender Policy: Achieving Gender Equality (August 2018)