

Women are key to fixing global food system



NAMIMUL HAQIIPS

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, women make up about 43 percent of the agricultural labor force worldwide, and in some countries they make up 80 percent of all farmers. In addition to tending crops, most women — particularly in the Global South — are also responsible for seed saving, animal husbandry, grain processing, and other tasks related to growing food. This is in addition to cooking, cleaning, and taking care of sick elders and children.

It's women farmers who produce the food that families eat. While male farmers often focus on growing commodity crops like maize, rice, and soybeans, women raise the fruits, vegetables, and small livestock that nourish families each day, Ip-nests reported.

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Nourished Planet, a new book put forth by the Barilla Center for Food and Nutrition, highlights stories of success through women's efforts in agriculture throughout the world. Examples range from female PhD students from Jamaica developing workshops for small farmers on climate-adaptive irrigation strategies to women dairy farmers in Ghana starting a co-op to pay for their children's healthcare and education.

The book goes on to highlight that, across the globe, women often have little agency over their own lives. They often lack the same access to resources — such as land, banking and financial services, education, and extension services — as male farmers. And in many countries, women aren't allowed to own land or even inherit their land.

As farmers across the globe are aging, women need to be able to take their rightful role as leader of their land, farm, and family. The average age of the American farmer is 57 years old; in Africa, the average farmer is 60. When their husbands die, we need to ensure that the women of these households are able to maintain the land they have grown, cultivated, and lived on for often many generations.

Traditional power structures in the food system commonly ignore or undervalue the vital roles women play. Women need to be recognized for their part in feeding

the world today, as well as empowered to grow their contributions into the future.

Across the globe, women are taking matters into their own hands by forming cooperatives and non-governmental organizations and innovating their way to a sustainable future.

The Women in Agriculture program in Nigeria is connecting women to vital extension services, and the Women Advancing Agriculture Initiative advocates for gender equality and access to information for women in Ghana. In America, the Women in Food and Ag Network is striving to create a global network to provide opportunities for education on economics and environment that promote a holistic view of agriculture.

Women farmers are letting governments, policymakers, and their own husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons know that we ignore women in the food system at our own peril.

A more economically viable, environmentally sustainable, and socially just food and agriculture system around the globe is within our reach. But it is an essential for farmers, eaters, businesses, policymakers, academics, funders, and anyone interested in contributing to a food system to value and support women to continue to grow our food, nourish our bodies and planet, and innovate to food system change.

Study links pollution to hospital visits

Scientists have found a direct link between air pollution levels and hospital admissions in Tayside.

A team at the University of Dundee studied the medical records of 450 patients with bronchitis against 15 years of pollution data for the study.

They discovered that many had sought medical help on days when pollution levels spiked, BBC wrote.

They concluded that a 'fairly modest' cut in pollution would have prevented nearly 1,000 medical interventions.

Bronchitis is a chronic condition that causes a persistent cough, breathlessness and chest infections.

Professor James Chalmers, who helped lead the study, said that during period of high pollution there were large increases in admissions to Ninewells Hospital and Perth Royal Infirmary for those with breathing problems, which was also witnessed at GP surgeries.

He added: "The patients we looked at, who all suffer from lung conditions, are to my mind the canary in the coalmine on this issue — they are the first and most seriously affected by air pollution but it can affect us all."

Chalmers said that the issue was particularly acute in areas where heavy traffic contributed to poor air quality and that Scotland was still regularly exceeding EU and Scottish safety limits.

Air quality is monitored at dozens of sites across Scotland, where measurements of nitrogen oxides and particulate matter linked to health problems, is recorded.

They have shown Seagate in Dundee and Atholl Street in Perth are among the country's most polluted streets outside of Edinburgh and Glasgow.

Staff at Dundee University said they were able to use 'sophisticated' medical data from NHS Tayside for their study because the health authority had digitized patient records years ago.

Ian Jarrold, head of research at the British Lung

Foundation, acknowledged that it was well-known that people with lung conditions were the first to become breathless when exposed to air pollution.

He added: "Thanks to this study, we now know that there is a clear link between high levels of air pollution and increased numbers of patients with breathing problems at hospitals and GP surgeries."

"The additional costs faced by the NHS in treating patients with lung conditions due to high exposure to air pollution can no longer be ignored."

He called for tough measures to be introduced to cut vehicle emissions in towns and cities across the UK.

The Scottish government has committed to phasing out petrol and diesel cars.



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Ministers have also committed to introducing low emission zones into Scotland's biggest cities by 2020.

The research team found that the worst effects of air pollution were seen in summer when there was hot and less windy conditions combined with the fact that people tended to spend more time outdoors.

He added: "At a time when the NHS is under increasing strain, we should be looking at effective ways of preventing illness. Our data shows that a fairly modest reduction in air pollution (of 10 µg/m³ of PM10) would have prevented nearly 1000 hospital admissions and GP visits during the study period."

Gains in safe education for Afghan children under threat

An increasing number of attacks on schools and lack of investment in education is jeopardizing the future of Afghan children, warned the Norwegian Refugee Council.

"The war in Afghanistan is taking its toll on a generation of children. Attacks on schools and students, lack of class-rooms and teachers, impoverishment, child labor and traumas among children jeopardize any gains made in Afghanistan and threatens the future of the country," said Head of Program for the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) in Afghanistan Will Carter, nrc.no reported.

Improvements within the education sector has, by NATO countries, been hailed as one of the achievements of the intervention in Afghanistan. Ahead of this week's NATO summit, NRC calls for countries that have been involved in the war, to scale up humanitarian support to education, including psychosocial support, for displaced children. So far, only 12.5 percent of the funding needed for education support in areas affected by crisis has been

provided.

"NATO countries have spent billions on the war in Afghanistan. It is therefore utterly incomprehensible that the same countries are unwilling to provide the little funding needed to support children affected by the war, especially when taking into account how important this investment is for the long-term stability of the country," said Carter.

"Any country that truly cares about the future of Afghanistan, should urgently step up their investment in Afghan children," he added. In total, 2.6 million Afghan children are out of school, according to UNICEF. Poverty, child labor and lack of capacity at already overwhelmed public schools deprive many children of their right to education, with displaced children being particularly at risk.

It will be impossible for Afghanistan to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal of ensuring all boys and girls can complete primary education by 2030, without serious and immediate remedial action.

A worsening security situation in many parts of

the country and an increasing number of attacks on schools and students are further threatening Afghan children's future. Most recently, on July 1, 2018, an attack on a school in Khogyani District, Nangarhar, where NRC was supporting schooling for over a hundred Afghan displaced children, resulted in the killing of three staff and

traumas, and children must be protected against attacks both on their way to school and at school," said Carter.

Exposure to continuous risk, violence and conflict has had a significant impact on Afghan children's psychosocial health. 55 percent of the respondents in a new study by the Norwegian Refugee Council cite psycho-social health needs



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destruction of the school building. This attack followed a spike in the number of attacks on students, teachers and educational facilities in the province in June.

"Many Afghan boys and girls have experienced or are experiencing violence that children should never have to witness. They need support to be able to deal with their fears and

as the biggest challenge for displaced Afghan children. Nightmares, flashbacks, physical pain, nausea, fainting, difficulty concentrating or socializing, and strong emotional responses such as frequent crying or anger were all common, according to the study, where more than a thousand displaced children, parents and teachers were surveyed.

Underfunding to blame for UK child protection 'crisis'

A former Tory children's minister has blamed the government's 'woeful underfunding' of local authorities for a crisis in child protection that is putting the safety of vulnerable young people at risk.

The MP Tim Loughton, who served as children's minister in David Cameron's coalition government, said pressure on safeguarding services in some areas was so severe that often the only way to guarantee safety for children was to take them into care, theguardian.com wrote.

Launching an all-party report into children's social care, Loughton said a 'post-code lottery' meant children and young people in serious need, including those who self-harmed, were physically abused, or in families where there was domestic violence, got varying levels of help, or no help at all, depending on where they lived.

Children at risk often had to reach a point where they were in grave danger before social services stepped in to offer support, the report found. There was also evidence that decisions on whether and when to intervene to help a child were overly influenced by budgetary considerations, it said.

"In some places, the pressure on children's services is so acute it is leaving social workers feeling that the only tool available to them to keep a child safe is to remove them from their family," said Loughton, who is the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group (APPG) for children.

Millions of children in England growing up in high risk environments

As a result, families may look at these skilled and caring professionals with mistrust. But this is wrong. It is the woeful underfunding by government of a proper breadth of social care interventions that is to blame.

In many areas, spending cuts had led to the erosion of early-support services



theguardian.com

for families, and made it harder for them to access help, the report said. There was 'compelling evidence' that thresholds for accessing services were rising, to the point that social work was now 'effectively crisis management'.

This meant safeguarding interventions were becoming more invasive, rather than supportive, leading to families being broken up unnecessarily, the report said.

"Social workers often feel that removing a child from their family is the only tool available to them to keep children safe."

Social workers told the inquiry that the shift to a more invasive approach was

driven by a risk-averse approach born out of fear of media scandal, by professionals' lack of experience in supporting families, and a lack of resources.

One social work team manager told the inquiry: "Local support services such as family centers, family support units, [and] parenting classes are no longer available... social workers feel unable to manage and work with risk without those services and therefore seek to remove children from home."

The report comes amid concern that growing pressure on children's services, fueled by increasing numbers of youngsters being taken into care, is overwhelming the family justice system and threatening the financial stability of councils already struggling with shrinking budgets.

The group said in 2016-17 local authorities in England overspent by £430 million on children in care and by £172 million on safeguarding. Funding for children's services fell by 24 percent in real terms between 2010 and 2015, while a £2-billion budget shortfall was predicted to open up by 2020.

"It is unacceptable that children's safety is potentially being undermined by a lack of sufficient resources," the report concluded.

The inquiry called on ministers to tackle the funding shortfall for children's social care and to consider introducing a legal duty on local authorities to provide early help services for children.

Loughton was under-secretary of state for children and families between 2010 and 2012. He led a previous APPG inquiry on child protection in 2017 which concluded that nine out of 10 local authorities were struggling to meet their legal duties.

Anna Feuchtwang, the director of the National Children's Bureau, which provides administrative support for the APPG, said: "It makes no moral sense that families are left to face crisis and children are put at risk of serious harm because services are chronically underfunded."