



## COP 21 Policy Brief

### Cultivating Equality: Just & Sustainable Food Systems in a Changing Climate

**OVERVIEW** We face a greater challenge than ever before: ending hunger and malnutrition in the face of climate change and natural resource scarcity. Success demands that we tackle inequity and gender inequality as a matter of social justice and human rights.

#### Introduction

Globally, 795 million people are chronically hungry; 161 million children under five are stunted. Yet we use 1.5 times the planet's resources every year, exhausting resources faster than the planet can naturally regenerate them. At the same time, changes in climate in the last 30 years have already reduced global agricultural production 1 to 5 percent per decade and could reduce it by 2 percent per decade for the rest of the century. Up to 600 million more people could be at risk of hunger by 2080 as a result.

Inequality shapes who has access to food and the resources to grow it and buy it. It governs who eats first and who eats worst. Inequality determines who can adapt to a changing climate. Hunger and poverty are not accidents—they are the result of social and economic injustice and inequality at all levels. The reality of inequality is no truer than for women—half the world's population, with far less than their fair share of the world's resources.

Despite this reality, proposed solutions to end hunger in a changing climate overemphasize increasing food production. While improving yields where there is not enough food or among small-scale food producers is important, it is not sufficient. To end hunger and malnutrition in a changing climate, we must address inequality in food systems.

#### THE INJUSTICE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change amplifies the risks already poor and marginalized people face—and the impacts are hardest on those least responsible for causing it. Climate change is expected to prolong existing and create new poverty traps, the latter particularly in urban areas and emerging hotspots of hunger. Vulnerability to climate change is shaped by an individual's, household's, community's, or country's ability to access information, resources, support and alternatives to livelihoods made less and less viable by global warming.

Without urgent and ambitious action, the world is at risk of the breakdown of local food systems, migration, increased risk of food insecurity, particularly for poorer populations, conflict, and the loss of rural livelihoods due to increased water scarcity. Small-scale food producers—and especially women—deserve a new strategy to support their agricultural efforts in the face of climate change.

**The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change concluded that climate change will impact “all aspects of food security...including food access, utilization, and price stability.”**

## REALITY FOR SMALL-SCALE FOOD PRODUCERS

Small-scale producers already struggle to grow, catch, or buy enough nutritious food because of degraded soil, small land plots, depleted fish stocks, water scarcity, lack of diverse foods in the market or low incomes. They often lack access to secure land tenure or access to natural resources, financial and extension services, information about weather, post-harvest storage, and markets. Higher temperatures, shifting seasons, and erratic rainfall pose significant challenges for small-scale food producers, who are already often one bad harvest away from crisis. Climate change is a further burden they do not need.



## WOMEN'S BURDEN, WOMEN'S POTENTIAL

Women comprise an average of 43 percent of the global agricultural labor force. They make up nearly 50 percent of farmers in Eastern and Southeastern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa and are responsible for almost 90 percent of food preparation in the household. Yet, only 10 to 20 percent of landholders are women, and they receive only five percent of extension services worldwide. Too often, women are not viewed as equal players in the household and community. So when they are not consulted on use of household income or community plans for natural resources, their knowledge is not captured, their priorities are not reflected, their needs are not addressed—and their rights are not respected.

A solution to the climate crisis that exacerbates inequality, violates human rights and undermines food and nutrition security is no solution at all. Small-scale food producers and especially women deserve a new strategy to support their agricultural efforts in the face of climate change.

## Recommendations

The cumulative reality of hunger, climate change, and poverty is proof that we need a new response grounded in sustainability and equity. Just and sustainable food systems demand a fair, ambitious Paris Agreement. CARE thus calls on UNFCCC Parties to commit in the Paris Agreement to:

- **Ensure that actions to tackle climate change advance gender equality and human rights and protect food and nutrition security.** The Paris Agreement must include operative text to ensure the protection and promotion of gender equality, human rights, and food and nutrition security.
- **Mandate a process to develop principles and guidelines for mitigation action in the land sector.** The Paris Agreement must recognize the special characteristics of the land sector and must mandate an inclusive process to develop guidelines and principles for mitigation action in the land sector.
- **Scale up financial support for vulnerable and marginalized people.** Developed countries and other countries with comparable capacity and/or responsibility must commit to scale up public climate finance additional to ODA for the post-2020 period with separate targets for mitigation and adaptation.
- **Agree a global adaptation goal to build the resilience of all communities, and anchor loss and damage in the Paris Agreement.** The Paris Agreement must recognize the need for support among vulnerable populations, including small-scale food producers, to loss and damage from impacts such as desertification, ocean acidification, and sea level rise.
- **Commit to keep global warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius and adopt a long-term goal of deep decarbonization, a phase out of fossil fuel emissions, and a phase-in of 100% renewable energy by 2050.** Parties must also commit to providing new, adequate, and fair national targets in relation to the above goals at least every 5 years.

### CARE International

Tonya Rawe, Senior Advisor for Policy and Research,  
Food and Nutrition Security  
Mobile: +1 202 459 3664  
trawe@care.org

