



نزرع للغد

ICBA
AGRICULTURE FOR TOMORROW

High-Level Policy Brief

**Outcome of the Regional Strategic Dialogue
“Climate Change and Women in Agriculture -
Challenges and Opportunities in the Central
Asian Countries (CAC) Region”**

22-23 October 2024, Baku, Azerbaijan



ICBAgriculture

WACAA

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Executive Summary

This report, an outcome of the Regional Strategic Dialogue on Climate Change and Women in Agriculture held in Baku, Azerbaijan on October 22-23, 2024, addresses the critical role of women in the Central Asian Countries (CAC) Region’s agricultural sector and the challenges they face due to climate change and systemic gender inequalities. Women constitute a significant portion of the agricultural labor force but often lack agency, ownership of land, and access to resources, which hampers their productivity and resilience. The dialogue held in Baku brought together 30 experts, policymakers and specialists from various academic institutions and organisations across the region, where they worked together to identify key challenges and discuss possible solutions. Challenges highlighted at the dialogue included a lack of women in leadership roles, prevalent gender stereotypes within the society, limited decision-making power among women, and women’s inadequate access to technology and financial services in the agriculture sector. To address these issues, this policy brief makes high-level, actionable recommendations to policymakers and stakeholders in a digestible format. By implementing these recommendations, we can create a more inclusive and resilient agricultural sector in the CAC region, empowering women to contribute significantly to food security and economic development in the region.

Introduction

Women play a critical role in agriculture in developing countries, accounting for an average of 43% of the agricultural labor force, yet their contribution often goes unrecognized (FAO, 2011). Moreover, women are involved in producing much food in developing countries but own only 15% of the agricultural land (FAO, 2018). Persistent and growing insecurity in women's land ownership, access, and control continue to impede the strengthening of communities' resilience to the negative impacts of climate change. Climate change is not gender-neutral. Women, particularly those in farming communities, are among the vulnerable groups disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change around the world (United Nations, n.d.). In addition, women lack equal access to skills, resources, and opportunities to make the most of their farming activities. They also do not have much say in decision-making on climate change adaptation and mitigation in agriculture.

The Central Asian Countries (CAC) region is significantly dependent on agriculture, which employs about 67% of the total labor force and contributes around 31% to the GDP of the region, establishing it as a critical economic sector for livelihoods (FAO, 2021). Similar to other regions, the CAC faces major challenges due to climate change, with an expected increase in the frequency and severity of droughts, floods, and unpredictable weather patterns. These climatic disturbances are predicted to reduce agricultural yields by 10-20% by 2050, particularly affecting vital crops such as wheat and cotton, which are staples in the region (World Bank, 2020). Women, who represent approximately 43% of the agricultural labor force in the CAC region, are disproportionately affected due to their restricted access to essential resources, land ownership, and participation in decision-making processes (UNDP, 2019). In Kazakhstan, for instance, only about 12.8% of agricultural land is owned by women, markedly limiting their capacity to adapt to climate change (UNDP, 2019). Furthermore, traditional roles and gender norms often exclude women from critical training and information sessions related to climate-smart agriculture practices, exacerbating their vulnerability to climate impacts.

The Women Alliance for Climate Action in Agriculture (WACAA) is one of the initiatives ICBA has launched during COP28 hosted by the United Arab Emirates in 2023. It aims to bring together women leaders, scientists, policymakers, farmers, and organizations working to address gender issues in agriculture. It works to mobilize all stakeholders and efforts to support women-led climate action in agriculture through policies, measures, programmes, or incentives that empower women and help make agriculture more sustainable, environmentally friendly, and resilient under climate change. WACAA serves as a forum and voice for advocating gender equality in agriculture, providing support and resources for women in agriculture, promoting sustainable farming practices, and addressing specific issues that affect women's engagement in and contribution to policy, science, and innovation. The Women Alliance offers a platform to exchange best practices, perspectives, insights, policies, and recommendations on women's engagement in science, innovation, and agriculture under climate change. It also aims to provide resources, tools, and opportunities for women to contribute to decision-making in agriculture.

Overview of the Regional Strategic Dialogue in Baku

As part of the WACAA initiative, in October 22-23, 2024, ICBA with support from the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), partnered with regional and local partners in Baku, Azerbaijan to organize a two-day regional strategic dialogue. This dialogue aimed to bring together experts from research and academic institutions in fields related to agriculture and/or climate change from countries across the Central Asian Countries (CAC) region. The event included a multitude of panel discussions, training and group activities to engage the participants in discussion and dialogue to help stimulate participants' thinking on gender mainstreaming within the agriculture sector. Participants at the dialogue included 4 ICBA team members and 30 (22 women and 8 men) experts, policy-makers and specialists. At the end of the event each participant received a certificate of appreciation for participation in the dialogue event. A detailed agenda and list of participants can be seen in the appendices section of this document.

Key points discussed at the dialogue

Over two days of dialogue, round tables and presentations, all participants discussed the following topics and challenges:

- The importance of enabling and empowering women, particularly in the agriculture sector across the CAC region, highlighting the critical role men play in advocating for women's issues and appreciating women's contributions in agriculture.
- ICBA's new strategy for 2024-2034, and the power of partnerships, knowledge sharing, and the use of data, AI and technology in agriculture.
- ICBA's scientific solutions like climate-smart crops and the Gene Bank, and the ongoing efforts to support and empower women in various countries through the WACAA, which includes enabling meaningful participation and facilitating climate finance solutions.
- Gender concepts such as equality, equity, intersectionality, women's empowerment, and gender mainstreaming, elucidating their implications for shaping equitable and inclusive agricultural policies and aligning with Sustainable Development Goal #5.
- The role of gender in agriculture alongside an overview of women's empowerment programs, which showcased successful interventions from the region that have enhanced agricultural productivity and sustainability through gender-sensitive approaches.
- Community-based approaches to enhance climate resilience and food security, illustrating how local actions and women's involvement lead to more resilient food systems.
- Innovative agricultural technologies for climate mitigation, detailing new tools and practices that could revolutionize agriculture by improving sustainability and efficiency.

- The impact of climate change on household food and nutrition security, focusing on the implications for the four pillars of food security in climate-vulnerable communities and the proposed solutions to these challenges
- The importance of women in leadership within the agricultural and environmental sectors, discussing empowerment strategies and barriers to their participation.
- Success stories and lessons learned from the CAC region, which provided practical examples of effective gender-sensitive practices in agriculture.
- The necessity of expanding biodiversity in marginal lands of the Caucasus, the promotion of non-traditional crops, the development of digital agricultural databases, and the need for advanced breeding and genetic engineering in the region.
- The importance of women's participation, which includes the fact that women are crucial to family and societal welfare, and their rational thinking, organizational skills, and conflict resolution abilities make them indispensable leaders and decision-makers whose improved conditions can benefit overall societal health.

Policy Recommendations

Within the scope of the above-mentioned key issues discussed at the CAC Regional Strategic Dialogue, this policy brief highlights key high-level policy recommendations proposed during group discussions and activities among the event participants, who come from backgrounds in academia, policy-making, and local and national level government entities across the region. Many challenges regarding women in agriculture were discussed at the dialogue. The challenges discussed are presented below as actionable Initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in the agricultural sector across the CAC region:

- **Calendar of Events in the CAC Region Involving Donors and Women Farmers:** Establish a calendar of events managed by ICBA and shared with entities and institutions from the CAC region that showcases events for potential collaboration, and where international and local donors can engage directly with women farmers from the region. This calendar can ensure to include both listening sessions and opportunities for donors to provide guidance and resources. Ensure that women farmers have a central role in shaping the event's topics and that the platform supports equitable dialogue between stakeholders.
- **Knowledge Sharing Sessions between ICBA, partners and beyond:** Develop a structured series of knowledge-sharing sessions that are regionally tailored and conducted in local languages. These sessions should be supported by both government and non-governmental organizations, incorporating technical expertise and peer-to-peer learning opportunities. Donors should be encouraged to fund capacity-building initiatives that enhance the dissemination of best practices in sustainable agriculture and women's economic empowerment.

- **Enhance Women's Leadership in Agriculture:** Implement programs that actively promote decision-making by women and empower young female entrepreneurs through access to necessary resources and targeted leadership training. Enforce quotas to secure significant female representation in leadership roles within agricultural bodies, promoting gender balance at decision-making levels.
- **Support Education and Capacity Building for Women:** Offer specialized training programs tailored for women to prepare them for roles traditionally dominated by men and enhance their skills in rural advisory services. Invest in educational initiatives that build agricultural competencies among women, coupled with career preparation programs specifically designed for female students.
- **Empower Women through Financial and Technical Assistance:** Facilitate access to agricultural finance specifically tailored for women to help them start and expand their businesses. Collaborate with governments to provide financial and technical support necessary for women to adopt innovative agricultural technologies.
- **Legal and Policy Reforms to Empower Women in Agriculture:** Advocate for and implement reforms in land ownership and inheritance laws to increase women's access to and control over agricultural land. Push for policy changes that ensure a gender balance in agricultural policymaking and actively promote women's ownership and participation as landowners and farmers.
- **Develop and Integrate Gender-Sensitive Data Practices:** Establish mandatory gender-disaggregated data collection across agricultural programs to inform policymaking effectively. Enhance gender-focused research and integrate these insights into monitoring and evaluation practices to ensure policies meet women's specific agricultural needs.
- **Address Cultural and Systemic Barriers Affecting Women:** Launch targeted awareness campaigns and support programs to dismantle cultural stereotypes that limit women's opportunities in agriculture. Focus on enhancing work-life balance and addressing economic disparities that disproportionately affect women.
- **Enhance Women's Access to Agricultural Inputs and Infrastructure:** Subsidize the leasing of machinery and production of organic seeds for women farmers. Implement tax relief measures that benefit women in agriculture, reducing their production costs and enhancing overall food availability.
- **Enhance Women's Use of Technology and Production Techniques:** Encourage the adoption of biomass technologies, drip irrigation, and other sustainable practices among women farmers to boost productivity and sustainability.

- **Improve Market Access and Financial Support for Women and Man:** Provide low-interest loans and grants to support farmers in establishing and expanding farmer markets. Enhance the visibility and frequency of farmer fairs organized by ministries to boost famers' direct sales opportunities.
- **Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategies Focused on Women:** Develop gender-sensitive climate adaptation and mitigation strategies, establish early warning systems, and promote practices that ensure women's agricultural activities are climate-resilient.
- **Promote Seed Certification and Crop Diversification Among Women and Men:** Support programs that train famers in certified seed production and promote diversification in famers' crop production to stabilize their food supply and reduce dependence on single-crop economies.
- **Youth Engagement with a Focus on Young Women:** Develop educational and community-based projects that engage young women in agriculture, ensuring the sector's future sustainability and increasing female participation.
- **Develop a Comprehensive Food Security Strategy at the regional or national level:** This strategy can include policy interventions to support the availability, access, utilization and stability of food for CAC populations. Example policy interventions include Enhance agricultural input systems by improving leasing options, boosting organic seed production, reducing taxes, and integrating advanced technologies to elevate productivity. Support sustainable agriculture with low-interest loans for market expansion and sustainable farming practices such as halophytic farming and drip irrigation. Promote food utilization through dietary diversification, brand diversification, and cooperative-based cold storage facilities, alongside improving market access by upgrading infrastructure and fostering inter-country exchanges. Strengthen stability by developing value chains, implementing climate adaptation strategies, promoting certified seed production and crop diversification, and engaging youth to build a resilient agricultural workforce.

These initiatives outline a comprehensive approach to fostering gender equality in agriculture, focusing on empowerment, policy reform, and capacity building tailored to the unique challenges and opportunities seen in the CAC region. By disseminating these proposed policy recommendations to ICBA partners and stakeholders, the brief seeks to inform and guide policy formulation and implementation, ensuring that the collaborative spirit of the Baku dialogue translates into tangible actions.

Appendices

Agenda of the Regional Strategic Dialogue in Baku

ORGANIZED BY: International Center for Biosaline Agriculture (ICBA), Dubai, United Arab Emirates

SUPPORTED BY: ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT BANK (ISDB), JEDDAH, SAUDI ARABIA

COLLABORATION WITH: Genetic Resources Institute, Ministry of Science and Education, Baku, Azerbaijan

SPEAKERS:

Dr. Tarifa Alzaabi, Director General, ICBA

Dr. Charbel Tarraf, Chief Operations and Development, ICBA

Ms. Nour El Jundi, Project Development Specialist, ICBA

Ms. Maha Gaad, Gender Consultant, ICBA

Prof. Zeynal Akparov, Director Genetic Resources Institute, Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan

Prof. Kristina Toderich, MIE University and International Platform for Dryland Research and Education, Tottori University, Japan

Dr. Bekzod Zakirov, Director of the Center for Policy Research and Outreach (CPRO), Westminster International University in Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Dr. Rukhangiz Mammadova, Plant Genetic Resources Institute, Azerbaijan

TUESDAY 22ND OCTOBER 2024

DAY 1: Tuesday 22 October 2024		
Time	Session	Session Objective
8:30 – 9:00	Registration	• Registration and Networking
9:00 – 10:00	Session 1: Opening session	
9:00 – 9:30	Opening Session	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opening Speech: Dr. Charbel Tarraf, Chief Operations and Development, ICBA • Welcome Remarks: Prof. Zeynal Akparov, Director General, Genetic Resources Institute, Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan • A brief about the “The Women Alliance for Climate Action in Agriculture (WACAA)”, Dr. Tarifa Alzaabi, Director General, ICBA
9:30 – 10:00	Coffee Break	• Coffee break and group photo
10:00 – 1:00	Session 2: Gender equality and women’s empowerment in the agricultural sector (Ms. Maha Gaad, Gender Consultant, ICBA)	
10:00 – 10:30	Gender concepts: Equality, Equity, Intersectionality, Women’s Empowerment, Gender mainstreaming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity on the difference between Gender Equity, Equality and Justice • Clarity on the concept of Intersectionality • Provide a brief on the UN Gender SDG – Goal #5

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity on the concept of Women's empowerment • Exploring the concept of gender mainstreaming, its importance to participants' work and how participants can take account of gender when planning and implementing policies and strategies
10:30 – 11:00	How to achieve Gender Equality in the Agricultural Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore and understand the importance of gender in the field of agriculture • Overview of current global and local women's empowerment programs in the agriculture sector • Analyzing the effectiveness of gender equality in the agriculture sector - Success stories and areas needing enhancement
11:00 – 11:50	Discussion in groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion in groups: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Exchanging knowledge on known programs and personal experiences of women's empowerment in agriculture ○ Brainstorm methods of how to achieve gender equality in the Agricultural Sector in their respective countries ○ Each group to present 1 known program on WE in agriculture and 1 idea on how to achieve gender equality in the Agricultural Sector
11:50 – 12:00	Wrap up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recap • Provide list of specific tools and resources on gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture related subjects
12:00 – 1:00	Lunch break	
1:00 – 2:30	Session 3: Enhancing Climate Resilience and Livelihoods through Community-based Actions with a Reference to Women Empowerment and Engagement	
1:00 – 1:15	Presentation on the "The Impacts of Climate Changes on Women's Empowerment in Agriculture", Dr. Rukhangiz Mammadova, Plant Genetic Resources Institute, Azerbaijan	
1:15 – 1:30	Presentation on "Facilitating citizen-science and community-based approach to enhance climate resilience and food security in CAC Region", Prof. Kristina Toderich, MIE University and International Platform for Dryland Research and Education, Tottori University, Japan	
1:30 – 1:45	Presentation on "Enhancing the role of women in promotion of halophytic mixed farming, nutrition and food security with reference to Central Asia and Caucasus drought and salt prone landscapes", Prof. Kristina Toderich, MIE University and International Platform for Dryland Research and Education, Tottori University, Japan	
1:45 – 2:15	Discussion	Working in groups (Questionnaire to be distributed)
2:15 – 2:30	Coffee break	
2:30 – 2:50	Presentation on "Sustainable future through women's participation in agriculture in Uzbekistan", Dr. Bekzod Zakirov, Director of the Center for Policy Research and Outreach (CPRO), Westminster International University in Tashkent, Uzbekistan	
2:50 – 3:00	Q&A	

WEDNESDAY 23RD OCTOBER 2024

DAY 2: Wednesday 23 October 2024		
Time	Session	Session Objective
9:00 – 9:30	Session 4: Innovative agricultural technologies (Dr. Charbel Tarraf, Chief Operations and Development, ICBA)	
9:00 – 9:30	Presentation on innovative technologies in agriculture and their potential for climate mitigation	

9:30 – 11:00		
Session 5: Impact of climate change on food systems and household nutrition security (Ms. Nour El Jundi, Project Development Specialist, ICBA)		
9:30 – 9:50	Presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation on the impact of climate change on household food and nutrition security
9:50 – 10:30	Group discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion (challenges and opportunities across the 4 food security pillars) template
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee break	
11:00 – 1:30		
Session 6: Women in leadership (Ms. Maha Gaad, Gender Consultant, ICBA)		
11:00 – 11:30	Strategies for Empowerment and Overcoming Obstacles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce the importance of women in leadership and decision-making • Introduce the significance of empowerment strategies and the need to overcome existing barriers in agricultural and environmental leadership. • Explain the importance of local relevance and adaptability of strategies
11:30 – 12:30	Discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion in groups: Ask participants to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reflect on 3 points regarding why women's participation matters ○ Discuss the challenges women leaders in CAC Region face (generally in all sectors) and the unique challenges women generally in CAC Region face in the agricultural and environmental sectors ○ Brainstorm how can women leaders support agricultural and environmental initiatives suitable for their communities. • Each group to present in 3-5 minutes • Encourage each participant to write down one actionable step they'll take to bolster their leadership and decision-making role in their respective areas
12:30 – 1:30	Lunch break	
1:30 – 3:00		
Session 7: Success stories, lessons learned and way forward (Prof. Kristina Toderich, MIE University and International Platform for Dryland Research and Education, Tottori University, Japan)		
1:30 – 2:00	Success stories and lessons learned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to voices from the region: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mrs. Gulniso Nekushoeva, Soil Research and Agrochemistry Institute, Tajikistan ○ Dr. Nataliya Akinshina, National University of Uzbekistan ○ Dr. Gulea Kunypiyayeva, Kazakh Research Institute of Agriculture and Plant Husbandry, Kazakhstan ○ Dr. Dr. Nurzat Totubaeva, Kyrgyz_Turkey Manas University, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan
2:00 – 2:15	Women-led network in the CAC region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the potential of creating a women-led network/platform in the CAC Region to exchange best practices on climate adaptation in agriculture.
2:15 – 2:30	Coffee break	
2:30 – 3:00		
Session 8: Recommendations and closing		
2:30 – 3:00	Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic dialogue recommendations • Closing remarks • Certificates distribution

References

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