



## Water security and the right to food in climate challenged countries:

### Women at the Center

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Export oriented industrial agricultural systems have caused the depletion of aquifers and pollution of waterways not only in the south, but also in the North. For several ACP countries, especially in Africa, water stress is either high or extremely high. Agricultural productivity is expected to decrease in almost all ACP countries, and in some of them by 15 to 50 percent. Marginal groups suffer most from these. More importantly, women amongst them bear a disproportionate burden of these challenges, and this is true for ACP countries, as well, where women play an important role in securing food and water. So, if the solutions are to be meaningful, they must be a central part of the solutions: they cannot simply be participants but must be decision makers.

Water, climate and food crises are very interconnected; each of these challenges not only influence others but are also influenced by others. Even though there is a Convergence of crisis, in policy development there is little recognition that that any action initiated to address any one of this can impact the other and thus we have to be extremely careful about the solutions we advocate. A cropping system with food production at its core, but with multiple benefits to society in the periphery, including solutions for water and climate challenges would offer integrated solutions. What I call multifunctional agriculture is a cropping system that can help fulfill multiple needs of the society related to health, leisure, spiritual needs or food, and also help sustain the ecosystem. Such a system shares some elements with agricultural systems in traditional societies, though it also includes ecologically appropriate modern practices as well.

Not surprisingly, marginal communities, who depend on local natural resources for their livelihood security and water security, are affected most by these crises, and women in particular. While women participate in almost all aspects of food provision, i.e. food production, food processing, food distribution, and food preparation, they are the most food insecure when it comes to nutritional food insecurity in most parts of the developing world.

A case study of multifunctional agriculture as a work in progress, with women at center: Women's Collective's work on food and water security can be understood using a framework of **three main principles**: *Empowerment of women as political actors in the society and as co-decision makers at household level; participation in Democratic Local Governance Systems; Promotion of multifunctional agriculture*; their policy advocacy on food and water security is clustered around *strengthening the local food system and rebuilding natural resource base*. Drawing a contrast between multifunctional agriculture as practiced by groups like the Women's Collective, and private and public efforts are under way to increase food production in many African and Asian countries it appears that the latter continues to ignore the imperative of having to develop and practice an integrated approach to help solve climate water and food crises simultaneously. On the other hand the adoption of the alternative, agro-ecological approach to food and water security should provide agrarian communities in ACP countries a chance to access climate adaptation finance.