

EVERYONE ON BOARD

Promoting equal rights and opportunities
for women and men, girls and boys

The Rainforest Alliance is creating a more sustainable world by using social and market forces to protect nature and improve the lives of farmers and forest communities.



Introduction

Women play a central role in the rural economy. According to UN Women, 64 percent of women in low-income countries and 42 percent in lower middle-income countries work in agriculture.¹ In many economies, their labor is essential to food production—both in paid work on commercial plantations and unpaid work on family farms. But it is significantly less common for women to receive a fair share of the associated resources and income—and they are even less likely to be in control of them. Globally, less than 15 percent of women are land-owners² and in 2021, women earned an average of 77 cents for every dollar earned by men.³ These trends are reflected in many of the world’s most popular commodity sectors. According to the International Coffee Organization (ICO), for example, women provide approximately 70 percent of labor in global coffee production, yet only 20 to 30 percent of coffee farms are female-operated. A similarly low proportion of cooperative members are women.⁴

This inequality gap is largely due to the social expectations that shape the roles and responsibilities of women and men. From a young age, women and girls are expected to combine domestic work alongside economic and community activities. Yet inequality means this triple burden of responsibility decreases, rather than increases, their influence, rights, and opportunities. Women have less access to the education, land, credit, training, and decision-making power necessary for productive farming or work. They are also more likely to experience violence, or the threat of violence, both in the home and at work. Meanwhile, men and boys are expected to lead households and generate income for families and may be ridiculed for performing domestic tasks. These roles and responsibilities feed the power dynamics that perpetuate inequality, creating a vicious cycle. Tackling gender inequality therefore involves changing social expectations about not only women and girls, but also men and boys.

At the Rainforest Alliance, we promote respect for human rights, including the principle that women and men should enjoy equal rights and opportunities.⁵ This promotes the operationalization of international frameworks on gender equality like the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the In-

ternational Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 190 on workplace violence and harassment.^{6,7} Our objective is to support women and men to create profitable and more sustainable agricultural livelihoods, while protecting natural landscapes and the well-being of rural communities. But to achieve this objective, women and girls must be free to engage equally in the rural economy. This means changing mindsets, which is a complex undertaking because beliefs are deeply rooted in societal norms and values, and in formal rules and regulations.

Gender equality and human rights

The right to gender equality, and freedom from discrimination, is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Specific rights are set out in the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW):

Right 1: Freedom from violence

Right 2: Gender equality in decision-making

Right 3: Equal property rights

Right 4: Freedom of thought, movement, and association

Right 5: Equal rights to work and leisure

Our approach is to identify the root causes of gender inequality and understand the practical ways in which it impacts women and girls in a specific landscape. Collaborating with relevant local stakeholders—farms, communities, companies, NGOs, and governments—we design and implement programs to create positive impacts and tackle root causes simultaneously. We do this across our four strategic interventions: certification, landscapes management, supply chain services, and advocacy.

The Rainforest Alliance’s gender transformative approach centers around addressing the main reasons for gender inequality, helping to build a more empowering environment for women and girls to take control of their own situation. By supporting them in forging their own paths—from improved access to education to increased representation in local decision-making bodies—our interventions have the power to change how people think of what women and girls “should” do. But change is only achievable when men and women, and girls and boys are engaged. Everyone must be on board.

GENDER EQUALITY VS. GENDER

What is gender equality?

Gender equality refers to a situation where “men and women experience equal rights and opportunities and are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles or prejudices.”

Laven et al 2012. Challenging Chains to Change. Gender Equity in Agricultural Value Chain Development. KIT, AgriProFocus and IIRR.

What is gender?

Gender is how a society understands relations between women and men, their roles and responsibilities, and the opportunities and work open to them. Gender is socially constructed and changes across time and space; this differentiates it from sex, which describes the biological and physiological characteristics of men and women.

GENDER INTEGRATION IN PROGRAMS AND PROJECTS

Various degrees of gender integration can exist within programs and projects. As the following infographic illustrates, “gender unequal” and “gender blind” interventions perpetuate inequalities by reinforcing existing gender roles and responsibilities. “Gender responsive” and “gender transformative” approaches, however, have the power to challenge existing inequalities.

Tackling the Root Causes of Gender Inequality

In agricultural and forest communities, gender inequality is rooted in social expectations or customs defining what people can or cannot do. These can have an especially negative influence on the lives of women and girls. For example, girls are less likely to access and complete a secondary school education than boys, while women are less likely to be a member of a producer organization than men. The outcome is that women have less control over their lives than men and less capacity to make effective economic choices.

Tackling the practical impacts of inequality—like improving access to membership of producer organizations for women—while influencing a change of mindsets enables women and girls to access the knowledge, influence, opportunities, and resources necessary to be productive farmers or workers.

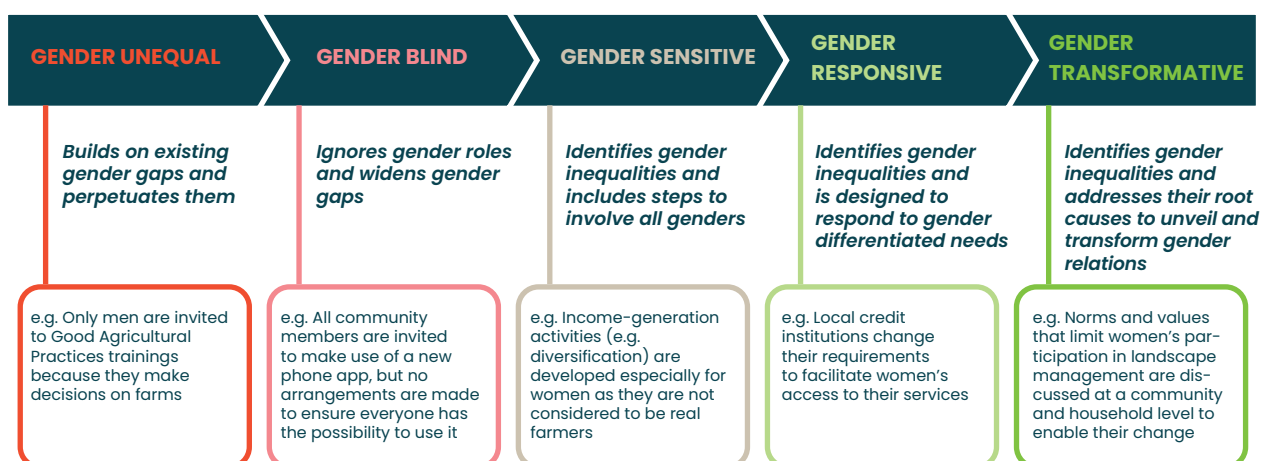
The following are examples of the impacts of gender inequality, many of which we address in our strategic interventions:

- **Resources and inputs:** Women are less likely than men to own land or trees, often because of land ownership customs and laws. This means they lack collateral to apply for financial credit, to join cooperatives, and to invest. They are less likely to attend trainings because they are excluded or have no time, which exacerbates the skills gap.
- **Division of labor:** Unequal sharing of household and caring responsibilities results in women bearing a “triple burden of work”. This means less influence and status, and less time to exploit opportunities to train, learn and develop, and to take on higher paid roles.
- **Equal income, pay, and job opportunities:** Women’s domestic labor is often under-estimated and under-valued because it is unpaid family work. In paid work, female workers typically earn a lower wage than male counterparts, despite doing the same job. They are often excluded from higher paid roles because of social norms, or lack of skills.
- **Decision-making:** Women are unlikely to be included in community or workplace decision-making and are seldom equally involved with men in shared decision-making at household level, for example, regarding children’s education, crop management, spending, or investments.
- **Representation:** Women may face more barriers to register as members of a producers’ group or cooperative, or to join trade unions. They are unlikely to be considered for election to decision-making roles in these bodies.

What is a gender transformative approach?

“Gender transformation actively examines, questions, and changes rigid gender norms and imbalances of power that advantage boys and men over girls and women. It aspires to tackle the root causes of gender inequality and reshape unequal power relations; it moves beyond individual self-improvement among girls and women towards redressing the power dynamics and structures that serve to reinforce gendered inequalities.”

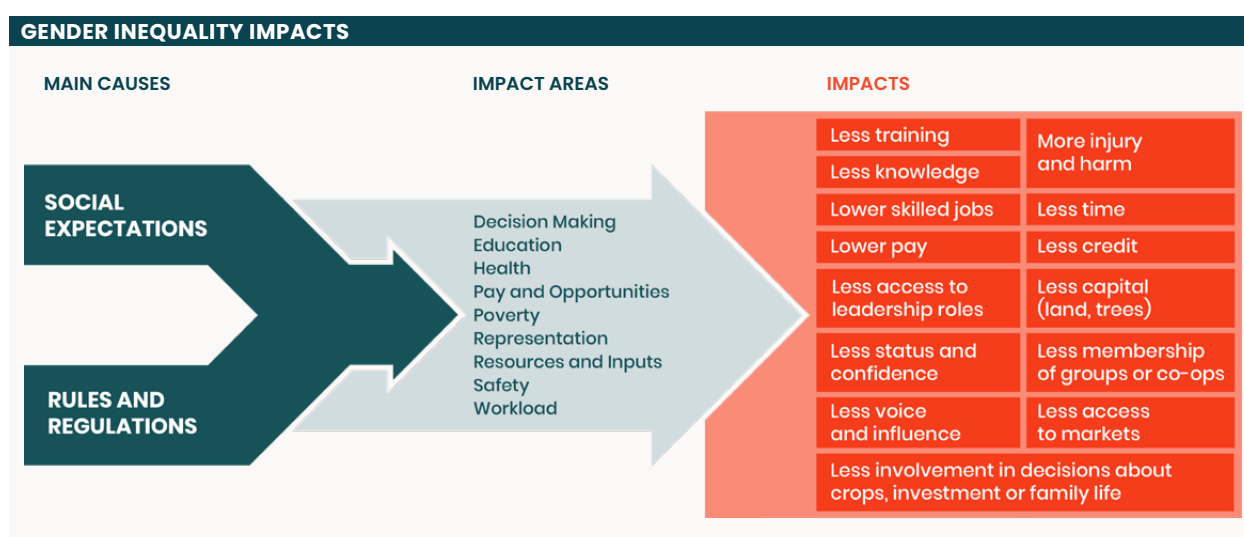
Reference: UNICEF, Technical note on gender transformative approaches



- **Violence:** Inequality creates situations where gender-based violence, workplace harassment, early and forced marriage, child labor, and sex trafficking are not tackled effectively, or are even tolerated—phenomena that have all worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁸ This affects all aspects of life, such as health, confidence, freedom to work, and access to markets.
- **Maternal healthcare:** Lack of access to reproductive healthcare, or poor safety protections at work, put women at risk during pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing. The result can be debilitating conditions that permanently affect their health, status, and ability to work, and to care for children.
- **Secondary education:** When girls are withdrawn earlier than boys from secondary school because it is too costly, perceived as unsafe, or due to work or marriage, this creates an education gap that limits their knowledge, confidence, and access to skilled work. According to UNICEF, 42 percent of countries have achieved gender parity in lower secondary education, and 24 percent in upper secondary education.⁹
- **Socio-economic empowerment:** In situations of poverty, the impacts of inequality are likely to be more severe on women across all the above issues. Socio-economic empowerment acts as a catalyst for creating an enabling environment for change.

When women have equal access to knowledge, influence, resources, and decision-making, they farm productively, innovate, diversify, and steward natural resources more sustainably. Female workers gain skills and higher-paid jobs. Farm yields improve, household income grows, food insecurity reduces, investment in children increases. The family becomes more resilient to economic shock, such as volatile prices, and adapts better to climate change impacts, such as drought or flooding. Notably, according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), if women farmers were given the same access to resources (such as land and credit) as men, national agricultural production could rise by 2.5 to 4 percent and the number of malnourished people could be reduced by 12 to 17 percent.¹⁰

By tackling the inequality impacts mentioned above, we help unlock women's potential and facilitate their socio-economic empowerment. This allows women to become agents of change, demonstrating that everyone benefits from gender equality in practice.



Gender equality in practice

- An individual's rights, responsibilities, and opportunities do not depend on whether they are male or female.
- Women and men are equally represented in decision-making; the interests, needs and priorities of both are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men.
- Gender equality concerns and engages men as well as women.
- Equality between women and men is a human rights issue and a precondition for, and indicator of, people-centered, sustainable development.

STRATEGIC PATHWAYS TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY IN FARMING AND FOREST COMMUNITIES

Through our four strategic interventions (Certification, Landscapes management, Supply chain services, and Advocacy) the Rainforest Alliance aims to achieve these outcomes:

	Target group	Outcome
Family level	Women and girls	become agents of their own change through strategic interventions that tackle the root causes and impacts of gender inequality.
	Men and boys	are actively engaged in supporting and facilitating women and girls' empowerment and see this as beneficial to the welfare of the household and society.
Community level	Management, farmers, foresters, and workers	understand that gender equality is a human right and key to respecting other human rights, as well as contributing to more productive and innovative farming and nature conservation.
	Committee members and representatives	have the knowledge, resources, and systems to identify and mitigate root causes of gender inequality, and to remediate gender-based human rights impacts. Men and women are equally represented in such groups.
External level	Certification auditors, inspectors, and trainers	have the knowledge and resources to evaluate the risk-based approach to gender equality and are able to audit with a gender perspective.
	Civil society, local government, and farm communities	engage in strategic interventions to understand risks related to gender inequality, and to provide the services and resources, or legal reform, necessary to support women's and girls' empowerment.
	Companies	understand and promote gender equality through the socio-economic empowerment of women.



The Rainforest Alliance Approach

The Rainforest Alliance considers gender equality a human right and a basic condition necessary for a diverse, innovative, and productive working environment where people feel safe and respected—a basic condition for more sustainable, productive, and innovative agriculture. We partner with diverse allies—rural producers, farmers, foresters, workers, companies, NGOs, and governments—to support women to be agents of their own change, in many of the world’s critically important landscapes, like tropical forests.

We pursue these objectives through four main strategic interventions: certification, landscapes management, supply chain services, and advocacy. In each type of intervention, we tackle the root causes of gender inequality, and thus enable women to transform the norms, rules, and beliefs that restrict their freedom to engage in the rural economy.

In our own organization, we strive to integrate gender equality in our procedures, rules and regulations, and practices. Through capacity building and integrating lessons learned after internal evaluation, we seek to create a working environment where all genders are respected and treated in a fair and equal manner.

Our Certification Program

Over the last 30 years, certification has proven to be a powerful tool in combination with landscape-level programs and advocacy efforts. Today, more than two million farmers follow our agriculture standards in 70 countries around the globe. In 2020, the Rainforest Alliance published a new certification program, based on our 2020 Sustainable Agriculture Standard—an enhanced set of practical, yet ambitious farm and supply chain requirements, developed over a two-year consultation period with farmers, companies, NGOs, governments, and researchers around the world.

Gender equality is a key theme running throughout the 2020 Certification Program. For example, all certified farms and processing facilities must collect gender-disaggregated data. Requirement 1.6 of our Sustainable Agriculture Standard incentivizes farmers and companies to understand the situation of women and girls compared to men and boys through risk assessments, and to take action to address the root causes of gender inequality.¹¹ They also must commit to promoting gender equality by sharing a statement with members or workers and by setting up a gender committee or appointing a responsible representative.

The committee/representative should:

- Raise awareness with management and staff
- Identify and tackle root causes of gender inequality within the farm or group through a risk assessment
- Actively support remediation of cases of gender-based violence and discrimination according to the remediation protocol

Moreover, gender equality is mainstreamed through many other requirements in the Rainforest Alliance’s Sustainable Agriculture Standard, notably our new Assess-and-Address approach to protecting and promoting human rights.¹²

Landscapes Management

Through our Landscapes Management program, the Rainforest Alliance’s strives to drive change beyond individual production units (such as a farm or forest) to a far wider geographical area spanning tens of thousands to millions of hectares. Applying an Integrated Landscape Management (ILM) approach, we bring together a diverse range of land-users and stakeholders—rural producers, companies, local communities and governments, NGOs—to discuss common interests and determine collective actions to tackle complex and inter-connected challenges that are too big to be solved alone—from human rights and local livelihoods to stopping deforestation and managing ecosystem services.

Gender equality and women’s empowerment can be the objectives of such programs, as well as being integrated within broader program goals, such as land stewardship, climate resilience, and socio-economic empowerment. We laid the foundations of our gender-specific programs and gender mainstreaming in broader programming through our Sector Partnership Program (2016–2020), the learnings of which inform our current approach to gender equality.¹³

The following are methods applied in these programs that enhance gender equality:

- **Gender-disaggregated data, and planning, monitoring, evaluation, and learning (PMEL):** We promote the collection of gender-disaggregated data to assess the potential impact of a program on male and female farmers and workers. We have started to do this through baseline assessments at the start of the program, and regular monitoring and evaluation assessments. This means that gender equality targets can be integrated across all relevant strategic interventions and that gender-sensitive data collection techniques are used.
- **Inclusive governance structures:** We promote the inclusion of women in governance structures in landscape programs, where local actors co-decide on the management of natural resources. Extra measures need to be taken to enable women to participate, including changing rules and regulations, raising awareness, and providing skills training. For example, in the Western Highlands of Cameroon, the Rainforest Alliance is working with local women and youth to improve their participation in the decision-making and leadership of community-based Landscape Management Boards.¹⁴

- **Socio-economic empowerment of women:** We ensure that landscape programs on climate change or crop productivity include specific measures to improve women's access to land, trees, training, credit, and markets; by improving women's socio-economic situation, they, their families, and their local landscapes become more resilient. In Central America, for instance, to improve equality and reduce violence against women, the Rainforest Alliance is delivering technical and leadership training and facilitating access to credit and markets for marginalized women.¹⁵ By supporting women, the Rainforest Alliance helps them to strengthen their role in conservation.¹⁶
- **Household approaches:** We use practical tools to facilitate shared decision-making by women and men in a household to achieve more equal workloads. The purpose is to strengthen the overall well-being of the household and all its members by enabling women to fully participate in, and benefit from, socio-economic activities. For example, in Indonesia, the Rainforest Alliance has partnered with ESCP (Equality for Sustainable Cocoa Production), the national CSP (Cocoa Sustainability Partnership) and Swisscontact to implement the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) in cocoa communities. GALS is a participatory process that helps change mindsets about gender roles and responsibilities within households and promotes improved family incomes.¹⁷

Supply Chain Services: Encouraging Corporate Leadership

Companies are uniquely positioned to ensure that gender equality is a pillar of responsible business. For example, they can help to put gender equality on the agenda of decision makers, use their purchasing power to influence suppliers, pay prices that ensure producers have a living income, and invest in promoting gender equality throughout their own supply chains.

We collaborate with businesses to tackle the impacts of gender inequality and promote women's socio-economic empowerment in their supply chains. To illustrate, in a two-year collaboration in Guatemala, the Rainforest Alliance, Lidl, CARE (an organization focused on eradicating poverty) and the UGK Foundation (a local farmer federation) are improving women's livelihoods through climate-smart agricultural training and promoting leadership through socio-economic empowerment.¹⁸

In addition to these tailored services, the Rainforest Alliance promotes the Accountability Framework¹⁹ as a freely accessible set of norms and guidance that supports companies in improving their sustainability performance and meet their commitments to gender equality (and many other areas) across their operations and supply chains. The Accountability Framework takes a due diligence approach: it supports companies in developing interventions in their supply chain that are informed by the real risks posed by their interventions and tailored to the context.

Advocacy: Influencing Government Policies

Tackling the root causes of gender inequality requires governments to reform laws, and to adopt strategies and policies to deliver the services and resources necessary to support the empowerment of women and girls. The Rainforest Alliance supports this goal through advocacy in three ways:

- by equipping local organizations with the knowledge, skills, and data necessary to influence decision-makers
- by networking and influencing government directly
- by raising awareness in its external communication by sharing women's voices and stories, and concrete examples of programs to support the agenda on gender transformation

For example, between 2016–2020, the Rainforest Alliance supported advocacy projects in nine coffee-, cocoa-, and tea-producing countries, bringing together different organizations and producers to advocate for issues including gender equality and female leadership.²⁰

5 GENDER EQUALITY



SDG 5 | Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

1. End discrimination against all women and girls
2. Eliminate violence against all women and girls
3. Eliminate all harmful practices such as child marriage
4. Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work
5. Ensure women's participation and leadership in decision-making
6. Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights



Conclusion

For the Rainforest Alliance, promoting gender equality is critical to respecting human rights and to our vision of improving rural livelihoods for everyone, while protecting natural landscapes.

When women have the same access as men to knowledge, inputs, resources, and decision-making, farms are more productive, workers' livelihoods improve, incomes rise, and land stewardship is more sustainable. Households become more resilient to climate change and less vulnerable to poverty and economic shock. In short: Everyone benefits.

The most powerful agents of change are the women and girls, and men and boys in the communities where we work. Our root-cause strategic interventions therefore

aim to open up spaces for women and men to gain the knowledge, access, voice, and respect necessary to find their own pathways to sustainable livelihoods. This is a gender transformative agenda.

But no single organization can tackle the root causes of gender inequality alone. Collaboration with all actors involved is essential—from local governments, who can adjust and implement more gender-sensitive laws and regulations, to local civil society organizations that support rural communities to create more opportunities for women and girls, and companies that invest in gender equality and ensure fair prices for women and men. Only by working together can sustainable and positive change towards a more gender equal world be achieved. We need everyone on board.



ENDNOTES

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- 2 FAO. 2018b. The gender gap in land rights. <http://www.fao.org/3/i8796en/i8796EN.pdf>
- 3 <https://interactive.unwomen.org/multimedia/infographic/changingworldofwork/en/index.html>
- 4 ICO, 2018, Gender Equality in the Coffee Sector. Available at <https://www.ico.org/documents/cy2017-18/icc-122-11e-gender-equality.pdf>
- 5 There are also many non-binary (those whose gender does not fall strictly within the conventional categories of male or female) farmers and workers involved in agricultural production. We aim to help make farms and companies more gender inclusive so that all genders in agricultural supply chains have equal rights and opportunities. Supporting the empowerment of women specifically is one of the main focuses of our certification program since women represent the largest marginalized gender group.
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