

A woman in a red shirt is pushing a wooden wheelbarrow filled with fresh green leafy vegetables and corn cobs through a lush green field. The sky is overcast with grey clouds. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image.

# Leveraging Voluntary Sustainability Standards for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agriculture:

A guide for development organizations based on the Sustainable Development Goals



Kathleen Sexsmith

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### **Leveraging Voluntary Sustainability Standards for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agriculture: A guide for development organizations based on the Sustainable Development Goals**

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Prepared by Kathleen Sexsmith

### Head Office

111 Lombard Avenue, Suite 325  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Canada R3B 0T4

**Tel:** +1 (204) 958-7700

**Website:** [www.iisd.org](http://www.iisd.org)

**Twitter:** @IISD\_news

*This paper is dedicated to Jason Potts, whose innovative thinking, visionary leadership, and compassionate heart helped put us on a path to sustainable development and to a fairer, better society. He is dearly missed.*



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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

<b>4C</b>	Common Code for the Coffee
<b>COSA</b>	Committee on Sustainability Assessment
<b>FAO</b>	Food & Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>IFOAM</b>	International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements
<b>KIT</b>	Royal Tropical Institute
<b>SAN</b>	Sustainable Agricultural Network
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCTAD</b>	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
<b>UNFSS</b>	United Nations Forum on Sustainability Standards
<b>VSS</b>	voluntary sustainability standard

## Glossary of Gender Terms

**Gender** “refers to the roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for men and women. In addition to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, gender also refers to the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context” (UN Women Training Centre, 2017).

**Gender division of labour** “refers to the way each society divides work among men and women, boys and girls, according to socially-established gender roles or what is considered suitable and valuable for each sex.” These gender roles relate to the production of goods and services, caring and domestic work, and community work (UN Women Training Centre, 2017).

**Gender discrimination** is “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field,” arising from either law or practice. (UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, cited in UN Women Training Centre, 2017).

**Gender equality** “refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women’s issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development” (UN Women Training Centre, 2017).

**Gender equity.** “The preferred terminology within the United Nations is gender equality, rather than gender equity. Gender equity denotes an element of interpretation of social justice, usually based on tradition, custom, religion or culture, which is most often to the detriment to women. Such use of equity in relation to the advancement of women has been determined to be unacceptable” (UN Women Training Centre, 2017). This guide adopts this approach and uses the language of gender equality and women's empowerment.

**Gender gap** “refers to any disparity between women and men's condition or position in society. It is often used to refer to a difference in average earnings between women and men, e.g. ‘gender pay gap.’ However, gender gaps can be found in many areas, such as the four pillars that the World Economic Forum uses to calculate its Gender Gap Index, namely: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival and political empowerment” (UN Women Training Centre, 2017).

**Gender norms** “are ideas about how men and women should be and act. We internalize and learn these ‘rules’ early in life. This sets up a life-cycle of gender socialization and stereotyping. Put another way, gender norms are the standards and expectations to which gender identity generally conforms, within a range that defines a particular society, culture and community at that point in time” (UN Women Training Centre, 2017).

**Gender-responsive auditing** refers to the procedures and tools used for analyzing whether practices and systems in an organization promote gender equality and women's empowerment, including whether and how practices and systems are being monitored and complied with over time. It requires that actions are planned and taken to target any gender inequalities and specific needs for women's empowerment that are found by the audit.

A **gender transformative approach** “attempts to redefine women and men's gender roles and relations.” For this approach, “gender is central to promoting gender equality and achieving positive development outcomes.” It aims for “transforming unequal gender relations to promote shared power, control of resources, decision making, and support for women's empowerment” (UN Women Training Centre, 2017).

A **gender impact assessment** is a study of a prospective development project's distinct or shared consequences for women and men. Gender impact assessments should normally include a baseline study of pre-project gender roles, relations and inequalities, and the likely impacts, both adverse and positive, actual and potential, direct and indirect, on women and men of the project activities.

**Intersectional analysis** “aims to reveal multiple identities, exposing the different types of discrimination and disadvantage that occur as a consequence of the combination of identities. It aims to address the manner in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression and other systems of discrimination create inequalities that structure the relative positions of women” (Association for Women's Rights in Development, 2004, p. 2).

**Sex-disaggregated data** are “collected and tabulated separately for women and men. They allow for the measurement of differences between women and men on various social and economic dimensions and are one of the requirements in obtaining gender statistics. However, gender statistics are more than data disaggregated by sex. Having data by sex does not guarantee, for example, that concepts, definitions and methods used in data production are conceived to reflect gender roles, relations and inequalities in society” (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.).

**Women's empowerment** is a multi-faceted concept that refers to “women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and to determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally” (United Nations Population Information Network, n.d.).

## Executive Summary

### Linking Gender Equality, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Voluntary Sustainability Standards in Agriculture

Gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture remain pressing challenges across the Global South. Food insecurity; unequal access to land, productive resources and education; the gender division of unpaid care and domestic work; gender discrimination in access to decision making and empowerment; and insecure and precarious conditions of agricultural work for women are barriers to gender equality that undermine women's contributions to economic, environmental and social sustainability in their communities.

This guidebook, a companion to the 2017 International Institute for Sustainable Development report, *Promoting Gender Equality in Foreign Agricultural Investments: Lessons from Voluntary Sustainability Standards* (Sexsmith, 2017), reviews the evidence of the contributions of voluntary sustainability standards (VSSs) to gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture; explains how VSSs can be used as a tool to meet related components of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); and provides recommendations for development organizations working toward gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture. It is the first publication to demonstrate the linkages between VSSs and the gender-equality-related goals and targets of the SDGs, and therefore serves as a useful tool for different representatives of development organizations working toward those goals in the agricultural sector.

VSSs have the potential to contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment in two ways: (i) the effectiveness of the standard at integrating gender into its certification criteria; and (ii) the outcomes from applying their design through specific activities and interventions by certifying bodies, producers as individuals and groups, and the organizations that work with and assist them. These potential contributions were reviewed for five VSSs in agriculture for this report, which were chosen based on their broad market coverage and effort to integrate gender criteria into their standards:

- Fairtrade International (for both smallholders and hired labour)
- Organic (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements [IFOAM])
- Rainforest Alliance
- UTZ Certified (for both group and individual certification)
- Common Code for the Coffee Community (4Cs)

### The Potential of VSSs to Promote Gender Equality in Agriculture

Overlaying the SDGs with the five VSSs described above, and through a comprehensive review of the available literature on gender and VSSs, this research has identified six cross-cutting gender equality and women's empowerment themes, which are analyzed to explore how VSSs: (i) can be leveraged to make positive contributions to gender equality; (ii) can promote gender equality depending on certain conditions; and (iii) risk exacerbating gender inequalities if not undertaken with sensitivity to local gender dynamics. The key findings are summarized below.

**Theme 1: Household Food Security:** Although household food security is not an explicit criterion for VSSs, there is some evidence to support the assertion that VSSs contribute indirectly to household food security and to equal access to food through sustainable production practices. These practices contribute to a diverse and nutritional diet, and potentially to higher incomes generated from certification. These benefits are most likely to arise when women have control of an income stream. However, certification is usually also a form of cash cropping, which can undermine women's subsistence agriculture, given that cash crops are largely the domain of men. In such cases,

when land is prioritized for cash crops over land used by women for subsistence food production, the consequences for household food security may be negative.

**Theme 2: Women's Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources:** Financial support provided through certification can contribute to women's ability to access productive inputs and credit. However, certification does not directly promote women's rights to land. It has only indirect impacts on women's land access when men have emigrated and the certification requires a landowner to be present during the audit. Certification has sometimes reinforced gender asymmetries in access to production-related information and training, except where outreach specifically targets women. Finally, standards can promote women's participation in climate-smart agriculture, provided there is equitable opportunity to participate in associated training.

**Theme 3: Gender Equality in Education:** VSSs promote children's school attendance by prohibiting child labour. They promote girls' and boys' education equally.

**Theme 4: Women's Unpaid Domestic Labour:** Certification can alleviate some of women's domestic labour burden, which includes cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and the elderly, through financial support for labour-saving investments. However, as standards prohibit child labour, sometimes even when it is cultural tradition for children to accompany their parents to the field, this requirement can make it difficult for women without any other child care support to perform agricultural work. In waged labour situations, this problem can be alleviated when the standard ensures adequate child care is provided on the plantation.

**Theme 5: Women's Decision Making and Empowerment:** Certification can promote women's participation in traditionally masculine areas of household decision making and in producer and worker group decision making if gender equality training is provided. However, it can be challenging to shift traditional forms of decision making, particularly where patriarchy is deeply entrenched, which is often the case in agricultural producer and worker groups. In the worst cases, standards may exacerbate male dominance in household decision making, when men retain control of the income stream from the certified product and/or when no gender equality training is provided to complement the social and economic changes accompanying certification. Certification might channel development-oriented investments into women's non-commercial activities, inadvertently impeding their economic empowerment.

**Theme 6: Decent Work for Women:** Certification encourages decent working conditions for women waged labourers because they require compliance with certification criteria that exceed national laws. Additionally, occupational health and safety conditions that consider the specific needs of women are improved by certification. However, certification involves extra labour—often unpaid and by women—thereby increasing women's work burden on smallholder farms without compensation or recognition, unless they are included in production decision making.

## How Development Organizations Can Promote Gender Equality in Agriculture by Leveraging Voluntary Sustainability Standards

Development organizations can take action to promote the effectiveness of VSSs across the thematic areas described above and leverage them as a tool for gender equality and women's empowerment.

### 1. **Enable household food security** (*SDG 2: Zero Hunger*):

- Promote women's subsistence crops and nutritious crops for inter-cropping, shade and other sustainable production practices.
- Use gender transformative approaches to encourage women's financial decision making within the household.
- Conduct a gender impact assessment of the introduction or reinforcement of cash crop cultivation before promoting certification.

2. **Increase women's rights to productive agricultural resources** (*SDG 1: End Poverty; SDG 2: Zero Hunger; SDG 5: Gender Equality*):
  - Promote and advocate for women's more stable and secure rights to land.
  - Development organizations working in extension (agricultural training) services should use female extension workers in services provided for women.
  - Promote women's rights to productive agricultural resources in women's empowerment-focused projects and interventions.
  - Provide support and training on climate change adaptation and climate-smart agriculture for women producers.
3. **Promote gender equality in education** (*SDG 4: Quality Education*):
  - Document and work to promote understanding of local cultural practices around child labour in agriculture.
  - Develop and support initiatives for women's literacy.
  - Advocate for the importance of girls' education, from primary through secondary, tertiary and post-secondary schooling.
4. **Increase the recognition and value of unpaid care and domestic work** (*SDG 5: Gender Equality*):
  - Undertake a gender transformative approach that emphasizes to women and men the importance of cooperating as a family.
  - Develop and implement projects that support women's ability to choose to participate in income-generating agricultural work.
  - Provide child care during any production-related trainings.
5. **Promote women's decision making and empowerment** (*SDG 5: Gender Equality; SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities*):
  - Impart trainings with child care provided to women so that they can obtain certification.
  - Train women on the production and commercial aspects of agriculture.
  - Provide gender equality training and resources to producer cooperatives, farms and worker organizations that assist them to meet the gender equality and women's empowerment criteria of VSSs.
  - Mandate the equal participation and representation of women in any decision making related to development programming.
  - Conduct research with local women to understand what empowerment means to them.
  - Support women-led commercialization projects.
6. **Promote decent work for women** (*SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth*):
  - Promote adoption of VSSs on farms with hired labour to improve their employment conditions.
  - Provide training for women and men that promotes women's access to higher-paid jobs with more decision-making responsibilities.
  - Work with women and men to understand the gender division of agricultural labour.
  - Develop and implement regular gender equality training for women and men at all levels of the workforce.

# Table of Contents

<b>1.0 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Purpose of the Guidebook</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1.2 Audience for the Guidebook</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1.3 Plan of the Guidebook</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2.0 CONTEXT</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2.1 Gender Considerations in Agriculture</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>2.2 Gender and the SDGs</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>2.3 VSSs</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>2.4 VSSs, Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>3.0 LEVERAGING VSSS TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>3.1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>3.2 Household Food Security</b> .....	<b>17</b>
3.2.1 Household Food Security: Overview.....	17
3.2.2 Household Food Security and the SDGs.....	18
3.2.3 Certification Criteria and Household Food Security.....	18
3.2.4 How VSSs Can Contribute to Household Food Security.....	19
3.2.5 Leveraging VSSs to Make a Difference in Household Food Security.....	21
<b>3.3 Women’s Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources</b> .....	<b>21</b>
3.3.1 Women’s Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources: Overview.....	21
3.3.2 Women’s Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources and the SDGs.....	22
3.3.3 Certification Criteria and Women’s Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources.....	23
3.3.4 How VSSs Can Contribute to Women’s Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources.....	24
3.3.5 Leveraging VSSs to Make a Difference in Women’s Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources.....	26
<b>3.4 Gender Equality in Education</b> .....	<b>27</b>
3.4.1 Gender Equality in Education: Overview.....	27
3.4.2 Gender Equality in Education and the SDGs.....	27
3.4.3 Certification Criteria and Gender Equality in Education.....	29
3.4.4 How VSSs Can Contribute to Gender Equality in Education.....	30
3.4.5 Leveraging VSSs to Make a Difference in Gender Equality in Education.....	30

- 3.5 Women’s Unpaid Domestic Labour..... 31**
  - 3.5.1 Women’s Unpaid Domestic Labour: Overview ..... 31
  - 3.5.2 Women’s Unpaid Domestic Labour and the SDGs ..... 31
  - 3.5.3 Certification Criteria and Women’s Unpaid Domestic Labour..... 32
  - 3.5.4 How VSSs Can Contribute to Gender Equality in Care and Domestic Labour..... 33
  - 3.5.5 Leveraging VSSs to Make a Difference in Gender Equality in Domestic Labour..... 33
- 3.6 Women’s Decision Making and Empowerment..... 34**
  - 3.6.1 Women’s Decision Making and Empowerment: Overview ..... 34
  - 3.6.2 Women’s Decision Making and Empowerment and the SDGs ..... 34
  - 3.6.3 Certification Criteria and Women’s Decision Making and Empowerment..... 35
  - 3.6.4 How VSSs Can Contribute to Women’s Decision Making and Empowerment ..... 36
  - 3.6.5 Leveraging VSSs to Make a Difference in Women’s Decision Making and Empowerment..... 38
- 3.7 Decent Work for Women ..... 39**
  - 3.7.1 Decent Work for Women: Overview..... 39
  - 3.7.2 Decent Work for Women and the SDGs ..... 40
  - 3.7.3 Certification Criteria and Decent Work for Women..... 42
  - 3.7.4 How VSSs Can Contribute to Decent Work for Women ..... 42
  - 3.7.5 Leveraging VSSs to Make a Difference in Decent Work for Women ..... 43
- **4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS ..... 44**
- **REFERENCES ..... 47**
- **APPENDIX 1. LIST OF VOLUNTARY SUSTAINABILITY STANDARDS CONSULTED ..... 53**



# 1.0 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of the Guidebook

This guidebook examines the potential of voluntary sustainability standards (VSSs) to support the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture. It serves as a companion to the 2017 International Institute for Sustainable Development report, *Promoting Gender Equality in Foreign Agricultural Investments: Lessons from Voluntary Sustainability Standards* (Sexsmith, 2017). That report provided a comprehensive review of the evidence relating to the ways that VSSs promote gender equality and gave recommendations for stakeholders promoting responsible investment frameworks for foreign agricultural investments. The present guidebook summarizes and updates the evidence presented in that report; explains how VSSs can be used as a tool to meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and targets related to gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture; and provides recommendations for development organizations working toward that goal.

Like sustainable development more broadly, achieving sustainability in agriculture requires that industry stakeholders work toward interrelated economic, environmental and social justice goals. The SDGs and VSSs both represent responses by the global community to that set of concerns.

- The SDGs represent the United Nations' (UN) member states' action plan to achieve global peace, prosperity and sustainability by 2030. The needs and goals of the agriculture sector figure prominently in this plan, most importantly in SDG 2: Zero Hunger; SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production; and SDG 15: Life on Land.
- VSSs in agriculture are private initiatives that aim to promote the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainability. They usually entail a certification process for smallholder farmers or large farms with hired labour by an independent body. There is significant overlap between the content of the SDGs and VSSs, including with respect to sustainability issues facing the agriculture sector.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time, systemic gender inequalities and the disempowerment of women persist in agricultural production across the Global South. Rural households face significant **food security** concerns, and women and girls face unequal access to the calories that are available (see Section 3.2). Women's agricultural work remains undervalued and under-resourced due to discrimination in access to **land and productive agricultural resources** (see Section 3.3). Gender inequalities in access to **education** beyond primary school undermines fair access for women and girls to opportunities to improve their agricultural production (see Section 3.4). **Unpaid domestic labour** burdens constrain women from empowerment opportunities outside the home (see Section 3.5). Formal regulations and cultural gender norms limit women's participation in **decision making and empowerment** in producer and worker organizations (see Section 3.6). And finally, **insecure and precarious conditions of work** render women a particularly vulnerable labour force in the agriculture sector (see Section 3.7). This guidebook shows that these specific concerns figure prominently in the SDGs and also in the content of VSSs for agriculture. It demonstrates that VSSs can be leveraged as a tool to promote the gender equality and women's empowerment issues in agriculture addressed by the SDGs, and it provides guidance to development organizations for how they can do so.

## 1.2 Audience for the Guidebook

The primary audience for this guidebook is development organizations seeking to understand the relationship between VSSs and gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture, and how they can use VSSs to achieve progress on specific gender equality issues. It will be useful to those who work in the field in agricultural communities with certified producers or those willing to become certified; those who conduct research to support

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<sup>1</sup> UN Forum on Sustainability Standards (UNFSS) performed a mapping of the content of VSSs and the targets associated with the 17 SDGs. They found overlap between VSSs and nine SDGs. Among these, several are related to agriculture, including SDG 12: Responsible Production and Consumption; SDG 15: Life on Land; SDG 13: Climate Action; and SDG 2: Zero Hunger. They also found overlap with SDG 5: Gender Equality, on which this guidebook builds. For more information on the mapping exercise, see: <https://unfss.org/vss-and-the-sustainable-development-goals/>

the strategic design of VSSs and programs that support their improvement and growth; and those who make decisions about investing funds in development initiatives.

The implementation of VSSs is already serving as a means to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture. This guidebook contributes a novel perspective on this relationship and is the first publication to demonstrate the linkages between VSSs and the gender-equality-related goals and targets of the SDGs. It is therefore particularly useful for development organizations seeking innovative approaches to gender equality and women's empowerment in their programming.

The guidebook will also be of interest to policy-makers, standard-setting and regulating bodies, researchers and experts on gender equality, standards and agriculture. Indeed, it responds to expressed interest by the global agricultural development community in the relationship between VSSs, the SDGs, and gender equality and women's empowerment. In November 2018, the UN Economic Commission for Europe adopted the *Declaration for Gender Responsive Standards and Standards Development*, which explicitly recognizes SDG 5: Gender Equality and makes a “pledge to make standards and the standards development process more gender responsive” (UNECE Gender Responsive Standards Initiative, 2018; see also ICTSD Reporting, 2018). Moreover, the UNFSS recently mapped areas of overlap between VSSs and the SDGs and highlighted gender equality as a significant area of overlap in their content, but did not examine the relationships in depth (UNFSS, 2018). This guidebook takes up that task in the agriculture sector.

## 1.3 Plan of the Guidebook

This guidebook is organized in three parts.

Following an introduction, Section 2 provides the context by summarizing the key concepts, issues and findings identified throughout the guidebook. It includes a synthesis of the gender issues in agriculture to which the implementation of VSSs can make a positive contribution, provides an overview of the five VSSs in agriculture on which this guidebook is based, summarizes findings from published research on the relationship between VSSs and gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture, and explains how gender concerns have been integrated in the SDGs.

Section 3, *Leveraging VSSs to Promote Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*, is the heart of this guidebook. It is divided into six sections according to six cross-cutting gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture themes. The six themes represent the nexus at which gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture, VSSs and the SDGs intersect. They are:

1. Household Food Security
2. Women's Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources
3. Gender Equality in Education
4. Unpaid Domestic Labour
5. Women's Decision Making and Empowerment
6. Decent Work for Women

Each section presents data on the cross-cutting theme, explains how the content of VSSs relates to the related gender content of the SDGs for that theme, analyzes the evidence pertaining to how VSSs promote gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture, and provides a detailed set of recommendations for how development organizations can implement VSSs in ways that promote those goals.

Section 4 summarizes the recommendations to development organizations on how to use VSSs to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture that are made throughout Section 3. A table links each recommendation to the SDGs relevant to the cross-cutting theme.



## 2.0 Context

## 2.1 Gender Considerations in Agriculture

This report focuses on six pervasive forms of gender inequality in agriculture. These six themes were developed through an analysis of the gender issues in agriculture that the SDGs address and through a review of the available literature on gender and VSSs. These issues are synthesized in Table 1 below and are laid out in more detail in Section 3. Each of the six issues is the subject of active debate among researchers, development practitioners and communities; however, a full examination of the issues is beyond the scope of this guidebook. Rather, the guidebook attempts to distill the key dimensions of the gender inequalities related to each issue. Table 1 summarizes the basic dimensions and characteristics of these concerns.

**Table 1. Summary of gender equality challenges in agriculture**

<b>Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Cross-Cutting Theme</b>	<b>Gender Equality Challenges in Agriculture</b>
Household Food Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's responsibility for subsistence agriculture, food procurement and food preparation</li> <li>• Intra-household inequalities in distribution of (nutritious) food</li> </ul>
Women's Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Systemic discrimination against women's access to land</li> <li>• Access barriers to productive inputs and credit among women</li> <li>• Women's exclusion from information and extension activities</li> <li>• Gender gap in agricultural productivity</li> </ul>
Gender Equality in Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender equality in primary education is improving, but secondary and higher education still lag</li> <li>• Persistent, intersectional inequalities between women and men in adult literacy and basic formal education</li> <li>• Reduced agricultural productivity of women due to their lower levels of formal education and access to productive inputs</li> </ul>
Unpaid Domestic Labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Significantly more time spent by women on domestic work and care for children, the elderly or sick family members</li> <li>• Limited mobility of women outside of the home</li> <li>• Engrained gender inequalities in domestic responsibilities from childhood</li> </ul>
Women's Decision Making and Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Institutionalized discrimination against women</li> <li>• Patriarchal norms affecting multiple spheres of life</li> <li>• Limited participation of women in agricultural groups</li> <li>• Exclusion of women from leadership roles</li> </ul>
Decent Work for Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women's work in subsistence agriculture is under-counted and undervalued</li> <li>• Participation by women in contract farming is limited</li> <li>• Precarious, low-paid and unsafe waged agricultural labour conditions for women workers</li> </ul>

## 2.2 Gender and the SDGs

In 2015, the UN member states adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a plan to reach global prosperity, peace and sustainability. The 2030 Agenda includes 17 global goals, commonly known as the SDGs (Figure 1). Each of the 17 goals is composed of targets (objectives for each goal that each UN member state will strive to meet) and indicators (specific measures for each target that allows comprehensive analysis and comparison of progress across countries and regions). Examples of goals, targets and indicators are provided throughout Section 3 of the guidebook. Altogether, 17 goals, 169 targets and 232 indicators comprise the 2030 Agenda.

Figure 1. The SDGs



Source: UN, n.d.

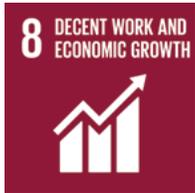
The global community has recognized that gender inequalities are not an isolated concern, but rather that they undermine the potential for all SDGs to be met. There are 54 gender-specific indicators (of 232 total), although reliable data is only available for 10 of these indicators due to the fact that data on women and girls are often unavailable (UN Women, 2018). Thus, the success of the gender equality dimension of the 2030 Agenda will require countries to improve attention to sex and gender-disaggregation in their own national censuses and other data-gathering plans (UN Women, 2018).

The six cross-cutting themes that comprise the framework for Section 3 of this guidebook were developed through an analysis of the gender issues in agriculture that the SDGs address and through a review of the available literature on gender and VSSs. The analysis found that several of these six cross-cutting gender equality and women empowerment in agriculture themes are mentioned several times in different SDGs. For example, women's rights

to productive resources is addressed not under a single SDG but rather by several SDGs, including SDG 1 (End Poverty), SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). By organizing the guidebook in this way, instead of by each SDG, readers can easily identify all information relevant to the theme of interest within a single section. These six themes are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2. List of gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture cross-cutting themes in SDGs, targets and indicators**

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Cross-Cutting Themes	Relevant SDGs	Relevant Targets	Relevant Indicators
Household Food Security		2.2	none
Women's Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources		1.4 2.3 5.a	14.2 2.3.2 5.a.1 5.a.2
Gender Equality in Education		4.1 4.2 4.3 4.5 4.6 4.7 4.a	4.1.1 4.2.1 4.2.2 4.3.1 4.5.1 4.6.1 4.7.1 4.a.1
Women's Unpaid Domestic Labour		5.2	5.4.1
Women's Decision Making and Empowerment		5.1 5.5 5.b 5.c 10.2 10.3	5.1.1 5.5.1 5.5.2 5.c.1 10.2.1

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Cross-Cutting Themes	Relevant SDGs	Relevant Targets	Relevant Indicators
Decent Work for Women		8.3 8.5 8.7 8.8	8.3.1 8.5.1 8.5.2 8.7.1 8.8.1 8.8.2

Source: Author's compilation from UN, n.d.

These gender-related goals, targets and indicators are written out in each section of Section 3 according to the cross-cutting themes. As Section 3 discusses in more depth, VSSs cover these issues to different degrees.

## 2.3 VSSs

VSSs are private sector initiatives operating in multiple sectors of the economy that aim to promote economically, environmentally and socially sustainable production and trade practices. The UNFSS defines VSSs as “standards specifying requirements that producers, traders, manufacturers, retailers or service providers may be asked to meet, relating to a wide range of sustainability metrics, including respect for basic human rights, worker health and safety, the environmental impacts of production, community relations, land use planning and others” (UNFSS, 2013, p. 3). VSSs offer a “systemic means” for ensuring that certain sustainability practices are implemented along value chains by providing companies a significant motivation to accomplish them through brand recognition, risk management and/or a price premium (Potts et al., 2014). Compliance is normally verified by an independent certification body that conducts audits on participating farms.

VSSs in agriculture seek to promote the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainable development by requiring that farmers meet certain minimum performance requirements in each of these areas and by providing guidance for improvement. Section 2.4 provides further details on how they integrate gender equality and women's empowerment into their content. Standards Map, the International Trade Center's web portal for sustainability standards, codes of conduct and audit protocols, identifies 148 standards in the agriculture sector.<sup>2</sup> Seventeen of the leading agricultural VSSs reach an estimated global trade value of USD 31.6 billion (Potts et al., 2014). While VSSs have been applied and implemented in agriculture in both the Global North (such as in organic certification) and the Global South, the focus of this guidebook is on the latter.

The findings in this report are based on an analysis of the content of five VSSs in agriculture, as well as a desk review of the literature on their application and its impact on gender equality and women's empowerment. The five VSSs are:

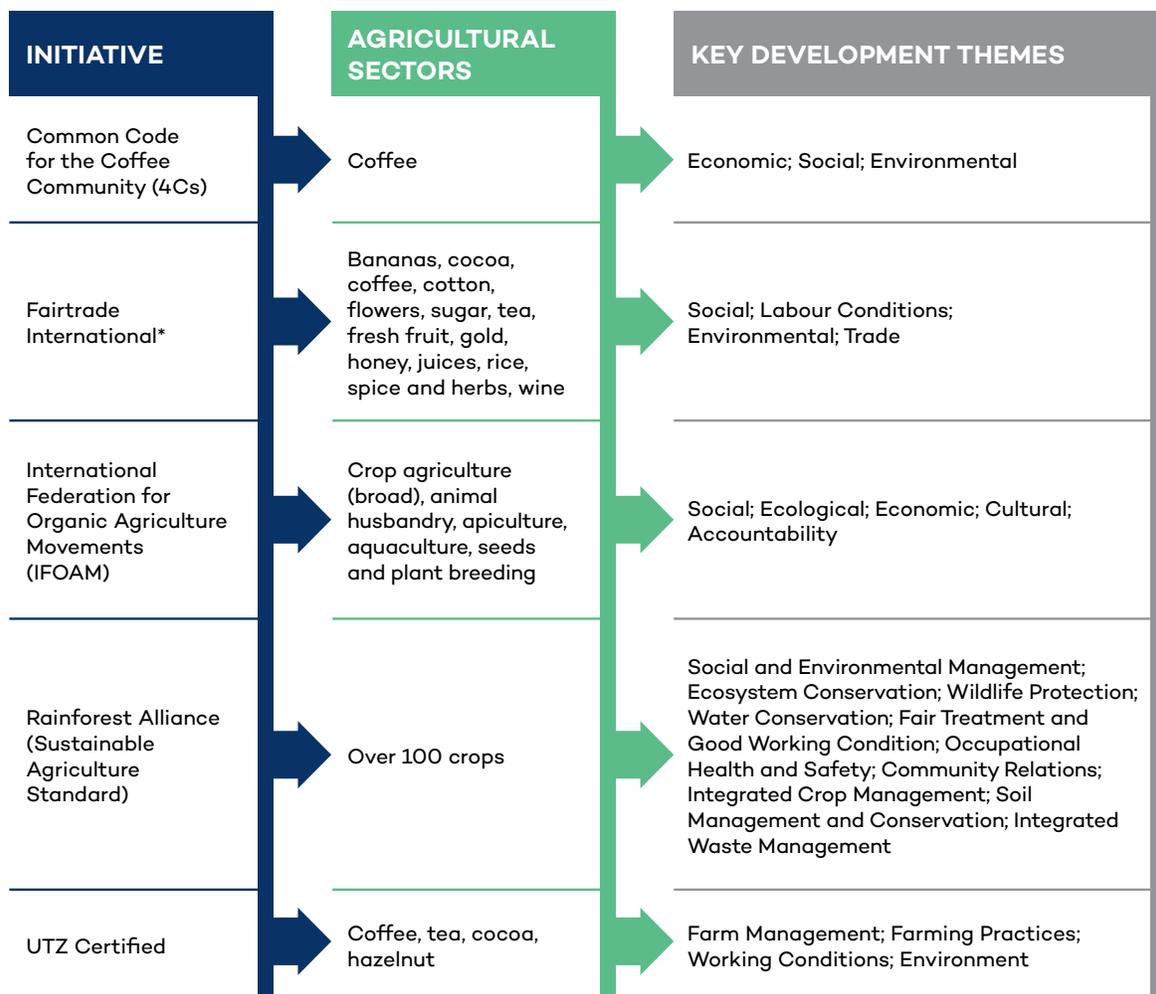
- Fairtrade International (for both smallholders and hired labour)
- Organic (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements [IFOAM])
- Rainforest Alliance
- UTZ Certified (for both group and individual certification)
- Common Code for the Coffee Community (4Cs).

<sup>2</sup> See the Standards Map at <https://sustainabilitymap.org/>

Rainforest Alliance and UTZ Certified, which formally merged in January 2018, are treated separately in this report according to the most recent published versions of their standards (listed in Appendix 1). A draft of the new merged standard, to be called the Rainforest Alliance standard, is expected to be published for public consultation by early 2019.<sup>3</sup>

The five standards were chosen for several reasons, including their significant market coverage, more significant efforts than other standards to integrate gender in their certification criteria and their longer history (which has afforded time for researchers to document evidence of the ways they promote gender equality). These same five standards were analyzed in the IISD companion report to this guidebook (Sexsmith, 2017). Since the time of that publication, two of the standards have released new versions: Fairtrade International's *Fairtrade Standard for Hired Labour* (201) and the *Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard* (2017). Figure 2 summarizes the agricultural sectors and the key development themes addressed by each of these five standards.

**Figure 2. Overview of five voluntary standards**



\* In this paper we refer to “Fair Trade” as a broad movement of alternative traders and producers, and to “Fairtrade” as the certification and labelling system institutionalized under Fairtrade International.

Source: Sexsmith, 2017

<sup>3</sup> For more information on the merger, see <https://www.rainforest-alliance.org/faqs/rainforest-utz-merger#why-merge>

## 2.4 VSSs, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

VSSs have the potential to make significant contributions to gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture. Importantly, VSSs themselves do not have a direct impact on gender equality or women's empowerment. Rather, as this guidebook illustrates, the influence lies in the ways that the certification criteria and procedures for the standard are implemented with agricultural producers and communities. Therefore, it is necessary to analyze the relationship between standards and gender equality on two levels: (i) the effectiveness of the standard at integrating gender into its certification criteria and (ii) the outcomes from applying their design, and supporting adoption and compliance through specific activities, procedures and interventions by certifying bodies, producers as individuals and groups, and the organizations that work with and assist them. This guidebook performs this analysis on both levels.

Table 3 summarizes the findings of this guidebook on the integration of gender into the certification criteria of VSSs when analyzed through the conceptual framework developed in Section 2.1. This guidebook does not attempt to map specific VSS certification criteria onto individual SDG targets or indicators because differences in specific language and the categorization of gender issues renders such an exercise impractical. Rather, areas of overlap in the substance and approach of VSSs and SDGs are illustrated. In the summary table below and throughout Section 3, rows are shaded green when referring specifically to gender equality and women's empowerment issues. Rows without shading indicate criteria that relate closely to the cross-cutting theme and may benefit gender equality and women's empowerment, but do not explicitly mention gender equality.

**Table 3. Summary of findings: Gender equality content of five VSSs and related SDGs<sup>4</sup>**

Related SDGs	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Cross-Cutting Themes	VSS Content Area	4Cs	Fairtrade Small Producer	Fairtrade Hired Labour	IFOAM	Rainforest Alliance	UTZ, Group	UTZ, Individual
	Household Food Security	Right to a living wage	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Women's Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources	Respect for customary land rights	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
		Access to productive resources	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		Access to agricultural training	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		<b>No gender discrimination in agricultural trainings</b>	✓		✓				
	Gender Equality in Education	Eliminate worst forms of child labour	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		Educational opportunities for adults		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
		<b>Equal educational opportunities for women</b>			✓	✓	✓		
	Women's Unpaid Domestic Labour	<b>Access to child care for workers</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

<sup>4</sup> Any discrepancies in the analysis of the gender content of the VSSs between the present guidebook and the companion report (Sexsmith, 2017) are due either to the release of newer versions of the standards (i.e., *Fairtrade Standards for Hired Labour* 15.01.2014\_v1.5 and *Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard*), to the combining or rephrasing of the analytical categories or, in a few cases, to a more flexible interpretation of the criteria.

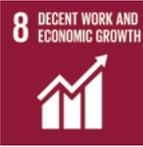
Related SDGs	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Cross-Cutting Themes	VSS Content Area	4Cs	Fairtrade Small Producer	Fairtrade Hired Labour	IFOAM	Rainforest Alliance	UTZ, Group	UTZ, Individual	
 	Women's Decision Making and Empowerment	Gender non-discrimination policy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
		Decent Work for Women	Maternity leave		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
		Breaks and flexibility for nursing mothers			✓		✓		✓	
		No tolerance for sexual harassment	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
		Prohibit pregnant and nursing women from participating in hazardous work			✓	✓		✓		
		Separation of worksite sanitation or rest facilities for women and men			✓	✓		✓		✓

Table 4 summarizes the findings on the ways VSSs can promote gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture through activities and interventions with producers. The findings presented in the table and throughout the document are colour-coded to indicate where standards can be leveraged to make a positive contribution (green), where the promotion of gender equality can take place depending on certain conditions (yellow) and where development organizations should proceed with caution due to the risk of standards exacerbating gender inequalities if not undertaken with sensitivity to local gender dynamics (red).

**Table 4. Summary of findings: Relationships between VSSs and gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture**

<b>Household Food Security</b>
Sustainable production practices can often contribute to a diverse and nutritional diet.
When certification leads to higher incomes it can contribute to food security, particularly when women have control of an income stream.
Certified cash cropping can undermine women's subsistence agriculture, potentially undermining household food security.
<b>Women's Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources</b>
Financial supports provided through certification can contribute to women's access to productive inputs and credit when producer cooperatives support these measures.
Certification does not directly promote women's rights to land, although indirectly it may contribute to women's enjoyment of temporary land rights when men have emigrated and the certification process requires the presence of a landowner.
Certification can reinforce gender asymmetries in access to production-related information and trainings unless specific outreach with women is undertaken.
Certification can promote women's participation in climate-smart agriculture if equitable opportunity to participate in production trainings is provided.
<b>Gender Equality in Education</b>
Standards promote children's attendance at schooling through the prohibition of child labour.
Standards promote girls' and boys' education equally.
<b>Women's Unpaid Domestic Labour</b>
Certification can alleviate some of women's domestic labour burden through financial support for labour-saving investments.
Certification prohibits child labour and can therefore render it more difficult for women with young children to perform agricultural work on their own fields or for a wage, unless the standard also requires that adequate child care is provided.

## Women's Decision Making and Empowerment

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Certification can promote women's roles in the production process and in community activities, which has often contributed to their participation in the traditionally masculine realm of household decision making.

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Women's gains in intra-household decision making may require complementary gender equality training efforts.

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Where patriarchy is deeply entrenched, certification is likely to have no impact on women's empowerment within the household, or worse, reinforce patriarchal social norms.

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Certification can contribute to gender equality in decision making in producer and worker groups, particularly when gender equality training is provided.

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Patriarchal norms render it difficult to promote women's empowerment within producer and worker groups and, in the worst case, may be reinforced if certification promotes male dominance in decision making.

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Certification might channel development-oriented investments into women's non-commercial activities, inadvertently impeding their economic empowerment.

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## Decent Work for Women

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Certification encourages decent work conditions for women waged labourers, because they require compliance with certification criteria that exceed national laws.

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Occupational safety and health conditions related to women workers; specific needs are often improved by certification.

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Certification entails extra labour to comply with crop quality and environmental sustainability criteria. This labour has often been provided by women as unpaid family labour, thus increasing their work burden without compensation or recognition, unless they are included in production decision making.

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VSSs are multi-functional in terms of promoting sustainable development issues including but not limited to gender equality. Therefore, they cannot be expected to address all facets of gender equality and women's empowerment. In particular, because of their voluntary structure, they do not affect official policy, women's participation in national politics, decisions related to land use, and other legal and regulatory transformations beyond the scope (by definition) of voluntary initiatives. Furthermore, there are gender equality issues that largely lie beyond the scope of VSSs in agriculture such as maternal and reproductive health, violence against women, clean water and sanitation, and energy. These gender issues have not been addressed in this guidebook, although they are critically important to the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment.

This guidebook can only summarize and address the issues that are covered in literature and publications on the topic of VSSs and gender equality. Overall, evidence on the relationship between VSSs and gender equality in agriculture remains limited. This occurs for several reasons, including that gender is often incorporated as a secondary research question in studies of VSSs. A significant gap is on intersectionality, or the processes through which some women (and men) become more marginalized than others. The findings presented below are limited by the available evidence. More research on the relationship between VSSs and gender equality and women's empowerment is needed, particularly that which approaches the topic with an intersectional lens.



## **3.0 Leveraging VSSs to Promote Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**

## 3.1 Introduction

Section 3 of this guide is organized into six sections, each one addressing one of six cross-cutting gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture-related issues addressed by the SDGs. The six cross-cutting themes are:

1. Household Food Security
2. Women's Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources
3. Gender Equality in Education
4. Unpaid Domestic Labour
5. Women's Decision Making and Empowerment
6. Decent Work for Women

Each section in Section 3 includes:

1. A gender analysis of the cross-cutting theme, including a box summarizing the “quick facts” on that theme
2. A table summarizing the SDGs, targets and indicators that pertain to the cross-cutting theme
3. A table summarizing whether specific dimensions of the cross-cutting theme are covered by the content of the five VSSs, as well as examples of the relevant text from standards
4. A summary of evidence from published research regarding the ways that the implementation of VSSs promotes the gender equality and women's empowerment theme
5. A set of recommendations for development organizations, in terms of how they can implement VSSs in ways that promote gender equality and women's empowerment

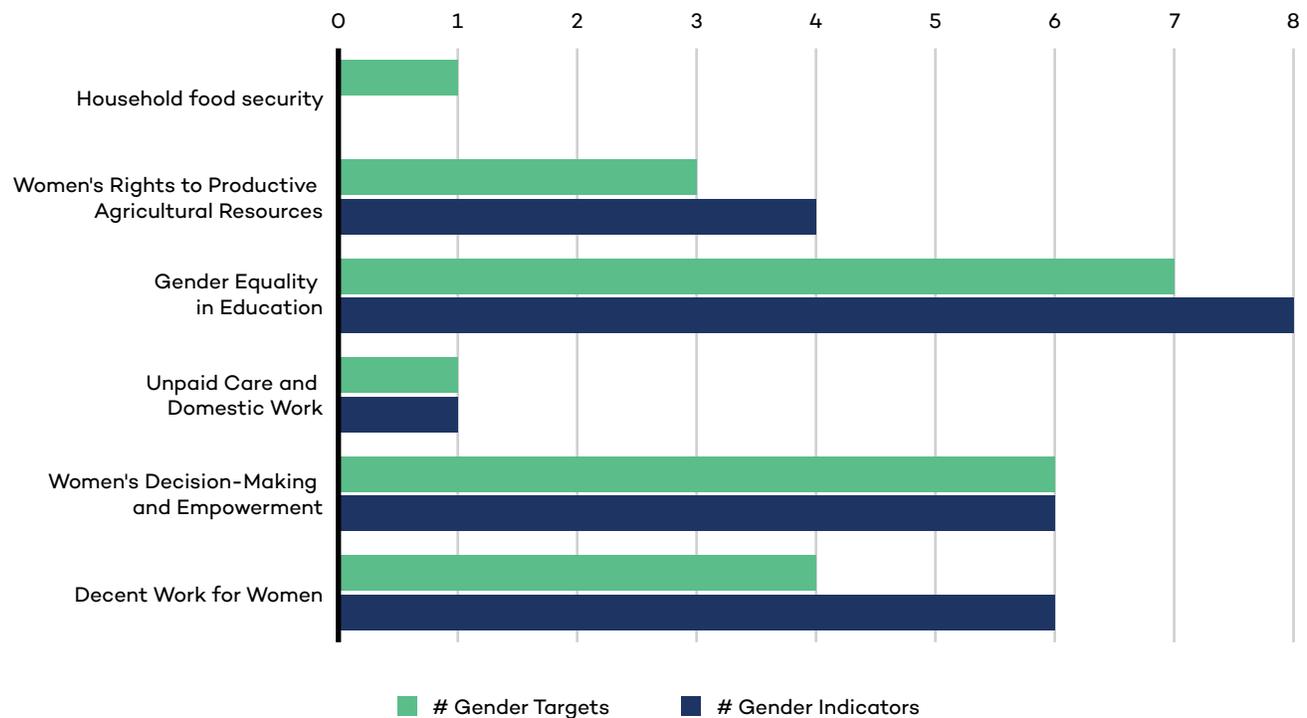
The methodology for this section includes a desk review of the literature on the SDGs and gender issues in agriculture as well as on VSSs and gender, and an update of the mapping of the gender content of five VSSs conducted in the companion IISD publication, *Promoting Gender Equality in Foreign Agricultural Investments* (Sexsmith, 2017).<sup>5</sup> Gender-related SDG indicators were identified and counted by reading the SDGs and their target and indicators. This count of the targets and indicators was then verified by comparing to the UN Women (2018) publication, *Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*,<sup>6</sup> which identifies the number of gender-related targets and indicators for each SDG. The gender targets and indicators of each SDG were then organized into six gender equality and women's empowerment issues. The targets and indicators included in SDG 5, Gender Equality, have also been categorized according to these six issues.

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<sup>5</sup> See footnote 4 regarding differences in the mapping of the gender content of standards between the two publications.

<sup>6</sup> Only one discrepancy was found between the author's count and the UN Women (2018) publication. The author found six gender indicators for SDG 8, but UN Women (2018) states that there are seven.

**Figure 3. Number of mentions of targets and indicators for gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture cross-cutting themes**



Source: Author's compilation from UN, n.d.

## 3.2 Household Food Security

### 3.2.1 Household Food Security: Overview

There is a strong correlation between gender equality and household food security. This relationship relates to women's roles in subsistence agricultural production and food preparation for their families, as well as women's and girls' access to nutritious food.

Women in rural areas usually hold primary responsibility for providing adequate food for the household through subsistence farming, food purchasing and food preparation. Women's work in subsistence agriculture, including homestead gardens and plots, collection of fruits and nuts from forests, fishing and small livestock holding, is critical for providing an adequate nutrient supply, although typically not officially counted as agricultural work (Doss, Meinzen-Dick, Quisumbing, & Theis, 2018). Moreover, women tend to have primary responsibility for ensuring household food and nutrition needs are met. A synthesis of studies across several national contexts finds that women provide 85 to 90 per cent of the time required for household food preparation (Food & Agriculture Organization of the United Nations [FAO], 2011). Yet inadequate access to productive resources (see Section 3.3) undermines their potential to provide adequate dietary diversity and nutrition for their families.

What's more, gendered power hierarchies in rural households have often meant that women have secondary access to food, whether by force or due to internalized gender norms, which causes them to prioritize the nutrition of children and men above their own. In addition, women are more likely to experience food insecurity than men in a majority of

countries worldwide, due to intra-household gender inequalities in access to food during times of crisis (UN Women, 2018). This sometimes occurs without exception even for pregnant and lactating women (whose caloric needs are higher than men's). In fact, anemia affects 29 per cent of young women ages 15 to 49 and 38 per cent of pregnant women, and rural and poor women are more likely to suffer from this preventable condition (UN Women, 2018).

### Box 1. Gender and household food security

- Women provide 85 to 90 per cent of the time required for household food preparation (FAO, 2011).
- Women are more likely to experience food insecurity than men in a majority of countries worldwide (UN Women, 2018).
- Anemia affects 29 per cent of young women ages 15 to 49 and 38 per cent of pregnant women, particularly in rural areas (UN Women, 2018).

### 3.2.2 Household Food Security and the SDGs

Food security is an intersectional issue relating to income and poverty, access to productive resources, gender-based discrimination and health. Food security and gender equality are directly addressed in SDG 2: Zero Hunger. There is one target and no indicators explicitly aiming to measure the gender dimensions of household food security.<sup>7</sup>

**Table 5. Gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture cross-cutting theme #1: Household Food Security**

#### SDG 2: Zero Hunger

Gender Targets	Gender Indicators
2.2 By 2030, end all forms of malnutrition, including achieving, by 2025, the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under 5 years of age, and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women and older persons	none <sup>8</sup>

### 3.2.3 Certification Criteria and Household Food Security

**Table 6. Household Food Security: Certification criteria**

	4Cs	Fairtrade (Small Producer)	Fairtrade (Hired Labour)	IFOAM	Rainforest Alliance	UTZ, Group	UTZ, Individual
Right to a living wage	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

<sup>7</sup> Target 2.3 relates directly to access to productive resources in agriculture, which is discussed further in this report.

<sup>8</sup> Although SDG 2 does not contain any indicators that specifically address gender inequalities in data collection, the language of target 2.2 suggests the importance of gathering sex-disaggregated data on stunting and malnutrition.

There is no certification criterion in the five VSSs reviewed that explicitly relates to food security or gender equality in access to a nutritious diet. However, all standards include consideration or requirement for payment of a living wage to agricultural workers. A living wage includes, among other considerations as defined below, access to adequate food. Below, examples of certification criteria from the Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard, Fairtrade Standards for Hired Labour and UTZ Certified Group Certification are cited. None of the VSSs make reference to gender equality considerations with respect to a living wage.

#### **RAINFOREST ALLIANCE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE STANDARD**

The Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard makes provision of a living wage a continuous improvement criterion (#4.29). A continuous improvement criterion means that a farm must demonstrate continually improved performance in this area over time in order to remain certified. In alignment with the Global Living Wage Coalition, Rainforest Alliance defines a living wage as:

“Remuneration received for a standard work week by a worker in a particular place sufficient to afford a decent standard of living for the worker and her or his family. Elements of a decent standard of living include **food**, water, housing, education, health care, transport, clothing, and provision for unexpected events. Fulfillment of these eight ‘essential needs’ together constitutes a decent standard of living” (Rainforest Alliance, 2017, p. 44, emphasis added).

#### **FAIRTRADE INTERNATIONAL, STANDARD FOR HIRED LABOUR**

Fairtrade International's Standard for Hired Labour requires payment of a living wage as a “core” (necessary requirement) for certification (core criterion 3.5.4, “wage level increase). Food is included in their definition of a decent wage (Fairtrade International, 2018a, p. 28). Specifically, the standard requires:

“If remuneration (wages and benefits) is below the living wage benchmarks as approved by Fairtrade International, your company ensures that real wages are increased annually to continuously close the gap with living wage.

The incremental steps and timeline toward the applicable living wage are negotiated with trade union/ elected worker representatives.”

#### **UTZ CERTIFIED, GROUP CERTIFICATION**

UTZ Certified requires that “group members are able to earn a Living Income and have a decent standard of living for themselves and their families” as one of its principles (listed under Block A: Management) (UTZ Certified, 2017a, p. 13). Further definition of a “living income” or its role in the certification process is not provided.

### **3.2.4 How VSSs Can Contribute to Household Food Security**

Although household food security is not an explicit criterion for VSSs, there is evidence to support the assertion that VSSs can contribute indirectly to household food security and to gender equalities in access to food. This can be promoted through sustainable production requirements, higher incomes and the promotion of women's participation in household decision making, as explained below.

*Sustainable production practices can often contribute to a diverse and nutritional diet.*

VSSs have been shown to contribute to food security through sustainable production requirements that make new sources of subsistence crops available. For example, shade requirements for several coffee certification standards can make new sources of nutrient-dense foods, like bananas, available for household consumption. Organic certification is also positively related to more diversified household agricultural production. For example, legumes

are grown by organic smallholder coffee farmers in Uganda to improve the fertility of soil (Meemken, Spielman, & Qaim, 2017). This practice has been shown to enhance nutritional outcomes and may be associated with lower energy and micronutrient deficiencies (Meemken, Spielman, & Qaim, 2017).<sup>9</sup> As another example, organic cotton production allows inter-cropping of the cash crop with edible plants. By contrast, conventional cotton production requires the use of pesticides that make it dangerous to inter-crop cotton with food plants. Organic cotton production thus contributes to the productivity of soya, niebe (cowpeas) and maize in Benin (Kloos, & Renaud, 2014). While this literature does not present findings from a gender lens, they can be seen as supporting women in their efforts and responsibilities to produce, procure and prepare adequate and nutritious food for their families.

*When certification leads to higher incomes it can contribute to food security, particularly when women have control of an income stream.*

Although gender-disaggregated data on the impacts of certification on smallholder incomes is not available, some research has found that certified producers earn 7 per cent higher net income than non-certified producers, due to both productivity increases and price premiums (Committee on Sustainability Assessment [COSA], 2013).<sup>10</sup> In a study of organic coffee farmers in Uganda, higher income levels with organic certification were related to greater food security, which showed that the “hunger period” was reduced or eliminated thanks to higher earnings (Bolwig, & Odeke, 2007). A comparison of certified (Fairtrade, organic and UTZ) to non-certified coffee farmers in Uganda showed that the certified households are more food secure (Chiputwa, & Qaim, 2016). They enjoyed higher caloric and micronutrient consumption, and lower levels of nutritional deficiency (Chiputwa, & Qaim, 2016). Specifically, measured in consumption per adult equivalent, they consumed 19 per cent more calories, 35 per cent more iron and 48 per cent more zinc than non-certified households (Chiputwa, & Qaim, 2016). Yet these advantages disappear when household income is controlled by men, likely because men tend to spend their income in different ways than women (Chiputwa, & Qaim, 2016).

Some research has shown that the extra income from certification can contribute to household food security when women have an independent income stream. For example, organic cotton cultivation in Benin allowed women to have their own income stream, which they used for children's schooling, health care and household nutrition (Kloos, & Renaud, 2014). Fairtrade, organic and UTZ certification are shown to contribute to both nutrition and food security because of positive income effects, and because increased time dedicated to production (see Section 3.7) contributes to a greater role for women in household decision making (Chiputwa, & Qaim, 2016). Since certification has in some cases promoted women's economic empowerment in the household (see Section 3.6) and women are more likely than men to spend their income on food and nutrition for children, VSSs can indirectly promote household food security. There is no available research to indicate whether intrahousehold differences in food security may still persist, however.

*Certified cash cropping can undermine women's subsistence agriculture, potentially undermining household food security.*

VSSs also introduce some food insecurity risks to the extent that incentivizing cultivation of a cash crop (often for export) lies at the heart of their purpose. Often, cash crops are the domain of men, while women are responsible for subsistence agriculture that contributes to household food security. Yet, as outlined in Section 3.3., women's land rights are significantly weaker than men's due to formal exclusions from landholding and to customary land tenure systems that often discriminate against women (Daley, 2011). The result of certification can therefore be that women lose access to land for subsistence food production, as land dedicated to cultivating a cash crop is prioritized. Although there is no empirical evidence to confirm this rationale (COSA, 2013), the potential loss of women's access to land for food production could undermine household food security.

<sup>9</sup> The researchers note that although the positive relationship between legume production and nutrition outcomes is strong, the evidence for causality is weak.

<sup>10</sup> SDG 1: End Poverty includes several targets and indicators addressing the gender dimensions of poverty. Since there is no available data on the relationship between standards and gender differences in income levels, this guidebook does not explicitly address the issue. Future research should focus on intra-household income inequalities under certification schemes.

### 3.2.5 Leveraging VSSs to Make a Difference in Household Food Security

For development organizations to successfully use VSSs to promote household food security equally for women and men, boys and girls, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Promote women's subsistence crops and nutritious crops for inter-cropping, shade and other sustainable production practices.** In most agrarian cultures, women and men are responsible for different crops. In addition, there is a gender division of labour for the work entailed in those crops. Development organizations can promote both food security and women's empowerment in agriculture by promoting the use of women's crops and nutrient-dense food crops when these new crops are covered by the sustainable production criteria of VSSs.
2. **Use gender transformative approaches to encourage women's financial decision making within the household.** The gender transformative approach to agricultural development encourages gender-equal food security within the household. Development organizations can work with women and men to encourage an equal role for women in household decision making over uses of the certified income stream and to eliminate gender discrimination in the distribution of food. Women's financial empowerment within the household can promote the use of funds from certified sales toward a diverse and nutritional diet.
3. **Conduct a gender impact assessment of the introduction or reinforcement of cash crop cultivation before promoting certification.** Development organizations must be attuned to local gender dynamics regarding land access and agricultural production when considering certification as a livelihood program for smallholders. They should invest time in understanding local gender dynamics with respect to land tenure patterns if they intend to promote certification as a means of access to more lucrative markets for cash crops. While certification can contribute positively to food security through sustainable production, higher income and women's economic empowerment, it can also undermine food security if land farmed by women is converted for cash crop production. A well-implemented gender impact assessment can help avoid this outcome.

## 3.3 Women's Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources

### 3.3.1 Women's Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources: Overview

Gender discrimination in land access and ownership is systemic in the Global South (Daley, 2011). Globally, women own an estimated 12.8 per cent of agricultural land (UN Women, 2018). Any existing protections for women's land ownership and inheritance afforded through formal legal systems are often undermined by informal local customs that prohibit or restrict women from owning land and/or receiving income from working that land (see Sexsmith, 2017). Moreover, when they do have access to land, it is often the least desirable land and can be very far from where they live.

Women's insecure land tenure imposes constraints on their ability to obtain credit, to gain access to production improvements like irrigation or labour-saving technologies, and to receive information about production improvements delivered through extension agents, non-governmental organizations and certification bodies. Research in multiple countries has consistently shown that legal systems and cultural norms discriminate against women's access to credit, undermining the ability of women farmers to undertake productivity-enhancing investments (FAO, 2011). Moreover, extension service providers favour wealthy, more educated, land-owning farmers, who are often men. This works to the disadvantage of women, who tend to be less wealthy, less educated and less likely to own their own land (FAO, 2011; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2010; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2015). This gender gap in access to productive agricultural resources is estimated to reduce women farmers' productivity by up to 30 per cent (FAO, 2011).

## Box 2. Quick facts: Women's rights to productive agricultural resources

- Globally, women own an estimated 12.8 per cent of agricultural land (UN Women, 2018).
- Women's ability to obtain credit, productive resources and production information is constrained by their insecure land tenure and discriminatory gender norms (FAO, 2011).
- If women farmers enjoyed equal rights to productive resources, they could produce 20–30 per cent more food on their land, increase total agricultural output in the Global South by up to 4 per cent and reduce the number of malnourished people in the world by up to 17 per cent (FAO, 2011).

### 3.3.2 Women's Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources and the SDGs

Gender discrimination in rights to productive agricultural resources, and particularly in women's access to land, is a prominent gender cross-cutting theme in the SDGs. There are three related targets and four related indicators cross-cutting through SDG 1: End Poverty, SDG 2: Zero Hunger and SDG 5: Gender Equality.

**Table 7. Gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture cross-cutting theme #2: Women's Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources**

#### SDG 1: End Poverty

Gender Targets	Gender Indicators
<b>1.4</b> By 2030, ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services, including microfinance.	<b>1.4.2</b> Proportion of total adult population with secure tenure rights to land, with legally recognized documentation and who perceive their rights to land as secure, by sex and by type of tenure

#### SDG 2: Zero Hunger

<b>2.3</b> By 2030, double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women, Indigenous peoples, family farmers, pastoralists and fishers, including through secure and equal access to land, other productive resources and inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.	<b>2.3.2</b> Average income of small-scale food producers, by sex and Indigenous status
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#### SDG 5: Gender Equality

<b>5.a</b> Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.	<p><b>5.a.1 (a)</b> Proportion of total agricultural population with ownership or secure rights over agricultural land, by sex; and <b>(b)</b> share of women among owners or rights-bearers of agricultural land, by type of tenure</p> <p><b>5.a.2</b> Proportion of countries where the legal framework (including customary law) guarantees women's equal rights to land ownership and/or control</p>
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### 3.3.3 Certification Criteria and Women's Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources

Direct references to gender discrimination in access to productive agricultural resources are limited in VSSs.

**Table 8. Women's Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources: Certification criteria**

	4Cs	Fairtrade (Small Producer)	Fairtrade (Hired Labour)	IFOAM	Rainforest Alliance	UTZ, Group	UTZ, Individual
Respect for customary land rights	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Access to productive resources	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Access to agricultural training	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>No gender discrimination in agricultural trainings</b>	✓		✓				

**Land Rights:** None of the VSSs reviewed include criteria for women's land rights. Several standards include specific provisions for customary or local land rights. Women's land rights are often customary, implying respect for their informal land rights in the certification criteria. However, gender discrimination in customary land rights is pervasive (Daley, 2011; Sexsmith, 2017). The VSSs that mention protection of customary land rights are:

- Fairtrade International, Small Producer Standard
- Fairtrade International, Hired Labour Standard
- Rainforest Alliance, Sustainable Agriculture Standard
- UTZ Certified, Group Certification
- UTZ Certified, Individual Certification

Gender and land rights are implicitly touched on by the *Generic Fairtrade Standards for Hired Labour* (Fairtrade International, 2018a). This is because the standard requires "alignment" with the *Voluntary Guidelines on Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries, and Forests in the Context of National Food Security* (FAO, 2012), itself a gender-mainstreamed document seeking to protect land rights for communities potentially disaffected by foreign agricultural investments (FAO, 2013).

**Credit and Productive Inputs:** All of the standards reviewed mention in some aspect producers' access to credit and productive inputs. However, none of the five VSSs analyzed explicitly addresses gender equality in access to credit or to productive inputs. However, several do address the need to provide special measures to ensure equitable access to services that support agricultural production for disadvantaged groups. Women are implicitly included among disadvantaged farmer groups in most contexts. For example:

#### **RAINFOREST ALLIANCE: SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE STANDARD**

As continuous improvement criterion #1.17, the Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard requires that: "The group administrator makes particular efforts to offer training to potentially less-advantaged group members, those in remote areas, and those with limited literacy" (Rainforest Alliance, 2017, p. 33).

**Information and Agricultural Production Training:** All of the standards reviewed mention fair access to agricultural trainings. Two of the reviewed standards reference gender discrimination with specific reference to agricultural trainings. While 4C mentions gender-equal language referring to women and men having the same right to participate, the Fairtrade standard goes further by stating the need for specific actions to support women's empowerment through participation in such trainings.

#### 4C CODE OF CONDUCT

Principle 1.2, in the category of Capacity and Skill Development, states that “Business partners and workers within the 4C unit are given access to relevant training and skill development in order to apply good agricultural and management practices, according to identified needs. ... **Women and men have the same right to participate**” (4C Association, 2015, p. 8, emphasis added).

#### FAIRTRADE STANDARD FOR HIRED LABOUR

Development requirement 2.2.6 states that “Your company gives special attention to the empowerment of women by means of adequate training, capacity building, guidance, encouragement and assistance as necessary” (Fairtrade International, 2018a, p. 18, emphasis added). A development requirement is a continuous improvement requirement. The standard requires companies to meet this criterion within three years. The absence of gender discrimination in training also is mentioned under core requirement 3.1.1.

### 3.3.4 How VSSs Can Contribute to Women's Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources

Despite the limited treatment of this issue in the literature, the evidence suggests that VSSs might promote women's rights to productive agricultural resources in several ways.

*Financial supports provided through certification can contribute to women's access to productive inputs and credit when producer cooperatives support these measures.*

Fair Trade entails both pre-financing and a premium for economic or community development. There is some evidence from Nicaraguan coffee cooperatives that women in Fair Trade cooperatives have better access to credit than other rural women (Bacon, Mendez, Flores Gomez, Stuart, & Diaz Flores, 2008). Moreover, sometimes, the Fair Trade premium is dedicated specifically to development projects for women. The Nicaraguan coffee cooperative CECOCAFEN operated a credit and savings program for over 500 women in activities not related to coffee production (Hoskyns, 2006). Nevertheless, women in certified producer organizations still tend to have less access to credit than men, and gender equality in access to credit, land and training is often overlooked (COSA, 2013).

A quantitative research study has identified a correlation between standards and a more gender-equal distribution of household assets (Meemken & Qaim, 2017). This study's comparison of certified to non-certified coffee-producing households in Uganda found that, with Fairtrade and UTZ certifications, women in both female-headed and male-headed households owned more assets, thanks to their greater control of revenue from the cash crop (Meemken, & Qaim, 2017). Meemken, & Qaim (2017) conclude that certification contributes to a more equal intra-household distribution of assets in male-headed households in this case study. However, the causal relationship between certification and women's greater enjoyment of assets is not examined, and more research is needed in this area.

*Certification does not directly promote women's rights to land, although indirectly it may contribute to women's enjoyment of temporary land rights when men have emigrated and the certification process requires the presence of a landowner.*

Women's unequal rights to land are not a specific focal area of certification schemes. Among certified farmers, women still have lower rates of land ownership and farm less productive land than men (COSA, 2013). In many cases, women's rights to land remain mediated by men under certification. One study found that women in Burkina Faso who rely on men for access to land to produce certified organic cotton are not always comfortable asking for land access (Bassett, 2009).

The consequences of women's exclusion from land rights are significant from the perspective of those seeking to leverage standards to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. A review of 129 studies on the social impacts of Fair Trade found that, because of their insecure land tenure, women are often excluded from the benefits of certification, which include increased income and decision-making power in cooperatives and families (Hanson et al., 2012). That is, since they often do not own the land that is certified, women often do not receive the additional revenues from certified sales, nor do they belong as members to producer cooperatives as often because membership is restricted to the landholders (men) (see Section 3.6). The lack of land titles reduces the empowering potential of Fair Trade for women (Bacon, 2010). Not surprisingly, then, not having access to land has been demonstrated to reduce women's interest in Fair Trade and organic certifications (Kasente, 2012).

While certification itself does not directly promote more secure land rights for women, there are some indirect connections between certification and women's land access. Some independent, gender-focused standards, like the "Manos de Mujer" cooperative in Guatemala, require women to own or manage the land to receive certification (Royal Tropical Institute [KIT], Agri-ProFocus, & International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, 2012). Another indirect way that standards can promote women's land access is through the common certification requirement that the landowner be present during the VSS audit. In places with high rates of male out-migration, male land owners sometimes transfer land ownership to their wives when they are temporarily absent (Lyon et al., 2010; Lewis & Runsten, 2008). For instance, in Oaxaca, Mexico, the proportion of women coffee producers rose from 10 per cent in 1999 to 35 per cent in 2005 for this reason (Lewis & Runsten, 2008). That said, even when the male land owner is abroad, and his wife represents him, he may still control decisions about agricultural production and land management. Moreover, upon his return, that land ownership will likely be transferred back to the man.

*Certification can reinforce gender asymmetries in access to production-related information and trainings unless specific outreach with women is undertaken.*

Production information and extension activities are usually provided to land owners. This means that women are dependent on men for access to information about agricultural production, whether the farm is certified or not (Bolwig & Odeke, 2007; Bullock, Gyau, Mithoefer, & Swisher, 2017; Farnworth & Goodman, 2006). As a result, women have less information and understanding about the production environment than men (Charlier, Yopez del Castillo, & Andia, 2000). A further consequence is that women tend to know less about VSSs and how they work (Bonnar-White, Hightower, & Issa, 2013; Blowfield, & Dolan, 2010; Hanson et al., 2012; Hoskyns, 2006; KIT et al., 2012). For example, in a study of a Nicaraguan Fairtrade-certified cooperative, women were unable to explain the concept behind the certification (Hanson et al., 2012). In itself, certification offers little remedy for the extension barriers faced by women in male-headed households (Meemken, & Qaim, 2017). Therefore, if specific outreach with women is not undertaken, standards can inadvertently reinforce gender inequalities in access to production information.

Nevertheless, when certification is accompanied by specific outreach to women (landowners and not), it might help address gender inequalities in access to production-related information and training. For example, female farmers in UTZ- and Fairtrade-certified coffee cooperatives in Uganda told researchers they had better access to agronomic training thanks to the certification (Riisgaard et al., 2009). In a couple of case studies of organic-certified producer groups, women were directly invited to participate in training events (Bolwig, & Odeke, 2007; KIT et al., 2012). These findings suggest that any trainings provided by outside organizations to assist with successful certified production create an opportunity to observe and identify gender inequalities in access to training, which some actors address by inviting more women to trainings.

*Certification can promote women's participation in climate-smart agriculture<sup>11</sup> if equitable opportunity to participate in production trainings is provided.*

Standards have recently begun to address smallholder adaptation<sup>12</sup> to climate change, and this issue is poised to become an integral element of future versions of sustainability standards. Examples include the creation of a new Fairtrade Climate Standard, the revised Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard and the UTZ Coffee Climate Care project. Early research on the relationship between standards and climate change has suggested that standards can promote climate change adaptation because they have positive impacts on income and credit that can be used to support the costs of adaptation, and by more effectively connecting producers to the global community that can provide knowledge and assistance with adaptation (Borsky, & Spata, 2018). There is no research yet available on whether standards can make a positive contribution to women's adaptive capacity to climate change. Therefore, an important remaining area for investigation is whether VSSs can contribute to women's capacity to adapt to climate change.

### 3.3.5 Leveraging VSSs to Make a Difference in Women's Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources

For development organizations to successfully use VSSs to promote women's rights to productive agricultural resources, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Promote and advocate for women's more stable and secure rights to land** in coordination with efforts to support certification and certified producers. For women to fully reap the benefits of certification, including premium prices, access to production information and extension, and the ability to take out credit, they require secure and equal land rights.
2. **Development organizations working in extension (agricultural training) services should use female extension workers in services provided for women.** There are several reasons why female extension workers could improve women agriculturalists' access to information and extension services. Cultural norms prohibiting women's one-on-one interaction with male extension workers undermine the effectiveness and access to extension activities for women smallholders. Moreover, women are more likely to understand and be able to respond to each other's needs, goals and constraints with respect to agricultural production. Thus, women are in many situations better suited to providing agricultural training services to other women than are men.
3. **Promote women's rights to productive agricultural resources in women's empowerment-focused projects and interventions,** to the extent of course that women themselves agree. Often the gender gap in agriculture is overlooked in favour of projects easing women's feminized labour burden. Projects seeking to remedy women's structural exclusions would start with access to land, credit and ultimately the generation of equal opportunities to prosper from an agricultural livelihood.
4. **Provide support and training on climate change adaptation and climate-smart agriculture for women producers.** As VSSs deepen their consideration of the consequences of climate change through climate-smart agriculture in their design and implementation, they stand to offer a strong benefit to smallholder producers seeking to remain productive while adapting successfully to new environmental conditions. It is essential that measures be taken to promote the participation of women producers in workshops, trainings and other activities designed to help smallholders adopt these climate-smart approaches. Development practitioners should not rely on this information being shared between men and women if only men participate in such activities.

<sup>11</sup> The FAO (n.d.) defines climate-smart agriculture as "agriculture that sustainably increases productivity, enhances resilience (adaptation), reduces/removes greenhouse gas emissions (mitigation) where possible, and enhances achievement of national food security and development goals."

<sup>12</sup> The Oxford Research Encyclopedia defines climate change adaptation as "the ability of a society or a natural system to adjust to the (changing) conditions that support life in a certain climate region, including weather extremes in that region."

## 3.4 Gender Equality in Education

### 3.4.1 Gender Equality in Education: Overview

Gender disparities in formal education in rural areas are pervasive but ameliorating. Of 106 countries that committed to achieving equal primary school enrolment for girls in boys in 2000, 83 had achieved the goal by 2005 (World Bank data cited in FAO, 2011). Gender differences in enrolment at the primary level have mostly been eradicated, with the exception of some Indigenous groups in Latin America, parts of Southeastern Asia and parts of sub-Saharan Africa (FAO, 2011). However, these inequalities between girls and boys may persist in secondary and higher levels of education due to domestic responsibilities, the quality of education locally available, and gender norms surrounding who advances and who does not.

Among rural adults, women remain disadvantaged in comparison to men in terms of educational achievement. This gender disparity holds regardless of region and level of economic development (FAO, 2011). These inequalities tend to be intersectional, meaning factors such as being an older woman, a member of an Indigenous language speaking group and poor create further and compounded disadvantages in women's access to education.

Lower levels of schooling create a disadvantage for women as farmers because higher levels of formal education are associated with greater agricultural productivity (FAO, 2011). For example, women's lower levels of formal education have been found to be associated with lower adoption rates for improved seeds and fertilizers (Saito, Mekonnen, & Spurling, 1994). What's more, in agricultural science and research, women are gaining ground but remain under-represented, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (FAO, 2011).

#### Box 3. Quick facts: Gender differences in access to education

- Many countries have eliminated gender disparities in primary education (FAO, 2011).
- Rural female heads of household often have fewer years of formal education than rural male household heads (FAO, 2011).
- The illiteracy rate among adults aged 15 to 49 is highest among women in poor households, including when compared to poor men (UN Women, 2018).

### 3.4.2 Gender Equality in Education and the SDGs

Gender equality in education is only mentioned in SDG 4: Quality Education. The goal includes seven targets and eight indicators referencing greater gender equality in access to education, including among children, adolescents and adults.

**Table 9. Gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture cross-cutting #3: Gender Equality in Education****SDG 4: Quality Education**

Gender Targets	Gender Indicators
<p><b>4.1</b> By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes.</p>	<p><b>4.1.1</b> Proportion of children and young people <b>(a)</b> in grades 2/3; <b>(b)</b> at the end of primary; and <b>(c)</b> at the end of lower secondary achieving at least a minimum proficiency level in (i) reading and (ii) mathematics, by sex</p>
<p><b>4.2</b> By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education.</p>	<p><b>4.2.1</b> Proportion of children under 5 years of age who are developmentally on track in health, learning and psychosocial well-being, by sex</p> <p><b>4.2.2</b> Participation rate in organized learning (one year before the official primary entry age), by sex</p>
<p><b>4.3</b> By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.</p>	<p><b>4.3.1</b> Participation rate of youth and adults in formal and non-formal education and training in the previous 12 months, by sex</p>
<p><b>4.5</b> By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.</p>	<p><b>4.5.1</b> Parity indices (female/male, rural/urban, bottom/top wealth quintile and others such as disability status, Indigenous peoples and conflict-affected, as data become available) for all education indicators on this list that can be disaggregated</p>
<p><b>4.6</b> By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.</p>	<p><b>4.6.1</b> Proportion of population in a given age group achieving at least a fixed level of proficiency in functional <b>(a)</b> literacy and <b>(b)</b> numeracy skills, by sex</p>
<p><b>4.7</b> By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.</p>	<p><b>4.7.1</b> Extent to which (i) global citizenship education and (ii) education for sustainable development, including gender equality and human rights, are mainstreamed at all levels in <b>(a)</b> national education policies; <b>(b)</b> curricula; <b>(c)</b> teacher education; and <b>(d)</b> student assessment</p>
<p><b>4.a</b> Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.</p>	<p><b>4.a.1</b> Proportion of schools with access to <b>(a)</b> electricity; <b>(b)</b> the Internet for pedagogical purposes; <b>(c)</b> computers for pedagogical purposes; <b>(d)</b> adapted infrastructure and materials for students with disabilities; <b>(e)</b> basic drinking water; <b>(f)</b> single-sex basic sanitation facilities; and <b>(g)</b> basic handwashing facilities (as per the WASH [water, sanitation and hygiene] indicator definitions)</p>

### 3.4.3 Certification Criteria and Gender Equality in Education

**Table 10. Gender Equality in Education: Certification criteria**

	4Cs	Fairtrade (Small Producer)	Fairtrade (Hired Labour)	IFOAM	Rainforest Alliance	UTZ, Group	UTZ, Individual
Eliminate worst forms of child labour	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
Educational opportunities for adults		☑	☑	☑	☑	☑	☑
<b>Equal educational opportunities for women</b>			☑	☑	☑		

Three of the VSSs reviewed address rights and access to schooling for children and educational opportunities for adults.

#### CHILDREN'S SCHOOLING

All of the VSSs include criteria for ensuring children have the opportunity to attend school, usually in the context of eradicating the worst forms of child labour on certified farms. Globally, it is estimated that 98 million girls and boys ages 5 to 17 years work in agriculture, making this sector the number one employer of child labourers (International Labour Organization, n.d.). None of the VSSs explicitly address the specific disadvantages that girls sometimes face in attending school, particularly beyond primary years. However, a ban on child labour might particularly benefit girls, since parents sometimes do not value investment in their education to the same degree as in boys' education, due to gender norms around the male household provider.

#### EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADULTS

Several standards address educational opportunities for women in the context of the creation of an equitable environment for women in the workplace. They are Fairtrade International's Standard for Hired Labour, Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard and IFOAM Best Practice Guidelines.

##### FAIRTRADE INTERNATIONAL, STANDARD FOR HIRED LABOUR

Development criterion 2.2.7 Equity in the Workplace states: "Your company undertakes activities to achieve equity in the workplace. This includes specifically addressing the employment and promotion of suitably qualified people from disadvantaged and minority groups." The guidance text for 2.2.7 further explains that "Examples of activities to support an equitable workplace include: **education and professional training for women** or other disadvantaged people or minority groups, in order to qualify them to take up more advanced positions" (Fairtrade International, 2018a, emphasis added). The standard requires companies to meet this criterion within three years.

##### RAINFORREST ALLIANCE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE STANDARD

Continuous improvement criterion 1.12 states: "The farm management and group administrator support equality and empowerment of **women, including participation in training and education** and equal access to products and services" (Rainforest Alliance, 2017, emphasis added). A continuous improvement criterion is one for which standards must demonstrate improved performance over time in order to remain

certified. Moreover, continuous improvement criterion 1.19 refers to the responsibility to develop a plan for basic education for members, although specific measures for women as an educationally disadvantaged population are not mentioned.

### IFOAM, BEST PRACTICE GUIDELINES FOR AGRICULTURE AND VALUE CHAINS

“Equity and gender” is the first item for this standard’s “Social Dimension” section. As a “practice example” for how to implement this principle, the standard suggests: “There is **no gender bias** concerning hiring, remuneration, access to resources and **education**, and career opportunities” (IFOAM, 2013, emphasis added).

## 3.4.4 How VSSs Can Contribute to Gender Equality in Education

### *Standards promote children’s attendance at schooling through the prohibition of child labour.*

Several studies have found that Fairtrade certification makes a positive contribution to children’s education (Arnould, Plastina, & Ball, 2009; Dragusanu, & Nunn, 2018; Meemkan, Spielman, & Qaim, 2017). One study in Uganda found that Fairtrade-certified households spend more on children’s education than non-certified households, most likely due to the fact that the standard prohibits child labour and offers a premium to producers (Meemkan et al., 2017). Another study in Costa Rica found that Fairtrade certification had no effect on elementary school enrolment (possibly because elementary school enrolment is already high for all families), but did have a positive effect on secondary school enrolment for children ages 13–17, who might otherwise be drawn out of school to work (Dragusanu & Nunn, 2018). As explained below, this research has only addressed gender disparities in child education in a limited way.

### *Standards promote girls’ and boys’ education equally.*

Research on the links between VSSs and educational enrolment of children has only scratched the surface of gender inequalities in children’s education. However, the Uganda study found that, among both certified and non-certified households, parents spent more money on girls’ education than boys’ (Meemkan et al., 2017). They conclude that standards do not promote a preference for either girls’ or boys’ education, but rather promote them equally, because they have no effect on the relative cost of sending girls and boys to school, nor do they affect parents’ preferences over whether to invest in the education of girls or of boys (Meemkan et al., 2017).

## 3.4.5 Leveraging VSSs to Make a Difference in Gender Equality in Education

The following recommendations will support development organizations in leveraging their work with VSSs to advance gender equality in education:

1. **Document and work to promote understanding of local cultural practices around child labour in agriculture.** Children who work in agriculture to support family farms are not always engaged in exploitative forms of agricultural work. In fact, sometimes it is essential for women to take children to the fields in order to accomplish their agricultural tasks and feed their families. It is essential to develop a culturally grounded understanding of these patterns to identify and distinguish harmful from non-harmful forms of child labour, particularly those that involve girls, who are at greater risk of being removed from school to perform agricultural work.
2. **Develop and support initiatives for women’s literacy.** Evidence demonstrates that rural women, particularly older, poor and Indigenous women, face significant educational barriers that have produced lower average levels of formal education. As a result, their ability to benefit fully from trainings on agricultural production, marketing, obtaining certification and other topics that have the potential to contribute to gender equality, is hampered. Initiatives that help women achieve greater literacy will complement and help them reap the benefits of these agricultural activities and interventions.

3. **Advocate for the importance of girls' education, from primary through secondary, tertiary and post-secondary schooling**, with local families, institutions and governments. Such advocacy efforts should promote not just the enrolment of girls in schooling but also the quality of their education. Opportunities for girls to achieve productive and satisfying careers in agriculture are harmed by social norms that discriminate against their equal participation in formal education beyond the primary years.

## 3.5 Women's Unpaid Domestic Labour

### 3.5.1 Women's Unpaid Domestic Labour: Overview

In most societies, women hold primary responsibility for domestic labour, which includes cooking, cleaning, and caring for children and the elderly. On average, they spend 2.6 times more hours performing this work than men (UN Women, 2018). Women who are of an agriculturally productive age (between 25 and 44) are also of child-bearing age, meaning that their domestic work responsibilities are even more significant than those of younger or older women (UN Women, 2018). The unequal gender division of domestic labour begins during childhood. Girls aged 7 to 14 have more care and housework responsibilities than boys of the same age (UN Women, 2018).

Rural women face unique barriers in completing their unpaid domestic labour because they are more likely to live in contexts where incomes are low and access to energy, water and care arrangements are more difficult. As a result, these domestic responsibilities tend to act as a significant obstacle to their participation in any activities away from the home that could enhance their agricultural livelihoods, including production and work for profit, training activities and decision-making bodies such as producer or worker cooperatives (UN Women, 2018).

#### Box 4. Quick Facts: Women's unpaid domestic labour

- Women perform 2.6 times more hours in unpaid domestic labour than men.
- Women ages 25 to 44 who have young children perform the most unpaid domestic labour.
- The responsibility for domestic labour limits women's time and mobility to engage in agricultural work, training activities and producer or worker organizations.

*Source: UN Women (2018).*

### 3.5.2 Women's Unpaid Domestic Labour and the SDGs

The significant responsibilities that women hold for unpaid domestic labour are addressed under SDG 5: Gender Equality. One target and one indicator address this theme.

**Table 11. Gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture cross-cutting theme #4: Women's Unpaid Domestic Labour**

**SDG 5: Gender Equality**

Gender Targets	Gender Indicators
5.4 Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.	5.4.1 Proportion of time spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by sex, age and location

**3.5.3 Certification Criteria and Women's Unpaid Domestic Labour**

**Table 12. Women's Unpaid Domestic Labour: Certification criteria**

	4Cs	Fairtrade (Small Producer)	Fairtrade (Hired Labour)	IFOAM	Rainforest Alliance	UTZ, Group	UTZ, Individual
Access to child care for workers	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

None of the standards directly addresses gender inequalities in domestic labour, most likely because this issue is often deemed a cultural concern beyond the scope of the mostly economic, environmental and social (public sphere) content of standards. However, there are indirect ways that standards address this issue, namely by providing mechanisms that help women meet their child-care responsibilities while still performing agricultural work.

Two examples below, Fairtrade International's Standard for Hired Labour and UTZ Certified, Individual Certification, demonstrate how VSSs address child-care concerns for women workers. In neither case is child care obligatory to be eligible for immediate certification.

**FAIRTRADE INTERNATIONAL, STANDARD FOR HIRED LABOUR**

Development criterion (which means a continuous improvement requirement for this standard) 2.2.10 states: "Your company provides support for crèche facilities for your workers' children either inside or outside your premises." The standard states that companies have six years to demonstrate compliance with this requirement (Fairtrade International, 2018a, p. 19).

**UTZ CERTIFIED, INDIVIDUAL CERTIFICATION**

I.C.94 states that "Workers living on-site have access to convenient and affordable day care services for their children" (UTZ Certified, 2017b, p.33). This requirement, however, is classified as an "additional" instead of "mandatory" control point. While certified producers must comply with all mandatory control points, they must only comply with a certain number of additional control points. In some sense, therefore, this provision is optional in order to obtain the certification.

### 3.5.4 How VSSs Can Contribute to Gender Equality in Care and Domestic Labour

Certification does not directly reduce women's unpaid labour burden (c.f. Hanson et al., 2012). In part, this is due to the fact that the gender division of labour, which often assigns women unpaid domestic work responsibilities while men undertake income-generating work outside the household, is embedded in local cultural norms that lie beyond the scope of certification systems. Regardless, the evidence cited below shows that standards can be leveraged to alleviate women's labour burden in several ways.

*Certification can alleviate some of women's care and domestic labour burden through financial support for labour-saving investments.*

The uptake of VSSs sometimes indirectly reduces the unpaid domestic labour responsibilities that women shoulder through investments in labour-saving services, equipment and technologies. Examples from the literature include a communal corn processing mill and a village electrification project, both of which facilitate women's work in maize processing (Fairtrade Foundation, 2015). Moreover, a case study of Fair Trade producers found that they spend more on both basic household items and investments, such as household durables, infrastructural improvements and education, thus, in this case, helping to alleviate women's domestic work burden (Dilley, 2011).

*Certification prohibits child labour and can therefore render it more difficult for women with young children to perform agricultural work on their own fields or for a wage, unless the standard also requires that adequate child care is provided.*

If standards do not allow women to bring children with them to work even when this practice is an accepted cultural norm and is not locally viewed as exploitative, they might undermine women's ability to participate in agricultural work. This is because sometimes women have little choice but to bring their children to work with them if they have no family members or older children (and particularly older girls) to look after their younger siblings at home. Indeed, sometimes the employment of adolescents in agriculture is well within local cultural norms and an important contribution to family income (Loconto, 2015). One study documented how a Fairtrade audit of a Tanzanian tea estate led to the firing of a 14-year old girl even though her waged employment was acceptable to local cultural norms (Laconto, 2015).

Some standards do recognize and support non-exploitative forms of children's participation in agricultural work. For example, the Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard critical criteria 4.6 prohibits "the worst forms of child labor" but allows "tasks that are traditional for children in the location and are undertaken for the purpose of encouraging the family's or local culture" (Rainforest Alliance, 2017, p. 46). Yet, certification has not consistently addressed the issue of adequate child care for working women. Among women working for wages on certified farms, as well as those who belong to certified cooperatives, research has found that they still struggle to find adequate child care to be able to perform their agricultural production work requirements (Bonnan-White et al., 2013; Grosse, 2016).

### 3.5.5 Leveraging VSSs to Make a Difference in Gender Equality in Domestic Labour

The following recommendations will support development organizations in leveraging the work with VSSs to advance gender equality in domestic labour:

1. **Undertake a gender transformative approach that emphasizes to women and men the importance of cooperating as a family.** For example, a gender transformative approach can support the development of arrangements for child care and food work that allow women to participate in labour markets equally to men.
2. **Develop and implement projects that support women's ability to choose to participate in income-generating agricultural work.** Examples include loans or investments that help women to acquire labour-saving technologies or community infrastructure projects that create safe and reliable child-care facilities.

3. **Provide child care during any production-related trainings** so that women may participate equally to men. Sometimes women are offered equal opportunities to men to participate during meetings, trainings and activities, but in practice the equal opportunity has little effect because women must stay home to take care of children. Offering child care will help promote true equality of opportunity to participate in training activities.

## 3.6 Women's Decision Making and Empowerment

### 3.6.1 Women's Decision Making and Empowerment: Overview

Formal and informal systems, practices and behaviours that discriminate against women are deeply embedded in many societies. Laws that allow husbands to prevent their wives from obtaining work, that deny daughters equal inheritance rights to boys, that sanction rape within marriage and that fail to protect women from domestic violence are surprisingly prevalent (UN Women, 2018). These formal exclusions are undergirded by prevalent cultural practices that normalize women's subordination to men. For example, cultural norms that prohibit or constrain women's land inheritance, that assign women responsibility for domestic labour and restrict their mobility outside the home and that limit their right to attend schooling are localized cultural practices that patriarchal societies draw upon to legitimize women's exclusion from formal mechanisms of decision-making power. In rural societies, these exclusions manifest in women's limited participation in agricultural groups, and particularly in decision-making roles within those groups. That is, women are under-represented among the leadership of agricultural producer cooperatives and worker groups, and where they are included, they do not always have the training and capacity to address gender inequalities in their organizations (FAO, 2011). Intra-household inequalities in decision-making power over agricultural activities and income vary across regional and even local contexts.

#### Box 5. Quick facts: Women's decision making and empowerment

- Women in many countries remain without legal protection from gender-based discrimination and violence (UN Women, 2018).
- Women's participation in leadership roles in national and local governments and in the private sector is curtailed by culturally biased gender norms (UN Women, 2018).
- Women are under-represented among the leadership of agricultural producer cooperatives and worker groups (FAO, 2011).

### 3.6.2 Women's Decision Making and Empowerment and the SDGs

Women's decision making and empowerment is referenced in two of the SDGs: SDG 5: Gender Equality, and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities. Together these goals incorporate six targets and six indicators related to this cross-cutting theme. These targets and indicators address both formal, institutionalized aspects of gender discrimination in decision making and informal practices and norms that relate to the theme.

**Table 13. Gender equality and women’s empowerment in agriculture cross-cutting theme #5: Women’s Decision Making and Empowerment**

**SDG 5: Gender Equality**

Gender Targets	Gender Indicators
<b>5.1</b> End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.	<b>5.1.1</b> Whether or not legal frameworks are in place to promote, enforce and monitor equality and non-discrimination on the basis of sex
<b>5.5</b> Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.	<b>5.5.1</b> Proportion of seats held by women in <b>(a)</b> national parliaments and <b>(b)</b> local governments <b>5.5.2</b> Proportion of women in managerial positions
<b>5.b</b> Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.	<b>5.b.1</b> Proportion of individuals who own a mobile telephone, by sex
<b>5.c</b> Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.	<b>5.c.1</b> Proportion of countries with systems to track and make public allocations for gender equality and women’s empowerment

**SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities**

<b>10.2</b> By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.	<b>10.2.1</b> Proportion of people living below 50 per cent of median income, by sex, age and persons with disabilities
<b>10.3</b> Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard.	none

**3.6.3 Certification Criteria and Women’s Decision Making and Empowerment**

**Table 14. Women’s Decision Making and Empowerment: Certification criteria**

	4Cs	Fairtrade (Small Producer)	Fairtrade (Hired Labour)	IFOAM	Rainforest Alliance	UTZ, Group	UTZ, Individual
<b>Gender non-discrimination policy</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Virtually all of the VSSs include gender non-discrimination criteria, an integral element of women’s decision making and empowerment. They cover economic dimensions of gender discrimination, particularly with reference to training, hiring, work processes, pay, promotions, firing and participation in the organization. Standards with

different categories for mandatory and continuous improvement criteria make non-discrimination (by gender and other social categories) mandatory or critical for certification. Several standards also promote equal opportunities for women's advancement in the workplace, namely Fairtrade (Standards for Hired Labour), IFOAM and UTZ Certified (Sexsmith, 2017). Several examples of non-discrimination criteria are below.

#### **FAIRTRADE INTERNATIONAL, STANDARD FOR HIRED LABOUR**

Core criterion 3.1.1 states: "Your company does not discriminate, support or tolerate discrimination on the basis of race, colour, **gender**, sexual orientation, disability, marital status, age, HIV/AIDS status, religion, political opinion, membership of unions or other workers' representative bodies, national extraction or social origin in recruitment, promotion, access to training, remuneration, allocation of work, termination of employment, retirement or other activities" (Fairtrade International, 2018a, emphasis added).

#### **RAINFOREST ALLIANCE, SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE STANDARD**

The Rainforest Alliance Sustainable Agriculture Standard makes explicit mention of gender discrimination in pay. Critical criterion 4.3 states: "All forms of discrimination in labor, hiring, training, task assignment, labor benefits, promotion policies and procedures, and other opportunities for better conditions, pay, or advancement are prohibited, including any distinction, exclusion or preference to invalidate or harm equality of opportunity or treatment in employment; and **different pay to men and women for work of equal value**" (Rainforest Alliance, 2017, emphasis added).

#### **FAIRTRADE INTERNATIONAL, STANDARD FOR SMALL PRODUCER ORGANIZATIONS**

This standard makes a clear call for gender equality in terms of women's active participation in the workplace. Development criterion 4.3.4 states: "You must have programmes in place related to the disadvantaged/minority groups that you have identified, to improve their social and economic position in your organization." The guidance notes add: "You are encouraged to give special attention to the **participation of female members**" (Fairtrade International, 2018b, emphasis added). Organizations have six years to comply with this criterion.

### **3.6.4 How VSSs Can Contribute to Women's Decision Making and Empowerment**

VSSs aim to improve working and living conditions for agricultural producers by drawing on the consumer's general awareness that the people who produce their food in the Global South often face economic hardship and by asking them to pay a price premium that will benefit the producer. However, some research on certification has shown that women do not necessarily identify these structural inequalities in global trade as the causes of their disempowerment, but rather see household and local group gender inequalities and patriarchal social norms as limiting their market access and interaction (Sen, 2014). In other words, women might be more concerned with addressing local gender inequalities, inadequate access to markets and gender discrimination than with addressing the structural inequalities of global commodity trade. VSSs might still make a positive contribution to women's household- and community-level decision making and empowerment.

#### **3.6.4.1 INTRA-HOUSEHOLD DECISION MAKING AND EMPOWERMENT**

*Certification can promote women's roles in the production process and in community activities, which has often contributed to their participation in the traditionally masculine realm of household decision making.*

Women's roles in household-level decision making can be improved indirectly through certification in several ways. In organic coffee production, there is some evidence that women's increased involvement in the production process has led to more of a role in household decision making (Ruben, 2008). A study in Nicaragua found that, with Fairtrade certification, women participated more frequently in community activities, such as trainings that increase their agricultural knowledge, which contributed to improved household gender relations (Bacon, 2010). As

women become more involved in production and community activities, men have sometimes supported them by contributing more to household work (Dilley, 2011). For example, in Nicaragua, female producers in the Fairtrade-certified SOPPEXCA cooperative reported that their husbands became more helpful with domestic work after attending a gender workshop from the cooperative (Dilley, 2011).

*Women's gains in intra-household decision making may require complementary gender equality training efforts.*

Other research suggests that whether standards contribute to women's more equal participation in household decision-making depends on complementary gender equality training. Comparative research in Uganda found that women in certified households enjoy greater decision-making control over coffee revenues than those in non-certified households; moreover, the likeliness of male control of revenues declined with time elapsed since certification (Chiputwa, & Qaim, 2016). The authors do not analyze why this is the case, but presume that women are able to leverage more bargaining power once they become more involved in production activities (Chiputwa, & Qaim, 2016). These empowering outcomes for women are not generalizable, however, because they seem to depend on specific interventions to promote gender equity, such as training workshops for women on production and commercial aspects of coffee, and workshops for both women and men on gender equity (Chiputwa, & Qaim, 2016).

*Where patriarchy is deeply entrenched, certification is likely to have no impact on women's empowerment within the household, or worse, reinforce patriarchal social norms.*

Sometimes standards have no effect on women's empowerment in household decision making. Where women do not participate in sales of the cash crop, they are unlikely to participate in decision making over how to spend income from its sale (Bullock et al., 2017). Thus, if standards do not improve women's participation in sales of the crop, they are unlikely to contribute to a greater role in household decision making. In Northern Nicaragua, Fairtrade certification did not promote women's participation in household and community decision making, even with several programs intending to improve women's participation among Fairtrade producers (Ruben & Zuniga, 2011). It is not entirely clear from the literature what factors contribute to this outcome, but presumably a deeply entrenched patriarchal culture will inhibit standards and related women's empowerment programming from having much effect.

In the worst cases, certification can even reinforce male control over household decision making. According to a research among banana and coffee producers in Peru and Costa Rica studied by Ruben (2008), Fair Trade tended to reinforce men's authority in the household, likely because men traditionally have and retain control of the income stream from the certified product. The exception was organic certified coffee, where women became more involved in the labour process and seemed to have gained more bargaining power in household decision making through this means (Ruben, 2008). In another study of Fairtrade organic cotton producers in Mali, Senegal and Cameroon, some men retaliated against their wives for having achieved economic empowerment, either economically or by finding new wives (Nelson, & Smith, 2011). In summary, adjustments to intra-household bargaining power dynamics between women and men due to certification are poorly studied, but likely to be limited (Ruben, 2017) in contexts where patriarchy is deeply rooted.

### **3.6.4.2 PRODUCER- AND WORKER-GROUP-LEVEL DECISION MAKING AND EMPOWERMENT**

*Certification can contribute to gender equality in decision making in producer and worker groups, particularly when gender equality training is provided.*

Certification may contribute to more gender-equal group decision making by providing new production-related knowledge that boosts women's confidence and desire to participate in producer groups (Farnworth & Hutchings 2009). Certifications sometimes offer gender equality training at the producer group level, which has been shown to promote women's participation in decision making and sales activities (Riisgaard et al., 2009).

*Patriarchal norms render it difficult to promote women's empowerment within producer and worker groups and, in the worst cases, may be reinforced if certification promotes male dominance of decision making.*

It must be noted that the evidence found is mixed regarding the relationship between certification and women's involvement in decision-making roles in producer cooperatives (Verstappen, Hanson, & McLaughlin, 2012). Several factors have been found to impede women's participation in decision-making roles in producer groups. These include local rules that families may not participate in meetings, which makes it difficult for women to attend and vote in cooperative matters (Ronchi, 2002); patriarchal customs whereby men bar their wives from participating in higher-level roles (Lyon et al., 2010); women's inability to join due to time constraints (Blowfield, & Dolan, 2010); and the simple refusal by women to accept high-level decision making positions (Ronchi, 2002) (which is likely related to internalized gender inequalities). Men might also support women's increased involvement on a symbolic level, without meaningfully promoting women's participation (Luetchford, 2008). In the worst case, certification can reinforce patriarchal control of producer groups when local non-governmental organizations come to rely solely on the men who run them (Sen, 2014).

Women's economic benefits from certification are sometimes undermined by exclusion from producer groups. Exclusion might be due to formal restrictions on their participation, men informally taking up the producer group space, norms that do not allow women's voices to be heard in groups, or a lack of self-esteem/empowerment for women to feel motivated to participate. A study of organic spice certification in Tanzania found that certification contributed little to women's participation in spice contracting, in part because married women did not participate in their spouse's producer groups and were therefore not recognized as producers (Bullock et al., 2017).

More research is needed on the relationship between certification and gender equality in worker groups. The available evidence suggests that Fairtrade has boosted women's representation on large farms, even if not equally to men (Smith 2010, 2013).

*Certification might channel development-oriented investments into women's non-commercial activities, inadvertently impeding their economic empowerment.*

Improved participation in the commercialization process of the product through certification may contribute to women's economic empowerment. However, certification might inadvertently take attention away from women's economic empowerment by channelling outside investments to their unpaid activities, such as subsistence farming (Lyon, 2008; Murray, Reynolds, & Taylor, 2008; Nelson, & Pound, 2009; Verstappen et al., 2012). A study of Ugandan certified producers found that women who are secondary decision makers often do not participate in coffee sales, and therefore benefit little from opportunities to gain marketing knowledge and from the revenue from sales (Meemken, Veetil, & Qaim, 2017). Research in Latin America found that this is related to cultural norms, which sometimes prohibit women from carrying cash, taking public transportation or engaging in other routine activities that would be required for participating in commercial transactions (Lyon et al., 2010). On the other hand, an Indian case study showed that Fair Trade can provide an alternative source of income for collective businesses among women once dependent on micro-loans, which are burdensome to repay (Sen, 2014). Thus, studies on this topic produce mixed results, and further research is needed to better understand the conditions under which the implementation of standards contributes to women's economic empowerment.

### 3.6.5 Leveraging VSSs to Make a Difference in Women's Decision Making and Empowerment

Development organizations can support women's decision making and empowerment through VSSs with the following recommendations:

1. **Impart trainings with child care provided to women so that they can obtain certification and provide child care.** As the evidence cited above illustrates, women often rely on men for information about certifications and tend to have a weaker understanding of certification processes, costs and benefits.

Trainings specifically for women to improve their understanding and assessments of the prospective benefits of certification for them and their families are needed to remedy these gender disparities. Child care should always be made available when women are invited to trainings; otherwise, they may not be able to leave their homes to participate.

2. **When providing trainings specifically for women, encourage activities focused on the production and commercial aspects of agriculture.** It is essential to ask, listen and respond to their stated needs in this regard. Gender training will be needed for both men and women in participating families to show the non-threatening nature of increasing women's participation in production and commercial activities, and to cultivate sensitivity to the importance of gender equality and women's empowerment as a shared objective.
3. **Provide training and resources to producer cooperatives, farms and worker organizations that assist them in meeting the gender equality and women's empowerment criteria of VSSs.** These activities will be useful whether the certification is being sought for the first time or whether it is being maintained. Support of this form will contribute both to the organization's ability to obtain certification or remain certified and to the intrinsically important pursuit of gender equality and women's empowerment.
4. **Mandate the participation and representation of women equally to men in any decision making related to development programming,** most importantly with respect to production, marketing and financial decisions. Also, it is important to continuously monitor impact to ensure women's participation is not putting them at risk of backlash or rejection by men or the community.
5. **Conduct research with local women to understand what empowerment means to them** and how it would be realized from their points of view. Economic empowerment might, for example, be only one dimension of their goals and desires. Education, political participation, knowledge of sustainable environmental practices and other areas might be at least as or more important than economic empowerment. An intersectional lens that identifies differences between groups of women in their goals and desires with respect to their own empowerment is also needed.
6. **Support women-led commercialization projects,** such as a "women-made" branded products, which creates opportunities for women's leadership in administrative and commercial decision making. For example, there are several successful brands for women's coffee. The Café Femenino Foundation<sup>13</sup> offers grants and a price premium to women coffee farmers around the world. To participate, farms must provide women farmers with legal rights to their agricultural land, cooperative leadership roles, decision-making power and direct payment for their product. Such programs contribute to women's economic empowerment, their participation in decision making and improved quality of life for women more broadly.

## 3.7 Decent Work for Women

### 3.7.1 Decent Work for Women: Overview

Women represent an estimated 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force, ranging from 20 per cent in Latin America to around 50 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa (FAO, 2011). Rural women spend at least 30 per cent and up to 80 per cent of their time in agricultural work across countries and contexts. Women's roles in agriculture vary widely depending on the place, crop being cultivated, their socioeconomic status and other factors. Some activities, like planting and weeding, are commonly performed by women. Others, like plowing, rarely involve women (FAO, 2011). However, the data on women's agricultural workforce participation may underestimate women's agricultural work because women under-report their own agricultural activities and because some of their agricultural work is not officially counted as such (Doss et al., 2018). Women have diverse and multi-faceted roles in agricultural work, including as subsistence agricultural producers, workers for outgrower schemes and waged agricultural workers (FAO, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> For more information on Café Femenino Foundation, see <https://www.cafefemenino.com>.

It is generally agreed that women perform a majority of subsistence agricultural production, generally on land whose access is mediated by a man, in homestead gardens and on communal land. Women's work in subsistence agriculture includes homestead gardens and plots, collection of fruits and nuts from forests, fishing and small livestock holding. Women also provide a significant share of the labour for outgrower schemes<sup>14</sup> for high-value produce as unpaid family workers. Although there is not a significant amount of published research on outgrower schemes, extremely low participation rates of women have been documented in the Kenyan fresh fruit and vegetable export sector and the Senegalese French bean sector (FAO, 2011). Yet women represent fewer than 10 per cent of contract farmers in global value chains for fresh produce and thus often do not benefit from the security of a global supply contract (FAO, 2011).

Agriculture is a primary source of employment for rural women. Women who are employed in developing countries are at least as likely as men to work in agriculture, with the exception of Latin America (FAO, 2011). However, women are less likely than men to earn a wage for their agricultural employment. In some countries, the wage gap is very large, with 24 per cent of men and only 3 per cent of women working in waged employment (FAO, 2011). Some studies have found that waged agricultural employment creates opportunities for empowerment and liberation from constraining local gender norms for female workers (FAO, 2011). However, across developing countries, women in waged rural employment are more likely to have part-time, seasonal and low-paying work than men, and women's waged agricultural jobs often expose them to occupational safety and health risks, including exposure to hazardous substances, long days and sexual violence (UNCTAD, 2015).

### Box 6. Quick facts: Women's work in agriculture

- Women represent an estimated 43 per cent of the agricultural labour force, ranging from 20 per cent in Latin America to around 50 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa (FAO, 2011).
- Agriculture is a primary source of employment for rural women. However, in some countries, the gender wage gap is very large, with 24 per cent of men and only 3 per cent of women working in waged employment (FAO, 2011).
- Compared to men's waged agricultural employment, rural women are more likely to have low-wage, part-time, low-skilled and seasonal work (UNCTAD, 2015).

## 3.7.2 Decent Work for Women and the SDGs

Decent, gender-equitable work is addressed by SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth. This SDG includes four gender-related targets and six indicators. While none of these targets or indicators explicitly addresses agricultural work, target 8.8 does address women, women migrants and precarious workers.

<sup>14</sup> Outgrower schemes are coordinated supply chains through which companies secure produce supplies from smallholder farmers through contracts (FAO, 2011).

**Table 15. Gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture cross-cutting theme #6: Decent Work for Women****SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth**

<b>Gender Targets</b>	<b>Gender Indicators</b>
<b>8.3</b> Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services	<b>8.3.1</b> Proportion of informal employment in non-agriculture employment, by sex
<b>8.5</b> By 2030, achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value.	<b>8.5.1</b> Average hourly earnings of female and male employees, by occupation, age and persons with disabilities <b>8.5.2</b> Unemployment rate, by sex, age and persons with disabilities
<b>8.7</b> Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms	<b>8.7.1</b> Proportion and number of children aged 5–17 years engaged in child labour, by sex and age
<b>8.8</b> Protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all workers, including migrant workers, in particular women migrants, and those in precarious employment.	<b>8.8.1</b> Frequency rates of fatal and non-fatal occupational injuries, by sex and migrant status <b>8.8.2</b> Level of national compliance with labour rights (freedom of association and collective bargaining) based on International Labour Organization textual sources and national legislation, by sex and migrant status

### 3.7.3 Certification Criteria and Decent Work for Women

Gender equality in employment conditions are well-addressed by VSSs for hired labourers. The issues covered are summarized in the table below, which is adapted and updated from Sexsmith (2017).

**Table 16. Decent Work for Women: Certification criteria**

	4Cs	Fairtrade (Small Producer)	Fairtrade (Hired Labour)	IFOAM	Rainforest Alliance	UTZ, Group	UTZ, Individual
Maternity leave		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Breaks and flexibility for nursing mothers			✓		✓		✓
No tolerance for sexual harassment	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Prohibit pregnant and nursing women from participating in hazardous work		✓	✓		✓		
Separation of worksite sanitation or rest facilities for women and men		✓	✓		✓		✓

### 3.7.4 How VSSs Can Contribute to Decent Work for Women

*Certification encourages decent work conditions for women waged labourers because they require compliance with certification criteria that exceeds national laws.*

In plantation agriculture, research has found that certification has the capacity to influence women’s participation in waged work in several ways. Standards usually improve employment conditions, for example by requiring compliance with wage and hour laws in order to receive certification (HIVOS, 2014). This can be particularly beneficial to women workers, who are disproportionately crowded into casual and temporary jobs, where lower wages and precarious conditions are more common (FAO, 2011). Moreover, a gender-responsive audit can identify gender gaps in women’s participation along the value chain and stimulate more participation by women in downstream stages (KIT et al., 2012).

*Occupational safety and health conditions related to women workers’ specific needs are often improved by certification.*

Worker safety policies and training programs contribute to safer workplaces (Center for Evaluation of the Saarland University, 2012). In fact, certified farms are four times more likely to have occupational safety and health policies than non-certified farms (COSA, 2008). These benefits usually include preventing pregnant women from using agro-chemicals (UTZ Certified, 2014). Organic certification, of course, eliminates the use of the most harmful agro-chemicals altogether.

*Certification entails extra labour to comply with crop quality and environmental sustainability criteria. This labour has often been provided by women as unpaid family labour, thus increasing their work burden without compensation or recognition, unless they are included in production decision making.*

Certification requires additional tasks to improve product quality and environmental management, and a number of studies have shown that, on smallholder farms, this additional labour is often provided by women (Bacon et al., 2008; Bolwig, & Odeke, 2007; Bullock et al., 2017; Kasente, 2012; Luetchford, 2008; Meemken, Veetil, & Qaim, 2017; van Druten-Vos, n.d.). For example, among Costa Rican coffee growers, Fairtrade certification resulted in an increase in women's labour burden because it requires greater attention to quality control in order to ready the crop for export, and quality-enhancing tasks like washing, drying and selecting coffee beans are performed by women (Luetchford, 2008). Similarly, a survey of Nicaraguan Fair Trade coffee cooperatives found that women worked 77 days per year in certified coffee, compared to only 33 days when producing for conventional markets (Bacon et al., 2008). Unless women are better incorporated into production decision making, these increased labour requirements can result in their feeling like subordinate workers to men, which reinforces disempowerment (Gibbon et al., 2008; Luetchford, 2008). However not all studies have found that certification increases women's work burden, which seems to depend on the degree to which the standard prohibits chemical inputs (thus requiring manual labour for tasks like weeding, which is often performed by women) (Meemken, & Qaim, 2017).

### 3.7.5 Leveraging VSSs to Make a Difference in Decent Work for Women

The following recommendations aim to ensure that development organizations leverage VSSs to advance decent work for women:

1. **Promote adoption of VSSs on farms with hired labour to improve their employment conditions.** As illustrated in this section, there is a demonstrated positive contribution of VSSs to improved employment conditions, and particularly women's employment conditions are strong. Given that women tend to be crowded into precarious forms of waged agricultural work, the significant provisions that VSSs hold to promote decent work for women pose significant potential to improve women's conditions of employment.
2. **Provide training for women and men that promotes women's access to higher-paid jobs with more decision-making responsibilities.** While VSSs are promoting decent work for women in significant ways, an additional goal is to promote women's participation in higher-level roles with greater responsibility within organizations. Such trainings will be reinforced by efforts to promote women's formal education and literacy (see Section 3.5).
3. **Work with women and men to understand the gender division of agricultural labour** and identify whether certification is likely to increase women's unpaid labour burden. To the extent that this is likely to be the case, development organizations should work with women and with men to discuss, identify and implement programming that supports or alleviates women's domestic work burden. This could be achieved through a gender transformative approach to working with women and men.
4. **Develop and implement regular gender-equality training for women and men at all levels of the workforce** to help mitigate gender discrimination and sexual violence concerns in the workplace. Separate trainings for women and for men are likely to be more effective, since they provide a safe space for women and men to vocalize their concerns about the changes that are likely to take place within producer organizations when gender equality measures are promoted.

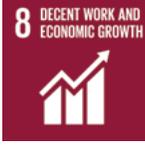


## **4.0 Recommendations for Development Organizations**

Table 17 summarizes the recommendations to development organizations that aim at leveraging VSSs to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment that are presented in sections 3.2 through 3.7. The table cross-references each recommendation to the cross-cutting theme and SDG(s) that the recommendations will help achieve. Consistent monitoring of implementation of these recommendations will be essential to making a lasting contribution to gender equality and women's empowerment.

**Table 17. Recommendations for leveraging VSSs to promote gender equality and women's empowerment**

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Cross-Cutting Theme	SDGs	Recommendations
Household Food Security		<p>Promote women's subsistence crops and nutritious crops for inter-cropping, shade and other sustainable production practices.</p> <p>Use gender transformative approaches to encourage women's financial decision making within the household.</p> <p>Conduct a gender impact assessment of the introduction or reinforcement of cash crop cultivation before promoting certification.</p>
Women's Rights to Productive Agricultural Resources	  	<p>Promote and advocate for women's more stable and secure rights to land.</p> <p>Development organizations working in extension (agricultural training) services should use female extension workers in services provided for women.</p> <p>Promote women's rights to productive agricultural resources in women's empowerment-focused projects and interventions.</p> <p>Provide support and training on climate change adaptation and climate-smart agriculture for women producers.</p>
Gender Equality in Education		<p>Document and work to promote understanding of local cultural practices around child labour in agriculture.</p> <p>Develop and support initiatives for women's literacy.</p> <p>Advocate for the importance of girls' education, from primary through secondary, tertiary and post-secondary schooling.</p>
Women's Unpaid Domestic Labour		<p>Undertake a gender transformative approach that emphasizes to women and men the importance of cooperating as a family.</p> <p>Develop and implement projects that support women's ability to choose to participate in income-generating agricultural work.</p> <p>Provide child care during any production-related trainings.</p>

Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Cross-Cutting Theme	SDGs	Recommendations
Women’s Decision Making and Empowerment	 	<p>Impart trainings with child care provided to women so that they can obtain certification.</p> <p>When providing trainings specifically for women, encourage activities focused on the production and commercial aspects of agriculture.</p> <p>Provide training and resources to producer cooperatives, farms and worker organizations that assist them to meet the gender equality and women’s empowerment criteria of VSSs.</p> <p>Mandate the participation and representation of women equally to men in any decision making related to development programming.</p> <p>Conduct research with local women to understand what empowerment means to them.</p> <p>Support women-led commercialization projects.</p>
Decent Work for Women		<p>Promote adoption of VSSs on farms with hired labour to improve their employment conditions.</p> <p>Provide training for women and men that promotes women’s access to higher-paid jobs with more decision-making responsibilities.</p> <p>Work with women and men to understand the gender division of agricultural labour.</p> <p>Develop and implement regular gender equality training for women and men at all levels of the workforce.</p>

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**Head Office**

111 Lombard Avenue, Suite 325  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Canada R3B 0T4

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