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Introduction

A vision for equitable food, land, and water systems by 2050

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ENVISIONING A MORE EQUITABLE FUTURE FOR FOOD, LAND AND WATER SYSTEMS

The world faces a defining moment. By 2050, global demand for food is expected to rise, climate shocks are expected to intensify, and youth populations in many regions are expected to grow rapidly.^{1,2} **Food, land and water systems** (FLWS) in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are being pushed to their limits by the **polycrisis** – multiple interconnected global challenges whose combined impacts exceed the sum of their individual effects – deepening inequalities and threatening food security, socioeconomic stability and ecological **resilience**.³ The compounding challenges facing FLWS include climate change, strains on natural resources and profound demographic shifts, including a growing population marked by shifts toward both younger and older population structures, rapid urbanization and accelerating, increasingly diverse, and often gendered patterns of internal and international migration.^{3,4,5,6} Sudden-onset triggers (like natural disasters, conflicts or pandemics) interact with slow-onset stressors (like demographic shifts,

rising temperatures and socioeconomic inequalities) to push established global systems into a state of disequilibrium and breakdown.⁵ A unique challenge of the polycrisis lies in the deep uncertainty it creates – FLWS actors at all scales are struggling to make decisions about a rapidly changing future.

Within this crisis lies a fundamental contradiction: that FLWS are the foundation of the livelihoods of many women, **youth** and other **socially excluded groups** and largely depend on their labor yet continue to marginalize them. In so doing, FLWS are inherently unjust and cannot achieve their full potential in terms of resilience, productivity, sustainability, or support for individuals' livelihoods and well-being. Socially excluded groups' circumstances in the face of a polycrisis are uniquely precarious, given that they often operate at the margins of FLWS and experience heightened **vulnerability** because of their relatively low social position and power, disproportionate labor

burdens, limited **access to and control over resources**, and other factors.^{7,8,9}

The impacts of the polycrisis on FLWS, and climate change in particular, threaten women's economic and personal security. These effects are compounded by growing income inequality and gendered crisis-induced inequalities,³ and are often exacerbated by their **intersectional** identities related to race, caste, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and other factors (**box 2**). Climate change and other shocks thus increase the likelihood of **gender** differences in food insecurity and undernutrition and widen existing gaps. In some regions, gendered migration patterns – whether driven by climate change, geopolitical tensions or economic opportunities – contribute to a **feminization of agriculture**, increasing women's participation in agricultural labor without necessarily expanding their role in decision-making.¹⁰ Compounding climate, demographic and ecological challenges further intensify gendered care responsibilities – disproportionately borne by women – and exacerbate women's **time poverty**.^{3,11,12} At the same time, urbanization, changing diet preferences and decreasing affordability of healthy diets contribute to less healthy consumption patterns and obesity, both of which are gendered challenges that also affect young people and Indigenous Peoples.^{3,11,12} The polycrisis may contribute to increasing intergenerational inequality as young people in FLWS experience the greatest risks to their livelihoods from climate change and stagnating youth employment following global health and geopolitical challenges.^{3,13} If current patterns persist, the pressures created by the polycrisis will interact with existing inequalities, deepening vulnerability and placing the greatest burdens on women, youth and other socially excluded groups.

Strategically timed, this report contributes to the UN-led campaign for the International Year of the Woman Farmer by providing projections of **gender equality** and **inclusion** in FLWS to 2050 and identifying actionable pathways toward a more equitable future FLWS in a period of drastic change. The report brings together evidence and projections to demonstrate that intersectional gender equality is foundational to the future of FLWS – not only for the **empowerment** of women, youth and socially excluded groups in FLWS, but also for communities' ability to feed themselves, sustain ecosystems and biodiversity, and pursue dignified livelihoods in the face of the polycrisis.

Progressing toward these goals and accelerating a transformation toward FLWS that foster gender equality, inclusion and **social justice** will require bold, deliberate and coordinated action by researchers, policymakers, development practitioners, civil society organizations, the private sector and funders. In this report, we identify pathways that can lead us to a better

future. We start with a vision for 2050 where FLWS are not only productive and resilient but also equitable and inclusive at their core:

We envision a future in which FLWS are equitable, inclusive and resilient by design. It is a future where access to land, water, markets, information and decision-making spaces are equitable; economic development is inclusive; care work is recognized, redistributed and supported as essential for economic and social growth; and social norms and other informal institutions foster equal opportunity for all to benefit from FLWS and participate in leading change. It is a future where women, youth and socially excluded groups are empowered and have a voice, not just as participants but as decision-makers, innovators and drivers of change.

The unprecedented urgency to support the resilience of farmers and other FLWS actors in the face of the polycrisis requires understanding, among other things, the obstacles women, youth and socially excluded groups face. Women are central to FLWS – in growing crops, managing livestock, processing food, trading, preparing meals, caring for family members, and sustaining households and communities. Across LMICs, particularly in the **global South**, women make up 38% of the global agricultural labor force and 41% of the off-farm agrifood workforce, and even higher shares in many countries.^{14,15} However, they continue to face systemic barriers that limit their productivity, earnings, decision-making power, food security and resilience to climate shocks and other stressors compared to men.⁹ These barriers are not coincidental. They are rooted in discriminatory laws and institutions, extractive economic practices, **racializing practices** and social norms. Critically, systemic arrangements reinforced by **gender norms** and other **social institutions** make women and girls primarily responsible for unpaid care and domestic work, while compounding their labor burdens across FLWS. This creates both injustice and productivity losses. Overall, **unpaid care work**, predominantly carried out by women and girls, is estimated to contribute US\$10.8 trillion annually to the global economy, yet remains invisible in most policy and investment decisions.¹⁶

Discriminatory laws and institutions, norms, and cultural and economic practices tied to gender, age, ethnicity, class and ability systematically constrain women's access to and control of resources such as land, water, inputs, finance, technology, formal education and markets. While globally less than half of young people own land, young women face the greatest barriers to accessing both land and capital.¹³ These barriers to **accessing and controlling resources** are mutually reinforcing and actively reproduced by the very systems meant to support livelihoods and food security. These inequalities are intrinsically unjust and measurably costly.^{9,16,17,18,19}

Women's agricultural land productivity remains 24% lower than men's, even after accounting for differences in farm size. Women also earn 18.4% less than men in agricultural wage labor, not because of a lack of skill or effort, but because of **structural barriers** and power inequalities.⁹ Young women make up two-thirds of the 20% of young people globally who are **not in employment, education or training** (NEET).¹³ These gaps translate into weaker food systems, higher economic vulnerability, higher rates of hunger and malnutrition and reduced resilience for entire communities, making gender inequality not only a matter of justice but a systemic drag on the collective capacity of FLWS to deliver for everyone.¹⁸ Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires attention to women's and young women's empowerment and gender equality, not only in the context of SDG 5 but beyond. For instance, more women are affected by food insecurity and poverty than men (SDGs 2 and 1, respectively), and women's traditional roles in water collection and cooking leave them uniquely vulnerable to the unavailability of clean technology (SDGs 6, 7 and 3).¹⁹

Closing intersectional gender gaps and supporting the empowerment of diverse farmers and agrifood workers, including women and young farmers, by securing their rights to land and other productive resources and strengthening their decision-making power are fundamental from a human rights perspective and for social equity. They are also imperative to human welfare, climate, environmental and economic goals, as they catalyze rural development, environmental protection, resilient livelihoods, and food and nutrition security. By deliberately tackling the structural barriers to equality and inclusion embedded in discriminatory laws, norms, resource access, and cultural and economic practices, we can close gender gaps and synergistically accelerate progress across multiple SDGs. Equalizing productivity and wages between women and men could add US\$1 trillion to global gross domestic product (GDP) and reduce the food insecurity of 45 million people.⁹ Reducing inequalities in women's access to education, employment and income could close over half of the gender gap in food insecurity.¹⁷ Eliminating youth unemployment and integrating NEET youth aged 20–24 into the workforce could

add US\$1.5 trillion to global GDP (1.4% increase), with **agrifood systems** contributing nearly half of those gains (US\$680 billion).¹³ If **gender-responsive** development interventions focused on supporting women's empowerment reached half of small-scale agricultural producers, they could increase the incomes of an additional 58 million people and enhance the resilience of 235 million people.⁹ Increasing women's participation in natural resource management would improve **resource governance** and conservation outcomes.²⁰ Expanding inclusive digital systems could lift 30 million women out of extreme poverty, improve food security for millions, and add up to US\$1.5 trillion to the global economy by 2050.²¹ When not constrained by social institutions, environmental stressors or lack of resources, information and technology, women's individual and **collective agency** – and that of other socially excluded groups – can play a critical role in crisis, climate adaptation and disaster response.^{22,23,24}

The coming decades will determine whether, by 2050, FLWS become engines of equality, inclusion and sustainability, or drivers of exclusion and instability. The projections presented in **chapter 1** of this report and the evidence across subsequent chapters illustrate the risks of backsliding on recent progress toward equality and inclusion and make clear the cost of inaction. Global FLWS are already undergoing a process of **agricultural transformation**, becoming less important as a share of the economy and shifting away from primary agriculture. This transformation, however, creates opportunities but also carries risks for women, youth and other socially excluded groups. Differences in labor force participation and earnings between women and men in FLWS, although shrinking, are likely to persist to 2050 and will remain substantive in regions where progress is currently slowest. Migration (especially among youth) is likely to accelerate, putting less-mobile women at an ever-greater risk of missing



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beneficial opportunities and being trapped in marginal production systems at home. Women who are working in off-farm jobs are often found in informal, lower-paid and vulnerable positions.⁹ Growing pressures on land and water resources may increase competition and drive women and youth further to the margins of FLWS if inclusion is not prioritized in resource access and governance. Persistent barriers to access and discriminatory practices around digital technologies may deepen the disadvantage experienced by women and socially excluded groups in accessing the latest information and tools for production and resilience-building in FLWS. The polycrisis puts all these projections into a state of deep uncertainty, with recent and anticipated gains under threat from new and interacting crises.

But by acting now on current knowledge and guiding future research, investments and policy action, we can enable vibrant, equitable and just FLWS by 2050. With the rapidly evolving climate, technological and socioeconomic realities, the ambition of this report is to leverage emerging opportunities and identify actionable, evidence-based pathways toward equity and inclusion in FLWS by 2050, providing specific guidance to inform global dialogues on how to do so. This report seeks transformative *solutions*¹ and pathways, underscoring that transforming FLWS requires shifts in power, norms and institutions that

maintain disadvantage at multiple scales – not just improvements in access to technologies, services and markets. As such, the report helps define not only what must change in current FLWS, but also how and why change must happen by 2050 to achieve equitable and inclusive FLWS.

The chapters that follow emphasize the importance of, among other things, bundling of social and technical interventions, leveraging collective action, and expanding financial inclusion, all while challenging discriminatory social norms and transforming formal institutions and governance systems to be more inclusive and just. The evidence presented makes it clear that technical fixes will not suffice, that the issues are strongly tied to power structures, and that sustained, coordinated action across FLWS actors, sectors and scales – from communities to national and global levels – will be required to achieve the envisioned future of FLWS.

The methods applied in this report are described in ANNEX A. Throughout the report, key terms appear in **bold** and are defined in ANNEX B.

¹ In this report, solutions are seen as pathways to equality and inclusion rather than finite endpoints. Solutions might be deliberately introduced by researchers, policymakers, or development actors, but may also emerge organically from communities or groups seeking change. They might also be co-produced in partnerships between these actors and the groups they seek to serve. Crucially, solutions are subject to ongoing improvements and adaptation and might therefore involve numerous iterations beyond what is presented in this report. Solutions might be social, technical, or political, or a bundle of diverse solutions that work together to create change.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS REPORT

This report offers a distinct, forward-looking and solutions-oriented contribution to the strong body of literature on intersectional gender equality and resilience in FLWS. Rather than documenting the present status of gender inequality in FLWS, which is already thoroughly established in the literature, it examines how current trends and the polycrisis may shape future FLWS and the constraints and opportunities women, youth and other socially excluded groups will encounter within them. By applying foresight methods to anticipate future gaps at the intersection of gender and age group and identifying priority areas for action, it directly addresses the insufficient integration of gender in existing foresight work,²⁵ advancing beyond documentation of the present status of women's roles and constraints, to identifying pathways to equality in FLWS.⁹

Where much of the existing literature tracks persistent inequalities,^{26,27,28} this report moves from diagnosis to **transformation**. It identifies actionable, evidence-based pathways to achieve greater social justice, empower women, youth and socially excluded groups, and strengthen resilience in FLWS. It also expands on intergenerational considerations in FLWS¹³ by considering today's youth as tomorrow's women and men, revealing the risks and opportunities this transition holds for gender equality and women's empowerment.

To situate these transformative pathways within the realities of the polycrisis, which disproportionately undermines women's and young women's food, economic and personal security,^{3,29} this report projects how these compounding pressures may evolve to 2050 and what deliberate action needs to be taken now to prevent backsliding and drive equitable transformation.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This report is anchored in the recognition that FLWS are at the center of the rapidly evolving polycrisis. This introduction presents the conceptual foundations of the report, and the following chapters explore how the intersectional gendered impacts of the polycrisis manifest in different aspects of FLWS and how these effects can be countered. This report focuses on rural areas rather than peri-urban or urban areas, and on adaptation and resilience to climate change and the polycrisis rather than mitigation.

The first forward-looking chapter projects the challenges that may lie ahead for future FLWS and the gender equality and inclusivity of these FLWS, highlighting where the efforts for transformative change should focus ([chapter 1](#)). Drawing on historical trends over the past 20 years, this chapter explores how key drivers of gender equality and youth inclusion in FLWS, such as employment and earning gaps, are projected to evolve by 2050 across regions under three scenarios. It considers business-as-usual, optimistic and pessimistic views of economic growth, which indirectly account for climate change, demographic shifts and technological development. It provides snapshots of current and expected future migration trends, and intersectional gender gaps in rights to natural resources and **digital inclusion**. The projections point to an ongoing process of agricultural transformation of FLWS but reveal that, under current trajectories, only slow progress is being made to address inequalities by gender and age group. Without deliberate intervention, women and youth are likely to remain marginalized in economic opportunities, governance and **adaptive capacity**, particularly in the

regions where progress is currently slowest, putting global development goals further out of reach.

The four subsequent chapters each focus on a specific thematic area: **resilience capacities** in the face of the polycrisis ([chapter 2](#)); land and water access, rights and governance ([chapter 3](#)); digital inclusion ([chapter 4](#)); and young women as drivers of transformative change ([chapter 5](#)).

Each chapter, within its thematic area, situates anticipated gendered and intersectional challenges and opportunities in FLWS within the context of the polycrisis and current inequality landscape, applying feminist and intersectional perspectives. Each chapter then addresses a central question: What are the promising solutions and pathways to address the current and future challenges and opportunities in this priority area, and drive a transformation toward equitable, inclusive, resilient and sustainable FLWS futures by 2050? To prioritize depth and relevance to FLWS in LMICs, these analyses are based on strategic, nonsystematic literature and evidence reviews, with the selection and prioritization of proposed solutions informed by their potential to not only reach and benefit women but also empower or transform, as well as the strength of the evidence behind them (see detailed methods in [annex A](#)). Each chapter culminates in tailored recommendations for policymakers, researchers, funders and development practitioners, including civil society organizations and the private sector, proposing actions that are needed to facilitate the successful **scaling** and contextual adaptation of the identified solutions.

Specifically, [chapter 2](#) explores solutions and strategies that strengthen equitable resilience capacities of women, youth and socially excluded groups to turn adverse future consequences from climate change, demographic shifts and fragility into opportunities for prosperity and social innovation. It shows how the intersectional and gendered impacts of the polycrisis are mediated by unequal access to resources, **agency**, discriminatory social norms and governance systems, leaving women and socially excluded groups disproportionately vulnerable to time poverty, livelihood insecurity, displacement, food insecurity and gender-based violence. The chapter highlights that the resilience of FLWS will depend on whether actions and investments address these structural inequalities through inclusive approaches that strengthen agency, resources, equitable norms and governance rather than merely buffering immediate shocks.

[Chapter 3](#) engages with the increasing demand for finite and often degraded resources such as land, water, forests and rangelands, leading to intensifying competition and exclusion.^{30,31,32,33,34} Inequalities in access and control remain stark, with women, youth and socially excluded groups persistently disadvantaged. The chapter identifies pathways to promote equality in land and water access, rights and governance. It highlights inclusive governance models, legal reforms and institutional innovations that can secure rights, enable collective action and address structural power imbalances in natural resource governance.

[Chapter 4](#) considers the rapidly unfolding digitalization in FLWS.³ On the one hand, digital technologies reduce

information gaps, expand access to markets and services, and amplify marginalized voices. On the other hand, increasing digitalization risks reinforcing gaps in connectivity, literacy, affordability and agency. Chapter 4 explores the gendered and intersectional dimensions of such **digital divides** and how digitalization can be a driver of equality rather than exclusion. It examines how to harness genuine digital inclusion where women, youth and socially excluded groups can decide, act, refuse, adapt and shape the technologies and pathways toward digitalization that affect their livelihoods.

[Chapter 5](#) delves into opportunities and challenges associated with a global youth population that is larger than ever before and continues to grow, most notably in LMICs. Nearly half of working youth worldwide are employed in FLWS. Young women, in particular, are disproportionately likely to be NEET, face structural barriers to engage, benefit, and empower themselves in FLWS, and as the farmers and agri-entrepreneurs of tomorrow, they experience intersecting challenges linked to the polycrisis, their gender and age.^{13,35} Chapter 5, centering young women's aspirations, **leadership** and innovation capacities, showcases strategies to support them to thrive in FLWS and act as critical drivers of transformation.

No single framework captures the full complexity of gender relations in FLWS. We therefore draw on a layered set of complementary frameworks, each highlighting a different dimension of structural inequality and the conditions for transformative change.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE REPORT

In this report, the analysis of current and future challenges to equality and inclusion in FLWS and the promising pathways presented to address them are anchored in the **Gendered Food Systems Framework (GFSF)** developed by Njuki et al.³⁶ for the United Nations (UN) Food Systems Summit 2021. This framework provides a systems-based lens for understanding how FLWS, their components and drivers interact with structural gender inequalities to shape livelihood, dietary, environmental, and gender equality and empowerment outcomes. It thus allows us to examine how changes in one part of the system affect other parts, focusing on systemic change rather than isolated solutions.

To present transformation pathways toward equality and inclusion in this report, we complement the GFSF with insights from the **Gender at Work (G@W) Framework**

on which Njuki et al.³⁶ draw, a framework for **gender-transformative change**, as well as critical structural and feminist theories, including feminist development studies, feminist economics, feminist political ecology, critical institutionalism and intersectionality. As such, the report adopts a systems-oriented approach to engaging with questions of power, social relations and institutions. These structures underpin persistent gendered and intersectional inequalities shaping the realities of individuals, households, communities, markets, value chains, organizations and governance structures within FLWS.

This conceptual foundation helps us move beyond documenting gender gaps and identifying solutions that merely reach or benefit women³⁷ by identifying pathways to challenge the systems of power sustaining structural barriers to equality and inclusion.



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a. The Gendered Food Systems Framework

The GFSF³⁶ conceptualizes how FLWS and their outcomes are shaped by and reproduce structural gender inequalities that influence who can access resources, make decisions, exercise voice and benefit from engaging with FLWS, as well as how shocks and vulnerabilities affecting FLWS are gendered.

FLWS interact with four interlinked barriers to gender equality, with differing degrees of formality and informality and operating from individual to systemic levels: i) gendered social norms, ii) gendered agency, iii) gendered access to and control over resources, and iv) gendered policies, institutions and governance. These four interlinked barriers – the GFSF “quadrant”

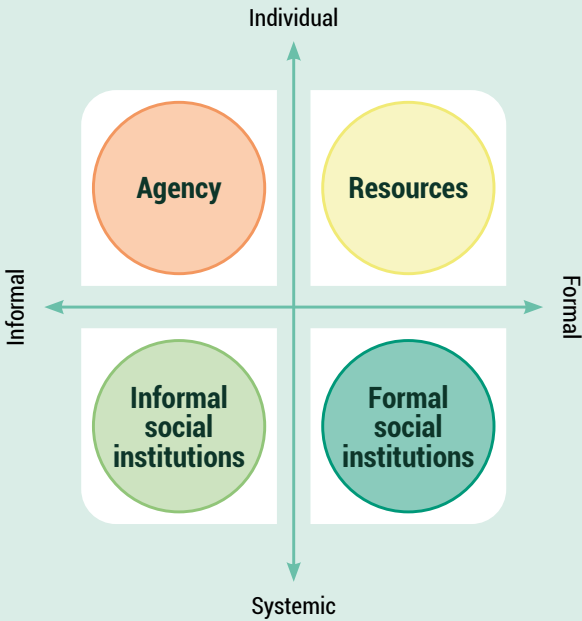
– are informed by the G@W Framework by Rao et al.³⁸ (box 1).

The four interlinked barriers to equality also interact with the drivers of FLWS and their effects, which is why these drivers may generate gendered shocks and vulnerabilities. Biophysical and environmental drivers such as climate change, for example, generate gendered shocks because, in many cases, unequal access to resources and decision-making on climate action leaves women with greater **sensitivity to harm** and more limited adaptive capacity.⁸

The GFSF illustrates that the interaction of FLWS with these gendered barriers and drivers influences not only gender equality and empowerment outcomes of FLWS, but also dietary, economic, livelihood and environmental outcomes.

Box 1. The G@W Framework

The G@W Framework was developed to assess and guide gender equality interventions aimed at transforming the “deep structures” embedded in the governance, norms, values and practices of organizations, programs and communities.³⁸



It highlights four interlinked domains that can expand equality – the G@W *quadrant*. At an informal and individual level, it emphasizes developing a **critical consciousness** of prevailing power relations and the agency to transform those power relations (upper-left quadrant). Access to resources provides the means to exercise agency and achieve one’s goals (formal and individual, upper-right quadrant).³⁹

At the systemic level, formal social institutions such as laws and policies shape opportunities to access resources and exercise agency (lower-right quadrant), while informal institutions, or social norms, dictate appropriate behaviors and roles for men, women, boys and girls in society (lower-left quadrant). These social norms shape, and are shaped by, the other three domains: critical consciousness and agency, access to resources and formal social institutions.

Across all domains, underlying power imbalances sustain structural gender inequalities and injustices. Understanding such power dynamics is key to imagining alternative realities and building the collective capacity to challenge and transform these barriers to equality.

Box 2. Intersectionality

An intersectional perspective examining gender in relation to age is particularly central to **chapter 5**’s focus on young women’s experiences in FLWS.

Our analysis of the challenges and possible pathways for advancing equality and inclusion in FLWS is guided by the concept of **intersectionality**. This means recognizing that people’s experiences of discrimination or disadvantage are shaped by multiple aspects of who they are – such as their gender, age, class, ethnicity, caste, religion, disability or other social identities.⁴⁰ To fully understand intersectionality, it is important to consider the broader social, economic, political, and historical contexts that shape these inequalities and oppressive structures, and how they give some groups more power and limit that of others.⁴¹

Intersectionality is relevant throughout this report. For example, it helps explain why people are affected differently by environmental shocks and stresses. A person’s vulnerability depends not only on the shock itself but also on who they are, their position in society, and the resources, rights, and power they have beforehand – all of which are influenced by their social and political-economic context.⁷

b. Feminist perspectives on power and structural inequalities

To further examine how intersectional gendered outcomes of FLWS, as well as intersectional gendered shocks and vulnerabilities, are shaped by everyday social relations and underlying power structures, we draw on the concept of intersectionality (box 2) and a framework of gender-transformative change, as well as critical structural and feminist theories.

GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

The framework on gender-transformative change highlights the central role of power relations and how change needs to happen across interconnected **scales**⁴² to transform the inequalities affecting women, girls and other socially excluded groups sustainably. Addressing imbalanced power relations to enable transformative change means moving away from situations where some hold power over others and instead promoting more positive forms of power – such as confidence and self-belief (**power within**), the ability to act (**power to**) and collective action (**power with**).^{39,43} It sees gender-transformative change as a process of change across three dimensions: people’s agency, power relations, and the formal and informal institutions that shape society.⁴⁴

The framework also recognizes that these dimensions operate at overlapping, interconnected scales and interact in complex ways, shaping outcomes at the

household, community, organizational and broader societal levels. This means that efforts to drive transformative change need to work at different scales, taking these interconnections and interactions into account.

FEMINIST DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

We draw further lessons from the field of feminist development studies, which argues, among other things, that empowerment is more than a measure of individual progress or improved material well-being. Cornwall⁴⁵ emphasizes that empowerment is a process of expanding consciousness about power structures that sustain inequality and challenging those structures collectively. From this perspective, empowerment cannot be given to people by others. Instead, empowerment can only be supported by creating and enabling the conditions that allow it to occur. This understanding of empowerment as a collective and politically grounded process, rather than an individual achievement, aligns with Batliwala’s⁴⁶ critique of how development institutions have diluted the concept by separating it from its roots in social movements and collective struggle. In line with the G@W Framework, Cornwall⁴⁶ highlights two ways to support this process. The first is helping people build a critical consciousness of power dynamics and how they operate. The second is engaging with social norms, including strengthening supportive formal institutions, such as laws and policies, and improving access to resources and opportunities.

FEMINIST ECONOMICS

Feminist economics offers an important conceptual lens for our exploration of gender and power in FLWS. This field emerged to challenge the idea that households act as a single, unified decision-maker. Instead, it looks at what happens within households, including how household members cooperate and negotiate with one another.⁴⁷ It shows that decision-making within households is shaped by the bargaining power household members derive from the resources – both material and social – that they have access to. Research in this field also considers how resources are shared between household members, as well as rules around ownership – such as rights to land and other assets.

Feminist economics takes a broader view of what counts as household economic activity. It includes not only production and consumption but also unpaid care work. This highlights the important role of women's unpaid labor – often assigned through gender norms and unequal power relations – in supporting household productivity.

Feminist economics helps explain why women are more likely to experience poverty and economic dependence than men by examining how **patriarchy**, social norms and societal structures – such as gender-discriminatory policy, gendered labor markets and gendered **property-rights regimes**, often reinforced by market forces and neoliberalization⁴⁸ – influence intrahousehold dynamics.

FEMINIST POLITICAL ECOLOGY

Feminist political ecology (FPE) provides a key conceptual foundation for understanding how relationships between people and the environment – such as environmental governance, resource management and the impacts of development efforts – are shaped by the intersection of gender relations and broader **forces of political economy**, such as global markets, privatization of the commons or market-driven environmental conservation.

FPE illustrates that women in the global South often face overlapping challenges in responding to environmental threats and oppression driven by patriarchy, exploitative capitalist and neo-colonial systems, and expectations around unpaid care work.⁴⁹ FPE also cautions against treating women as a homogenous group with static roles and responsibilities. Women should not be exploited as tools toward broader goals – either as environmental stewards or victims.^{50,51,52}

Recent FPE contributions underscore that pathways to ecological sustainability need to recognize **diverse forms of knowledge**, the heterogeneity of people's **lived experiences**, and the power structures that shape the challenges faced by women and other socially excluded groups.⁵³ This research highlights that power, gender

relations and the environment are interconnected across different scales, from the intimate level (with the body as a central site) to households, to wider systems, and that gender shapes power relations at each of these scales.

FPE calls for recognizing how power structures, intersecting inequalities, extractive practices and exclusion shape and are shaped by **socioecological systems**, while valuing lived experiences, diverse forms of knowledge, and perspectives from **ecofeminist** and **decolonial thinking**.⁵⁴ In the context of FLWS, FPE underscores that transformative change requires not just technical solutions but strategies that acknowledge forces of political economy and patriarchal norms and practices and promote inclusive governance, women's agency, collective action and equitable access to resources.⁵⁵

CRITICAL INSTITUTIONALISM

Critical institutionalism further expands our understanding of how inequalities are created by and persist through social institutions (the lower-left and right quadrants in the G@W Framework [box 1]). It focuses on how natural resources are governed and how social institutions – both formal rules and informal practices – are made and remade through people's everyday practices.⁵⁶ These institutions are thus dynamic and influence one another.

The concept of **institutional bricolage** describes how people shape and reshape institutions by piecing together institutional structures and processes, drawing on their social, cultural and historical knowledge, often in both conscious and unconscious ways.⁵⁷ As a result, the institutions that govern people's access to and use of local resources – at household, community and broader scales – are shaped by social relations, norms, power dynamics, identities, as well as by ecological, geographical, political and economic factors. These dynamics can reinforce inequalities and discrimination in FLWS.

Because institutions are **socially constructed**, they arguably cannot be designed with fixed roles and functions, free from power imbalances and discrimination. However, the same dynamic that produces discriminatory institutions can be leveraged to reshape them.

FRAMEWORKS CONCEPTUALIZING YOUNG PEOPLE'S ENGAGEMENT WITH FLWS

The thematic **chapter 5** on young women's experiences in FLWS will additionally draw on frameworks conceptualizing young people's engagement with FLWS from the perspectives of **opportunity spaces** (the viable options to establish an independent life, given structural constraints⁵⁸), transitions along a life course, social navigation, **positive youth development**, as well as a (relational) generational perspective.⁵⁹

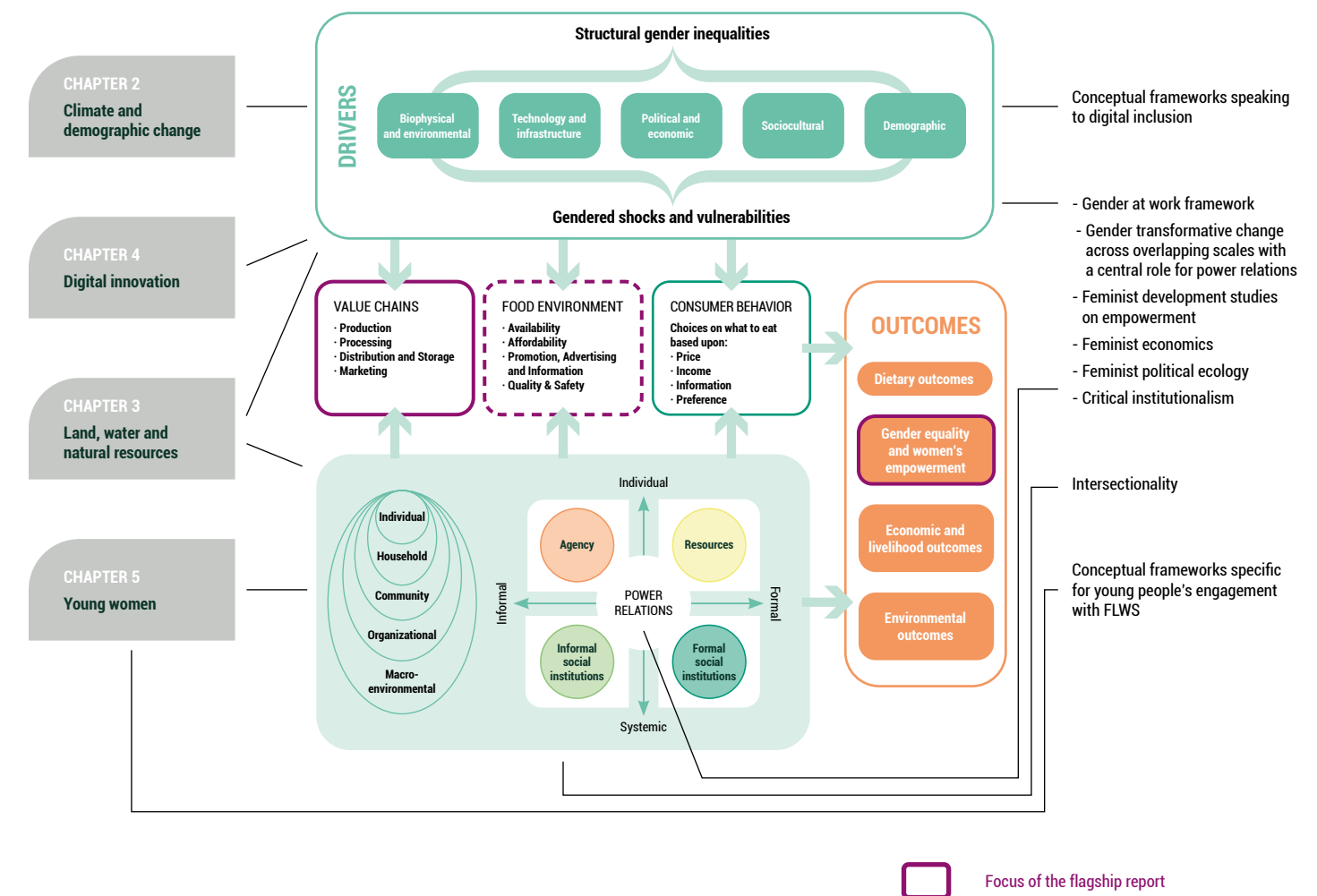


Figure 1. The focus of the report and its thematic chapters mapped to the GFSF, complemented with critical and feminist perspectives (Authors' compilation building on Njuki et al.³⁶)

c. How the conceptual foundations guide the thematic chapters

In this report, we focus on gender equality and empowerment outcomes of FLWS, primarily through agrifood **value chains** and secondarily through the **food environment**. Each thematic chapter is grounded in the GFSF and engages with the G@W Framework while examining how different system drivers interact with formal and informal barriers to gender equality at individual and systemic levels. **Figure 1** maps each of the thematic chapters to the GFSF, complemented with critical and feminist perspectives.

Chapter 2, focused on resilience to the polycrisis, climate change and demographic shifts, principally addresses the *biophysical, environmental and demographic* drivers of FLWS, while **Chapter 4**, on digital innovation,

focuses on *technological and sociocultural* drivers. To analyze how the drivers generate gendered shocks and vulnerabilities and identify strategies to address them, both chapters 2 and 4 also engage with the four types of barriers to intersectional gender equality (as identified in the G@W quadrant). **Chapter 3**, on natural resource access and governance, explores *biophysical and environmental* as well as *political and economic* drivers and also speaks directly to gendered access to and control over resources (the upper-right quadrant in the G@W Framework [box 1]).

Chapter 5, focused on young women as drivers of change in FLWS, complements and extends the GFSF by examining how gender intersects with age and life stage. It highlights the specific challenges and opportunities facing young women, and how these intersecting identities shape their ability to participate, innovate and thrive within FLWS.

Each thematic chapter is anchored in relevant critical structural and feminist theories and, where appropriate, engages more deeply with the gender-transformative change framework. These perspectives encourage a broader set of strategies that go beyond reaching, benefiting and empowering women through material solutions, instead supporting transformational change of FLWS. They seek to recenter social justice, equity, accountability, inclusion and non-discrimination as objectives of work on gender, rather than viewing women as worthwhile “investments” for development.⁶⁰

In adopting these critical and feminist perspectives alongside the GFSF, we acknowledge that lasting

transformative change toward more equitable resilience capacities, inclusive resource access and governance, digital inclusion and the empowerment of young women as drivers of change in future FLWS will require correcting power imbalances at multiple scales, as well as changes in norms, agency, resources, governance and voice that support equality and inclusion across these domains in mutually reinforcing ways. This will often require pushing against vested interests that sustain current systems.

The following chapters develop the insights needed to chart a path toward more equitable, inclusive and resilient FLWS by 2050.



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