

Women's empowerment is key to crop diversity in lower-income countries, study finds

July 13 2023



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Empowering women farmers in low and middle-income countries can lead to greater crop diversity—helping to improve year-round supply of

healthy foods, research suggests. The findings have been published in *The Lancet Planetary Health*.

Involving women more in agricultural decision-making, [community groups](#) and the ownership of farm equipment results in more crops with a higher nutritional value being grown, the study shows. Growing a wider variety of crops brings environmental benefits, improving soil fertility and reducing the threat from pests and crop diseases.

The resultant crop diversity also enables farmers to adapt more readily to market changes, and builds resilience against increasingly erratic weather patterns, researchers say.

The team says these findings suggest a pathway to improving [global food supply](#), protecting the world's low-income farming communities, while supporting women's rights.

Most of the world's farmers are smallholders and women make up more than half of the agricultural workforce, but typically they have less control over decision making.

An international team led by the University of Edinburgh analyzed data from four countries—Burkina Faso, India, Malawi and Tanzania—to explore the relationship between women's empowerment and crop diversity.

Previous studies in South Asia had indicated that supporting women farmers could enhance [crop production](#) and diversity, but it was unclear whether the findings would apply to other regions.

Analysis revealed that greater involvement from women improved three measures of crop diversity—the number of crops grown, the number of food groups grown, and if nutrient-dense crops were grown.

In low and [middle-income countries](#), crops produced by smallholders are vital to protect the livelihoods and food supplies of local communities, but they are increasingly threatened by the impacts of climate change.

The research team plans to translate these findings into targeted interventions that support women and improve crop diversity, without adding to women's existing work burdens.

The analysis also involved researchers from, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, the University of Oxford, Cornell University, The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, Northwestern University, Tufts University, Anuvaad Solutions, and the International Food Policy Research Institute.

Dr. Lilia Bliznashka, from the Global Academy of Agriculture and Food Systems at the University of Edinburgh and the International Food Policy Research Institute in Washington, D.C., said, "We hope to encourage efforts to consider women's empowerment in the context of agricultural production and food system resilience to support critical win-win agendas for women's rights and for the provision of a healthy diet from a healthy planet."

More information: Kaela Connors et al, Women's empowerment, production choices, and crop diversity in Burkina Faso, India, Malawi, and Tanzania: a secondary analysis of cross-sectional data, *The Lancet Planetary Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/S2542-5196\(23\)00125-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(23)00125-0)

Provided by University of Edinburgh

Citation: Women's empowerment is key to crop diversity in lower-income countries, study finds (2023, July 13) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-07-women-empowerment->

[key-crop-diversity.html](#)

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.