Closing gender gaps can ease hunger – report

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CLOSING the gender gap between women and men in access to productive resources could decrease the number of people who experience hunger, a new report from Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) said.

According to the report “Gender Equality and Food Security—Women’s Empowerment as a Tool Against Hunger,” about 60 percent of undernourished people worldwide are women or girls.

It added that giving women access to education and employment opportunities has a large impact on reducing overall hunger and improving child health and education.

However, the report said that restrictions on female land ownership, limited access to credit and farm advisory services, and a lack of education hamper women’s ability to produce and access more food and earn decent incomes.

The FAO study estimated that closing the gender gap in access to productive resources such as land, credit, machinery or chemicals could eliminate yield gaps of 20 percent to 30 percent among women and men.

It could also increase domestic agricultural output by 2.5 percent to 4 percent and mean up to 100 million fewer people living in hunger.

“Even rural women working off-farm in low-skill jobs in agribusiness face gender discrimination and low wages,” it stated.

To address these problems, the report recommended that policymakers tackle laws and regulations which discriminate against women, particularly in land ownership, initiate programs to boost gender equality in agriculture and the labor market, while updating education and employment policies to be more gender sensitive.

“Food security strategies must also be developed to improve women’s access to childcare, farmer support mechanisms, and credit and agricultural services,” it added.

The report noted that social protection programs, such as active labor market programs with targets for women’s employment should also be fine-tuned to incorporate women’s needs.

In Asia and the Pacific, the report said that labor and land ownership laws throughout region must change if women are to reach their full potential as farmers and food production workers.

“Removing the barriers women face in their roles as food producers, farm workers, and primary caregivers is achievable and inexpensive,” said Lourdes Adriano, practice leader for Agriculture, Food Security and Rural Development in the Regional and Sustainable Development Department at ADB.

“Paying women a decent wage, improving their access to tools, fertilizers, and credit, and guaranteeing their right to own and access land will have a huge multiplier effect on food security and hunger reduction,” she said.

The report is authored by United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food Olivier de Schutter and takes an in-depth look at women’s role in food production, nutrition, and access to food in the region, and the steps needed to remove the barriers facing them.