Bread for the World
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Food Security and Women

March is the month when we observe International Women’s Day. The time the global community focuses on how to eliminate and prevent all forms of violence against women and girls. In spite of the major role played by women in producing food and feeding their families, little attention has been paid to the connection between gender, violence and food security.

Gender discrimination fuels female malnutrition and disempowerment. Very often, discriminatory practices in rural communities generate biases in intra-household food distribution, whereby women and girls usually have access to limited and less nutritious food.

Poor families may marry off under-age daughters during times of famine so there’s one less mouth to feed. Refugee women may be forced to trade sex for food. Women spend hours collecting firewood to cook the family meal, leaving themselves vulnerable to rape and other attacks. Widows are persecuted over land ownership but, all too often, national laws favor men over women. Domestic violence has an overall negative impact on agricultural production and family well-being. For many women struggling to feed themselves and their children today, food security would mean personal and legal security.

If we unite to increase food security for women, we also nourish the minds and bodies of whole communities. If a girl can attend school in a safe environment, she can reach her full mental and physical potential. She can avoid early marriage, forced marriage or other forms of violence. If a woman can register the birth of her children, legally own land and the money she earns, she can contribute to the benefit of her society and its economic development.

Women make up more than 40% of the agricultural labor force in developing countries. Improving equality in women’s access to agricultural inputs; such as seeds, tools, fertilizers, education and public services would contribute significantly to achieving food security and better nutrition for all.

“If we unite to increase food security for women, we also nourish the minds and bodies of whole communities.” (Joint statement by Food & Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), World Food Program (WFP) and International Development Law Organization (IDLO).

Empowering women and girls legally and economically creates opportunities for development, enhances their political voice and reduces their vulnerability to violence. Food security links the diverse elements needed to build a peaceful and fair future for them.