

GENDER INCLUSIVITY IN COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE

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Acknowledgements

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Nearly 100 million women work in India's agricultural sector, with a majority employed as farm labourers. In commercial agriculture, **women's participation across value chains is notably higher**, especially in crops like cotton, sugarcane, tea, coffee, and cashew, where over 50% of the workforce comprises women.

Despite their substantial contribution to major commercial crops, **women's roles are undervalued, marked by a 60% pay gap, discrimination, exploitation, adverse health outcomes, and drudgery**. Limited access to finance, technology, and knowledge further invisibilises them within the value chain. Women farmers are underrepresented in leadership roles, with restricted decision-making powers in decisions related to production. The agricultural value chains essentially mirror the power dynamics of a patriarchal society, further exacerbating the disempowerment of women within the sector.

In this context, addressing the gendered nature of value chains is crucial for women's economic empowerment. **Shifting from a gender-blind to a gender-sensitive approach within agribusinesses** is imperative. Key steps include conducting **gender-sensitive value chain analysis, identifying and addressing gender-based constraints** through innovative solutions. Global initiatives such as gender-responsive procurement, Fairtrade certifications, and fostering women's entrepreneurship contribute to enhancing gender inclusivity in value chains.

Empowering women in agriculture yields manifold benefits, including a 20% increase in yields with equal access to resources and training, higher adoption of climate-smart practices, improved nutrition, and an overall boost to national output. Embracing intentional gender-inclusive practices within agribusiness is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic move for sustainable and inclusive practices. Agribusinesses must actively promote gender equality to unlock the full potential of women in agriculture and contribute to broader societal and economic development.



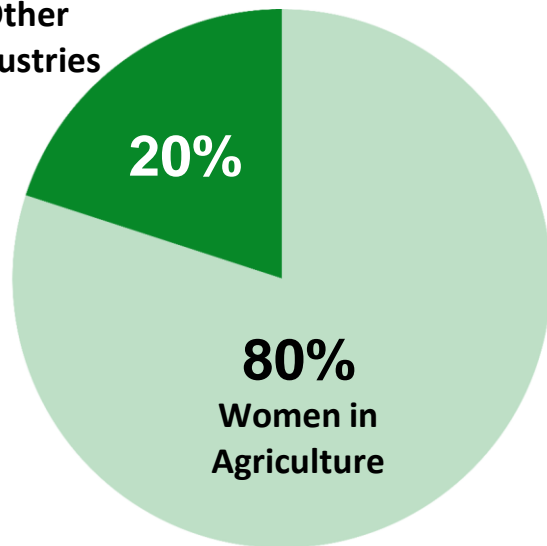
UNDERSTANDING GENDERED DYNAMICS OF THE AGRICULTURE VALUE CHAIN



The agricultural sector employs nearly 100 million women in India.

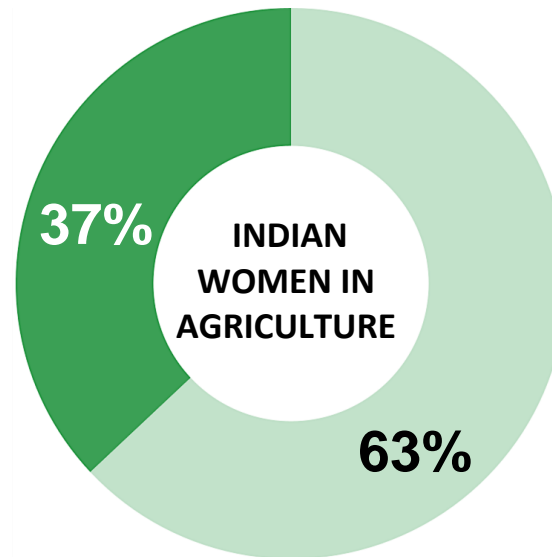
In India, the agricultural sector provides employment to **80% of economically active women**¹.

Women in
Other
Industries



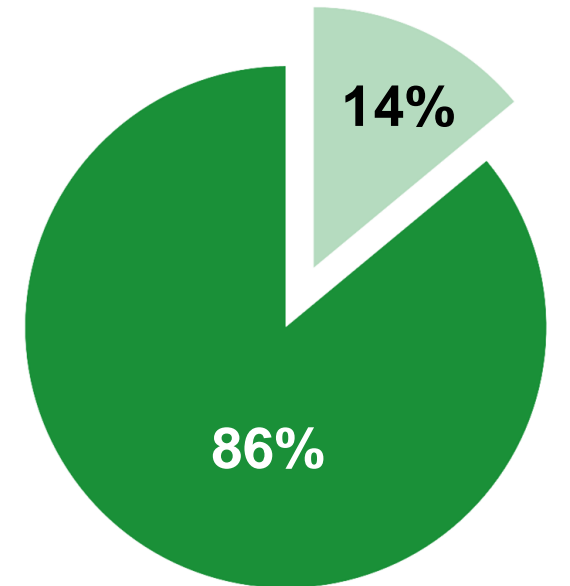
Informal Employment
Formal Employment

Nearly 98 million women are employed in the agricultural sector, with approximately 63 percent of them serving as labourers.²



Farm Labour Farmers

Out of 146 million operational landholdings in India, only 20.4 million landholdings (14%) are owned by women.³

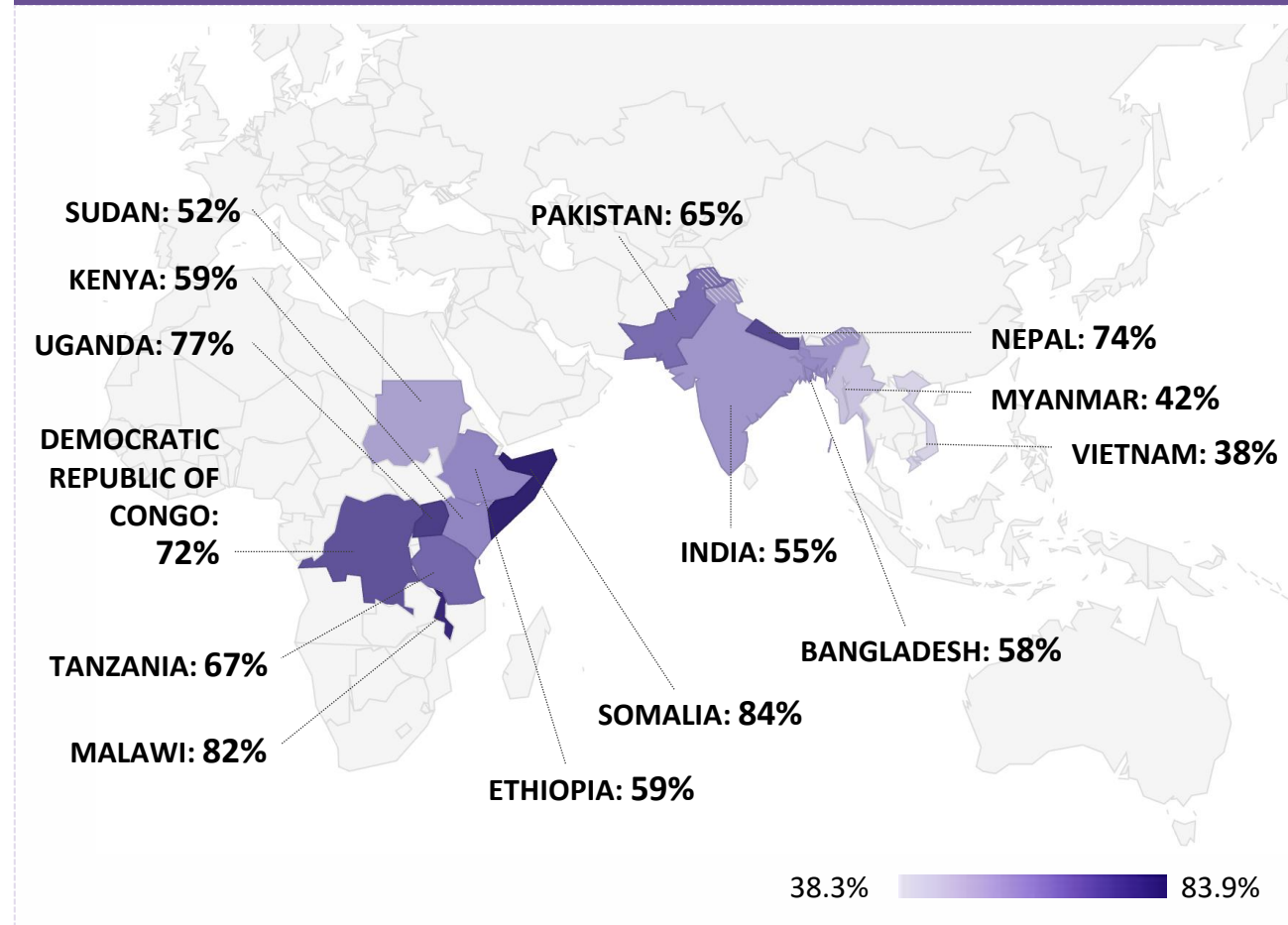


Women-owned Landholdings
Male-owned Landholdings

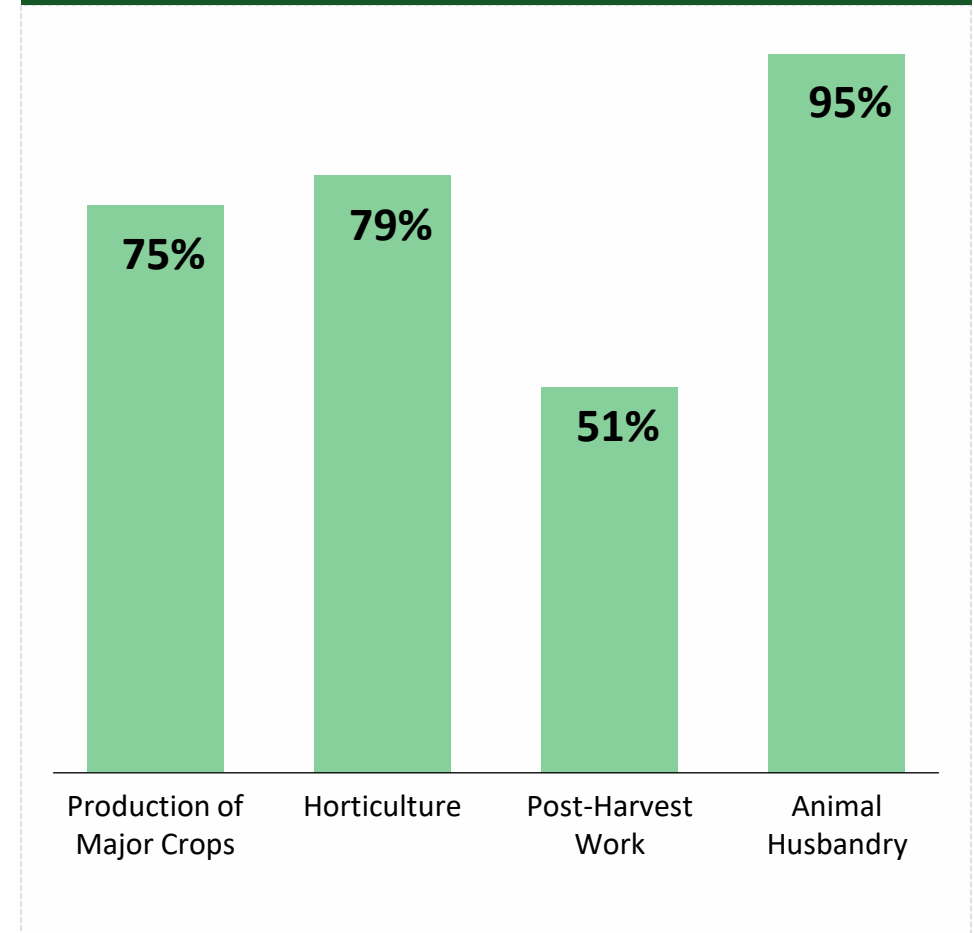


60% of the total female labour force in developing countries is engaged in agricultural activities.

In major countries across Asia and Africa, approximately **60% women are engaged in agriculture.**⁴



In India, women play a significant role by jointly participating across various aspects of agriculture.⁵

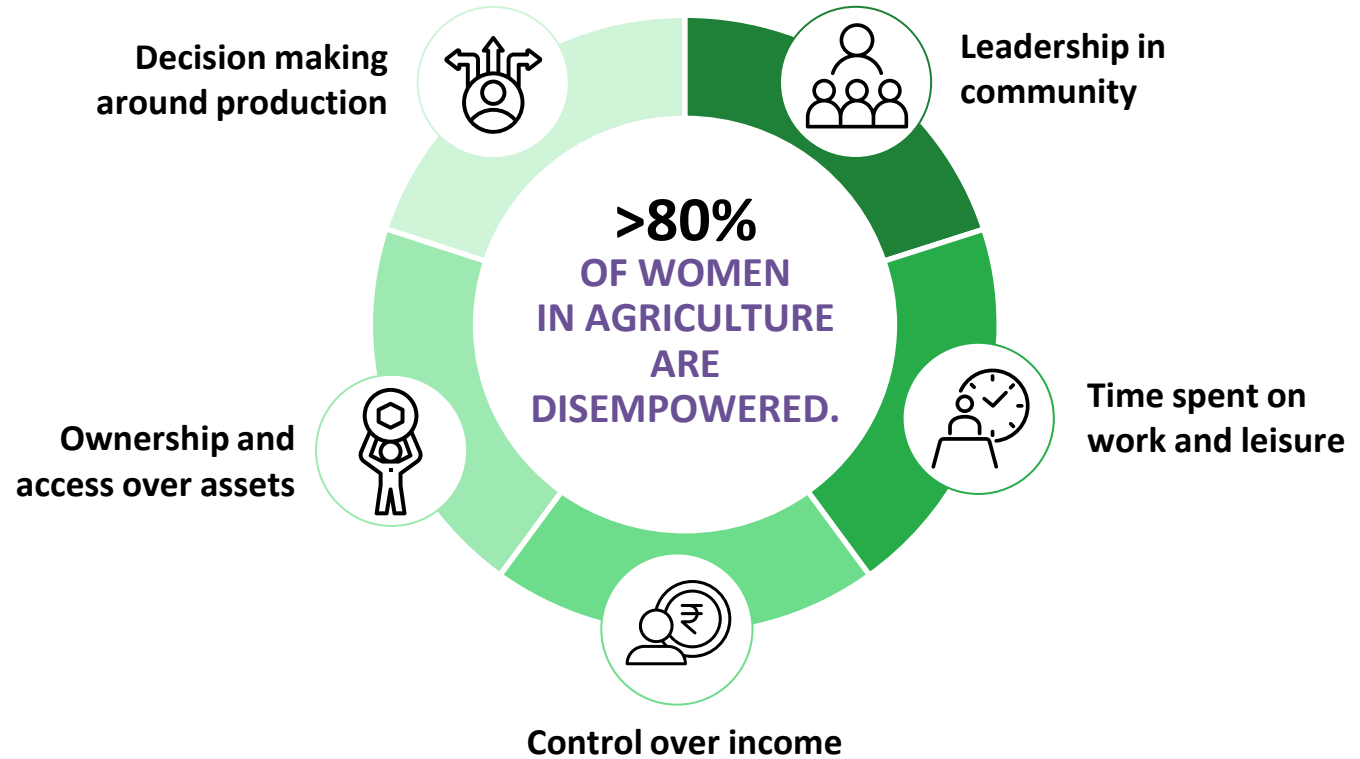


Due to the gendered nature of value chains, women tend to be disempowered in agriculture.

The **Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI)** was introduced by IFPRI in partnership with USAID. It is measured **across five domains of empowerment** within agricultural households.⁶

A 2019 study funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation adapted the WEAI and measured it across three states in India - **Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Odisha**. The results revealed that at least **80% of women in agricultural households are disempowered**.⁷

The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) is measured across **five domains of empowerment**.



Commercial agriculture presents the highest opportunity for accelerating economic empowerment of women.



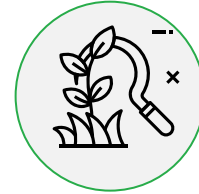
Women participate more in commercial value chains.

Women comprise over 50% of primary labour in most commercial value chains, including cotton, coffee, maize, vegetables, and fruits⁸, as compared to 39% in the rice value chain (for West Bengal)⁹.



There is a stark gender gap in resource access.

Only 10% of cotton-farming women owned smartphones, limiting their ability to access online training.¹⁰



Women's work is labour-intensive and burdensome.

Above 80% of the harvesting tasks for key crops like cotton, coffee, and tea are done by women.¹¹



There is low participation in lucrative market-facing roles.

Across India and Pakistan, less than 15% women are involved in trading activities for cotton.¹²



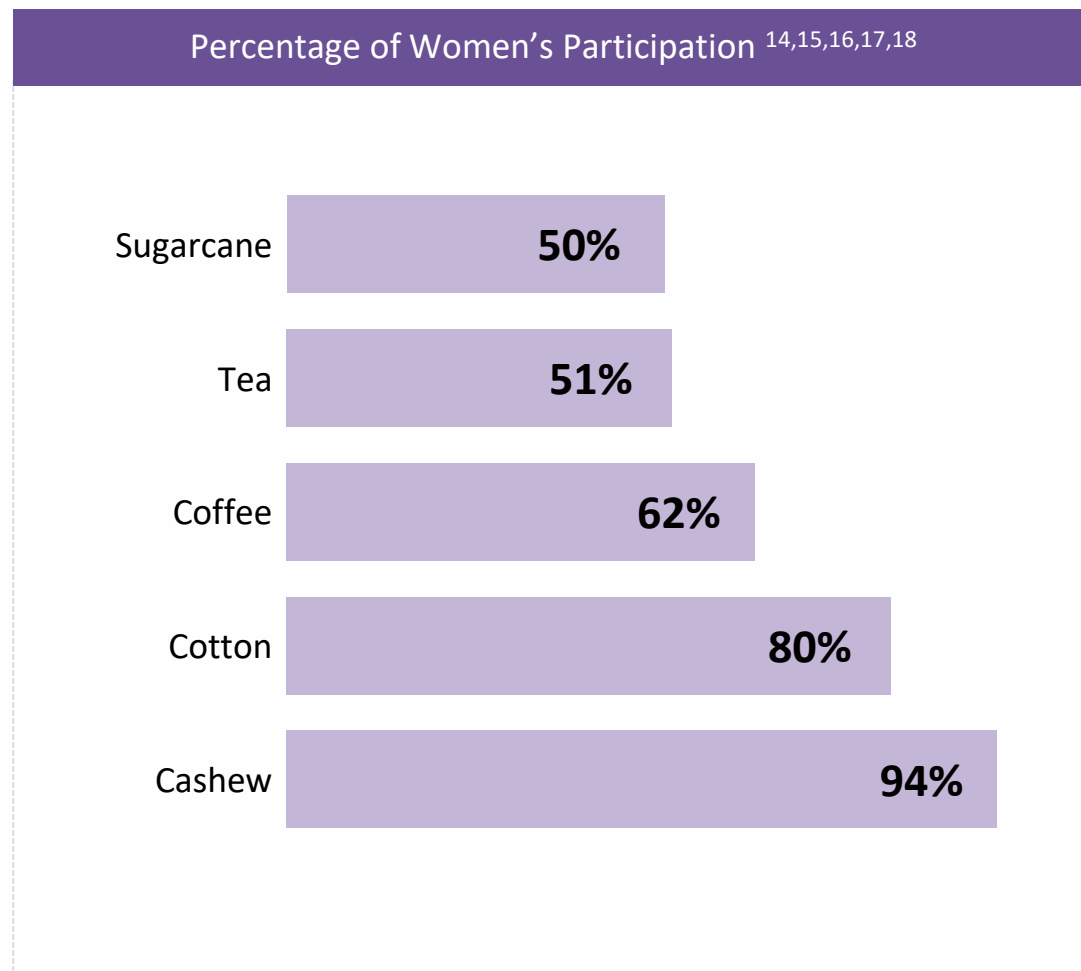
Women's work is undervalued and underpaid.

There is up to 60% gender gap in wages within key commercial value chains in India.¹³

Commercial agriculture, defined by the FAO as agriculture with profitable production and marketing system, has a high female participation and stark discrimination in resource access and profit-making roles. Therefore, it presents **the greatest opportunity for women's economic empowerment through gender-inclusive value chains.**



Women play a pivotal role in the top five commercial value chains in India, and their activities often determine quality of the produce.



Women are mostly engaged in the field and are largely responsible for harvesting activities across commercial value chains.



Cashew peeling, shelling, cutting and grading employ most female labour.¹⁹



In cotton, women handle >84% of the stubble picking, sowing, weeding, and cotton-picking.²⁰



In coffee, women handle up to 90% of fieldwork and 80% of harvesting tasks.²¹



80 to 90% of the female workforce in tea is engaged exclusively in tea plucking.²²

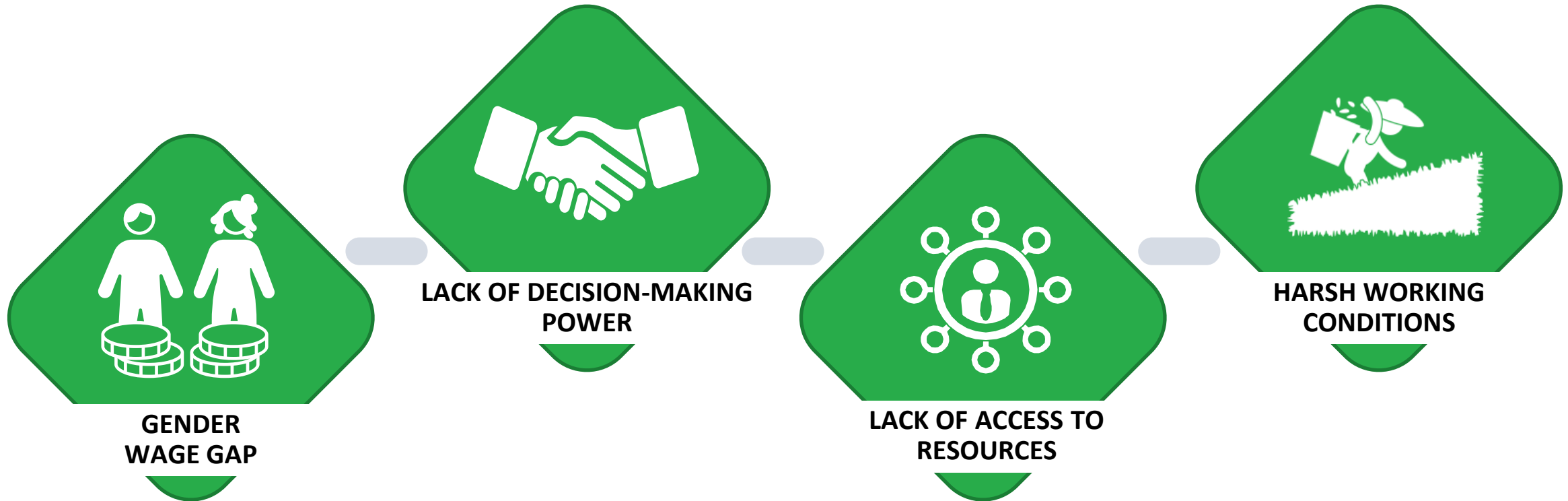


In sugarcane, they handle sett spreading, hand weeding, chemical mixing, cane cleaning, bundling, and transportation.²³

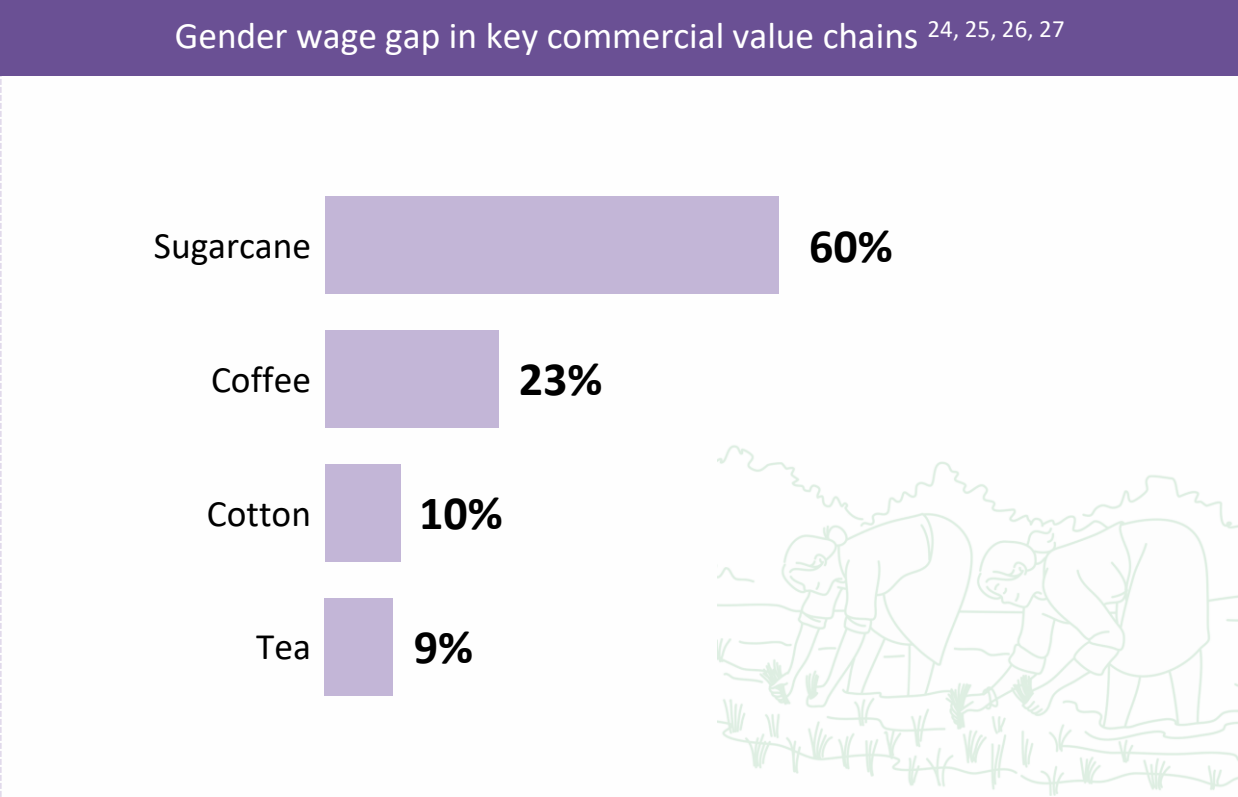
UNVEILING CHALLENGES IN COMMERCIAL AGRICULTURE



In commercial value chains, women broadly face four challenges.



Women in commercial value chains earn up to 60% less than men.



In Maharashtra, **women cotton cultivators were typically paid INR 150 per day whereas men were paid INR 200-300 per day.**²⁸ This was largely due to the perception that men carried out the “heavier work” which entailed market-facing roles.



In sugarcane farming in Uttar Pradesh, wages vary from **INR 200 to 400 for men and INR 80 to 200 for women, highlighting a stark gender wage gap.**²⁹

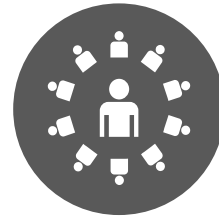
Women have limited decision-making powers in production.

Women's participation in decision-making is hindered by factors like hesitancy, low literacy, and limited awareness.



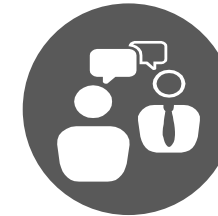
Women's participation in decision-making is as low as 6%.

For most production-related decisions in sugarcane, such as choosing crop variety, allotting area for crops and time of crop planting, **women's participation in decision-making ranges from 6% to 18%.**³⁰



Women believe they participate more in decision-making than men perceive them to.

In cotton, women believed that **3% to 10% of decisions were made by them, but men attributed only around 5%** to women's participation in decision-making.³¹



Men decide if women can attend trainings.

In coffee, **two-thirds of the men surveyed said that they would prefer if only men attended trainings, and 62% men decided** whether women could attend trainings.³²

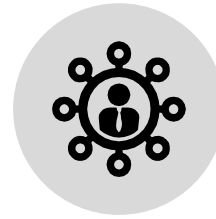


Further, a significant gender gap persists in access to finance, training and technology.



Limited access to finance

- A 7% global gap still persists between men and women when it comes to ownership of bank accounts.³³
- In India, 20% of women still do not have bank accounts, and out of those that have one, 50% do not use their accounts.³⁴



Limited access to training

- 77% of female cultivators in cotton do not have access to any trainings due to opportunity, mobility and time constraints.³⁵
- Only 11% had access to extension services³⁶, that provide technical aid to farmers on agricultural issues.

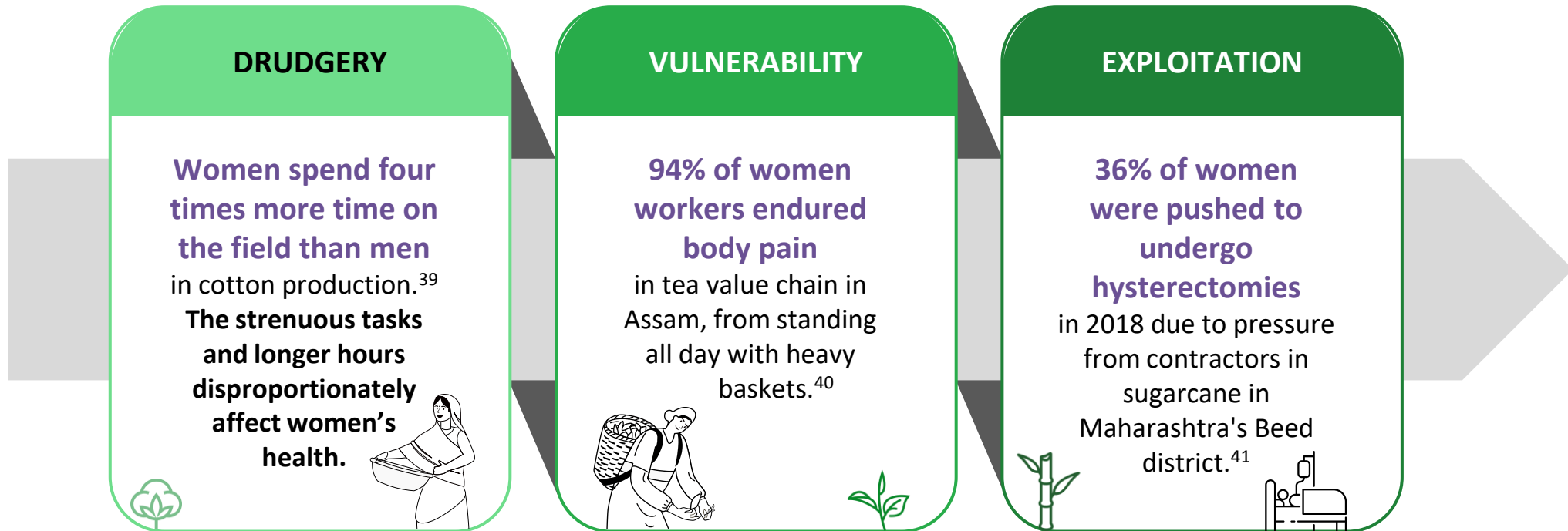


Limited access to Technology

- Only 10% of cotton-farming women own smartphones.³⁷
- Only 25% know how to access the internet on their mobile devices.³⁸



Harsh working conditions impact women's health adversely.

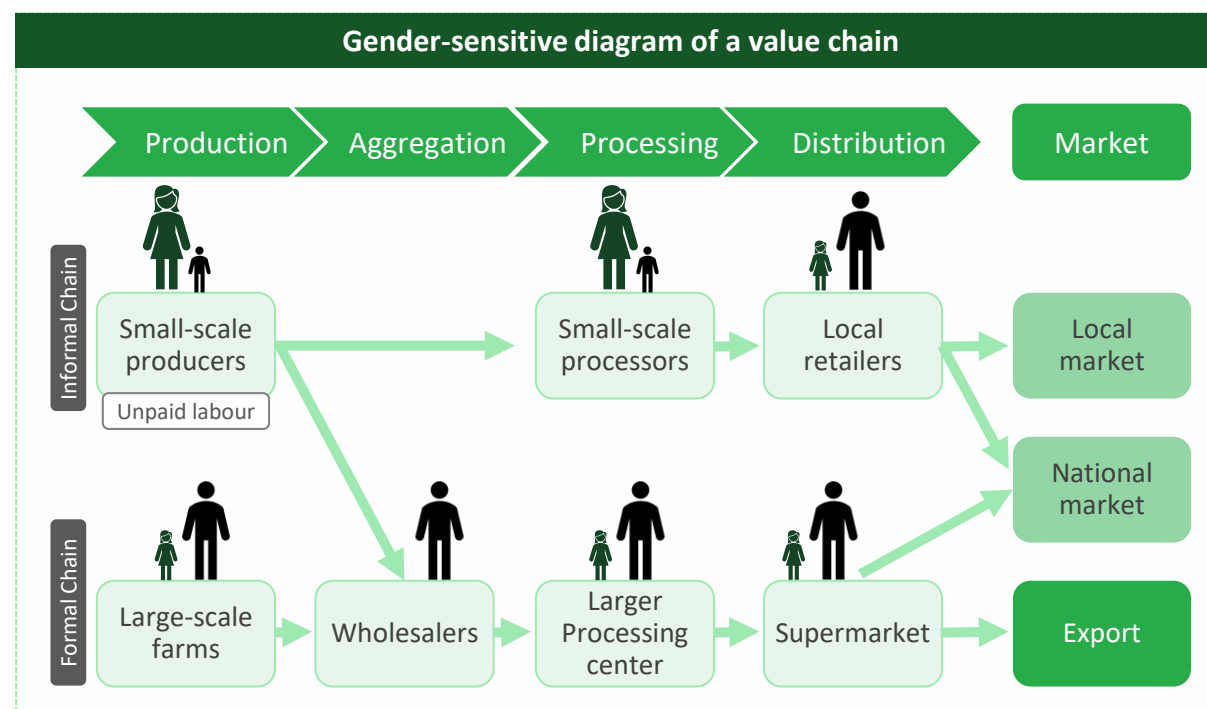
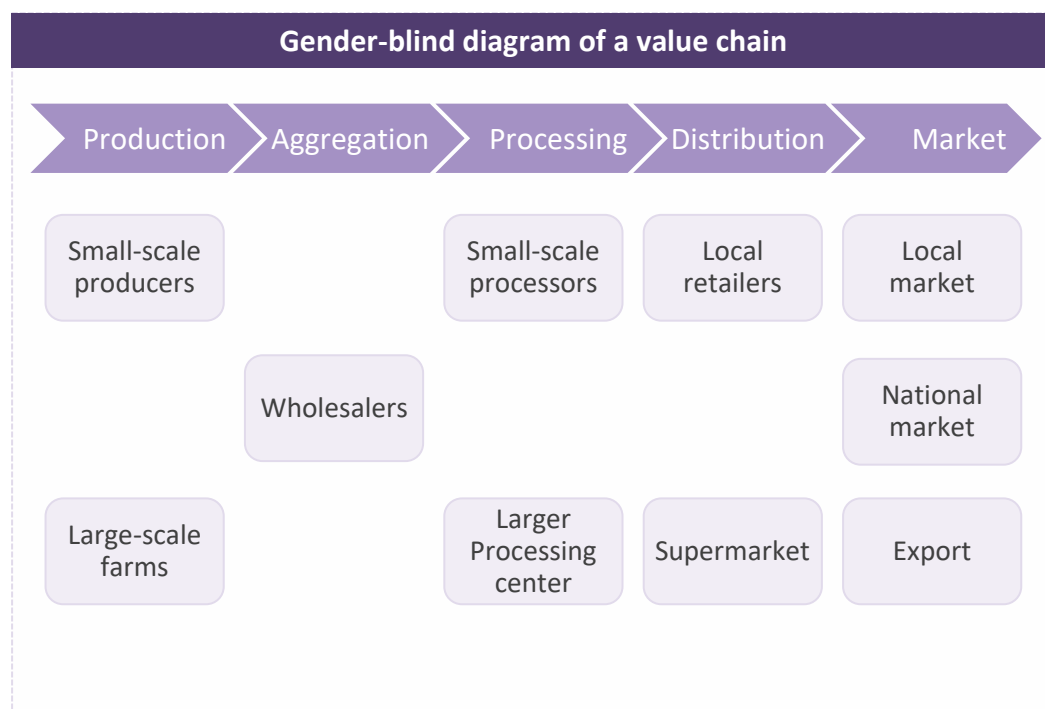


EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH GENDER INCLUSIVITY



Gender-sensitive value chain mapping is the first step towards moving away from a gender-blind approach to a gender-sensitive one.

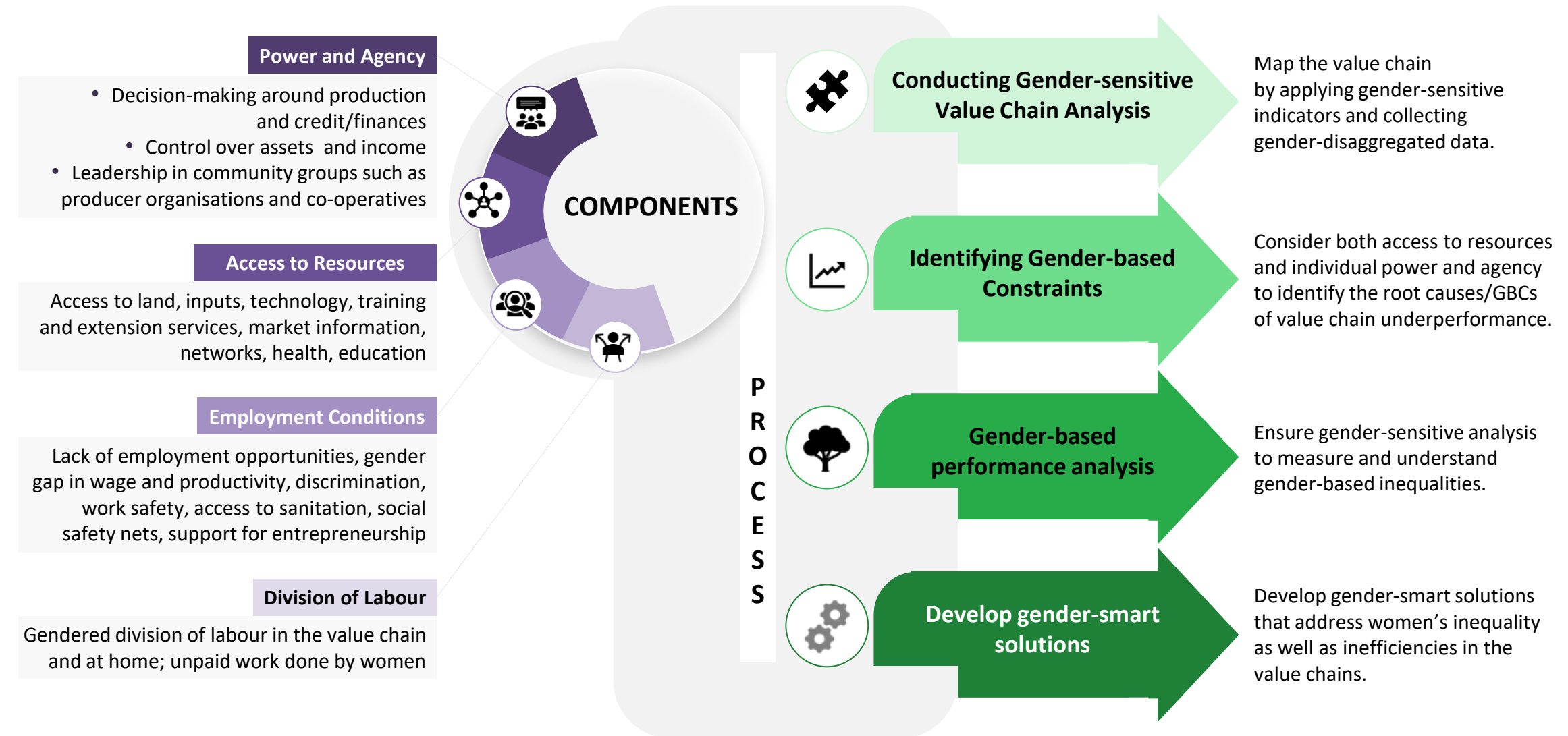
A gender-sensitive approach highlights the invisible, unpaid work by women in various stages of the chain, transforming the evaluation from gender-blind to gender-sensitive.⁴² Conducting a value chain mapping process unveils the comprehensive journey of a crop, from production to consumption.



Percentage/proportion of women and men for each actor/activity mapped is represented by size of the male and female icons.



A gender-sensitive value chain approach aims to address and mitigate the impact of gender norms and promote gender equality.^{43, 44, 45, 46}



Gender inclusive practices need to be embedded in commercial value chains to empower women in agriculture.



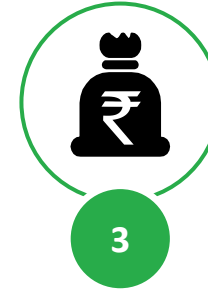
Fostering Equitable Opportunities

Creating the conditions for both men and women to participate in value chain services and activities



Addressing the needs of women

Recognising the differences and design activities that meet the needs of both men and women



Supporting women's economic advancement

Supporting the development of solutions that create equitable opportunities



Designing benefit-sharing mechanisms

Ensuring that men and women are adequately rewarded for their contributions to the value chain

Companies currently following some of these best practices:



International trade initiatives have made headway in promoting gender-inclusivity through responsible business practices.



1

Gender-responsive Procurement

Gender-responsive procurement (GRP)⁴⁷ emphasises sourcing from women-owned businesses and gender-responsive enterprises to ensure equitable access to markets and gender-inclusive value chains.



2

Fairtrade Certifications

Fairtrade prioritises dialogue, transparency, and respect in international trade, aiming for greater equity.⁴⁸ Fairtrade actively works to challenge gender disparities, focusing on promoting gender equality.⁴⁹



3

Gender Analysis

Effective use of digital solutions to gather gender-disaggregated data and evidence highlighting the gendered trade-offs, benefits, opportunities and vulnerabilities is integral for advancing gender inclusivity in value chains.⁵⁰



4

Women's Entrepreneurship

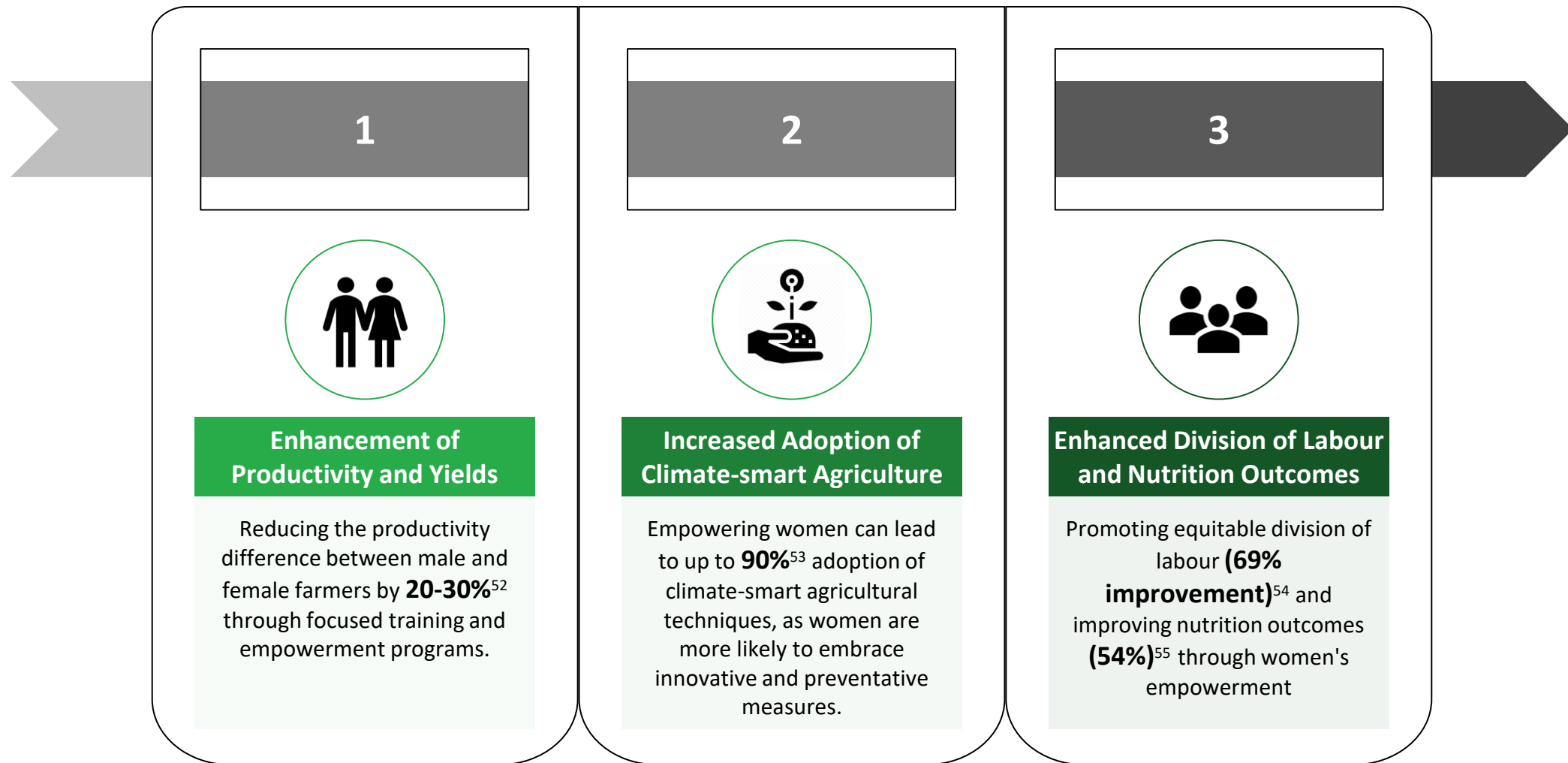
To promote gender-equitable leadership and decision-making within associations, it is essential to address potential barriers to women's leadership positions and promote their leadership.⁵¹



POTENTIAL IMPACT OF GENDER-INCLUSIVE VALUE CHAINS



Empowering women in agriculture through gender-inclusivity in value chains has three major impacts.



Improvement in women's access to productive resources, trainings and education can enhance overall income, productivity and yields.



20-30% increase in productivity through reduction of gender gap in access to inputs and resources



An FAO study reports that there is an average yield gap of 20-30% between male and female farmers due to differences in input utilisation. By bridging this gap, productivity in female farmers' land could match that in male-owned landholdings, **leading to a 20-30% increase in production.**⁵⁶

25% increase in yields through focused training



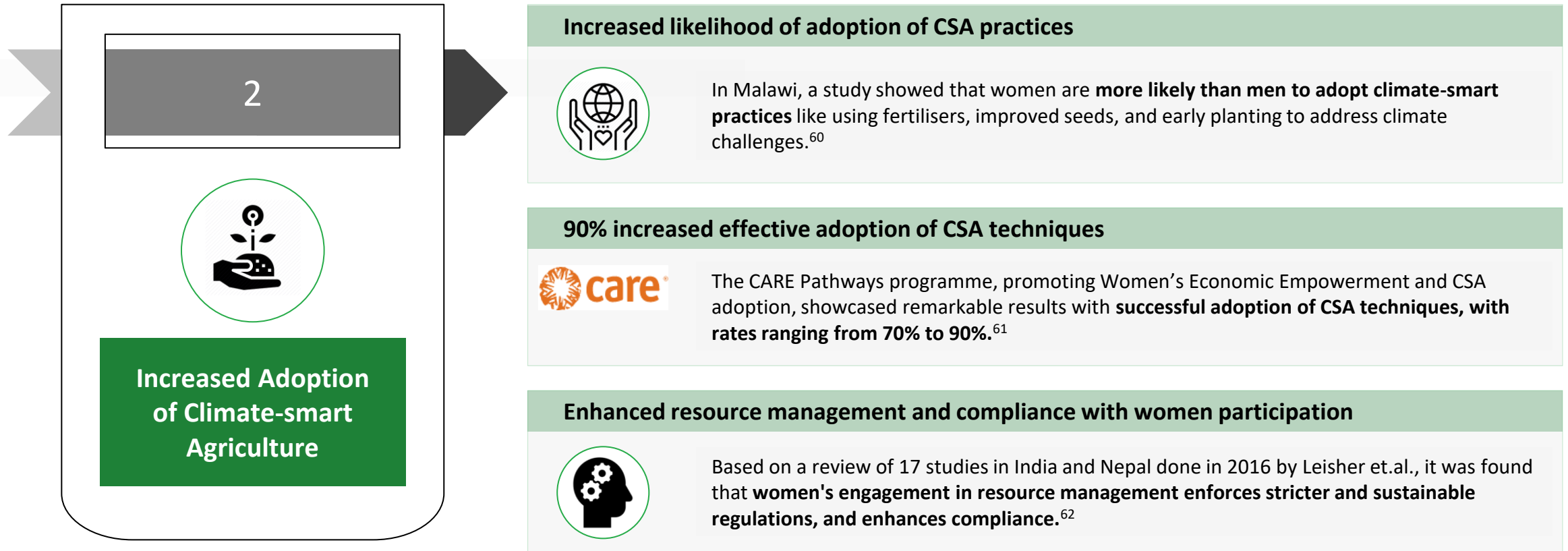
DCM Shriram's gender-responsive programme led to **increased farm yields among participants by 25%**⁵⁷. Similarly, the impact of Cotton Connect's programme with women showed an increase in yield by 16%, and in profit by 41%.⁵⁸

10-20% increase in national output and incomes through increase in women's access education and resources

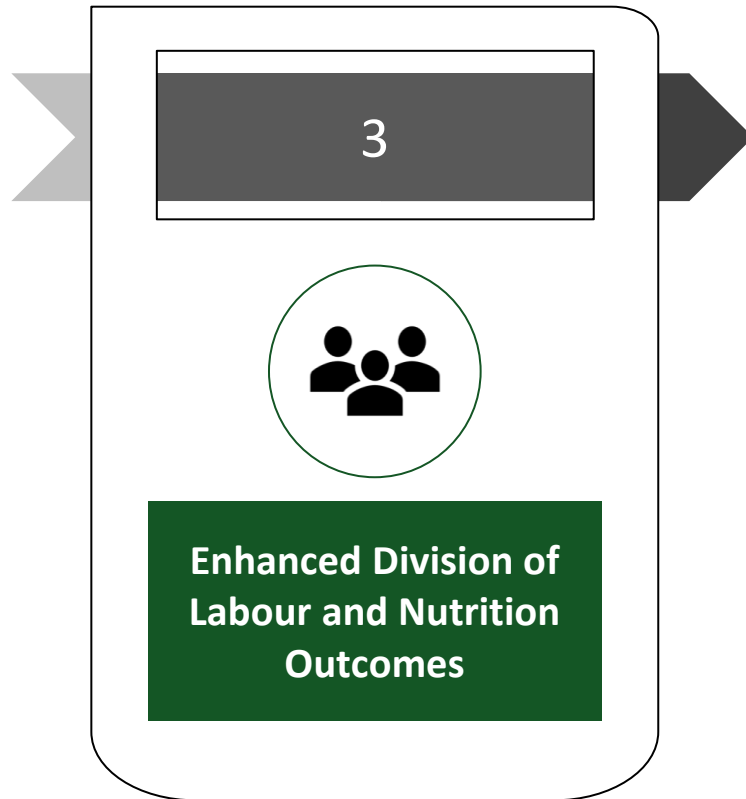


A World Bank program in Burkina Faso, Kenya, and Tanzania found that giving same inputs and education to women entrepreneurs and producers could **increase their output and incomes by an estimated 10-20 percent.**⁵⁹

Women's readiness to adopt innovation can lead to increase in adoption of climate-smart agricultural (CSA) practices thereby driving business sustainability goals.



Women's empowerment can also lead to increased food and nutritional security due to their direct impacts in affecting nutrition outcomes.



54% increase in improved nutrition outcomes



An Agriculture and Food Security study conducted in 2023 showed that interventions which focused on a gender-sensitive approach to women empowerment had a substantial impact on improving food security, affordability, and availability, leading to better nutrition outcomes.⁶³

69% increase in equitable and improved division of labour



PepsiCo's programme on gender-inclusive potato value chains led to **69% farmers seeing an improved division of caring and household labour** with their partners.⁶⁴

Reduction in global hunger rates by 17%



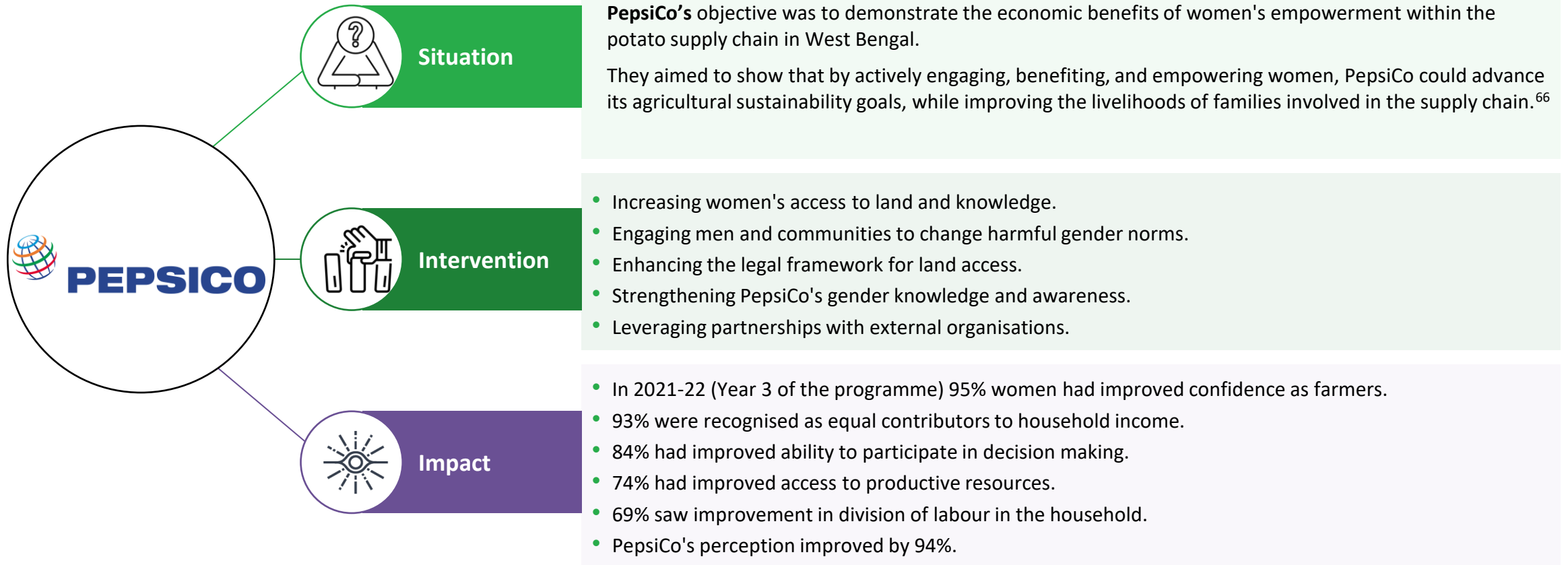
FAO predicts that increased women empowerment could improve agricultural production by 4%. This could result in **potential reduction in global hunger rates by 17%, impacting over 150 million people.**⁶⁵



CASE STUDIES



PepsiCo and USAID's efforts to be gender-inclusive have led to a 95% increase in confidence for women farmers.



WFP's gender-responsive procurement programme has led to 300,000 women farmers having increased access to market



CARE's intervention led to a rise in women's participation in extension services, from less than 5% to at least 33%.



Nestle's efforts in coaching women in gender awareness has increased their representation in decision-making positions from 8 to 17% in 2 years.



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