

Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition • FSN Forum

TEMPLATE FOR SUBMISSIONS

Call for submissions No. 202 • 09.10.2024 - 27.11.2024

https://www.fao.org/fsnforum/call-submissions/community-engagement-ruraltransformation-and-gender-equality

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS:

Community engagement for inclusive rural transformation and gender equality

The objective of this call for submissions is to collect good practices, experiences, and lessons learnt on the use of community engagement for inclusive rural transformation and gender equality. The initiative, organized by the Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division (ESP), seeks to gather insights from a diverse range of contributors, both within FAO and from external stakeholders. Its goal is to share knowledge, foster learning, and guide the scaling up of community engagement and community-led collective action to leave no one behind. The call builds on FAO's



past efforts in this area, such as the Community Engagement Days series of webinars.1

The call for submissions is open until 27 November 2024.

How to take part in this call for submissions:

To take part in this Call for submissions, please <u>register</u> to the FSN Forum, if you are not yet a member, or "sign in" to your account. Please review the **topic note** to understand the criteria we are considering for this call. If you wish to learn more about community engagement, you may refer to the <u>background document</u>. Once you have completed this submission template, upload it in the box "Post your contribution" on the **call <u>webpage</u>**, or, alternatively, send it to <u>fsn-moderator@fao.org</u>. Please keep the length of submissions limited to **1,500 words** and feel also free to attach relevant supporting materials.

¹ The call for submissions is directly aligned with the thematic components of collective action within FAO's Programme Priority Areas (PPAs), specifically Better Life 1 (Gender Equality and Rural Women's Empowerment), Better Life 2 (Inclusive Rural Transformation) and Better Life 3 (Agriculture and Food Emergencies – a CNG doesn't really resolve this issue).

2

Template for submissions

Contact person	Name: Dr. Sharmishtha Basu Organization/Unit: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH Country: India Email address: sharmishtha.basu@giz.de
Name/title of the good practice	Community Nutrition Gardens: An Inclusive and gender transformative approach for Rural Development
Where is the good practice taking place?	☐ Europe and Central Asia
(Multiple selection allowed)	☐ Latin America and the Caribbean
	☐ North Africa and Near East
	☐ Sub-Saharan Africa
	☑ Asia and the Pacific
	□ North America
	□ Global
Affiliation	☐ Farmer and producer organizations
	☐ Trade Union
	☐ Informal community-based, farmer-based or self-help group
	☐ Research and academia
	□ Government
	☐ Local/traditional authorities
	☐ Private Sector
	☐ Civil Society Organization
	☐ Intergovernmental Organization (e.g. UN system, World Bank)
	☐ Resource Partner/Donor
	□ Other (please specify)
	☐ Education
In which sector(s) and context (s) have you	☐ Health and Sanitation
used this community engagement good practice? (Multiple selections allowed)	Health and Samtadon
	⊠ Food production in agrifood systems (please also tick the sub-categories)
	\square Fisheries and aquaculture production \boxminus Livestock

	☐ Forestry
	☐ Agroforestry
	ightharpoons Horticulture
	☐ Apiculture (beekeeping)
	→ Agroecology and sustainable farming practices
	☐ Soil and water management
	☐ Other:
	☐ post-production in agrifood systems (please also tick the sub-categories)
	☐ Processing and value addition
	☐ Marketing and retailing
	☐ Transporting
	☐ Food loss and waste
	□ Packaging
	☐ Storage ☐ Distribution
	□ Other
	☑ Gender Equality
	☐ Climate Action
	☐ Citizenship and Governance
	⊠ Social Protection
	☐ Humanitarian and protracted crisis
	☐ Conflict resolution, peace and resilience
	☐ Digital innovation
	☐ Other sector (please specify)
Who are the financial partners supporting this good practice, if applicable? (35)	The project was primarily funded by BMZ. It also received resources from the Department of Panchayat and Rural Development, Government of Madhya Pradesh (provincial government) in the form of wages for labor, farmland, Agri-inputs etc.
1. In a few sentences, summarize your commun	nity engagement good practice. (48)
	plemented in Madhya Pradesh, engages women from
sey-melp Groups (smos) of the state Kurat Livett	hood Mission to collaboratively cultivate community

gardens on shared land. It aims to enhance women's agricultural skills, economic agency, and self-efficacy while promoting nutrition and gender equality within communities.

2. What **problem(s)** or **challenge(s)** does your good practice aim to address through community engagement? (71)

The CNG initiative addresses the following challenges affecting the vulnerable households:

- 3. **Gender inequality**: Limited economic opportunity, and low self-efficacy, mobility and agency of women due to entrenched patriarchal norms,
- 4. Nutritional deficiencies: Poor access to diverse and nutritious food,
- 5. **Economic constraints**: Limited earning opportunities, especially for landless and marginalized women.
- 6. Community cohesion: Weak collaboration and collective action within rural communities.
- 7. *Infrastructure gaps*: Poor access to water, markets, and basic amenities like toilets.
- 8. Describe your **good practice** in more detail. Include the main **guiding principles**, the **desired changes or outcomes** you aim to achieve (*Theory of Change*), and the **key phases of implementation.** (268)

Guiding principles:

- 9. **Empowerment:** Foster women's leadership, decision-making, and confidence through collective action.
- 10. **Inclusion:** Engage with women those from vulnerable groups (e.g., Scheduled Tribes, OBCs, widows).
- 11. **Sustainability:** Focus on skill-building, resilience, and durable capacity to manage agricultural initiatives.
- 12. **Equity:** Ensure equitable participation and resource sharing.

Theory of Change

The project adopted the following Theory of Change, which integrates Naila Kabeer's empowerment framework with the Can-Act-Resist model to address systemic barriers and promote transformative change:

If women of Self-Help Groups are mobilized into groups, trained in farming practices and equipped with resources such as farmland and agricultural inputs to collaboratively cultivate community gardens, then over a period, household dietary diversity, household income and women's role in household economic and non-economic decisions and their ability to resist gender-based violence would improve.

Pathway to Change: Capacity Building (Can), Action and Participation (Act), Resilience and Advocacy (Resist)

Key phases of implementation:

- 1. **Mobilization**: Members of existing SHGs were mobilized and connected to appropriate CNG sites.
- 2. **Policy Framework**: Guidelines were issued by the government

- 3. **Asset allocation**: Common lands were mapped and leased out to VOs and SHGs for CNG development by Gram Panchayats and Revenue Department and budget was allocated for CNGs by the government
- 4. Capacity building: Women were trained in farm practices, leadership, and gender equity.
- 5. **Implementation**: Land preparation and planting was done and regular maintenance of plots taken up.
- 6. **Monitoring & evaluation**: Key project outcomes, namely, individual empowerment (in terms of both nutrition and economic agency), collective agency, and systemic change were tracked.
- 7. **Sustainability planning**: Diversified farming (e.g., fish farming) was introduced and market access secured.
- **13.** Who are the **key actors and stakeholders** involved in the design and implementation of the good practice, and what are their respective roles? *Consider local partners, government, local authorities, community radios, civil society, research, the private sector, etc. (58)*
 - 14. NGO partners: Lead the implementation, provide training, and monitor outcomes.
 - 15. **Government:** Support with land and fund allocation and promoting gender-sensitive policies.
 - 16. Local authorities (Gram Panchayats): Ensure local buy-in and resolve conflicts.
 - 17. **Self-Help Groups:** Drive implementation, collective decision-making, and operations.
 - 18. Community: Both participants and beneficiaries come from the community, with men often assisting in heavy agricultural tasks and decision-making.
- 19. How does your intervention ensure **inclusivity and equal and meaningful participation** within the **community?** (123)

Describe how your intervention includes and engages different groups within the community. Consider aspects like gender, age, ethnicity, disability status, livelihoods, and other specific conditions (e.g., people living in prolonged crisis, migrants, and refugees). Explain how your intervention engages diverse segments of the rural community. Highlight the specific actions or strategies you use to reach these groups. If applicable, mention if your intervention uses specific approaches such as gender-responsive, gender-transformative, intersectionality, or other methods to ensure inclusivity and gender equality.

The intervention emphasizes inclusivity by:

- 20. **Targeting marginalized women**: The project focuses on including landless and tribal women who are part of the existing SHGs.
- 21. **Engaging men**: Involves men in awareness sessions and group meetings to address gender norms and reduce resistance.
- 22. **Intersectional approach**: Considers caste, age, marital status, and vulnerability to ensure diverse representation.
- 23. **Collective action**: Empowers women to advocate for community goals such as liquor bans and market space for produce.
- 24. **Gender-transformative methods**: Provides gender equity training and creates opportunities for women to gain public leadership roles.

Strategies include:

- Addressing barriers to mobility through collective visits to CNGs.
- Collective meetings with local governance representatives
- Offering gender-sensitive leadership training to enhance decision-making capabilities.

Building trust through early engagement with families and community leaders.

25. By using community engagement, what **results and impacts** have your good practice achieved? (151)

Please provide specific examples and evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of your intervention, focusing on both qualitative and quantitative outcomes related to livelihoods and well-being improvements.

Oualitative outcomes:

- Empowerment: Women gained the confidence to make decisions, advocate for resources, and address social issues like domestic violence.
- Community dynamics: Increased solidarity and collective problem-solving among SHG members.
- Gender norms: Improved communication skills and reduced hesitation in interacting with male leaders and officials.

Quantitative outcomes:

- *Nutrition*: 55.8% of women use CNG produce for home consumption, enhancing household dietary diversity.
- **Economic agency**: 60% of participants had no income before CNG; the intervention has increased earnings for some women up to ₹2,500–₹5,000 per month.
- Participation: 66% of women reported daily visits to CNG plots, reflecting high engagement.
- **Decision-making**: 68% of women reported improved recognition and autonomy in household financial decisions.

Evidence:

- High self-efficacy scores (86.29 intervention vs. 84.14 comparison).
- Improved mobility, with over 67% attending public meetings and 46.5% visiting markets regularly.

The initiative has demonstrated a holistic approach to addressing rural challenges, advancing both individual empowerment and community development.

26. Among these results, has good practice led to improvements in terms of **gender equality**, **women's empowerment**, **and/or social inclusion**? (292)

Describe the **behavioral changes** in terms of gender that the good practice promotes, emphasizing agency, leadership, and participation in local governance. Include efforts to challenge discriminatory norms and unequal power dynamics. Highlight also how the intervention has supported the well-being (including psychological resilience) of marginalized groups and enhanced their inclusion and participation in decision-making processes.

Gender equality:

The CNG initiative has led to significant progress in challenging gender norms and fostering gender equality:

Agency: Women gained confidence to make independent economic and household-level decisions, negotiate within markets, and advocate for community resources. Over 68% of women in the intervention group reported enhanced recognition and autonomy within their households.

Leadership: Women have taken on leadership roles in managing SHGs and advocating for community initiatives like liquor bans and improved market access. Their communication skills with local leaders and officials have remarkably improved.

Participation in governance: Some women now hold roles in Gram Panchayats and engage actively in decision-making within their communities. This shift has also led to increased attendance at public meetings (67% of CNG women versus 52% of non-CNG women).

Behavioural changes in gender norms:

Women's mobility increased, as many now travel daily to CNG plots and markets, demonstrating a break from traditional norms of confinement to domestic spaces.

Men's perceptions of women's roles have evolved positively, as many acknowledge the economic and nutritional benefits of women's participation in CNGs.

Resistance to gendered criticism from community members reflects women's growing resilience against discriminatory norms, such as sexist remarks in markets.

Supportformarginalized groups:

The initiative prioritizes inclusion by targeting landless, tribal, and socially vulnerable women. Key outcomes include:

Improved psychological resilience: Women reported feeling motivated, hopeful, and determined to excel, with 62% stating they feel more driven to achieve their goals than before.

Increased social inclusion: Women from marginalized groups now collaborate within SHGs, reducing isolation and building solidarity. Collective efforts have empowered them to address shared challenges, like lack of market access and water scarcity.

Enhanced decision-making: Women's involvement in financial decisions, such as loans, has increased, with 53.8% reporting joint decision-making with their husbands.

27. What **key challenges** did you encounter while implementing **the community engagement** activities, and **how did you address them**? (275)

Include any resistance from communities, pushback, or issues related to unequal power dynamics, if applicable.

Challenges:

Resistance from the community:

Initial scepticism from men, who believed women's participation in CNGs detracted from their household responsibilities.

Sexist remarks and lack of respect in male-dominated markets.

Power dynamics:

Unequal decision-making in households, with husbands often dominating decisions about loans and the use of funds.

Some CNG groups reported dominance by a few members, creating tensions.

Structural and logistical issues:

Lack of water for irrigation due to depleted groundwater levels and inadequate infrastructure (e.g., borewells).

Poor access to basic amenities like toilets and rest areas at CNG plots.

Heavy household workloads limited women's time for CNG activities.

Group dynamics:

Lack of experience in collective governance led to occasional conflicts among SHG members.

Responses and mitigation strategies:

Engaging men and families:

Early meetings with men and family members highlighted the benefits of CNG participation, such as better nutrition and reduced food costs. Involving men in CNG activities (e.g., agricultural tasks) built their understanding and support.

Addressing market challenges:

Women received leadership and communication training to strengthen their confidence in negotiating prices and asserting their presence in markets.

Promoting inclusive decision-making:

NGOs facilitated leadership training and conflict-resolution sessions within SHGs, helping women manage power imbalances within groups.

Tackling infrastructure issues:

Advocacy efforts targeted local authorities for infrastructure improvements, such as better water access and market facilities. Women are also exploring activities like fisheries and goat farming for income diversification.

Balancing workloads:

Training on time management and collective action reduced individual burdens, and group solidarity provided emotional support during challenging times.

By addressing these challenges, the initiative fostered a more inclusive and supportive environment, enabling women to overcome barriers and achieve greater empowerment and social inclusion.

28. What are the key **lessons learned** from your community engagement good practice? (258)

Inclusivity drives success:

Engaging landless and socially marginalized women through SHGs created opportunities for those traditionally excluded from economic activities. Prioritizing intersectionality ensured diverse participation and equitable benefits.

Collective action amplifies impact:

Working in groups empowered women to address shared challenges, such as accessing markets and resolving conflicts. Solidarity fostered resilience and strengthened women's voice in decision-making. The focus on collective action, such as advocating for resources and addressing gender-based violence, created a sense of shared responsibility and empowerment.

Empowering women requires multifaceted interventions: Providing agricultural training, leadership development, and gender sensitization collectively fostered women's confidence, mobility, and agency. The initiative demonstrated that skills development must go hand-in-hand with challenging discriminatory social norms.

Engaging men is essential:

Involving men in the early stages of implementation reduced resistance and fostered shared ownership of the initiative. Men's support enhanced women's ability to participate without household opposition.

Access to infrastructure is critical: Challenges like water scarcity and lack of market facilities highlighted the importance of physical resources for sustaining agricultural activities and improving market access.

Continuous capacity building is vital:

Periodic training on leadership, communication, and conflict resolution helped women overcome internal group dynamics and external challenges. Sustained support equips women to take on larger roles in governance and advocacy.

Behavior change takes time: Transforming gender norms required sustained engagement and training to build confidence, leadership, and communication skills among women while sensitizing the broader community.

Local ownership ensures durability: Ensuring that women took ownership of CNGs through shared decision-making and leadership strengthened their commitment and the likelihood of sustained operations.

29. Has this practice been **replicated** in the same context or in different contexts? What are the required conditions to replicate and adapt the practice in another context/geographical area? (46)

The concept of Community Nutrition Gardens has been scaled up by the government in the entire state. The required conditions are to have enabling policy framework, land and fund allocation by the government, leveraging social protection schemes and SHG platform and capacity building of SHG women.

30. How sustainable are the results achieved by this good practice? (322)

Describe the key elements that need to be in place to make the initiative sustainable, including enabling environment (legal and policy frameworks and institutions), local ownership, accountability, etc.

The results achieved through the CNG initiative are moderately sustainable, provided certain key conditions are met. While the initiative has fostered strong ownership and improved women's agency, long-term sustainability depends on addressing structural and systemic challenges.

Key elements for sustainability:

Enabling environment:

Legal and policy frameworks: Secure land rights for women's collectives to ensure long-term access to CNG plots. Policies promoting gender-sensitive market spaces and water access (e.g., borewell subsidies) are essential.

Institutional support: Continued engagement from local governments and NGOs is needed to provide technical guidance, resolve disputes, and secure resources like water and fencing.

Local ownership and accountability:

SHG women should remain primary decision-makers, with clear governance mechanisms to maintain equitable participation and resolve internal conflicts.

Transparent information sharing, such as land ownership and funding details, will ensure accountability and build trust among group members.

Economic viability:

Diversifying income streams (e.g., fish farming, livestock) can reduce dependence on vegetable production and increase resilience against environmental challenges.

Building partnerships with private-sector players for market access, branding, and fair pricing can sustain economic benefits.

Community engagement:

Continued efforts to challenge patriarchal norms and ensure community-wide buy-in will create a supportive environment for women's participation.

Engagement with male allies can reduce household burdens on women and promote shared responsibility for CNG operations.

Infrastructure development:

Reliable water access is critical. Investment in borewells, rainwater harvesting, or drip irrigation systems will address recurring water shortages.

Facilities like toilets and rest areas at CNG plots are essential to ensure safe and dignified participation for women.

Capacity-building and training:

Ongoing training in leadership, financial literacy, marketing, and agricultural techniques will enhance women's ability to adapt to challenges and scale up activities.

Incorporating digital literacy can improve access to online markets and government schemes.

CNG initiative has laid a strong foundation for sustainable gender empowerment and economic inclusion. However, continued investment in infrastructure, enabling policies, and community engagement is necessary to scale and sustain these outcomes over time.

31. Based on the conversations FAO held during the Community Engagement days, a definition of community engagement for empowerment was proposed:

"Community engagement for empowerment and community-led collective action can be defined as an inclusive and participatory process that enables community members to become active agents of change in decisions affecting their lives, health, and environment. This process develops their capacity to achieve sustainable outcomes for improved rural livelihoods. Embracing a rights-based approach, it prioritizes the agency and participation of all community members, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, caste, socioeconomic status, political affiliation, migration status, or ability/disability. Indeed, inclusive approaches recognize the complexities of overlapping marginalization and discrimination that can exclude different community members from decision-making processes and implement strategies to foster their participation, agency and empowerment."

We invite you to contribute to this definition. What would you add or change? Please share your thoughts, suggestions, and any additional elements you believe are crucial for a comprehensive understanding of community engagement approaches aimed at community-led collective action for inclusive rural transformation, people's empowerment and gender equality.

32. Based on your experience, what gaps or areas for improvement still need to be addressed in the field of community engagement? (470)

Limited access to resources and infrastructure:

Gap: Community engagement efforts often overlook the need for essential infrastructure like water supply, transportation, and market access, which are critical for sustaining initiatives like the CNG program.

Improvement: Increased investment in infrastructure (e.g., irrigation, storage) and integration of resource planning into project design.

Unequal participation and power dynamics:

Gap: Marginalized groups, including women, often face barriers to participation due to societal norms, lack of confidence, or dominance by a few members within collectives.

Improvement: Promote participatory governance within groups and ensure equitable representation of all voices. Use training to empower the vulnerable members to participate actively.

Sustainability challenges:

Gap: Many community engagement initiatives rely heavily on external funding and expertise, creating risks for long-term sustainability.

Improvement: Build local capacity for financial independence, resource management, and leadership. Encourage partnerships with local institutions to ensure continuity.

Resistance to gender equity and behavioural change:

Gap: Deeply rooted patriarchal norms often hinder gender-transformative approaches, and resistance from men or communities can limit progress.

Improvement: Increase community sensitization campaigns and engage men as allies from the outset. Use evidence-based storytelling to showcase successful examples of gender-equitable practices.

Inadequate attention to intersectionality:

Gap: Programs often fail to address intersecting forms of discrimination (e.g., caste, disability, or economic vulnerability), resulting in uneven impacts across diverse groups.

Improvement: Design interventions with an intersectional lens, considering the unique needs of subgroups and tailoring support to their circumstances.

Limited integration of technology:

Gap: There is insufficient use of digital tools to enhance community engagement, especially in rural areas with low literacy rates.

Improvement: Leverage mobile technology for information sharing, capacity-building, and market linkages. Provide training to improve digital literacy among participants.

Weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms:

Gap: Many initiatives lack robust systems to track progress, capture lessons, and adapt approaches based on data.

Improvement: Develop participatory monitoring and evaluation frameworks to ensure communities have a stake in measuring success and addressing gaps.

Insufficient focus on social cohesion:

Gap: Community engagement initiatives sometimes focus too narrowly on individual empowerment without fostering collective action or resolving broader social tensions.

Improvement: Facilitate inclusive dialogue to build trust, resolve conflicts, and promote shared goals within communities.

Scalability and replicability issues:

Gap: Successful practices are often localized and not easily adapted to other contexts due to differences in social, economic, and political environments.

Improvement: Document and disseminate learnings to create adaptable models that can be scaled or replicated in diverse settings.

Limited male engagement:

Gap: Community engagement often focuses exclusively on women's empowerment without addressing the role of men in perpetuating or challenging gender norms.

Improvement: Include men as stakeholders in discussions about gender equality and shared responsibilities in household and community activities.

By addressing these gaps, community engagement practices can become more inclusive, sustainable, and impactful, ensuring that they effectively empower marginalized groups while fostering community resilience.

33. What do you think is **FAO's role in the field of community engagement**? How can FAO support and enhance interventions like yours, if applicable? *Consider aspects such as policy advocacy, capacity development, funding, technical assistance, knowledge production and sharing, and fostering partnerships.*

Community Nutrition Garden Initiatives of the Department of Panchayat and Rural Development, Government of Madhya Pradesh supported by GIZ, FAO may provide support as below:

With NRLM for developing the marketing mechanism: We can work closely with FAO and NRLM to enhance the development of a structured and sustainable marketing mechanism for community nutrition gardens initiatives.

Presenting our Experience: FAO could share our successful experiences from Madhya Pradesh, potentially with an objective of integrating this approach with NRLM to explore opportunities for scaling the initiative nationwide and even to other countries.

Link(s) to specific references about your
good practice (e.g. reports, communication
products, videos, articles)

Please include attachment(s) or add here link(s) to documents/videos/podcasts/other with specific references.

Planting Seeds of Change

Issue 22 SNRD AP Newsletter - Newsletter SNRD Asia and the Pacific (Community Nutrition Garden: An approach towards Agro Ecological Transformation for Sustainable Food Systems

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS