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Women seek to bridge farming's gender gap

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Lima, Peru -- Latin American women comprise one-fifth of the region´s farmers, but they face inequalities such as obstacles to land ownership, loans and farming supplies, putting a crimp in food production, according to a new report by the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, or FAO.

According to its State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11 report ?Women in Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap for Development,? published on March 7, women farmers work more temporary or seasonal jobs and with lower income compared with their male counterparts.

?Closing the current gender gap is not only about social justice,? said Alan Bojanic, head of the Latin America and Caribbean office of the FAO. ?It is a key step in increasing productivity, reducing food insecurity and promoting sustainable development in Latin America, three key factors to fend with the current global scenario which is marked by rising food prices.

Women in Latin America have less access to land, and when they do, it is usually a smaller and lower-quality plots. They also have fewer heads of livestock and use less technology than men.

The report said families benefit when women have more decision-making powers in household finances, because they spend more on food, education, health care and clothing.

Studies in Brazil have shown that mothers´ income has a greater impact on her children´s nutrition than that of fathers, and that extended co-habitating Mexican families have shown that income contributed to the household by women ? not only mothers ? has a greater impact on children´s nutrition than money generated by men, report said.

The FAO called on governments to eliminate discriminatory laws that hurt women´s opportunities and to improve their access to farming resources, education and loans.

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