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“Exploring opportunities ...
for managing natural resources and a better life for all”

Gendered governance for sustainable transformations in agri-food systems

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Abstract

Agri-food systems (AFS) are complex multi-actor and multi-resource systems that are continuously adapting and evolving. Changes in them can be attributed to the adjustments in their components and interactions between them along with the external drivers like climate change. Additionally, governance strategies also influence the trajectory of change in these systems. In this paper, we critically explore how governance of agri-food systems (AFS) is intricately intertwined with gender and other social dynamics further affecting the way they transform.

Gender, often intersecting with other domains of disadvantage, such as poverty, caste, ethnicity, age or life-cycle affects the access and control over resources and the development outcomes in AFS. For instance, women, despite their integral role in influencing the transformation pathways in AFS, rarely participate in the governance processes. Their participation or perhaps a lack of it remains largely an outcome of prevalent gender norms and structural inequalities.

Evidence shows that for ensuring inclusive transformation of agri-food systems, integrating gender and social equity considerations into institutions, policies, and programmes remains essential. Such integration requires a paradigm shift in the global governance scholarship that could divert the focus towards actor interactions, identifying opportunities within governance spaces at different levels, and emphasising the role of policy language. Thus, by examining the critical role that different governance arrangements play in influencing the AFS sustainability and gender equality goals at various scales, we explore the evolving discourse on inclusive and equitable governance strategies. Through qualitative evidence synthesis, our main aim is to comprehend the interrelationship between gender, governance, sustainability, and agri-food systems. We also argue for a more nuanced lens for understanding and adopting governance strategies that enhance the existing knowledge systems and practices and can work towards making them more sustainable and resilient. The paper addresses the key question of “How gender equality lens in governance can facilitate equitable and sustainable transformations in agri-food systems?” This discussion significantly contributes towards understanding the diverse contextual perspectives in natural resource and food systems governance.

Keywords: Agri-food systems, gender, governance, social equity, socio-ecological systems, transformation