

# "Harvesting Wisdom: Learning and Insights from the International Conference on 'FROM RESEARCH TO IMPACT' for Just and Resilient Agri-Food Systems"

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Published by the Director General, MANAGE  
on behalf of the National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management (MANAGE),  
Rajendranagar, Hyderabad - 500030, Telangana, India.

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## About the Authors

Dr. Shirisha Junuthula, a MANAGE Fellow at the Centre for Gender in Agriculture, Nutritional Security & Urban Agriculture, holds a Ph.D. in Foods & Nutrition from Prof. Jayashankar Telangana State Agricultural University, Hyderabad. She received ICSSR Short-Term Fellowship during her doctoral program and an IMMANA Fellowship for her post-doctoral project. With a Project Internship at ICRISAT during her Masters, Dr. Junuthula brings 4 years of experience in Nutrition and Child development fields, contributing to NIN and UN-FAO collaborative projects at MANAGE. She has successfully cleared UGC-NET and ICAR-NET in Home Science, showcasing her expertise. Her research prowess is evident through publications in international platforms and NASS rated journals.

Dr. Veenita Kumari, currently the Deputy Director at MANAGE's Centre for Gender in Agriculture, Nutritional Security & Urban Agriculture, brings over 13 years of experience as an Assistant Professor at the College of Home Science, Central Agricultural University, Tura, Meghalaya. A M.Sc. university gold medalist, Dr. Veenita has 26 published research articles and two book chapters. Her expertise spans Women Empowerment, Gender Studies, Women in Agriculture, Community Nutrition, Rural Development, Foods & Nutritional Security, Nutrition Sensitive Agriculture, Urban Agriculture, and Microgreens. She is a recipient of the Young Scientist Award and Young Teacher Award, recognizing her academic excellence.



## INTRODUCTION

This conference holds significant importance in the field of agriculture and food systems, as it serves as a platform by CGIAR to bridge the gap between research and actionable impact. It provides a space for participants to share their knowledge and experiences, foster collaboration, and drive meaningful change in agri-food systems to make them more just and resilient.

The conference is offering a regular opportunity for experts and stakeholders to convene, exchange insights, and keep pace with the evolving dynamics of agri-food systems. Each year, the event is held in a different location, making it accessible to a diverse range of participants and providing a unique perspective on the challenges faced in various regions.



**Participants group photo at the conference**

## **Day 1: Monday, 9 October, 2023**

The conference "FROM RESEARCH TO IMPACT: Towards just and resilient agri-food systems" kicked off with an air of excitement and anticipation in New Delhi on Monday, 9th October, 2023. The day began with the registration of participants from diverse backgrounds, all united by a common goal: to advance agri-food systems for a more equitable and resilient future.

The inaugural session took place in the morning, setting the stage for four days of intensive discussions, knowledge-sharing, and collaborative efforts. Distinguished speakers emphasized the importance of addressing the challenges facing agri-food systems and working towards solutions that are just and sustainable.

During the opening plenary, experts in the field shared their insights on the conference's key themes. They highlighted the need for innovative approaches and systemic change to achieve gender equality and social inclusion in agri-food systems.

After a brief tea break, the day continued with six parallel sessions, each focusing on different aspects of agri-food systems and gender dynamics. These sessions allowed participants to delve deeper into specific topics, exchange ideas, and explore potential solutions.

## **Day 2: Tuesday, 10 October, 2023**

The second day of the conference started with another plenary session, which brought together thought leaders, researchers, and practitioners to reflect on the previous day's discussions and set the tone for the day ahead. Gender equality and social inclusion remained at the forefront of the conversations.

Participants then dispersed into six parallel sessions, each exploring various aspects of agri-food systems and gender dynamics. The sessions provided a platform for in-depth discussions, knowledge sharing, and collaborative problem-solving.

Tea breaks served as opportunities for informal networking and sharing insights with fellow attendees. These breaks encouraged meaningful interactions and the exchange of ideas that would shape the course of the conference.



### **Day 3: Wednesday, 11 October, 2023**

On the third day of the conference, participants reconvened for another plenary session, which reinforced the importance of the themes and discussions that had unfolded over the previous two days. The enthusiasm and commitment of the attendees were palpable as they continued to explore the intricacies of agri-food systems.

Six parallel sessions ran throughout the day, enabling attendees to engage with a diverse range of topics and speakers. These sessions were instrumental in broadening the participants' understanding and perspective on gender dynamics within agri-food systems.

Lunch provided not only nourishment for the body but also opportunities for participants to engage in informal discussions and network with colleagues, further enhancing the collaborative spirit of the event.

### **Day 4: Thursday, 12 October, 2023**

The final day of the conference featured a comprehensive discussion on the insights and outcomes of the previous days' discussions. The final plenary session and closing ceremony provided an opportunity to reflect on the key takeaways and chart a path forward for the future of agri-food systems.

As the conference drew to a close, participants departed with a sense of purpose and renewed dedication to advancing gender equality and social inclusion in agri-food systems. The event had successfully bridged research with action, paving the way for impactful changes in the agri-food sector.

The conference also celebrated the importance of culture with a captivating cultural performance and concluded with a cocktail reception, fostering a sense of camaraderie and collaboration among participants.

The diverse sessions, thought-provoking discussions, and networking opportunities ensured that the conference "FROM RESEARCH TO IMPACT: Towards just and resilient agri-food systems" was a resounding success. It showcased the commitment of participants to working towards more equitable and resilient agri-food systems, setting the stage for transformative change in the field.

## **Some of the key topics and sessions from the conference "FROM RESEARCH TO IMPACT: Towards just and resilient agri-food systems."**

### **1. Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Agri-Food Systems:**

#### **An Innovative Approach to Examination (Capacity Strengthening)**

As an attendees, we found this session to be exceptionally enlightening. The speakers presented innovative approaches to examining and addressing gender equality and social inclusion within agri-food systems. They emphasized the importance of recognizing and tackling the deep-rooted inequalities that exist in this sector. I was inspired by the examples of real-world initiatives that have successfully challenged the status quo.

The discussions in this session underscored the significance of inclusivity in the agricultural sector. It became clear that sustainable change could only be achieved when marginalized groups, especially women, were actively involved in decision-making processes. The session also highlighted the need for comprehensive data collection and analysis to understand the complexities of gender dynamics within agri-food systems.

### **2. Designing Gender-Smart Agricultural Advisory Services: Examining Evidence from Ethiopia, India, and Uganda (Capacity Strengthening)**

This session provided a comprehensive view of the challenges and opportunities in designing gender-smart agricultural advisory services. The case studies from Ethiopia, India, and Uganda revealed the diverse approaches taken in different regions and the unique solutions implemented to enhance the participation of women in agriculture.

We are particularly impressed by the emphasis on tailoring advisory services to the specific needs and contexts of women farmers.

This approach not only improves their access to resources and knowledge but also strengthens their overall empowerment. It was clear that a one-size-fits-all model does not work in promoting gender equality in agri-food systems.

### **3. Supporting Young People's Entrepreneurship and Empowerment in and Beyond Agri-Food Systems**

The session on supporting young people's entrepreneurship and empowerment was both inspiring and thought-provoking. It emphasized the critical role of young individuals in shaping the future of agri-food systems. The insights shared in this session showed that the involvement of youth is not just an option but a necessity for sustainable development.

The examples of successful youth-led initiatives from different countries were a testament to the creative and innovative solutions that young people bring to the table. The session also highlighted the need for mentorship and access to resources to help young entrepreneurs thrive in agri-food systems.

### **4. Towards Systemic Change: Challenging Inequalities in Institutions and Policies**

This session brought to the forefront the need for systemic change in agri-food systems. Attendees discussed how institutional and policy-level inequalities often perpetuate gender disparities. We left this session with a deep appreciation for the importance of advocating for policy changes that ensure fairness and equality for all.

The presentations shared real-world examples of organizations and institutions that have successfully challenged these inequalities. This session left me with a renewed sense of purpose and the belief that we can drive significant change when we address systemic issues at their root.

### **5. Understanding the Outcomes of Agri-Food System Interventions on Women's Empowerment**

The insights shared in this session shed light on the measurable outcomes of interventions aimed at empowering women in agri-food systems. It was clear that investments in women's empowerment not only benefit individuals but also have a positive ripple effect on entire communities.

We appreciated the emphasis on the need for clear indicators and data to assess the impact of interventions. This evidence-based approach ensures that resources are directed where they can make the most difference.

## **6. Improving Women's Status and Enhancing Nutrition Outcomes:**

### **Insights from Practice**

This session explored the vital link between women's status and nutrition outcomes in agri-food systems. Attendees learned how improving women's access to resources, education, and decision-making power can have a direct impact on the nutritional well-being of their families and communities.

The practical insights shared in this session served as a reminder that women are central to ensuring food security and good nutrition. It was inspiring to hear about the success stories of projects that have improved both women's status and nutrition outcomes.

## **7. Understanding Young People's Involvement with Agri-Food Systems and Rural Geographies**

This session provided valuable insights into the engagement of young people in agri-food systems and rural areas. It became evident that young people are not just the future of agriculture; they are the present. The discussions underscored the need to create opportunities for young people to thrive in rural settings.

The examples of successful youth-driven initiatives and projects were both inspiring and motivating. This session reinforced the idea that young people are dynamic agents of change, and their participation in agri-food systems is essential for their sustainability.

**MANAGE Session delivered by Dr Veenita Kumari, DD (Gender Studies)  
and Dr Shirisha Junuthula, MANAGE Fellow**

**Session title: Strengthening Capacities of Extension Advisory Service  
(EAS) Providers in Making Food Systems Gender- and Nutrition-  
Sensitive: MANAGE Experiences (Capacity Strengthening)**

This particular session proved to be a pivotal moment in the conference, shedding light on the essential role of Extension Advisory Service (EAS) providers in making food systems more gender- and nutrition-sensitive. The session was divided into three distinct parts, each offering unique insights and experiences.

**Part 1: FAO and MANAGE Project**

The first part of the session focused on the collaboration between the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and MANAGE (National Institute of Agricultural Extension Management). The partnership between these organizations highlighted the significance of global and national efforts to promote gender equality and nutrition-sensitive food systems.



**Dr Shirisha delivering the session at the conference**

Attendees learned about the initiatives undertaken by FAO and MANAGE, which aimed to build the capacities of EAS providers. These initiatives were crucial in equipping extension service providers with the knowledge and skills to address gender disparities and nutrition-related challenges within agri-food systems. The session emphasized that capacity strengthening at this level is essential to ensure that gender- and nutrition-sensitive practices are integrated into the fabric of agricultural extension services.

### **Part 2: GIZ and MANAGE Collaborative Project**

The second part of the session focused on the collaborative efforts between the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) and MANAGE. This collaboration demonstrated the global dimension of the challenges and the need for international partnerships to address them effectively.



**Dr Veenita Kumari delivering the session at the conference**

Attendees were provided with an in-depth look at the projects undertaken in collaboration with GIZ. These projects were aimed at enhancing the capacities of EAS providers, with a strong focus on gender and nutrition sensitivity. The shared experiences highlighted the importance of adapting strategies to local contexts while maintaining a global perspective.

### Part 3: Gender and Agriculture Development

The final part of the session delved into the broader context of gender and agriculture development. It emphasized the pivotal role that EAS providers play in fostering gender equality within agri-food systems. Attendees gained a deeper understanding of the critical link between gender dynamics and agricultural development.

A significant aspect of this part was the presentation of a video that underscored the importance of gender participation in agriculture. The video showcased real-world challenges and called for collective solutions. It served as a powerful reminder of the urgency of addressing gender disparities and the tangible impact that gender-sensitive practices can have on food systems.

The session left attendees with a clear understanding of the necessity of strengthening the capacities of EAS providers in making food systems more gender- and nutrition-sensitive. It highlighted the essential role of international collaborations and showcased the transformative potential of these initiatives.



**Group photo with the session attendees**

Overall, the session not only informed but also inspired attendees to take action in their own spheres of influence to contribute to more equitable and nutrition-sensitive agri-food systems. It emphasized that a concerted effort at the grassroots level is essential for achieving meaningful change in the broader agricultural landscape.

In conclusion, the International Conference on "FROM RESEARCH TO IMPACT: Towards just and resilient agri-food systems" proved to be an illuminating and transformative event. It served as a melting pot of ideas, experiences, and expertise, with attendees and presenters alike emerging with a deepened understanding of the critical issues facing agri-food systems and a heightened commitment to driving change.

Throughout the conference, we witnessed the power of collaboration and knowledge sharing. The sessions on gender equality and social inclusion, capacity strengthening, and innovative approaches to agri-food systems underscored the complexities and opportunities within the field. Attendees learned that addressing these challenges necessitates a multifaceted and inclusive approach, where all stakeholders have a role to play.

As we departed from this annual gathering, our shared experience reinforced the notion that transformation is not just a vision but a tangible reality. The connections forged and the lessons learned at this conference will undoubtedly continue to ripple through the agri-food systems landscape, inspiring and guiding the actions of attendees in their respective roles and regions.

This conference, with its consistent commitment to propelling research into impactful change, has become a vital catalyst for the advancement of just and resilient agri-food systems. As we look forward to the next iteration of this remarkable event, we carry with us a renewed dedication to the cause, armed with the wisdom and insights gleaned from this year's gathering. With the continued collaboration of organizations and individuals worldwide, we move forward with the shared goal of creating a more equitable, sustainable, and resilient future for agri-food systems across the globe.





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