



## Environment, Food and Water Security

Millions of people, especially those living in marginalized and remote areas, lack access to safe drinking water. Many communities are facing severe food shortages and other environmental stressors due to climate change.<sup>1</sup> These challenges impact all members of society, but can be particularly challenging to women and girls, who often have specific responsibilities and needs in relation to natural resources. Discriminatory gender roles and exclusion from decision-making processes present many barriers to women's ability to own and manage basic resources. In many societies, women lack the ability to buy or inherit land due to their higher rates of poverty and their unequal status under laws and social norms. Although women perform a majority of the agricultural work around the world, they own less than 2% of the world's land.<sup>2</sup>

*With the same access to productive resources as men, women could increase yields on their farms by 20-30% and lift 150 million people out of hunger.<sup>6</sup>*

Women and girls often bear the majority of responsibilities in agricultural work while also trying to meet the food, water, and energy needs of the family and community.<sup>3</sup> In many areas, women and girls must travel long distances to get water and fuel. For women, time spent collecting water and fuel reduces time that could be spent on income-generating activities. For girls, traveling to access basic resources can endanger their physical safety and takes valuable time away from education. Limited access to health care, often caused by discriminatory social norms, increases women's and girls' vulnerability to illness from water and food-borne diseases.<sup>4</sup> According to a United Nations report from Sub-Saharan Africa, involving and engaging women and girls is critical to developing solutions for environmental and natural resource sustainability.<sup>5</sup> Access to food, water, and natural resources is essential to survival and to ensuring that women and girls can exercise the full spectrum of their human rights.

VGIF reached about **24,660** people through environment, food and water security projects, including **more than 14,000** women and girls

From 1970-2013, VGIF invested more than 429,680 USD to support 95 projects to increase women's and girls' access to food, water, and other natural resources and increase their participation in environmental sustainability efforts

### VGIF grantees used a range of strategies in this topic area including:

- Training women in vegetable farming and livestock raising to increase yields;
- Developing communal gardens to improve the local food supply;
- Building wells, water harvesting systems, and latrines to enable women to better manage the community's water supply;
- Educating communities about nutrition and food security;
- Engaging communities to promote environmental sustainability and reforestation.

## PROJECT HIGHLIGHT: Wells and Women Water Keepers



The “Women Water Keepers Project” in Nicaragua by Wangki Tangni and MADRE was funded by VGIF in 2011-2012 to improve water management systems for indigenous Miskito women to provide access to clean, safe water to reduce the incidence of waterborne diseases among community members. Over the course of the project, 10 water wells were repaired and 2 water pumps were installed. Wangki Tangni hosted trainings for women on water care and management, as well as trainings on how to advocate for water rights and sustainability. In addition, they distributed a manual on water conservation and management in Spanish and the native indigenous language.

Wangki Tangni shared with VGIF the story of Prudilia, an Indigenous Miskito woman helping to support the 11 people living in her home. After participating in the project, Prudilia reported that her family’s health had improved and she became more informed over the course of the grant. **She stated that “she now feels**

**more empowered to demand her human rights, both as a woman and as an Indigenous Person.”**

## VGIF ACHIEVEMENTS: Environment, Food, and Water Security

From 1970-2013, VGIF funded **95 projects** that included an environment, food, and water security component, improving women’s and girls’ access to natural resources and basic survival needs.

Environment, food, and water security encompassed projects to increase agricultural production, ensure access to safe water, and develop sanitation systems and latrines. The majority of VGIF’s funded projects focused on agriculture including livestock production, providing sources of income and improving the food supply for **80 different communities**. Through agriculture projects alone, VGIF reached more than **21,400** people.

<sup>1</sup> Women’s Environment & Development Organization, “What We Do.” (WEDO, 2014), available at <http://bit.ly/1rB8wTO>.

<sup>2</sup> Rebecca Pearl, “Common Ground: Women’s Access to Natural Resources and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals.” (WEDO, 2003)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, “Water and Gender.” (UN Water, 2013), available at <http://bit.ly/1m6B6Zk>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.