

Title:

Invisible Partners: Strengthening Gender Equality in Agricultural Contracting through the UNIDROIT/FAO/IFAD Legal Guide

Abstract:

Contract farming has become central to global agricultural systems, promising market stability, economic inclusion, and poverty alleviation. For over a decade, the UNIDROIT/FAO/IFAD Legal Guide on Contract Farming (“the Guide”) has provided crucial international legal guidance on agricultural production contracts. However, despite recognising women farmers' substantial contributions, the Guide lacks enforceable gender informed provisions critical for real-world empowerment. This essay critically evaluates the Guide’s approach to gender equality, highlighting gaps between recognition and meaningful implementation. Drawing upon international human rights obligations, comparative national frameworks, and practical sector-specific examples, the essay proposes targeted recommendations to strengthen future editions of the Guide, specifically advocating measures to ensure women's equal participation in negotiation processes, equitable access to resources, and gender-responsive dispute-resolution mechanisms.

Gender Equality in the Guide: Existing Strengths and Opportunities

Contract farming, as framed by the UNIDROIT/FAO/IFAD Legal Guide on Contract Farming (“Guide”), has significant potential to positively impact gender equality by acknowledging women’s essential contributions to agricultural production, rural livelihoods, and food security.¹ Notably, the Guide recognises women’s pivotal role in agriculture

¹ International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), *UNIDROIT/FAO/IFAD Legal Guide on Contract Farming* (Guide, 2015) <https://www.unidroit.org/english/guides/2015contractfarming/cf-guide-2015-e.pdf>.

globally, emphasising their extensive contributions, particularly in developing countries, where they comprise approximately 43% of the agricultural labour force.² Its foundational principles, fairness, transparency, and good faith, if interpreted and applied through a gender responsive lens, create opportunities for women's increased participation and equitable recognition in agricultural contracts.³

Additionally, the Guide highlights the importance of producer organisations, identifying their potential as critical platforms for producer empowerment through collective bargaining.⁴

While not specifically gender-focused, such organisations offer substantial opportunities for enhancing women's active participation, representation, and leadership, which empirical evidence confirms as effective for reducing gender disparities. Moreover, the Guide's broad emphasis on transparency and good faith in contractual arrangements further establishes an enabling context conducive to promoting gender equality if supported by gender sensitive (GS) provisions.

This essay critically analyses the extent to which the Guide integrates gender equality considerations, highlighting strengths but primarily focusing on specific gaps that hinder women's equitable participation. While acknowledging the Guide's strengths, including recognition of women's pivotal contributions to agriculture and its foundational principles of fairness, transparency, and collective empowerment, the analysis identifies significant limitations in its practical effectiveness due to the absence of GS provisions.

The discussion is structured around three targeted areas for enhancing gender equality within agricultural contracts: firstly, ensuring women's participation in contract negotiations; secondly, securing women's equitable access to finance, inputs, and resources; and thirdly,

² CGIAR, 'Recognizing the Agricultural Efforts of Women' (Web Page, 16 March 2021) <https://cgiar.org/news-events/news/cgiar-celebrates-international-womens-day-2021/>; Guide (n 1) ch 1 [58].

³ Ibid ch 1 [7]–[9], ch 2 [61], [64].

⁴ Ibid ch 2 [20]–[24], [40]–[41].

establishing gender informed dispute-resolution mechanisms. Drawing from international human rights frameworks, comparative national experiences, and successful sector-specific practices, each section offers precise recommendations designed to directly address the identified limitations.

It is acknowledged from the outset that these recommendations involve practical complexities and implementation challenges beyond what can be comprehensively addressed within this essay, given both the constraints of word length and the author's level of expertise.

Nevertheless, by synthesising existing literature and best practices, the analysis aims to constructively expand scholarly discourse, ultimately contributing to the development of a more inclusive, effective, and gender responsive Guide.

Limitations and Recommendations for Strengthening Gender Equality

(i) Enhancing Women's Meaningful Participation in Contract Negotiations

Although the Guide recognises fairness, transparency, and good faith as foundational principles in contract formation, it notably fails to include guidance ensuring women's direct and meaningful participation in negotiation processes.⁵ It highlights producers' limited negotiation power, attributing it to factors such as lack of experience or insufficient information.⁶ Yet, critically, the Guide overlooks GS barriers that disproportionately constrain women's negotiation capabilities, including patriarchal norms, limited education or literacy, restricted mobility, and unequal household bargaining power.⁷

⁵ Guide (n 1) ch 2 [64]-[68].

⁶ Ibid ch 2 [64]-[68].

⁷ UN Women, 'Remove the Barriers' (Web Page) <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/csw61/remove-the-barriers>.

Empirical evidence confirms that without measures addressing these barriers, agricultural contracts overwhelmingly favour male household heads.⁸ In Kenya’s horticultural sector, despite women providing approximately 90% of the total labour, fewer than 10% of contracts are awarded directly to women.⁹ This imbalance arises precisely because agricultural contracts typically target formally recognised landowners, predominantly men. Similar findings emerged from Navarra’s (2019) research in Mozambique, demonstrating that without provisions recognising women's roles, contract farming arrangements disproportionately favour male household heads, systematically marginalising women and restricting their access to economic benefits.¹⁰

In response to these critical gaps, international standards mandate proactive corrective measures. Article 14 of the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (“CEDAW”) obligates states to proactively ensure rural women’s equal participation in agricultural economic opportunities, including contract farming.¹¹ CEDAW’s *General Recommendation No. 34 (2016)* clarifies states' duties further, mandating the elimination of gender discrimination and proactive measures ensuring women’s rights to equitably access, control, own, and manage productive agricultural resources.¹²

Complementing this, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights require agricultural businesses and investors to undertake human rights due diligence processes that

⁸ Melissa Hidrobo et al, 'Making Complementary Agricultural Resources, Technologies, and Services More Gender-Responsive' (2024) 42 *Global Food Security* 100778 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2024.100778>.

⁹ Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, *Improving Opportunities for Women in Smallholder-based Supply Chains: Business Case and Practical Guidance for International Food Companies* (Guide, 2010) 19 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2024.100778>.

¹⁰ Cecilia Navarra, 'Contract Farming in Mozambique: Implications on Gender Inequalities Within and Across Rural Households' (Working Paper No wp-2018-26, UNU-WIDER, 2018) <https://doi.org/10.1111/saje.12222>.

¹¹ *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, opened for signature 18 December 1979, 1249 UNTS 13 (entered into force 3 September 1981) art 14 ('CEDAW').

¹² Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *General Recommendation No 34 on the Rights of Rural Women*, UN Doc CEDAW/C/GC/34 (7 March 2016).

assess and address human rights impacts, including gender inequalities, within their contractual practices.¹³

Scholarly analyses strongly reinforce the necessity for legal innovations in contract arrangements. Brewin and Murphy (2019), in "The Farmer and Her Husband: Legal Innovations for Women in Contract Farming," underscore the systemic marginalisation of women within agricultural contracts.¹⁴ They highlight that women frequently provide significant labour yet remain excluded from signing contracts, severely limiting their control over economic outcomes. The authors advocate legal measures such as mandatory joint spousal signatures or clear consent requirements from female spouses to effectively address these imbalances. They propose concrete measures, including compulsory written consent by spouses affected by agricultural contracts, gender-inclusive contract templates, and structured provisions to ensure women's informed consent, aiming to rebalance power dynamics and safeguard women's economic rights within agricultural contractual relationships.¹⁵

Given this clear alignment of empirical evidence and international standards, the omission of gender-inclusive negotiation provisions within the Guide represents a significant missed opportunity. Without guidance, existing gender disparities remain entrenched, perpetuating women's marginalisation and limiting their ability to benefit equitably from contract farming arrangements.

Recommendations for Gender-Inclusive Negotiation Practices

¹³ United Nations Human Rights Council, Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework, UN Doc A/HRC/17/31 (21 March 2011); BSR, *10 Human Rights Priorities for the Food, Beverage, and Agriculture Sector* (Web Page) <https://www.bsr.org/en/primers/10-human-rights-priorities-for-food-beverage-and-agriculture-sector>.

¹⁴ Sarah Brewin and Sophia Murphy, *The Farmer and Her Husband: Legal Innovations for Women in Contract Farming* (Policy Brief No 8, International Institute for Sustainable Development, February 2019) <https://www.iisd.org/system/files/publications/women-contract-farming-policy-brief-en.pdf>.

¹⁵ *Ibid* 4-11.

To effectively bridge existing gaps, future revisions of the Guide should incorporate measures mandating and supporting women’s active participation in contract negotiations. Building upon previously discussed evidence and international obligations, the following contractual measures are proposed:

(A) Gender-Inclusive Contractual Clauses:

“Agricultural production contracts should require or strongly encourage women's meaningful engagement and direct representation throughout negotiation, signing, and implementation stages. Provisions should mandate joint spousal signatures or recognise women individually as contracting parties, guaranteeing their full legal and economic recognition.”

(B) Structured Measures Facilitating Women’s Engagement:

“Contracts should embed practical strategies designed to overcome GS barriers, including balanced representation within negotiation committees, scheduling negotiation sessions accommodating women’s household responsibilities, appointing female facilitators or mediators, and maintaining detailed records and regular reporting of women’s involvement and roles.”

Embedding these GS measures directly into the Guide will tangibly empower women, align with international human rights standards, enhance agricultural productivity, and advance genuine gender equality within agricultural contracting arrangements.

Implementation and Monitoring of Women's Engagement

To translate these measures into tangible improvements, future editions of the Guide must incorporate clear implementation and accountability structures tailored specifically to

women's involvement. Drawing from global best practices and successful experiences, the following mechanisms are recommended:

(A) Gender disaggregated Participation Monitoring:

“Contracts should mandate regular, transparent tracking and reporting of women’s actual involvement in negotiation processes. Monitoring must capture the proportion of women participants, their specific roles, and encountered barriers, thus enabling accountability, informing necessary adjustments, and clearly demonstrating progress toward gender equality.”

(B) Gender-focused Oversight Structures:

“Contractual arrangements should establish balanced oversight or advisory committees responsible for enforcing GS negotiation provisions. Committees must have defined mandates to oversee women’s participation, offer actionable recommendations, and enforce corrective measures as necessary.”

(C) Mandatory Gender Impact Assessments in Negotiation:

“Agricultural contracts should require periodic gender impact assessments specifically addressing negotiation processes. These evaluations should systematically identify GS barriers, document women's empowerment progress, and recommend ongoing adjustments to enhance women’s meaningful inclusion and equitable outcomes.”

Incorporating these concrete implementation and monitoring recommendations into the Guide will significantly boost accountability, ensuring active enforcement of commitments to gender equality. Such steps will empower women substantively, address persistent inequalities directly, and improve agricultural productivity and household welfare outcomes.

(ii) Promoting Women’s Equitable Access to Resources, Inputs, and Finance

The Guide outlines contractors' responsibilities regarding agricultural inputs, technical assistance, and financial support, emphasising fairness, transparency, and clear obligations.¹⁶ However, it notably lacks guidance addressing GS barriers that disproportionately limit women's access to these critical resources. While paragraphs 63–94 discuss input provision, paragraphs 87–91 detail financial support, and paragraphs 113 and 170 cover training responsibilities, none specifically address systemic obstacles faced uniquely by women, such as limited collateral, insecure land tenure, restricted access to credit, and exclusion from technical training.¹⁷

International human rights standards provide a clear benchmark illustrating the significance of this omission. Specifically, *CEDAW* mandates proactive state measures to ensure rural women's equal access to productive resources, financial services, technology, and training.¹⁸ *CEDAW's General Recommendation No. 34 (2016)* further emphasises the obligation to eliminate discriminatory practices and ensure rural women's rights to access, control, and manage agricultural resources equally.¹⁹ Additionally, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (*UNGPs*) require agribusinesses to undertake GS human rights due diligence, proactively identifying and mitigating gender based inequalities within their agricultural contracting practices.²⁰

Empirical research consistently underscores the necessity and transformative potential of addressing these gender disparities. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2023) has highlighted persistent global gender gaps in agriculture, emphasising that interventions are

¹⁶ Guide (n 1) ch 3 [63]-[94].

¹⁷ Guide (n 1) ch 3 [63]-[94], [87]-[91], [113], [170]; Cheryl Doss and Ruth Meinzen-Dick, 'Land tenure security for women: A conceptual framework' (2020) 99 *Land Use Policy* 105080 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2020.105080>.

¹⁸ *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, opened for signature 18 December 1979, 1249 UNTS 13 (entered into force 3 September 1981) art 14 ('CEDAW').

¹⁹ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, General Recommendation No 34 on the Rights of Rural Women, UN Doc CEDAW/C/GC/34 (7 March 2016).

²⁰ United Nations Human Rights Council, Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework, UN Doc A/HRC/17/31 (21 March 2011).

essential to dismantle structural biases limiting women's productivity and economic empowerment.²¹ The World Bank's "Women, Business and the Law" report (2021) similarly identifies legal reforms such as joint titling of marital property and equal inheritance rights as critical for significantly enhancing women's agricultural participation.²² The effectiveness of interventions is further evidenced by empirical research from Puspa Raj Ghimire et al. (2016) demonstrating that joint titling substantially improved women's access to credit, inputs, and technical training, resulting in measurable socio-economic empowerment.²³

The positive impact of gender targeted initiatives is also demonstrated practically in projects such as the International Finance Corporation's seed-production programme in Bangladesh, which directly channelled credit, agricultural inputs, and tailored technical assistance to women, substantially boosting their productivity and economic independence.²⁴ Similarly, - GS training interventions in Ghana's cocoa sector have significantly increased women farmers' efficiency and yields, effectively reducing economic disparities, empowering women, and enhancing overall household welfare.²⁵

Given these insights, the Guide's omission of GS resource allocation measures represents a significant missed opportunity. Without incorporating enforceable GS provisions, agricultural

²¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems – Overview* (Report, 2023) 4, 5-8;

²² World Bank Group, *Women, Business and the Law 2024* (Report, 2024) 1-2; Kathleen Sexsmith, *Promoting Gender Equality in Foreign Agricultural Investments: Lessons from Voluntary Sustainability Standards* (Report, International Institute for Sustainable Development, January 2017) 3.

²³ Puspa Raj Ghimire et al, 'Does Joint Land Ownership Empower Rural Women Socio-economically? Evidence from Eastern Nepal' (2024) 138 *Land Use Policy* 107052 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2024.107052>.

²⁴ Lamia El-Fattal, *Turning Agriculture into Agribusiness: Overcoming Institutional Barriers to Rural Women's Entrepreneurship* (Policy Brief, Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture & Natural Resource Management (WOCAN), 2012) https://www.wocan.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/WOCAN_Turning-Agriculture-into-Agribusiness.pdf.

²⁵ Abdul-Basit Tampuli Abukari, Abraham Zakaria and Shaibu Baanni Azumah, 'Gender-based Participation in Income Generating Activities in Cocoa Growing Communities: The Role of Youth Training Programs' (2022) 8(2) *Heliyon* e08880 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e08880>; Mondelez International, *Cocoa Life: A Story on Women's Empowerment in Ghana* (Web Page) <https://www.cocoalife.org/in-the-cocoa-origins/cocoa-life-in-ghana/a-story-on-womens-empowerment-in-ghana/>.

contracts risk inadvertently reinforcing systemic inequalities, limiting women’s meaningful participation and benefit from agricultural development.

Recommendations for Guide Revision: Targeted Gender-Responsive Resource

Allocation

To effectively address identified gaps, future revisions of the Guide should integrate enforceable, gender-responsive provisions to guarantee equitable access to financial, technical, and agricultural resources. Based on international standards (*CEDAW*, *UNGPs*) and evidence from successful national practices, the following targeted recommendations are proposed:

(A) Gender-Responsive Resource Allocation Provisions:

“Agricultural production contracts should mandate contractors to proactively facilitate equitable, direct access for women farmers to financial services, agricultural inputs (including seeds, fertilisers, equipment), extension services, and agricultural technology.”

“Contracts should incorporate provisions supporting alternative collateral arrangements such as collective guarantees, joint land titles, or future harvest agreements to address GS barriers related to collateral.”

“Additionally, contracts must require gender disaggregated monitoring and regular reporting to ensure accountability and equitable resource distribution”

(B) Tailored Training and Technical Support:

“Contracts should require training and technical support specifically addressing barriers faced by women farmers. Arrangements should include sessions scheduled to accommodate women's domestic responsibilities, employ female extension personnel

to improve outreach and engagement, and mandate regular documentation and reporting of women's participation rates and outcomes from training initiatives.”

Definite incorporation of these targeted recommendations will substantively align the Guide with international obligations, empirical evidence, and best practice. These actions will enhance the practical effectiveness of agricultural contracts, economically and socially empower women, and drive inclusive agricultural development.

Implementation and Monitoring of Gender-Responsive Provisions

To ensure these measures effectively tackle systemic inequalities, future editions of the Guide should include vigorous mechanisms for their implementation and monitoring. Drawing from international best practices and successful national initiatives, the following measures are recommended to ensure sustainable improvements:

(A) Gender disaggregated Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms:

" Contracts must mandate the regular collection and reporting of gender disaggregated data on resource allocation, financial service access, participation in technical training, and technology distribution. This requirement will enable transparent assessment of tangible benefits accruing to women farmers, promoting accountability and continuous improvements in gender equitable outcomes."

(B) Establishing Gender Focused Oversight Structures:

"Contractual arrangements should establish oversight or advisory committees responsible for monitoring compliance with gender responsive resource allocation and training obligations. These committees must feature gender balanced representation, including women representatives, and hold clear authority to recommend corrective actions based on monitoring outcomes."

Conclusion of Recommendations:

Integrating these practical and enforceable recommendations into future editions of the Guide directly addresses previously identified critical gaps. By aligning closely with established international standards and successful practical experiences, these recommendations ensure meaningful improvements in women's equitable access to resources and technical support. Embedding GS mechanisms into agricultural contracts, supported by monitoring and evaluation measures, substantively empowers women economically and socially. Ultimately, these targeted reforms position agricultural contract farming as a key driver of genuinely inclusive, equitable, and sustainable rural development globally.

(iii) Establishing GS Dispute Resolution Mechanisms

The Guide encourages the use of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) methods, such as mediation and arbitration, to effectively manage conflicts in contract farming arrangements, highlighting their potential to reduce costs and power imbalances between producers and contractors.²⁶ However, despite acknowledging general barriers faced by producers such as limited literacy, unequal bargaining power, and fear of retribution the Guide critically omits recognition of GS barriers uniquely impacting women producers.²⁷ These barriers frequently include cultural discomfort or reluctance in participating in predominantly male-led grievance mechanisms, heightened risks of stigma or retaliation, and additional mobility constraints.²⁸

International human rights frameworks underscore the necessity for GS dispute resolution procedures, mandating states, and indirectly corporate actors, to ensure grievance

²⁶ Guide Ch 7 [21]-[24], [34]-[45].

²⁷ *Case Study: Research on Women Empowerment among Female CmiA Cotton Farmers* (Final Report, July 2024) 31-36 <https://cottonmadeinafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/Study-on-Women-Empowerment-2024.pdf>; Peter Geschiere, 'Men own the Fields, Women own the Crops: Gender and power in the Cameroon grassfields' (2001) 71(1) *Africa* 188; Bina Agarwal, *A Field of One's Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

²⁸ *Ibid.*

mechanisms are accessible, inclusive, culturally sensitive, and capable of addressing rural women's unique constraints.²⁹ Likewise, the *UNGPs* implicitly emphasise the responsibility of businesses including agricultural investors to establish effective grievance mechanisms capable of addressing GS barriers.³⁰ It explicitly outlines criteria for grievance mechanisms, stressing they must be accessible, equitable, and responsive to the specific concerns of affected individuals, logically extending to the inclusion of women considerate approaches.³¹

Practical experiences further confirm the transformative effectiveness of GS dispute resolution mechanisms. Standards developed by the Cotton Made in Africa (CmiA) initiative mandate GS grievance procedures, such as confidential and culturally appropriate reporting channels, and promote the active employment of female grievance officers and mediators.³² Implementation of these grievance mechanisms has demonstrably improved women's confidence, engagement, and willingness to report disputes, resulting in more equitable outcomes and strengthened producer-company relationships.³³

Gender conscious dispute-resolution mechanisms significantly enhance women's participation by addressing their specific barriers and concerns, such as comfort, safety, and accessibility needs. Evidence from the World Food Programme's (WFP) Purchase for Progress (P4P) initiative underscores the transformative potential of implementing tailored grievance mechanisms that specifically accommodate women's experiences.³⁴ In particular, the P4P initiative demonstrates that the use of women inclusive facilitation and dispute

²⁹ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, *General Recommendation No. 33 on Women's Access to Justice*, UN Doc CEDAW/C/GC/33 (3 August 2015).

³⁰ United Nations Human Rights Council, *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework*, UN Doc A/HRC/17/31 (21 March 2011).

³¹ *Ibid* 33.

³² *Case Study: Research on Women Empowerment among Female CmiA Cotton Farmers* (Final Report, July 2024) 9, 49-50 <https://cottonmadeinafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/Study-on-Women-Empowerment-2024.pdf>. Cotton Made in Africa, *Cotton Made in Africa (CmiA)* (Web Page) <https://cottonmadeinafrica.org/en/>.

³³ *Ibid*.

³⁴ World Food Programme, *P4P's Women's Empowerment Pathways: Roadblocks and Successes* (Global Learning Series Report, 2014) https://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/special_initiatives/wfp265434.pdf.

resolution approaches has effectively addressed societal dynamics that previously excluded women from voicing their concerns or actively participating in grievance procedures.

Women farmers in P4P pilot countries, including Guatemala and Liberia, reported significant increases in their confidence and capacity to raise issues within their organisations, directly attributed to genderfocused interventions.³⁵ This focus on gender considerations such as gender-balanced mediation committees, female facilitators, and confidential grievance channels proved crucial for overcoming structural barriers that typically discouraged or excluded women from participation.³⁶ Consequently, adopting similar gender conscious dispute resolution provisions within agricultural contract frameworks, as recommended by the P4P experience, can substantially enhance women's equitable access to justice and improve the overall fairness and effectiveness of agricultural contracts.

The absence of such gender aware recommendations in the Guide significantly limits its effectiveness, perpetuating women's reluctance to engage fully in dispute resolution processes. Consequently, without enforceable provisions, women remain disproportionately disadvantaged, undermining both fairness and substantive gender equality within agricultural contract arrangements.

Recommendations for Gender Aware Grievance and Mediation Processes

To directly address existing gaps, future editions of the Guide should incorporate enforceable GS dispute-resolution mechanisms. The following targeted recommendations are proposed:

(A) Gender Sensitive Dispute Resolution Provisions:

“Agricultural production contracts should require the establishment of dispute resolution mechanisms designed to be GS, accessible, culturally appropriate, and

³⁵ Ibid 18-23.

³⁶ Ibid 18-23.

responsive to the specific barriers women face. Contracts should mandate the appointment of female mediators or grievance officers, guarantee confidentiality, and provide protections against retaliation to facilitate women's confident and equitable participation."

(B) Gender Balanced Representation in Grievance Processes:

"Contracts must ensure gender balanced representation within mediation panels or grievance committees, facilitating meaningful participation by women. Procedures enabling women farmers to report grievances safely, confidentially, and without fear of stigma or reprisals should be outlined within contractual agreements."

(C) Tailored Training and Capacity-Building for Women:

"Contracts should mandate regular training and capacity-building sessions specifically designed to inform and empower women farmers about grievance mechanisms.

Training initiatives should engage female facilitators, provide materials in accessible formats and local languages, and directly address practical barriers women encounter in accessing dispute-resolution processes."

Implementation and Monitoring Mechanisms

To ensure these gender conscious provisions effectively deliver accountability and improved outcomes, robust implementation and monitoring frameworks should be clearly articulated in future editions of the Guide:

(A) Gender disaggregated Monitoring and Reporting:

"Contracts must require regular collection, analysis, and transparent reporting of gender disaggregated data related to grievance submissions, resolution processes, and

outcomes. Monitoring should clearly track women's engagement, satisfaction levels, and experiences with the grievance procedures.”

(B) Establishment of Explicit Oversight Structures

“Contractual agreements should establish oversight committees with gender balanced membership explicitly tasked with monitoring grievance processes. These committees should regularly review effectiveness, identify barriers faced by women, and implement corrective measures as necessary.”

(C) Regular Gender Impact Reviews:

“Contracts should mandate periodic gender impact assessments specifically targeting dispute-resolution processes. These reviews should systematically identify persistent obstacles, evaluate the efficacy of existing gender conscious mechanisms, and proactively recommend necessary improvements to ensure continued effectiveness.”

Integrating these enforceable attuned to gender provisions and monitoring mechanisms within the Guide will significantly enhance women's empowerment, equitable participation, and effective access to justice. Such targeted interventions directly contribute to inclusive, sustainable, and equitable agricultural contract farming practices globally.

Strengthening the Guide: A Pathway to Inclusive Agriculture

While the Guide effectively establishes foundational principles of fairness, transparency, and collective empowerment, specific GS measures are necessary to fully realise its potential for advancing women's equality. This essay has provided targeted recommendations for future revisions, including contractual clauses mandating women’s meaningful participation in negotiations, explicit provisions ensuring women’s equitable access to financial resources, inputs, and technical training, and clearly defined GS dispute resolution mechanisms.

Practical measures such as joint spousal signatures, alternative collateral arrangements, female facilitators, and targeted capacity building for women farmers were highlighted as particularly effective strategies, supported by empirical evidence and international standards.

By explicitly incorporating these practical, enforceable gender responsive recommendations into future editions, the Guide can substantively empower women, increasing their active participation, economic independence, and equitable access to justice. Such targeted reforms would not only significantly enhance accountability but also tangibly transform agricultural contracts into instruments of inclusive and sustainable rural development, fulfilling international gender equality obligations and realising contract farming's full potential.