During the last 25 years significant progress has been made towards the commitments of the Beijing Platform for Action. However, not in all areas and not to the benefit of all women and girls equally. Rural and indigenous women and girls continue to face structural barriers that impact their human rights and prevent them from achieving their full human and productive potential. This, in turn, negatively affects efforts to attain food and nutrition security and eradicate poverty and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Today, 479 million people in Asia and the Pacific do not have enough to eat and the impacts of climate change exacerbate the situation even more. In many countries, the agriculture sector is underperforming, and one reason is that women do not have equal access to the resources and opportunities they need to be more productive and realize their full potential.

This region's rapid economic transformations are not keeping pace with inclusive transformative change for rural and indigenous communities, and for women in particular. Indeed, socio-economic inequalities have increased and, in the rural context especially, women continue to face significant gender-based constraints and inequalities including in access to land, water and other natural resources, decent employment, services, voice and decision-making.

Rural women comprise near to or even more than 50 per cent of the agricultural workforce in developing countries. In this region, the female share of those engaged in agriculture ranges from about 35 percent in South Asia to between
40 and almost 50 percent in Southeast and East Asia. Rural and indigenous women play key roles in this region as farmers, fishers, agrobiodiversity experts and conservers, contributing family workers and primary providers of care and wellbeing of rural households and communities.

This is why FAO considers gender equality and women’s empowerment crucial and core of its mandate of eradicating hunger and malnutrition and poverty; and ensuring sustainable management and utilization of natural resources. Women are critical agents of change in the fight against rural poverty, hunger and malnutrition. If we are to end hunger by 2030, we must address the inequalities between women and men in agriculture.

Development efforts will not automatically benefit and empower rural and indigenous women and girls. It is also clear that piecemeal and sectoral approaches do not work. In fact, for the most part, the existing inequalities are the foundation upon which the continuing manifestation of patriarchy, social injustices and discrimination reside.

We need radical, transformative change and commitment to such change – in national policies, strategies, programmes, and in backing these up with adequate data and budgetary allocations.

The opportunity and importance of the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action and five-year milestone of the Sustainable Development Agenda calls for all of us to commit to stronger and urgent action towards the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, everywhere.

FAO stands ready to work with member States, civil society and other actors towards this goal.