

Day 3 — GAFSP Knowledge Forum 2026

Sessions Notes and Takeaways

7 May 2026 | FAO Headquarters, Rome

Overview

Day 3 focused entirely on cross-cutting themes — climate resilience, gender, and nutrition — and how to integrate them coherently across GAFSP’s portfolio. The day moved from breakout room discussions (Sessions 13A, 13B, 13C) to plenary synthesis and project showcases (Session 14), before closing remarks from senior representatives of GAFSP, FAO, and the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty (Session 15).

Session 13A — Climate Room Report

Format: Breakout group discussion | **Facilitator:** Lorenzo Maestriperi, FAO

Enabling Factors

The climate room found that integration of cross-cutting themes is made possible by:

- Looking at existing global practices and adapting them to local cultural and agricultural contexts
- Building public-private partnerships (PPPs) that add a layer of validation for results tracking
- Embedding cross-cutting themes (including gender-specific project design) at the design stage

Risks and Challenges

- **Acceptability:** cultural norms and the types of crops and practices that communities will adopt
- **Climate uncertainty** affecting all activities’ implementation
- **Monitoring:** developing outcome-level indicators for integrated reporting across multiple themes
- **Monitoring:** time and resource constraints for tracking
- **Narrative:** how to build a credible chain linking outputs to outcomes to impact

Question for the Plenary

How do we ensure that indicators can adequately track cross-cutting themes without excessive complexity? The tension this question identifies is central to the whole day’s discussion: cross-cutting themes risk adding a layer of complexity that makes

implementation more difficult and less effective. The challenge is to achieve integration while simplifying, rather than multiplying, reporting demands.

Session 13B — Gender Room Report

Format: Breakout group discussion | **Moderator:** Mattia Barina, IFAD

Enabling Factors

- **Participatory diagnostics and inclusive design** — engaging women from the assessment phase to ensure relevance and ownership
- **Targeted activities, technologies, and quotas for women** — including women's leadership roles and dedicated targeting mechanisms
- **Capacity building across levels** — farmer and producer organisations, local authorities, and women themselves (decision-making, soft skills, resilience)
- **Engagement of men and households** — male sensitisation and shared domestic responsibilities as preconditions for women's participation
- **Policy and institutional backing** — national gender policies, government commitment, and structural change at macro level reinforcing micro-level action
- **Financial incentives and inclusion** — matching grants, co-payment schemes, and access to financial services
- **Awareness raising and intergenerational change** — investment in shifting norms and reaching the next generation

Risks and Challenges

- **Persistent cultural and social norms** — traditional practices and male dominance over roles, land, and leadership
- **Unequal access to productive inputs** — water, seeds, tools, and land
- **Knowledge and financial literacy gaps** — affecting both women and men, limiting uptake
- **Low engagement and commitment** — from both women and men, particularly when activities compete with other demands
- **Limited access to credit** — constraining investment and uptake of new practices
- **Mismatch between project timelines and transformation horizons** — gender norms shift over generations; projects operate in years (“a marathon, not a sprint”)

Questions for the Plenary

- **Measurement and M&E:** How can we show — rather than assume — that women's empowerment contributes to climate resilience and nutrition outcomes? What indicators or methods are other groups using?

- **Co-benefits vs. instrumentalisation:** When does women's empowerment create real climate or nutrition co-benefits, and when are women simply used as delivery channels?
- **Burden and time poverty:** What technologies or design choices can ensure integrated climate and nutrition activities reduce — rather than increase — women's workload?

Session 13C — Nutrition Room Report

Format: Breakout group discussion **Facilitator:** Anne Law, WFP

Enabling Factors

- Integration at the design stage, by identifying activities that deliver multiple benefits simultaneously (e.g., crop diversification builds climate resilience and increases dietary diversity)
- Being flexible and opportunistic during implementation — seizing unforeseen opportunities for integration that arise in the field
- Identifying climate- or nutrition-sensitive activities that can specifically target women (e.g., micro-SMEs, climate farmer field schools, social and behaviour change communication)
- Gender- and climate-sensitive national nutrition plans (Lao PDR cited as an example)
- Specific emphasis on integration in GAFSP and other funding proposals — the design of calls for proposals drives the incorporation of nutrition and other cross-cutting themes

Risks and Challenges

- It is not always possible to focus on all three cross-cutting themes simultaneously; forcing integration can produce artificial linkages with no real impact. Gender was identified as easier to mainstream across both climate and nutrition than the two are to link to each other. Projects should not be required to integrate all three themes if the context does not support it.
- Nutrition does not fall under a single ministry, creating ownership vacuums and institutional silos between agriculture, health, gender, and climate ministries
- Top-down integration risks producing artificial linkages with no real impact; responsiveness to farmers' expressed needs is essential
- Nutrition-sensitive activities such as micro-enterprises and home gardens can add additional burden on women; targeting women is not sufficient without addressing underlying gender dynamics

Questions for the Plenary

- Should all three cross-cutting themes be mandatory, or should projects be required to address only one?

- How do we ensure that the burden of nutrition programming does not fall disproportionately on women?

Session 14 — Exploring the Nexus Among the Cross-Cutting Themes

Format: Plenary synthesis, two project showcases, and facilitated Q&A | **Facilitator:** Joanne Gaskell | **Presenters:** Rudaba Khondker (GAIN/RAINS Bangladesh); Asuka Okumura (World Bank/FANSEP Nepal); Lorenzo Maestriperi, FAO (EX-ACT Team)

Plenary Synthesis of Breakout Rooms

Joanne Gaskell opened by noting strong convergences across all three rooms: the centrality of design-stage integration; the recurrence of M&E as a structural challenge; the risk of over-burdening women when activities are added without addressing gender dynamics; and the persistent tension between the transformative ambition of cross-cutting themes and the short timescales of project cycles. She raised for discussion whether gender was indeed the easiest theme to mainstream across the other two, as the nutrition room had suggested, and whether that carried implications for how GAFSP structures its requirements.

Project Showcase 1: RAINS Bangladesh (GAIN/IFAD)

The Diversified Resilient Agriculture for Improved Food and Nutrition Security (RAINS) project operates across 14 districts in Bangladesh, in three climatic hotspots (drought-prone, riverine, and coastal areas), targeting 420,000 smallholder households (40% women, 30% youth). It integrates five development themes simultaneously: climate-smart agriculture; nutrition-sensitive agriculture; gender and nutrition empowerment; youth and economic inclusion; and market systems and resilience.

Enabling factors included:

- Strong alignment with Bangladesh's national policies, including the Second National Plan of Action for Nutrition (which mandates multi-sectoral, multi-stakeholder, and multi-level engagement)
- Collaboration among the three Rome-Based Agencies (FAO, IFAD, WFP) and GAIN alongside government ministries
- Multi-stakeholder platforms established at the local level to develop and influence budgets and plans
- Community-based farmer group approaches that encourage participation, transparency, and local ownership
- Integration of women's and youth voices at all levels, including links to women-led agencies and businesses

Challenges encountered included:

- Institutional capacity gaps: production-focused mindsets resistant to nutrition or gender transformation at ministry and field level

- Climate-related shocks disrupting infrastructure and farming systems in target areas
- Difficulties reaching remote riverine and coastal communities with extension and market services
- Social norms limiting women's participation in economic activities, market access, and decision-making
- Poor market infrastructure and limited access to finance constraining private sector engagement

The overarching lesson from RAINS was that integrated programming — combining climate resilience, nutrition, gender empowerment, and market systems within a coherent framework — delivers greater impact than isolated sectoral interventions. Siloed delivery, in the words of the presenter, “doesn't bring results.”

Project Showcase 2: FANSEP Nepal (World Bank)

The Food and Nutrition Security Enhancement Projects (FANSEP I, 2018–2024, and FANSEP II, 2023–2027) in Nepal target vulnerable households including earthquake-affected, food-insecure, and women-headed households. The first phase reached over 59,000 beneficiaries, of which 81% were women; FANSEP II is reaching an additional 55,000, with a minimum 65% female beneficiary target. The project is implemented through a three-way collaboration between Nepal's Ministry of Agriculture, the World Bank (supervising entity), and FAO (technical advisor).

What makes FANSEP distinctive:

- Integration of climate, nutrition, and market systems by design from the outset, not retrofitted during implementation
- Strong research-to-field translation through NARC (Nepal Agricultural Research Council), identifying climate-smart agriculture practices suitable for each specific project area
- Women-centred design applied to every individual activity — including ensuring mechanisation equipment is physically usable by women and that Nutrition Field School locations are accessible to pregnant women in hilly terrain
- Participant-led Farmer Field Schools and Nutrition Field Schools that combine classroom-style learning with practical field trials and income-generating activities within a single intervention
- Market-enabling investments (small warehouses, sorting and cold storage facilities) co-financed with municipalities to build local government ownership and extend services beyond project beneficiaries

Key challenges:

- Component silos: agriculture and nutrition activities tended to operate independently, with agriculture specialists defaulting to “nutrition is not my issue” and vice versa. Changing this mindset required persistent effort at every level — ministry, project coordination unit, and field agent.
- Sustainability of market access for marginal farmer groups after project closure; rural-to-urban migration continuously depleted group membership

Q&A and Emerging Recommendations

The Q&A surfaced several important discussion threads:

- **On sustainability of women's groups:** There is no universal solution; the key is identifying the incentive for each group to remain cohesive and actively connecting them to municipalities to continue receiving support after the project closes.
- **On local government engagement:** Inviting municipal agents into field school activities and co-financing market infrastructure builds genuine ownership. Local governments often have the will but not the capacity or awareness; projects can bridge that gap.
- **On framing and terminology:** One participant proposed agroecology as a unifying framework that already integrates social participation, environmental conservation, and economic fairness within a trackable framework, potentially reducing the proliferation of separate themes.
- **On communication with communities:** The Nepal team tested multiple 'framings' of nutrition messages adapted to different audience types (commercially-oriented farmers, subsistence farmers, etc.), rather than using a single top-down narrative.

Recommendations for GAFSP emerging from the session:

- Integrate cross-cutting themes at the design stage, not during implementation, and build in flexibility for participatory adaptation throughout the project lifecycle
- Use grants as a flexibility tool — particularly in contexts of climate or economic shocks — allowing projects to adapt while remaining relevant to their objectives
- Shift M&E focus toward outcome-level indicators that capture transformative change on women's empowerment and food security over time, rather than relying solely on output-level tracking; consider delegating output tracking to supervising entities and focusing GAFSP reporting on outcomes

Session 15 — Closing Remarks

Format: Plenary | **Speakers:** Joanne Gaskell (GAFSP/Forum Facilitator); Shobha Shetty (GAFSP); Mohamed Manssouri (FAO); Renato Godinho (Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty)

Joanne Gaskell — Substantive Synthesis

Joanne Gaskell closed the substantive programme by synthesising three days of learning. She acknowledged the structural constraints that recurred across all sessions: poor social cohesion, unpredictable procurement, high interest rates, complex local food markets, and lack of land tenure for women and Indigenous people. She balanced this against the practical solutions that had emerged:

- Stable enumerator teams and knowledge transfer across generations
- Technologies that reduce rather than increase women's time burden

- Digitised M&E tools (e.g., KoboToolbox) and data-driven decision-making
- Flexibility built into project architecture; approaching simplicity as a strategy, not a compromise
- Integration across the entire value chain, from healthy consumer demand to inclusive, climate-smart production
- Structured off-take agreements and transparent quality and pricing frameworks as anchors for agricultural training

She proposed creating an M&E community of practice to sustain peer learning between Knowledge Forums. She noted that a participant from Togo had said on Day 1, “I thought I was the only one struggling” — and that perhaps the most important outcome of the Forum was the collective realisation that no one faces these challenges alone.

Shobha Shetty (GAFSP) — Formal Closing

Shobha Shetty framed the three days through the Indian parable of the blind men and the elephant: each participant touching a different part of a large and complex system, and leaving with a more complete understanding of the whole. She acknowledged the growing pressures of rising hunger and intensifying climate shocks, but pointed to the network in the room as evidence of what is possible — even in conflict zones, data-scarce environments, and markets previously considered uninvestable. She thanked all participants for traveling long distances and making significant efforts to contribute to the Forum.

Mr. Mansouri (FAO) — Remarks

Mr. Mansouri reflected on GAFSP’s origins in the 2008 global food price crisis and described the programme as an architectural innovator in the global financing landscape. He highlighted two key messages:

- GAFSP’s producer organisation window is unique globally in treating farmers as economic agents — the world’s largest private sector by number, yet typically treated as aid recipients. This is GAFSP’s most innovative and distinctive contribution.
- The burden of scaling good practices should fall on large institutions learning from GAFSP, not on GAFSP itself. The “big guys” should be coming to GAFSP to understand what works at scale, rather than GAFSP constantly being asked to scale up.

He also emphasised the value of knowledge, capacity development, and data as the “first port of de-risking” for agricultural investment — investments in human capital and social capital matter as much as physical infrastructure.

Renato Godinho (Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty) — Remarks

Renato Godinho, Director of the Support Mechanism of the Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty (launched during Brazil’s G20 presidency in 2024, now with 215 members including GAFSP), linked the Forum’s work to the Alliance’s three pillars: knowledge, finance, and political will. He described ongoing work to develop country-

level implementation roadmaps that bring multiple actors (GAFSP, AgriConnect, climate funds, and others) into aligned support around a single country programme.

Ethiopia's Ilima Tirufat programme was cited as an early example of this coordination methodology — an initiative spanning cold chain infrastructure, training of smallholder producers, support to producer organisations, and multiple value chains including honey, fish, poultry, and meat. He expressed hope that upcoming GAFSP calls would allow for country-level convergence of GAFSP's different financing windows, with lessons from Rwanda's experience informing how multiple tracks can be designed to complement each other from the outset.

Key Themes Running Through Day 3

Four themes recurred with particular force across all Day 3 sessions:

- **Design-stage integration:** Cross-cutting themes cannot be retrofitted; they must be built in from the beginning, with shared objectives defined before implementation starts.
- **M&E for cross-cutting outcomes:** There is a persistent and unresolved challenge of measuring transformative change in gender, climate, and nutrition at the outcome level. A strong call emerged for outcome-level rather than output-level tracking across all three themes.
- **Women as beneficiaries, not delivery channels:** The risk of instrumentalising women as a means of delivering programming rather than as the intended beneficiaries was named repeatedly. Integration that adds to women's burden without addressing gender dynamics is not genuine integration.
- **Integrated programming delivers better results:** Evidence from both RAINS Bangladesh and FANSEP Nepal demonstrated that combining climate resilience, nutrition, gender empowerment, and market systems within a coherent framework delivers greater and more sustained impact than siloed sectoral approaches — even when integration demands more from project teams.