



**BUILDING
GENDER-JUST
FOOD, LAND AND
WATER SYSTEMS**



**M S Swaminathan
Research Foundation**
SCIENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE **BUILDING GENDER-JUST FOOD, LAND AND WATER SYSTEMS**



7–8 August 2026



M. S. Swaminathan Research Foundation,
Chennai, India



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Conference Background

The 2026 edition of the International Conference organised by the M S Swaminathan Research Foundation, as part of its Annual Foundation Day Celebrations, is being held on 7–8 August 2026 in Chennai. The conference titled “Building Gender-Just Food, Land and Water Systems” is being convened in the context of the International Year of the Woman Farmer, declared by the United Nations (2026). This is a landmark global observance that recognises the indispensable contributions of women to agriculture, fisheries, pastoralism, biodiversity stewardship, food and nutrition security, and sustainable rural livelihoods.

Women are central to food, land and water systems worldwide as farmers, fisherwomen, pastoralists, forest dwellers, entrepreneurs, caregivers, innovators, and custodians of traditional knowledge. They have been contributing significantly to food production, natural resource management, and community well-being. Yet, despite their critical role, their contributions are not formally recognised. Women continue to face systemic

barriers in accessing land, water, finance, technology, markets, information, and decision-making spaces.

The conference also draws inspiration from the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists, highlighting the important role of women in pastoral systems, livestock management, grassland conservation, and climate adaptation. At a time when climate change, biodiversity loss, environmental degradation, food insecurity, malnutrition, and social inequalities are becoming increasingly interconnected, women are emerging as leaders bringing about transformative change. Across agricultural landscapes, forests, coastal ecosystems, mountains, drylands, and wetlands, women are developing innovative solutions that strengthen resilience, sustain biodiversity, improve nutrition, and create sustainable livelihoods.

Women are also increasingly engaging with digital technologies, artificial intelligence-enabled advisory services, climate information systems, and emerging



GENDER JUSTICE IN FOOD, LAND AND WATER SYSTEMS

- Recognition of women's labour
- Equitable redistribution of resources
- Representation of women in decision-making fora



value chains, opening new opportunities for empowerment and entrepreneurship. Simultaneously, community volunteers, women's collectives, self-help groups, producer organisations, and grassroots institutions are playing an important role in advancing sustainable development through collective action.

Building upon Professor M S Swaminathan's vision of an equitable, sustainable, and nutrition-

secure future, the conference seeks to provide a global platform for women farmers, fisher women, pastoralists, researchers, policymakers, development practitioners, entrepreneurs, civil society organizations, youth leaders, private-sector actors, and international agencies to exchange experiences, share innovations, build partnerships, and co-create pathways toward gender-just food, land, and water systems.



EMPOWERING WOMEN FARMERS

Recognising women as leaders in agriculture, fisheries, pastoralism, and sustainable rural development



BUILDING RESILIENT AND INCLUSIVE FUTURES

Women are driving innovation, strengthening resilience and shaping sustainable food, land and water systems for future generations





Conference Objectives

01



Recognise and showcase women-led innovations in agri-food systems, agrobiodiversity conservation, climate resilience, sustainable livelihoods, nutrition security, natural resource management and community development.

02



Foster evidence-based dialogue and policy engagement among researchers, policymakers, practitioners, civil society organisations, entrepreneurs, and community institutions to address gender inequalities, strengthen women's rights, social protection and care systems, and examine the gendered climate, environmental, and health impacts.

03



Enhance women's participation and leadership in agri-food systems, and scale women-led innovations through technologies, artificial intelligence, and collaborative networks.

04



Develop a conference policy note on gender-just food, land and water systems, highlighting key recommendations, strategic actions, and policy priorities for governments, development agencies, research institutions, civil society organisations, and donor partners.

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE BUILDING GENDER-JUST FOOD, LAND AND WATER SYSTEMS



7-8 August 2026



M S Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai, India

DAY 1: 07 AUGUST 2026

10.00-11.15 hrs

Inaugural Session Women Farmers at the Centre of Sustainable Development

The inaugural session will set the global context of the International Year of the Woman Farmer and emphasise the central role of women in achieving food security, nutrition security, biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, and sustainable development. The session will highlight women's contributions across agriculture, fisheries, pastoral systems, natural resource management, entrepreneurship, and community leadership while exploring pathways to strengthen women's agency, rights, and participation in decision-making. The conference will focus on:

- Women as leaders of sustainable food systems
- Gender justice and inclusive development
- Climate resilience and sustainable livelihoods
- Policy and institutional perspectives

Session Coordinators: Dr R Rengalakshmi, Mr Srini Raman and Dr N Parasuraman

Session Rapporteur: Ms Anbuvaahini and Dr R Gopinath

Welcome Address

Dr Soumya Swaminathan, FRS, Chairperson, MSSRF

Guests Felicitated by Chairperson and Trustees

Release of MSSRF Annual Report 2025-26

&

Launch of "Project Jeevadhara"

A project to conserve Rare, Endangered, Threatened and Endemic Species and

Under-utilised Food Plant Species of Western Ghats

by

Prof S Mahendra Dev, Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister,
Government of India, New Delhi

Book Release

Fields of Change: Stories of Women's Agency and Transformation

by

Smt Aditi Varda Sunil Tatkare, Hon'ble Minister for Women and Child Development,
Government of Maharashtra

Special Address	Dr C Chandramouli, IAS (Retd.), Member, Board of Trustee, MSSRF
Special Address	Dr Mangi Lal Jat, Director General, Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi (Online)
Guest of Honour Address	Smt Aditi Varda Sunil Tatkare, Hon'ble Minister for Women and Child Development, Government of Maharashtra
Inaugural Address	Prof S Mahendra Dev, Chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, Government of India, New Delhi
Vote of Thanks	Dr E D Israel Oliver King, Director, Biodiversity, MSSRF

Day 1: 11.15 – 11.45 hrs

Inauguration of Exhibition: CULTIVATING EQUALITY

*Showcasing Women-led Innovations for Climate Resilience,
Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Development*

by

Smt Aditi Varda Sunil Tatkare, Hon'ble Minister for Women and Child Development, Government of Maharashtra

Exhibition Pavilions

- Gender Justice & Biohappiness
- Agrobiodiversity and Seed Heritage
- Opportunity crops for food and nutrition security
- Forgotten Fruits Diversity
- Rangeland and Pastoralists
- Climate Resilient Agriculture
- Technologies and AI Innovation Hub
- Innovation for gender equality
- Women Agripreneurs and FPO Product Hub
- Fisheries and Coastal Resources
- Heat, Health, Nutrition and One Health
- Every Child a Scientist

Coordinators: Dr C M Pratheepa, Ms P M Jennifer and Mr R Rajamanikkam

Day 1: 11.45 -13.15 hrs

Session 1

Women as Custodians of Agrobiodiversity, Forgotten Foods and Climate-Resilient Farming Systems

Women have long been custodians of crop genetic resources, biodiversity, traditional knowledge, and local food systems. This session will explore the critical role of women in conserving agricultural biodiversity, promoting neglected and underutilised species, sustaining traditional ecological knowledge, and strengthening climate-resilient farming systems. Discussions will focus on agroecological approaches, nutrition-sensitive agriculture, community seed systems, gender, ecosystem restoration, and biodiversity-based livelihoods.

Session Coordinator: Mr Prashant K Parida and Dr Niraj Joshi

Rapporteurs: Mr Girigan Gopi and Dr Archana Bhatt

Chair: Dr Prem Lal Gautam, Chancellor, Dr Rajendra Prasad Central Agricultural University, Bihar

Co-Chair: Dr Balaji B, IFS, Member Secretary, National Biodiversity Authority, Chennai

Speakers:

- **Mr Ajith Radhakrishnan**, Senior Water Resources Management Specialist, World Bank, New Delhi
- **Ms Usha Thorat**, Board Member, Foundation for Ecological Security, New Delhi (Online)
- **Ms Surajita Kumari Turuk**, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation, Jeypore, Odisha
- **Dr Aditi Mukherjee**, Principal Scientist, Climate Action, International Livestock Research Institute, Kenya (Online)
- **Ms Geetha**, Custodian Farmer, Puthoorvayal, Wayanad
- **Ms Moti Khora**, Custodian Farmer, Similiguda, Koraput

13.15 – 14.15 hrs

Lunch

Day 1: 14.15 - 15.45 hrs

Session 2

Advancing Women's Leadership in the Governance of Coastal Resources, Fisheries, Wetlands and Rangelands

Healthy coasts, wetlands, fisheries, rangelands and village commons depend not only on ecological integrity, but also on inclusive, accountable and effective governance. Across India, women play a central role in sustaining these interconnected socio-ecological systems as fishers, pastoralists, wetland managers, biodiversity custodians, community leaders, knowledge holders, innovators and stewards of natural resources. Despite these critical contributions, women's leadership continues to remain under-recognised in many formal institutions and decision-making spaces related to natural resource governance. This session will therefore examine women not only as resource users or beneficiaries, but as knowledge holders, innovators, decision-makers and custodians of ecological resilience.

Session Coordinators: Dr S Velvizhi and Dr Rupesh K Bhomia

Session Rapporteurs: Dr M Utchimahali and Ms Shwetha Tony

Chair: Ms Marianne Manuel, Director, Dakshin Foundation

Speakers:

- **Dr Divya Karnad**, Senior Lecturer, Centre for Ecology and Conservation, University of Exeter
- **Dr Aaron Savio Lobo**, Marine Conservation Scientist (Member, IUCN SSN Marine Conservation Committee)
- **Ms Pechiyammal**, Lead, Ghost Gear Segregation Centre, Vedhalai, Ramanathapuram
- **Ms Neeta Pandya**, Founder Director, Maldhari Rural Action Group (MARAG)
- **Dr Jayashree Vencatesan**, Managing Trustee, Care Earth Trust (Online)

15.45 – 16.00 hrs

Tea break

Day 1: 16.00 - 17.30 hrs

Session 3

Gendered Experiences of Climate Change, Heat Stress, Health and Care Systems

Women experience climate change in unique ways because of their multiple roles in agriculture, food production, water management, caregiving, and household well-being. This session will examine the impacts of heat stress, climate variability, environmental degradation, and health risks on women and explore pathways for adaptation, resilience-building, and social protection.

Session Coordinators: Dr R Mohan Kumar and Dr R Priyadarshini

Session Rapporteurs: Dr D J Nithya and Ms Manjula Devi

Chair: Dr Balakrishna Pisupati, Head, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), India

Co- Chair: Dr Sutapa Choudhury, British Deputy High Commissioner to India, Chennai

Speakers:

- **Dr Anna Aggarwal**, Fellow (Adaptation and Resilience), Sustainable Futures Collective, New Delhi
- **Dr Prathijna Poonacha Kodira**, Lead, Director's Office and Practice, Indian Institute of Human Settlements, Bengaluru
- **Dr Indu Murthy**, Sector Head (Climate, Environment and Sustainability), Centre for Study of Science, Technology and Policy, Bengaluru
- **Prof Jane Hirst**, Chair (Global Women's Health), Imperial College London, (Online)
- **Dr Rajalakshmi RamPrakash**, Senior Research Fellow, The George Institute for Global Health
- **Ms Vinotha**, St Antony's Higher Secondary School, Perungudi, Chennai

17.30 - 17.50 hrs

Refreshment Break

Day 1: 17.50 - 19.00 hrs

Nurturing Changemakers- 2026

This session brings together the current Hema Ramachandran Fellow, Mina Swaminathan Media Fellows, and Green Stewards to share their journeys of learning, leadership, and community action. Through brief reflections on their experiences in biodiversity conservation, sustainable agriculture, science communication, and grassroots innovation, the speakers will highlight how MSSRF's fellowship and stewardship programmes are nurturing a new generation of changemakers committed to advancing ecological sustainability, inclusive development, and the Foundation's pro-poor, pro-women, and pro-nature vision.

Chair: Dr Thamban C, Senior Fellow, M S Swaminathan Research Foundation, Wayanad

Co-chair: Dr Mini Kachumbron, Director- Agroecology, Food Systems and Rural Transformation,
Keyi Panyor Mission Plan 2040

Speakers:

- **Aisha KP**, Prof Hema Ramachandran Fellow
- **Tara P.T.**, Conservation Steward
- **Sravan Chandra**, Conservation Steward
- **Mukund Pingale**, Mina Swaminathan Media Fellow
- **Kanmani**, Mina Swaminathan Media Fellow

Day 1: 19.00 – 20.00 hrs

VEPPATHIN VERIYAATTAM

The crisis of extreme heat in Tamil Nadu told through
Kattaikuthu, ensemble theatre

Veppathin Veriyaattam is an original Kattaikuthu production that brings the story of rising heat and climate change to the stage. Through storytelling, music, songs, dance, humour, and audience interaction, the performance explores how extreme heat is affecting our everyday lives

by

Ms Thilagavathy Palani and team

20.00 onwards

Dinner

DAY 2: 08 AUGUST 2026

10.00- 11.30 hrs

Session 4

Women Agripreneurs, Digital Innovation and Inclusive Food Value Chain

Women are increasingly emerging as entrepreneurs, innovators, and leaders across agri-food value chains. This session will examine how biotechnologies, digital technologies, artificial intelligence, financial inclusion, producer organisations, and market innovations can strengthen women-led enterprises and create sustainable livelihood opportunities. Successful models of women's entrepreneurship and technology-enabled development will be showcased.

Session Coordinators: Dr Venu Margam, Dr Gayatri Venkataraman and Dr R Nagarajan

Session Rapporteurs: Dr Ugalechumi and Ms P M Jennifer

Chair: Prof Pravat Kumar Roul, Vice Chancellor, Odisha University of Agriculture and Technology, Bhubaneswar

Co-Chair: Ms Megha Desai, Senior Coordinator, Self-Employed Women's Association, Ahmedabad

Speakers:

- **Dr David Hogg**, Chief Regenerative Agriculture Advisor, NAANDI Foundation
- **Ms N Deepthi Reddy**, Chief Women Empowerment, Reliance Foundation
- **Ms Reema Sathe**, JSW Chair (Women in Agriculture & Rural Systems), MSSRF
- **Mr Vikas Kanungo**, Senior AI & Digital Transformation Consultant, World Bank
- **Ms Radha**, Agripreneur, Thirumalairayasamuthiram, Pudukottai
- **Ms. Catherina Borgoyari**, Project Coordinator- SuATI

11.30 – 11.45 hrs

Refreshments Break

11.45 – 13.15 hrs

Session 5

Policies, Entitlements and Collective Action as Pathways Towards Gender-Just Food, Land and Water Systems

The concluding technical session will focus on the policies, institutions, and collective actions needed to achieve gender-just food, land, and water systems. Discussions will address women's rights to land, water, technology, finance, and markets while highlighting the role of self-help groups, cooperatives, producer organisations, community volunteers, and civil society institutions in advancing sustainable development and social transformation.

Session Coordinators: Dr Anamika Ajay, Dr Prathibha Ganesan and Dr R Gopinath

Session Rapporteurs: Ms Surajita Kumari Turuk and Ms C P Ridha

Chair: Prof Nitya Rao, Professor of Gender and Development University of East Anglia, United Kingdom

Speakers:

- **Shri Sachin Ramachandra Jadhav**, Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Department of Agriculture & Farmers' Empowerment, Government of Odisha
- **Prof Sara Ahmed, Adjunct Faculty**, Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Pune
- **Dr Shreya Yadav**, Program Manager, Seafood Markets and Equity, Conservation International (Online)
- **Ms Ma. Esther Penunia**, Secretary General, Asian Farmers' Association for Sustainable Rural Development, Philippines (Online)
- **Dr N Venugopal**, Researcher, Small-scale Fisheries, Kerala
- **Dr R V Bhavani**, Senior Fellow, MSSRF

13.15 – 14.15 hrs

Lunch

Day 2: 14.15 - 15.30 hrs

Valedictory Session

The valedictory session will synthesise the key lessons, experiences, innovations, and recommendations emerging from the conference. This will result in a policy note that articulates a shared vision and action agenda for strengthening women's leadership, advancing gender justice, promoting climate resilience, conserving biodiversity, and transforming food, land, and water systems.

Session Coordinators: Dr R Rengalakshmi, Dr N Parasuraman and Dr E D Israel Oliver King

Session Rapporteurs: Dr P Prajeesh and Ms Meera Sundararajan

Welcome Address and Felicitation of Guests	Dr Soumya Swaminathan, FRS , Chairperson, MSSRF
Salient Points from the Sessions	Dr E D Israel Oliver King , Director, Biodiversity, MSSRF, Chennai
Special Remarks	Dr Purvi Mehta , Member, Board of Trustees, MSSRF (Online)
Special Remarks	Dr N R Bhanumurthy , Director, Madras School of Economics, Chennai
Guest of Honour Address	Ms Kanta Singh , Deputy Country Representative, UN Women India Country Office
Guest of Honour Address	Thiru R Kumar , Hon'ble Minister of Artificial Intelligence, Information Technology, and Digital Services in Tamil Nadu
Valedictory Address	Thiru P Venkataramanan , Hon'ble Minister for Food and Civil Supplies Food and Civil Supplies, Consumer Protection and Price Control, Government of Tamil Nadu
Vote of Thanks	Dr Anamika Ajay , Lead, Gender Equality and Social Inclusion, MSSRF
15.30 hrs	High Tea

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