

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD FOR WOMEN IN AFRICAN AGRICULTURE

Interventions to address gender-based inequalities

Women provide about 40% of agricultural labour in Africa (albeit with variations across countries), excluding time allocated to livestock, food processing and marketing. Most of that time is spent on crop production. Despite their widespread participation, they are systematically disadvantaged within the agricultural sector and value chains. Traditional gender norms and systemic barriers can often limit women's time, resources and mobility and make it difficult for female farmers to invest in their production. These barriers prevent them from producing high-quality goods in sufficiently large quantities and take advantage of more lucrative market opportunities. In approaching this topic, it must be noted that conditions differ considerably between communities and across the continent. Nonetheless, patterns of inequity in access to resources and income can be observed. Working towards an even playing field requires a gender transformative approach and building on existing norms to strengthen women's access to resources and opportunities in the agricultural sector.

What puts African women working in agricultural production at a disadvantage?

Unequal access to land

In much of Africa, women have lesser access to land than men and lack formalized land titles. For instance, in Nigeria, women hold 4% of household agricultural land, while men hold 87%. In other countries such as Niger, Ethiopia and Tanzania, men own three to seven times more agricultural land than women. Though women's rights to land are enshrined in the constitutions of many African countries, inheritance laws often do not explicitly safeguard women's rights. Besides, women and their communities are not always aware of their rights, and customary systems can run counter to state laws, meaning that legal rights are not always respected.

Unequal access to land creates a productivity gap between male and female farmers. One form of unequal access to land is when women-run plots are smaller and less fertile than those run by men. When a woman runs a low-yield plot or is not sure whether her claim to her land will continue from year to year, she has little incentive to make investments that will improve her production and increase her income in the longer term. Where women have lesser access to land and lack formalized land titles and resources, they have less collateral available, which can limit their access to credit.

Gender norms around tasks and crop types

In general, women are responsible for a majority of unpaid household work, such as collecting water and fuel, caring for children and family members, cooking and cleaning. For women farmers, these time-consuming tasks can limit their ability to care for their plots. Women are also more likely to work as unpaid family labourers or part-time workers. A pattern can also be seen in the types of crops grown by women and men. Women often grow crops for household consumption, while men tend to grow cash crops. As a result, women derive less value and income from their plots than their male counterparts.

Access to extension services

Extension services are an important resource for rural populations, providing access to information, technology and support to family-run farms, mainly through individual visits by extension agents. But typically, extension officers deliver their services to male farmers. A 2011 study of 97 countries showed that only 5% of extension services were targeting women directly. An imbalance can also be seen in the gender of extension agents themselves. The same study found that only 15% of extension personnel were women. This in itself can be a barrier preventing women from accessing



these services, namely in cultures where strong norms control how men and women can interact with each other.

Financial inclusion

Women's access to financial services that can increase agricultural productivity, such as credit, savings and insurance, is lower than that of men in much of Africa. The barriers to access can be:

- **Cultural:** constraints on women's mobility and time can make it difficult for women to travel to financial institutions, especially when these are located far away.
- **Economic:** women generally have less access to and control over resources (such as land) than men, and are therefore less likely to have the required collateral for loans.
- **Legal or administrative:** women in developing countries do not always have the identity documents required to access financial services or open accounts. Additionally, some countries have regulations that require a woman to have a male relative's permission to access financial services.
- **Educational:** where women have a lower educational attainment than men, they are likely to be less financially literate and lack confidence when seeking services from formal institutions.

Towards a female-friendly agricultural system

Creating a more even playing field for women requires multiple interventions that address the various obstacles facing women who earn their livelihoods through agriculture in Africa. Focus areas include:

Investing in the development of agricultural innovations and technologies to benefit women specifically. Current innovations often do not take into account women's needs and can therefore deepen in-

equalities in the agricultural sector by making women more dependent on help from men, e.g. tools that are too heavy or technologies that require the operator to wear pants. Innovations that could benefit women include technologies that reduce the amount of labour necessary to complete tasks traditionally assigned to women. This can help free up women's time and enable them to make better use of their limited resources.

Making extension services more accessible to women farmers. Extension services can target women by providing training in women's gathering places; ensuring the training considers women's busy schedules, offering couples training; adapting services to potentially lower levels of education; and delivering training through female extension officers. The first step is increasing extension officers' awareness of gender issues and how to address them, which will require buy-in and support from extension agencies.

Further securing women's land rights. Some strategies include:

- Reforming inheritance laws where these do not specifically address the rights of women to inherit lands and resources.
- Ensuring women and communities are aware of their legal rights through training and support, e.g. by facilitating partnerships between local NGOs, paralegal networks and legal empowerment agencies.
- Formalizing existing progressive social norms within communities (rather than creating new norms) and secure buy-in from all levels of customary and state authority to ensure these legal or institutional innovations are sustained.
- Supporting research initiatives on land governance and tenure systems and the sharing of expertise and best practices.

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IMPRINT:

Center for Development Research (ZEF)
Genscherallee 3 | 53113 Bonn | Germany
E-Mail: presse.zef@uni-bonn.de
Phone: +49-(0)228 - 73 18 46
Brief prepared by Evelyn Baraké
Layout: Katharina Zinn



zef
Center for
Development Research
University of Bonn