



AgriFoSe2030

Agriculture for Food Security 2030
- Translating science into policy and practice



Reaching sustainable intensification in Kenya by involving female smallholders

Introduction

Women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Thus, female farmers are a key resource in enabling low-income countries to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 2 of zero hunger. However, women face many and serious constraints that reduce their agricultural productivity in comparison to their male counterparts. The systematic under-representation of women in decision-making processes in particular, leads to the perpetuation of unsustainable production practices which exacerbate food insecurity. For agricultural development to be sustainable and resilient, the practice as well as decision-making processes must be gender inclusive. Inclusivity of women in decision making not only enhances implementation of designed policies but also reduces challenges that impede sustainable intensification.

In Kenya, women constitute the majority, about 70%, of the agricultural labour force. However, women suffer inequalities and limited access to essential resources such as land, finances, education, clean energy, extension services and markets which undermine their productivity. For instance, despite the fact that about 32% of households in Kenya are headed by women, they hold only 1% of land titles on

Key messages

- To eradicate hunger in Kenya; social, economic and political challenges among female smallholder farmers must be addressed.
- These challenges include women being excluded in decision making, low education levels, women being highly involved in the labour of collecting fuelwood, and poor access to land, financial support and extension services.
- Gender inclusiveness and education of women are key components in political strategies to achieve sustainable intensification of smallholder farming in Kenya.

their own, while 5% own land jointly with men. Yet, armed with the same resources as male farmers, women have been shown to increase yields by 20-30%. Thus, increasing productivity amongst female smallholders, combatting hunger and improving rural livelihoods requires interventions to improve



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technology use, enhance women's participation and stimulate inclusive and efficient markets.

This policy brief is based on a [report that nuanced the socio-economic dimensions of women and youth in smallholder agriculture and food security in Kenya](#).

Gender inclusiveness through education and increased awareness

Female farmers are core in attaining zero hunger. Education access among women remains low yet empowering and investing in women would significantly increase productivity while reducing hunger.

Including women in development and decision making processes is a critical step to reduce inequality which in turn can reduce food security, hunger and poverty. Studies show that 55% of hunger reduction in developing countries is associated with improvement in women's education

(both formal and informal) as well as in reducing inequality. This study has identified a number of interventions that could potentially ensure gender inclusiveness.

For example, increasing public awareness on the provisions of the Constitution of Kenya 2010, which provides equal rights for men and women over land ownership, could reduce related land access inequalities between men and women. Such increased knowledge would also enable the Kenya Constitution 2010 to be successfully implemented and could be a key step forward in addressing gaps in access to land, a most crucial asset of agricultural production. Increasing public awareness and implementation of the Constitution could also enhance harmonization of statutory and customary laws, which continue to deny women the right to own land. Women that have tenure security with equal land rights as men experience an increase in farm productivity, as they can adopt practices that contribute to long-term agricultural sustainability such as conservation agriculture.

Education programs that target skills development and capacity building would empower women economically. This could be achieved through training programs in information and technology, agroforestry, finances, digital climate information services and value addition on agricultural products, such as for example the weaving of sisal woven bags. Agriculture should also be better linked with knowledge and education about health and nutrition to support these most vulnerable groups in the society.

Education and training around information and communication technologies (ICT) could be better tailored to women's needs, for example by being delivered by gender sensitized female trainers to further build trust and increase the resilience in the system. The ICT information on climate and weather services, market locations and prices must

also be available in local languages as these are often the common languages spoken by women. Keeping women farmers conversant in ICT will help them to overcome agricultural challenges by learning and contributing to this peer-based communication platform.

Moreover, women currently lose one day in every five working days in firewood collection with heavy backloads causing spinal injuries. The time spent in collecting firewood excludes women from development processes including participation in decision making. Training women to use affordable and clean energy sources could save women time and hardship associated with current practices. This includes recycling of farm waste for energy, e.g. briquettes from maize stalks and biogas from cattle slurry, as well as harnessing solar energy.



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Goats at a climate smart farm in Western Kenya.

Suggestions for future policy development

- Policy processes should meaningfully involve women in decision making so as to increase policy ownership and give women an opportunity to propose home-grown interventions for their felt needs.
- Target education programs should be established at the government technical training centres. These should teach soft skills for women, for instance weaving, information and communication technologies.
- Future policies should ensure support is given to women organized in common interest groups, that are linked to micro-credit institutions, markets and agricultural value chains.

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