

## What works to empower women in Africa's agriculture?

Most studies note that women play an important role in Africa's agriculture sector. In Africa as a whole, [about 60% of economically-active women](#) work in agriculture - and this number [has grown](#) over the last decades.

Nevertheless, despite their important contribution, women usually have less power over the use of resources and land than men:

- Women tend to have less access to land, agricultural inputs (seeds, fertilizer, etc.), capital, labour, knowledge and services than men. They often do not have enough money or control over household money to buy land themselves. Due to lesser productivity and less control over assets, women farmers [earn less](#) for the same work than their male counterparts.
- In many African countries and regions, customary law and cultural practices restrict women from owning and inheriting land. [Less than 20%](#) of agricultural holders are women in most of the African countries for which data are available. After marriage, land is often either registered in the name of the man only or becomes the property of the household. In Ghana, for example, men have [exclusive property rights](#) and women only have access through male relatives. If women do not inherit land when their husband dies, it can cause problems, especially if they depend on the land for their livelihood. Over the last decades, some countries and regional states have adopted laws for equal land rights, including as [Kenya](#) (after the 2010 constitutional reforms) and the state of [Tigray](#) in Ethiopia. Nevertheless, in practice, the situation [has not changed](#) much.
- Whereas women play an important role in working and managing the land, men usually [make decisions](#) on the use of the land, over which they usually have ownership. Women tend to have less fertile and smaller plots of lands on which to grow food crops. These food crops are usually used for household consumption (for which women are primarily responsible). Cash crops are considered '[men's crops](#)'. Only a [small number of women](#) sell their crops, and when they do it is [hardly profitable](#).

This unequal access to (quality) land, capital and resources [has caused](#) a gender gap in agricultural productivity: the average value of agricultural produce is [up to 25% lower](#) from land cultivated by women than by men, when the same crops are grown. The [monetary value](#) of the gender gap in agricultural productivity annually is estimated at US\$100 million in Malawi, US\$105 million in Tanzania and US\$67 million in Uganda.

### How to empower women in agriculture

To empower women farmers and increase their productivity, what works best is a combination of policies and programmes to register land and work towards more equal ownership of land, capital and resources, combined with specific measures to improve women's agricultural productivity (as recommended by [Lawry et al.](#), [Ahmed and Ahmed](#), and [Buvinić, Furst-Nichols and Courey Pryor](#)). This entails the following recommendations for governments and donors.

### What works to increase equal ownership of land, capital and resources?

- Work towards more equal land ownership rights for women. Land registration programmes formalize how land has been divided under customary law. When women are given official land certificates

through tenure formalization programmes, they can lend more money (with their officially acknowledged collateral), [invest more](#) in (the fertility of) their land, and [fallow it more often](#). This will, in turn, [enhance productivity](#). To be sure that women have equal ownership rights as men and obtain access to better quality plots, governments also need to create additional land rights programmes, in which women are explicitly given the right to own and inherit land, and make sure that these programmes are implemented in practice, taking into account cultural sensitivities.

- Ensure that policies and programmes increase the decision-making power of women over assets and capital and take into account cultural sensitivities in this respect.
- Support women farmers' collectives and savings groups, which help women to [collectively obtain better prices](#) for their agricultural [input and produce](#).
- Support legal and financial training and increase awareness of new laws that improve land rights equality so that women know about their improved rights.
- Investigate how the negative consequences of tenure interventions can be countered. Globally, according to [Lawry et al.](#), "social impacts resulting from tenure interventions can [...] in some instances have negative consequences such as displacement or diminished property rights for women", as happened after the [2010 Rwanda land tenure regularization programme](#).

## What works to improve the agricultural productivity of women?

- Improve access to capital for women, not only through micro credit, but also through larger loans, which are [needed to upscale farms](#) to agribusinesses. Governments, banks and donors need to think of a system through which loans can be provided [without requiring formal land ownership as collateral](#).
- Increase women's access to farm labour, inputs and [agricultural technology](#), such as machinery, to increase productivity.
- Increase women's knowledge, for example to prevent lower productivity from leading to [intensified farming](#), which may cause over-cultivation and land degradation, creating a vicious circle of lower productivity.
- Create [micro-insurance schemes](#) to support rural women farmers. Read more on how [social protection](#) programmes work in agriculture.

## What works to empower women economically in the value chain?

- Increase women's access to markets through improved transportation and infrastructure.
- Support small farmers to meet the delivery requirements of [producing for agricultural value chains](#), such as increasing their production capacity and start just-in-time delivery of products that consumers demand. [Read more](#) on creating inclusive agricultural value chains.

Authors: Annemarie van de Vijssel and Marleen Dekker

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