

Policy Brief February 2015

Delivering Women Farmers' Rights

Summary

The 2003 Maputo Declaration on Food and Agriculture committed signatory countries across Africa to a 10% allocation of national budgets to agriculture by 2008. To bolster the implementation of this commitment, the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) was established. But 12 years later, the situation for women smallholder farmers across Africa has hardly changed. Even allowing for Africa's diversity and varying policy and legal contexts, the disproportionately low levels of access to and control over productive resources by women – and limited efforts to match policy directives with programmes on the ground – is widespread across Africa.¹

Euphrasia Akimana, works in a field with members of the Abishyizehamwe Cooperative (others not pictured) in Kibilizi, Rwanda.
PHOTO: LAURA ELIZABETH POHL/ACTIONAID



Women smallholder farmers remain under-represented or excluded from state-led efforts to improve land and water management, rural infrastructure, market access, and agricultural research. Yet, women in sub-Saharan Africa have the highest average agricultural labour force participation rates in the world, making up almost 50% of the agricultural labour force; in some countries women account for over 50%, such as in Ghana, Lesotho, Mozambique and Sierra Leone.² Moreover, African women smallholder farmers make this major contribution to the agricultural sector despite a near-absence of infrastructural support and their hugely unequal and time-consuming responsibility for unpaid care work.

Alongside CAADP, African regional policy documents recognise the important role women smallholder farmers play, and the need for sustainable forms of agriculture. These instruments include:

- Protocol on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa³
- Beijing Platform for Action
- Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa⁴
- 2014 Malabo Decision on the on the high-level work programme on climate change action in Africa
- Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change, Women and Gender Programme (to engage women and gender on Climate Change)⁵

Despite these, two major gaps remain. The first is a persistent shortfall in adequate financial and human resources to deliver on the commitments to equitable and sustainable agriculture generally, and gender commitments in particular. The second is the absence of gender-specific targets and indicators to guide implementation of some of these instruments, such as the CAADP results framework and the 2014 Malabo Declaration (a declaration that speaks to gender equality but is silent on women's disproportionate share of unpaid care work).

As Africa re-defines its agenda through the Common Africa Position and Agenda 2063,⁶ a paradigm shift is necessary to deliver these often well-articulated policy positions. With the African Union summit re-dedicating its policy conversations in 2015 to the *Year of women's empowerment and development towards Agenda 2063* (and following the *Year of Agriculture and Food Security 2014*), the time is right to design and implement policies that effectively empower 'the other half' of the agricultural labour force in Africa: women smallholder farmers.

Structural barriers for women smallholder farmers

There are four main ways in which the continued absence of women smallholder farmers in African national agricultural policies can be understood. These are:

- women's access to and control of land;
- unpaid care work (childcare, household maintenance, etc.);
- women's lack of access to finance and extension services offered by the state;
- limited state investments in the agricultural sector.

Given the extent of women's contribution to agriculture and African governments' commitments to gender equality broadly, states have an obligation to fulfill these commitments and put in place measures that challenge and transform factors that sustain structural gender inequality as outlined below.

Women's right to land

Agriculture remains the backbone of African economies and livelihoods, so land tenure systems remain important. For smallholder farmers land is both an asset and a form of social security. Land is key to sustaining the care economy which refers to all the activities, resources and labour that go towards caring for others, including children and adults. Women depend on agricultural land for subsistence farming and cash crop farming to generate household income and ensure food security for their households. Land is needed for the collection of firewood and water, grazing for livestock, and provides fruits and medicinal plants necessary for the care of others.⁷ Women's gendered responsibility for care provision means they have multiple uses for land beyond farming. Yet women do not enjoy secure and equitable land rights in most societies as access is controlled by male family members and national or foreign elites.

Further, the existence of triple and often contradictory land tenure regimes – customary, individual titling or state-owned – increases the widespread denial of women's equal rights to access and control land and natural resources. These competing regimes remain patriarchal – where men hold primary power over the use, ownership and inheritance of land which continues to reinforce the denial of women's equal rights to land even when constitutions provide for it.

Research suggests that the increasing privatisation and improper acquisition of land results in increased concentration of land in the hands of those already better able to assert control and ownership in the first place, such as men, local leaders, national governments, and large corporations, all to the detriment of women.⁸ Research by the International Land Coalition, International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) and Agricultural Research for Development (CIRAD) puts the volume of reported acquisitions of land in Africa at 134.5 million hectares in 2011, primarily from foreign investors and national elites, with the expectation that demand for land and natural resources will only intensify in coming decades.⁹ As Table 1 shows, women form the majority of workers on the land and their contribution to agriculture across the value chain remains enormous in terms of food production, food preparation, sale and storage.

Table 1: The role of women farmers in seven African countries

Burundi	Women constitute 55% of the agricultural labour force and do 70% of farm work. ¹⁰
Ghana	Women constitute over half of the agricultural labour force and produce around 70% of the country's food. ¹¹
Kenya	Women account for 75% of the labour force in small-scale agriculture, manage 40% of small farms and play a major role in food preparation and storage. ¹²
Nigeria	Women constitute 60-80% of the agricultural labour force and are responsible for carrying out 50% of animal husbandry and 60% of food processing. ¹³
Rwanda	Women contribute up to 70% of agricultural labour and do 80% of the sowing, 65% of food processing, 61% of hoeing and 72% of the storage and transportation of produce. ¹⁴
Uganda	Women constitute 55% of farmers. They head 26% of households in rural areas and do 85% of the planting and weeding, 55% of land preparation and 98% of food processing. ¹⁵
Zambia	Women constitute around 65% of smallholder farmers. They are the main producers of food and manage, either independently or jointly, around 60% of the land under maize production. ¹⁶

The contributions made by women to these value chains could be greatly increased through government support for women's rights to make decisions about land and productive resources. This would strengthen women's bargaining power and share of revenue within value chains.

Unpaid care work

Unpaid care work, which includes fetching water, collecting firewood and taking care of the home and children is critical for creating and sustaining social ties in all societies. The care of children and adults sustains and reproduces the current and future labour force for the state and private capital. Despite society's dependence on care work, the responsibility for care rests disproportionately on women's shoulders because of the stereotypes that define what is deemed men's or women's work. Care work is time-consuming and more difficult to undertake in the context of poverty – in which most women farmers find themselves.¹⁷ More time is spent on unpaid care work when access to public services is limited and there is a lack of adequate infrastructure in rural communities.

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“The term ‘unpaid’ differentiates this care from paid care provided by employees in the public and non-governmental organisation sectors and employees and self-employed persons in the private sector.

The word ‘care’ indicates that the services provided nurture other people. The word ‘work’ indicates that these activities are costly in time and energy and are undertaken as obligations (contractual or social).”

UN Women, Progress of the World's Women 2000: UNIFEM Biennial Report ii

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Women and girls living in poor rural areas spend far too long collecting water and firewood because of multiple and compounding factors including the inadequate state provision of key infrastructure in energy, water and sanitation, intensifying competition for natural resources and the fall in water tables resulting from climate change. For example, a 2014 ActionAid baseline survey in Ghana showed that most of the 480 women interviewed in Ghana spent three to four hours per day collecting water for household use.¹⁸ ActionAid's *Making Care Visible* report also shows a similar pattern in Kenya's peri-urban Bamburi and rural Tangelbei areas, where women spend three to four hours on household work and an additional two hours on the care of children and the collection of fuel or water.¹⁹

The Beijing Platform for Action called for the development of “suitable statistical means to recognise and make visible the full extent of the work of women and all their contributions to the national economy, including their contribution in the unremunerated and domestic sectors”. Time-use surveys are therefore used to measure the average time women and men spend on different activities in a day. They allow national governments to measure unpaid care work and employment trends.²⁰ The Tanzanian national time-use

survey conducted in 2006 (see Table 2) further illustrates the differences in time that women and men allocate to paid work and unpaid care work. Women on average devote three times as much time as men to unpaid care work activities such as household maintenance, in addition to spending a similar share of their day on agricultural unpaid work. Men, on the other hand, tend to spend more time on other forms of paid work than women do, and non-work activities such as social and cultural engagements and learning.²¹



Zelia Azumah in Gnani Camp, Northern Ghana, Ghana: PHOTO: JANE HAHN/ACTIONAID

Table 2: Average time spent on activities in a day by sex and main activity type

	Broad activity type	Minutes per day	
		Female	Male
1	Employment for establishments	34.7	89.7
2	Primary production activities not for establishments	163.0	180.2
3	Services for income and other production of goods not for establishments	6.9	5.7
4	Household maintenance, management and shopping for own household	169.9	51.8
5	Care for children, the sick, elderly and disabled in own household	35.4	11.5
6	Community services and help for other households	7.2	8.9
7	Learning	75.1	86.9
8	Social and cultural activities	94.6	129.7
9	Mass-media use	7.7	17.8
10	Personal care and self maintenance	845.7	857.8

Source: Tanzania Time Use Survey, 2006

The data from the time-use survey above have several implications for women. First, when women's paid and unpaid work is considered, women perform a larger share of work in both developed and developing countries. Women's unpaid care work is not visible in national statistics, policies and debates, in part because of the lack and inconsistent use of time-use surveys by governments, and the persistent resistance to acknowledging and addressing women's unequal and unjust responsibility for unpaid care work and the resulting negative impacts on their human rights.²² In this way, national policies continue to turn a blind eye to women's unpaid care work and how this entrenches inequalities between women and men.²³

Second, evidence from time-use surveys shows how improving public infrastructure such as roads, access to water points, health facilities and markets markedly transforms women smallholder farmers' ability to both invest more time in agriculture as well as expand their farming practices, and enhance access to state services where they exist. Studies indicate that in sub-Saharan Africa, 71% of the burden of collecting water for households falls on women and girls who spend in total 40 billion hours in a year collecting water.²⁴ In the wake of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, care needs of poor rural households have increased substantially, and it is primarily women who have taken on this role. Home-based caregivers' groups across Africa are calling for compensation, access to health supplies and resources, and recognition as the main healthcare providers to rural households – this is unpaid care work done alongside women smallholder farmer's agricultural production.²⁵

Improved access to quality public services and infrastructure reduces the long hours spent by women and young girls on water and fuel collection, food preparation and other domestic and care activities. A 2014 study by ActionAid in Rwanda illustrates how small investments in care support structures can improve women's ability to participate fully in agricultural activities.²⁶ ActionAid supported the development of an Early Childhood Development Centre to enable women to have more time to take part in income-generating activities and improve their livelihoods. For example, after the introduction of early childcare centers in Rwanda by ActionAid, women gained five additional hours to engage in income-earning activities as well as having more time to take care of themselves.²⁷

Third, unpaid care work denies women time to participate in local decision-making forums, thus perpetuating the stereotype of women as second-class citizens, and men as decision-makers in the community.

Finally, when states rely on women's assumed roles and responsibilities to subsidise the absence of services such as accessible healthcare, water, fuel and transport services for households, they contribute to and sustain the assumption that unpaid care work is part and parcel of how households function. They ignore that women's unequal share of unpaid care work prevents them from enjoying their right to decent work, education and political participation.²⁸



Nyirakanani Severine, a member of voices of hope and dignity for women smallholder farmers in Rwanda, Rwanda PHOTO: ACTIONAID

States need to acknowledge, as well as integrate, work performed by women as part of key economic indicators of national production. Additionally, governments need to invest in quality public services and infrastructure that would facilitate the re-distribution of unpaid care work, thus freeing up women's time for social, economic and political empowerment. As noted by the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and Extreme poverty, "care work is a social and collective responsibility that should be distributed more fairly between women and men, between the state and households".²⁹

Access to finance, markets and extension services

Combined with their lack of ownership and control over land and labour, and their disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, women farmers also have limited access to finance, extension services and technological innovation.

First, access to finance, including formal credit services within banking institutions and cooperatives, is constrained by a lack of collateral – usually land – and the perception of women farmers as being too high-risk and therefore excluded from cooperatives. For instance, for every 100 Ghanaian farmers accessing credit, only 47 are women.³⁰

Second, lack of market access – a critical pillar for food security – is hampered by time constraints, limited market information, lack of transport and a lack of infrastructure and personal safety structures in market spaces such as toilets, child-care facilities, adequate lighting and security measures such as crime prevention programmes in market places.

Third, extension services tend to be tailored to men and commercial crops rather than the staple crops principally grown by women. As Table 3 below shows, women farmers continue to have limited access to extension services despite commitments to gender parity.

Table 3: Percentage of female-headed households with access to extension services

Ethiopia	23% (27% of men; 20% of women) ³¹
Ghana	12% of male-headed households vs. 2% of female-headed households ³²
Malawi	13% (15% of male-headed households; 8% of female-headed households) ³³

While most African governments promote sustainable agriculture, there is still a focus on prioritising high-input approaches to agriculture, such as those that use chemical fertilisers, often combined with chemical pesticides and hybrid seeds. This is visible in the kind of extension services provided to farmers. Yet high-input conventional agricultural methods based on Green Revolution technologies have led to polluted water and degraded soils, and caused a dramatic loss of biodiversity, agro-biodiversity and traditional knowledge.^{34,35} The short-term gains in increased production made through high-input agriculture are offset by the long-term negative impacts that make it far more difficult for future generations to feed themselves and adapt to a changing climate. For rural livelihoods to be sustainable for women smallholder farmers, a shift towards climate resilient sustainable agriculture is needed. Climate resilient sustainable agriculture is based on the practices of agro-ecology, aimed at developing climate-adaptation strategies to reduce vulnerability and increase the productivity, resistance and resilience of smallholder production systems while reducing dependence on chemical inputs. Extension services that promote climate resilient sustainable agriculture would focus on technologies that reduce dependence on external inputs and agro-chemicals; help adapt to climate change, and build on and reinforce local knowledge.

Women smallholder farmers are often holders of knowledge about cultivation, processing and preservation of nutritious and locally adapted crop varieties. Women therefore need to be directly involved in leading and promoting agro-ecological innovations. Combined with sustained gender responsive agricultural research, sustainable agricultural practices that tap into women farmers' indigenous knowledge of low-cost methods and coping strategies are vital for resilient farming systems.³⁶

Public financing for agriculture

The pivotal role women smallholder farmers' play with respect to agriculture is further hampered by the allocation of financial resources to the agricultural sector by signatories to the Maputo Declaration. A review of seven African governments' agriculture budgets and policies conducted by ActionAid³⁷ and five country analyses of National Agricultural Investment Plans (NAIPs) by ACORD³⁸ reveal three major trends in spending on agriculture in African countries.

The first trend is the lack of adequate financial resources to the agricultural sector when governments invest in agriculture. The ActionAid and ACORD studies show that governments are not spending enough on agriculture to reach expenditure levels outlined in their plans.³⁹ This means that fulfilling the commitment to 10% investment of national budget in the agricultural sector is far from being reached.

The second trend is the fact that too high a proportion of agriculture budgets is spent on recurrent costs such as salaries. Kenya, Uganda and Zambia spend 23-27% of their agriculture budgets on salaries and administration.⁴⁰ Further, the ACORD study illustrates that gender commitments are not provided for in budgets. While all the NAIPs reviewed mention women farmers and call for policies to promote gender equality, only Rwanda specifies how women farmers will actually be supported.⁴¹

The third trend is the identification of smallholder farmers as intended beneficiaries of agricultural investments while pursuing policy measures that have the potential to undermine them rather than help them. The ACORD review of NAIPs in Burkina Faso, Burundi, Ethiopia, Rwanda and Tanzania revealed no mention of issues such as land tenure security affected by land grabs and national land tenure regimes, or the promotion of labour-saving technologies or the prioritisation of staple crops which are likely to promote pro-poor economic growth.⁴²

There is demonstrable evidence that public investment in agriculture plays a key role in reducing hunger, alongside other investments. For example, the seven⁴³ African countries that spent more than 10% of their national budgets on agriculture in 2004-07 achieved reductions in the proportion of hungry people.⁴⁴



Wupuni women's group, in Tamale, Northern Ghana, Ghana PHOTO: JANE HAHN/PANOS PICTURES /ACTIONAID

African governments can mobilise resources towards agriculture by harnessing close to US\$2.8 billion a year lost by African countries through tax incentives and exemptions by transnational corporations, as well as clamping down on tax evasion, which cost Africa an average of US\$60 billion a year between 2005 and 2010.⁴⁵

Comprehensive government investments in agriculture can be directed towards robust gender-sensitive and climate resilient sustainable agricultural research, support to farmers' seed networks, the development of and support of storage facilities and market infrastructure, and access to finance and extension services to name a few.

Recommendations

In light of the factors above we offer the following recommendations to member states and the African Union.

1. Ensure women's right to land:

- 1.1 We call for member states to secure women's land rights by holistically implementing the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests negotiated and adopted by member states in 2012 through the World Committee on Food Security.
- 1.2 We urge member states to ensure that public land is regulated and protected from use as a trading instrument, which has resulted in the conversion of land meant for agriculture into land for alternative commercial use – leaving women without the primary factor of production – and making land unaffordable.
- 1.3 Member states should ensure the proper use and management of public land whose historical and current illegal allocation and use has denied women secure and equitable land rights.

2. Address unpaid care work:

- 2.1 The African Union and member states should support the proposed Sustainable Development Goal on gender equality that calls for the recognition, reduction and redistribution of women's unpaid care work between women and men by financing the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies.
- 2.2 We recommend the development of a clear framework that integrates unpaid care work and climate resilient sustainable agriculture by the AU's Department of Rural Economy and Agriculture (DREA) in collaboration with the African Union Gender Directorate.

3. Access to finance, markets and extension services:

- 3.1 The African Union and NEPAD need to develop a mechanism to guarantee the participation of women smallholder farmers in the AU Women and Gender Programme on climate change, as well as resource allocation for investments in research and extension for climate resilient sustainable agriculture. In this regard we recommend developing a programme to empower women smallholder farmers to have control over productive resources such as land and seeds systems.
- 3.2 We urge member states to increase spending on extension services for sustainable agriculture. This will include recruitment of more female extension officers, support for farmer field schools, and training for extension staff and increased outreach for women farmers' in order to maximise their food security and food production.
- 3.3 We call for substantial investment in infrastructure and services that complement sustainable agriculture such as roads, markets and electricity.
- 3.4 We recommend that member states quantify access to credit as flexible and credit friendly facilities to women, including soft loans that do not require collateral such as land that women smallholder farmers do not have.

4. Increase public financing and gender-responsive budgeting in agriculture:

- 4.1 We recommend that states adequately mobilise domestic resources to finance agricultural investments and public services that support rural women farmers by strengthening tax enforcement capabilities, developing progressive tax regimes and closing loopholes that facilitate tax avoidance and evasion.
- 4.2 The African Union needs to put in place a timeline for the full implementation of the 2003 Maputo Declaration on Food and Agriculture by member states and ensure that financial resources are allocated to sustainable agricultural investments at a national level.
- 4.3 We urge member states to invest in gender disaggregated data collection in the agricultural sector to inform appropriate gender programmes within national agriculture plans.

5. Ensure an integrated and coordinated multi-sectoral approach to women's empowerment and development:

- 5.1 We recommend that the African Union and its agencies set up a clear gender goal and targets for women's empowerment within the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Results framework 2015-2025. This will ensure that financial resources are allocated to address the challenges that women smallholder farmers face (which are captured in this policy brief) and institute accountability measures for effective delivery of programmes.

Endnotes

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Widows and Orphans Movement



ActionAid is a global movement of people working together to achieve greater human rights for all and defeat poverty. We believe people in poverty have the power within them to create change for themselves, their families and communities. ActionAid is a catalyst for that change.

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