

December 2016

# WOMEN EXCLUSION IN AGRICULTURE: *The Contextual Background*

By: Matilda Nakawungu

## INTRODUCTION

Women play an increasingly central role in Africa’s agriculture sector particularly in the natural resource management and in food production, producing more than 80% of the continent’s food. Women represent over 52% of the total population in the sector and are responsible for approximately 50% of the agricultural labour force in Sub-Saharan Africa.

## UGANDA CONTEXT

Uganda is predominantly an agricultural based economy with about 80% of the country’s total land area arable. <sup>1</sup>The agricultural sector employs over 66% of Uganda’s working population with more than 85% relying on it for their livelihoods. It contributes over 24.8% to the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and accounts for 48% of export revenue. The sector continues to be a key engine for local and regional economies, representing a critical source of income and ensuring food and nutrition security.

Despite the sector’s clear importance to poverty reduction, inclusive economic growth and food security, <sup>2</sup>agricultural productivity increases have stalled in recent years (2.2%)—below the population growth rate (3.2%), and well below the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) target (6%).

### The State of Ownership, Control, Access and Use of Production Resources

Despite the renewed interest in the agricultural sector as an engine of growth and development, and greater recognition of the importance of women in agriculture, there still exists an immense gender gap in access, use, control and ownership of agriculture production resources including but not limited to: land management, plot size, input application, control of proceeds and labour inputs.



Closing the gender gap in agriculture is essential to increasing agricultural productivity, achieving food security, and reducing hunger.

**Land management.** In Uganda, <sup>3</sup>only 23% of female-headed households in rural areas own land. <sup>4</sup>Women manage plots that are 20–30% less productive than male-managed plots. The majority of female-managed plots in Sub-Saharan Africa are located within male-headed households, the typical structure of which is fundamentally different from the typical structure of female-headed households. In particular, female-headed households are overwhelmingly characterized by cases where the husband has passed away, is a migrant laborer, or is polygamously married and member of a different household.

**Plot size.** <sup>5</sup>The average plot size is 0.69 acres, with male-managed plots significantly larger (0.85 acres) than female managed ones (0.54 acres).

This difference in plot size has implications on the productivity gap between male- and female-operated plots

**Input application.** Material input use is strikingly low in Uganda: <sup>6</sup>improved seeds are used on 7%, manure on 4%, chemical fertilizer on 1% and pesticides/fungicides on 5% of plots. Despite these low levels of material input use, female managers are significantly less likely than males to apply any of the aforementioned. For female-managed plots on which these inputs are applied, the quantity per acre is also significantly lower for both fertilizers and pesticides/

*... targeted investments in women farmers evidently can yield....*

<sup>1</sup>UBOS Statistical Abstract 2015;World Bank Development Indicators, 2013

<sup>2</sup> Ali, D., Bowen, D., Deininger, K., & Duponchel, M. (2016). Investigating the Gender Gap in Agricultural Productivity: Evidence from Uganda

<sup>3</sup> Uganda National Household Survey 2012/13

<sup>4</sup>FAO, 2011

fungicides compared to male-managed plots on which they are applied. This is partly attributed to insufficient quantities applied per unit area, late application and limited technical capacity resident among women plot managers.

**Control of proceeds.** Despite the fact that women provide majority of the labour, <sup>7</sup>less than 20% of the women engaged in agriculture have control over the produce from their efforts and have decision making power over the proceeds from sale of the produce. This has an implication on meeting the Food and Nutrition Security needs, future investments in the sector to improve production and productivity, peace and harmony at household and general social, economic and political improvements.

**Labour as an input.** Family labor is the main input applied to 99% of both male and female plots. Female-managed plots receive more labor days per acre of cultivated land (147 versus 125 days for male-managed plots per acre). Predominantly women are relying on the hand hoe and physical labour demanding tools compared to their male counterparts. On average, hired labor is applied to 32% of male-managed plots versus 24% of female-managed plots. This has an implication on production and productivity, and diversification—an important safeguard in agriculture particularly in Uganda. It's a reflection of how the woman labour hours are distributed between household chores, production, and biological responsibilities such as child birth and nurturing.

### Implications

The gap in productivity between male and female-managed plots is of meaningful concern both to GDP growth and to the distribution of income between men and women. Women have inherently been excluded from owning, controlling and using the production resources they are entitled to in order to realise development. As has been widely documented, gender-based inequalities in access to and control of productive and financial resources inhibit agricultural productivity and reduce food security.

According to FAO, the underperformance of agriculture in developing countries is attributable to women's limited access to productive resources and inability to take advantage of opportunities in the

sector. Limited access in this regard, is experienced more severely by women than their male counter parts, demonstrating a clear "gender gap".

Despite growing evidence of the important role that women's empowerment plays in poverty reduction. The few gender equity or women's empowerment measures that do exist do not address the issues most relevant for women in agriculture.

### CONCLUSION

Empowering women and reducing gender inequalities are two key objectives of development policy. As such, more deliberate effort needs to be made to realise gender focused social transformation and economic development in the sector. It is recommended that these efforts include: (1) Adoption of a gender-responsive Land Policy, Regulatory Framework and land reforms; (2) Prioritisation of gender-based diagnostics to inform the design of regional and national programmes; and (3) Integration of small women producers and exporters in High-value agricultural Value chains for domestic, regional and global markets. These targeted investments in women farmers evidently can yield enormous benefits for women, their households, communities and country.

Addressing the issues of women's exclusion in agriculture and creation of safeguards to increase their resilience to shocks of hunger, malnutrition and poverty does not necessarily mean giving women aid but rather, creating an enabling environment.

### NOTES

*The FAO estimates that closing the agricultural productivity gap globally could increase agricultural output in lower-income countries by 2.5–4%, reducing undernourishment by 12–17% or 100–150 million individuals (FAO, 2011). It is also commonly argued that redistributing household resources from men to women would improve efficiency through the channel of more optimal investment in human capital of the next generation—such as child health, education, clothing and nutrition (World Bank, 2011).*



<sup>5</sup> Peterman et al. (2011)

<sup>6</sup> Uganda National Panel Survey 2009–10 and 2010–11, World Bank Living Standards Measurement Study – Integrated Surveys on Agriculture (LSMS-ISA)

<sup>7</sup> The Women's Manifesto 2016 to 2012: The Unfinished Business

<sup>8</sup> Ali, D., Bowen, D., Deininger, K., & Duponchel, M. (2016). Investigating the Gender Gap in Agricultural Productivity: Evidence from Uganda; Alkire, S., Meinzen-Dick, R., Peterman, A., Quisumbing, A., Seymour, G., Vaz, A. (2007). The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index

<sup>9</sup> The Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) - (2011). The State of Food and Agriculture: Women in Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap for Development