



A woman pours water collected from a municipal water tanker into a storage container in a township in drought-stricken Graaff-Reinet, South Africa, November 17, 2019. [Photo/Agencies]

BREAKING BARRIERS FOR AFRICAN WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

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Agriculture sustains 70% of Africa's livelihoods. African women, on average, make up 40% of the agricultural labour workforce and produce 70% of Africa's food. But African women farmers are excluded from conversations that determine agricultural policies, while discriminatory laws and practices deprive them of their land, their rights, and their livelihoods. However, initiative aimed at mentoring, empowering and raising the next generation of women in agricultural are starting to pay off.

Africa women farmers play a vital role in food production and food security with 80% of the agricultural production coming from small farmers, who are mostly rural women. According to the Food Agriculture Organization (FAO), women in some African countries spend up to 60 percent of their time on agricultural activities contributing up to 50 percent of labour on farms in sub-Saharan Africa. But African women farmers are excluded from conversations that determine agricultural

policies, while discriminatory laws and practices deprive them of their land, their rights, and their livelihoods.

First, women farmers in Africa depend on rain-fed agriculture, and have little access to farm inputs including; fertilisers, seeds, water, credit, and to markets for their products.

Second, most of them either own small pieces of land or have no land at all and receive 7 percent of extension services, 1 percent of all agricultural credit and own only 1 percent of the land.

Third, biased cultural practices restrict women in Africa from accessing Information and Communications Technology (ICT), Furthermore, illiteracy and lack of formal education are constraints that most rural women face.

Fourth, Like in most patriarchal societies in Africa, socio-economic conditions, among other factors, affect the decision-making role in agriculture.

This means, although African women farmers are heavily involved in agriculture, their level of participation in farm management decision making are quite low attributable to their age, education, land tenancy, and the wealth status.

Fifth, women in Africa are rarely connected with agricultural export crops such as cocoa, rubber, cotton, but rather involved with the production of food crops such as maize and vegetables that do not yield large revenues as compared to export crops.

However, initiatives aimed at mentoring, empowering and raising the next generation of women in agricultural are starting to pay off.

At the continental level, the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) through Gender Climate Change and Agriculture Support Programme (GCCASP), organises Conferences for Women in Agribusiness as a direct response to the

African Union Summit's call to enhance support for preferential entry and participation for women and youth in gainful and attractive agri-business opportunities by the year 2025.

Further, in October 2019, the African Union Commission for Rural Economy and Agriculture under the "Bobo-Dioulasso Declaration", officially launched the campaign on "Reducing the Drudgery of Rural Women" and the formation of the Platform for African Women in Agriculture (PAWA).

This signifies the continental agenda of promoting agriculture mechanization among women to improve food production and security.

At the regional level, in February 2017, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) among its Member States in East Africa, on the realisation of their strategy on peace and security issues and regional integration.

This has essentially helped women businesses in agriculture to get behind regional peace building efforts, and women to build more inclusive societies, mitigating the effects of climate change, and supporting more transparent natural resource management.

In West Africa, the Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in partnership with the regional governments is spearheading their Technical Cooperation Project on: "Gender Responsive Regional and National Agricultural Investment Plans for meeting the Zero Hunger Challenge in the ECOWAS region.

This highlights the gender gaps inherent in the regional's agricultural and rural development sectors, and provides policy recommendations for agricultural growth and transformation that leaves no woman behind

At the national level, in 2019, the Kenyan

government passed affirmative policies that preferentially give tenders to African women-led agricultural enterprises.

In Nigeria, the National Gender Policy of 2006, created in 1968 established Women in Agriculture as an arm to the Agriculture Development Programme.

This has enabled the integration of women into the agricultural development system, by providing equal access to agricultural inputs, credit, loans and extension services.

In Ethiopia, the Joint Programme on “Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women” is being implemented by the Government to inject basic labour and time-saving technologies, along with the relevant knowledge, to smallholder women farmers’ cooperatives as critical elements in the sustainable escalation of the value chain in agriculture.

The recognisance of these contributions is critical given that the bulk of challenges in Africa today. However much still needs to be done.

Sixth, devoting resources to researching the impact of agricultural policies and new techniques on the wellbeing of female farmers will go a long way in promoting systematic evaluation of mechanisms to improve women’s access to agricultural markets and participate fully in agricultural value chains.

Finally, improving access to finance through and lowering collateral requirements will empower in women in Agribusiness.

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