

## New Report Highlights Need for Gender Equality to Achieve Agricultural Growth Goals in Africa

**November 11, 2019, Lomé, Togo**, - Many African governments have committed to promoting inclusive agricultural growth in recent years, but their efforts often neglect the key role played by gender, according to a new report. Evidence shows that gender differences are affecting African countries' ability to meet their goals of ending hunger, reducing poverty, boosting trade, and increasing resilience to climate change and other risks. To achieve those outcomes, governments and development practitioners must understand how gender norms shape the context for agriculture, livelihoods, and well-being.

Launched on November 11 during the inaugural session of the 2019 [ReSAKSS Annual Conference](#) in Lomé, Togo, The [2019 Annual Trends and Outlook Report \(ATOR\) "Gender Equality in Rural Africa: From Commitments to Outcomes,"](#) pulls together the growing body of evidence needed to advance gender equality across the African continent and realize the 2014 Malabo Declaration to end hunger and increase resilience. Published by the Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System (ReSAKSS), a program facilitated by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), this year's report applies a gender lens to several issues that must be addressed to fully achieve the Malabo commitments.

"Realizing the Malabo commitments will not be possible without taking gender into account and working toward achieving gender equality," said Ruth Meinzen-Dick, IFPRI senior research fellow and co-editor of the report. "Moreover, measuring progress toward these commitments and holding leaders accountable will not be possible without data systems that provide information on gender gaps."

Gender norms—the culturally determined expectations about what it means to be a man or a woman in a society—are increasingly recognized as important barriers that undermine women's economic empowerment and prevent them from acting on opportunities.

These norms affect various facets of agriculture, such as who can own resources, who can participate in certain activities, and who can make decisions. The frequent exclusion of women from these facets prohibits key actors from fully contributing to production, often resulting in lower productivity and growth. In this way, gender norms can affect the performance of the entire agriculture sector.

Furthermore, effective political and agricultural leadership cannot be achieved if women are excluded from positions of influence. Shifting social norms can thus be as influential as monetary incentives or policy prescriptions in changing behavior at scale.

"What new about this year's ATOR," said Agnes Quisumbing, IFPRI senior research fellow and co-editor of the report, "is that it highlights the many costs of gender inequality at all levels: from the individual to the household, the community, and the nation."

Gender norms and inequality have led to disparities in men's and women's incomes, assets, productive capacity, human capital, and overall well-being, the report says. For example, women continue to have less secure land tenure than men. Despite recent gender-friendly land reforms in several countries, in some places women's access to land is decreasing.

Women also have less access to financial services and products. Although services such as credit, savings, and insurance can enhance women's economic prospects, the gender gap in financial inclusion is often worsened by women's lack of access to mobile phones, their lower literacy levels, and the norms that limit women's mobility and ownership of assets.

"Financial inclusion is a mechanism through which women grow their businesses and investments, so closing the gap is critical to ensuring that women are able to make the investments that they need," said Jemimah Njuki, senior program officer at Canada's International Development Research Centre. "This means making sure that financial institutions meet the needs of women, not changing women to fit them. We too often think about making women bankable, whereas what we should be doing is making financial institutions 'womenable'".

To close the gender gap in agriculture, countries and development practitioners face an overarching need for better data on the influence and impact of gender. In the aspiration to eliminate hunger and poverty, rural women and girls in Africa south of the Sahara are a key demographic, but data on many aspects of their lives are lacking. The ATOR highlights the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) as a reliable tool for measuring and tracking changes in women's empowerment over time and across countries, regions, and population subgroups.

Data and evidence, from tools such as the WEAI and on other indicators as well, can empower policymakers to move beyond commitments to equality and into integrating gender into programs and policies. Research shows well-designed policies can simultaneously enhance gender equality and development outcomes by harnessing the untapped potential of women and girls.

"The most critical challenges facing the African continent are all going to require the best leadership possible," said Wanjiru Kamau-Rutenberg, director of AWARD. "If we as a continent can solve gender inequalities, it will provide access to the kinds of top-notch leaders we need to solve these problems."

To build upon the evidence in the ATOR, researchers point to additional areas of work, including the need for more attention to women's participation in parts of the agricultural value chain beyond growing crops, such as their roles as processors, traders, exporters, and consumers. New research is also needed to identify how best to support women entrepreneurs in agriculture.

Despite the formidable impact of gender inequality, the researchers emphasized that recognizing the high costs of gender inequality is an essential step towards, spurring action. "We have reasons to be optimistic," said Meinzen-Dick. "We have the knowledge and increasingly better data to commit to gender equality. Drawing together all of our political will, we can make informed decisions in future policy plans and programming to ensure women and men both benefit from agricultural growth."

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**The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI)** seeks sustainable solutions for ending hunger and poverty. IFPRI was established in 1975 to identify and analyze alternative national and international strategies and policies for meeting the food needs of the developing world, with particular emphasis on low-income countries and on the poorer groups in those countries. Visit: [www.ifpri.org](http://www.ifpri.org)

Established in 2006 under the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), the **Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System (ReSAKSS)** supports efforts to promote evidence- and outcome-based policy planning and implementation. In particular, ReSAKSS provides data and related analytical and knowledge products to facilitate CAADP benchmarking, review, and mutual learning processes. The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) facilitates the overall work of ReSAKSS in partnership with the African Union Commission, the African Union Development Agency-NEPAD (AUDA-NEPAD), leading regional economic communities, and Africa-based CGIAR centers. Visit: [www.resakss.org](http://www.resakss.org)