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# International Journal of Agricultural Extension

ISSN: 2311-6110 (Online), 2311-8547 (Print)

<http://www.escijournals.net/IJAE>

## SUSTAINABLE RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN RWANDA: THE IMPORTANCE OF A FOCUS ON WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

Shirley Randell, Megan McCloskey

*SRI Public Sector Reform Pty Ltd., Australia.*

### ABSTRACT

Rwanda is most well known internationally for the shocking 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in which over 800,000 people were cruelly slaughtered and over 300,000 women were brutally raped in 100 days. The nation's second most widely known characteristic is that it leads the world in the representation of women among decision-makers and in Parliament: the only country with a majority of women in its Chamber of Deputies and, at 64 percent, a substantial one. This paper examines a third important facet: the place of gender in agriculture and agricultural extension in economic development and poverty reduction in Rwanda. It is this aspect that is the particular focus of this paper, which suggests that Rwanda is an important case study for Pakistan to consider. Gender equality and women's empowerment are critical components of any program for sustainable development and poverty reduction. In Rwanda, where agriculture is the backbone of the domestic economy, women are much more likely than men to work in agricultural occupations, and are more likely to depend on their farm work for income. The Government of Rwanda has been a world leader in its commitment to gender equality, through legal reforms that guarantee women a representative voice in public policy, a commitment to increasing the enrollment of girls in primary and secondary schools, and institutional reforms that ensure accountability for gender sensitive policies. Nevertheless, women's effective participation in programs targeting economic development, particularly in the agricultural sector, has lagged. Women continue to face challenges caused by poor skills and lack of effective organizations, limited access to improvements like seeds and fertilizers to support greater productivity on small farms, soil degradation, weak coordination of agricultural actors and insufficient collaboration between farmers-researchers and extension workers. In part as a result, Rwanda remains one of the poorest countries in the world, despite having made extraordinary progress in decreasing rural poverty. To overcome the challenges facing farmers and ensure women's inclusion, the Government of Rwanda has adopted the Agriculture Gender Strategy. The Strategy lays out clear steps to ensure that the programs and activities targeting the agricultural sector set a strong foundation for equal rights and equal opportunities for both women and men in rural development. The Agriculture Gender Strategy serves as a complement to other policies, including the National Agricultural Extension Strategy, whose collective vision is to ensure ideal conditions for the dissemination and exchange of information between producers, farmer organizations and other partners in order to transform and to modernize the agricultural sector so that it can effectively contribute to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, Vision 2020, and the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy objectives. This paper analyzed the challenges facing the agricultural sector, particularly Rwanda's women farmers, analyze the strategies Rwanda is using to meet these challenges, and suggest good practice from Rwanda's experience that might be relevant for consideration by Pakistan and other countries represented at this conference.

**Keywords:** Women Empowerment, Rawanda, Millennium Development Goals, Vision 2020

### INTRODUCTION

The 1994 genocide against the Tutsis was a shattering event in the history of Rwanda. In 100 days, it is estimated that over 800,000 people were killed (10 percent of a population of nearly eight million), over two

million were displaced and over 300,000 women were raped. Sexual violence was a major weapon of war, and mass violence has been the experience of many Rwandans, at least since the pogroms against the Tutsi began in 1959. In addition to altering the demographic and political landscape of the country, the genocide is also considered to have set a social revolution in motion. Before 1994, Rwandan women were legally designated

\* Corresponding Author:

Email: [mail@shirleyrandell.com.au](mailto:mail@shirleyrandell.com.au)

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as minors. Most were not encouraged either to go to school, or if they did, to progress beyond primary school, so the majority were illiterate and severely disadvantaged. Women were responsible for domestic work and caring for children and elderly relatives. They were not allowed to own or inherit land, conduct financial transactions or seek employment without male consent. Their husbands were the decision makers. Women's subordination was reinforced by the *inkwano* (dowry) that the husband paid to the woman's family on marriage, establishing men as women's masters.

After 1994, with their husbands either dead, missing, or in prison, women had to assume the role of the head of the family, responsible not only for the care of their own children and older relatives but also for the wounded women and children suffering the trauma of the genocide. After the genocide, millions of women faced another crisis (Burnet, 2008). Many of them were themselves traumatized when they took up these responsibilities. These two crises disrupted the old social order and were the beginnings of the gender revolution in Rwanda.

Women were involved in the legislative and policy formulation that amended the 2003 *Constitution*, in particular the incorporation of the 30 percent clause for women's participation in decision-making at all levels. It was considered that the involvement of women in leadership would facilitate harmony and minimize the possibility of a return to violence (Adams, 2008). Once elected, women influenced the enactment of gender-sensitive legislation aimed at empowering women and protecting women's human rights through inheritance, land and gender-based violence laws, and policies such as gender-responsive budgeting for all ministries. Through reserved seats as well as the electoral system, women gained maximal representation of 48 percent in parliament and cabinet positions during the 2003 national elections. This increased to 56 percent after the 2010 national elections and 64 percent following the 2013 elections.

As part of the new social order, many women had to take responsibility for the agricultural businesses and farms that had been in the control of their husbands, fathers, brothers and sons.

#### **Overview of Agricultural Development in Rwanda**

*Women perform 66 percent of the world's work, and produce 50 percent of the food, yet earn only 10 percent of the income and own 1 percent of the property. Whether*

*the issue is improving education in the developing world, or fighting global climate change, or addressing nearly any other challenge we face, empowering women is a critical part of the equation.*

*Former President Bill Clinton, at the annual meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative (September 2009), Quoted in Women's Economic Empowerment, OECD, 2012.*

Rwanda is a small, landlocked country in central east Africa. It is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with more than 400 inhabitants per square kilometer (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2014). Agriculture is the mainstay of the Rwandan economy, representing more than one-third of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) (Twesigye-Bakwatsa, 2010). The agricultural sector generates over 80 percent of employment, especially among women, and produces 90 percent of the country's food (MINAGRI, 2010). More than 90 percent of households farm at least one plot of land but, because land is scarce, most farming is done on very small plots – 84 percent of farming households cultivate less than 0.9 ha of land (National Institute of Statistics Rwanda, 2012). Most farms' produce is used for subsistence only, with barely one-third of the food produced making it to market. Despite Rwandan farms meeting most of the country's food needs, significant numbers of the population still struggle with poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition.

In 2002, Rwanda finalized its *Vision 2020*, a sweeping statement of goals that target economic development and plan for Rwanda to become a middle-income country (with per capita annual income of at least \$1240 USD) by the year 2020. Agricultural development is one of the six pillars of *Vision 2020*, targeted as one of the most significant means of reducing poverty and improving food security. To meet the *Vision's* goals, the Government of Rwanda (GoR) has developed a series of policies and programs aimed at increasing agricultural production and improving living conditions for the rural population. They include the Ministry of Agriculture (MINAGRI's) *National Agricultural Policy (NAP)*, the *National Land Policy*, the *Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy (EDPRS)*, and the *National Agricultural Extension Strategy*, among a host of others.

These interventions are credited with significantly decreasing poverty over the past two decades. In the decade between 2000 and 2010, Rwanda had the tenth fastest-growing economy in the world, and the

agricultural sector grew at an average rate of 5.8 percent per year. Between 2005/2006 and 2010/2011, the rural poverty rate dropped by 6 percent to 48.7 percent, improving living conditions for more than one million people (MINAGRI, 2013). Extreme rural poverty also fell during the same time period, from 39.5 percent to 26.4 percent, as did malnutrition rates, with the percentage of households experiencing food shortages or borderline nutritional conditions dropping from 34.7 percent of the population to 21.5 percent (MINAGRI, 2013).

Although Rwanda is well on its way to meeting the goals of *Vision 2020* and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it continues to face challenges reducing rural poverty and increasing incomes for its population. To meet these challenges, Rwanda has targeted significant expansion and improvement of agricultural extension services, and greater inclusion of Rwanda's women farmers in program development and administration. The following sections will review, first, the policy framework through which Rwanda is pursuing agricultural development, and the role of extension services in promoting economic development. Next, we assess how gender interacts with development planning, and where the unique barriers faced by Rwanda's women farmers may have impeded agricultural growth. Finally, we discuss Rwanda's *Agriculture Gender Strategy*, which offers valuable insights into how gender can be mainstreamed into development programs in a way that will benefit poor communities and ensure economic development that is sustainable and inclusive.

#### **POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

**International Commitments Promoting Agricultural Development:** Rwanda is party to a number of international treaties and protocols that promote agricultural development and facilitate increased trade of agricultural products. It is one of the 191 United Nations (UN) member states that has committed to achieving the MDGs, and has developed its domestic policies with the goal of meeting all MDGs and their targets by 2015. Its agricultural strategies recognize the importance of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger (MDG 1), promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women (MDG3), and ensuring environmental sustainability (MDG 7), among other things. Rwanda is also a party to the *Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), and has adopted the principle of gender

equality into its *Constitution*, which sets quotas requiring the inclusion of women in decision-making positions as well as empowering GoR to promote gender equality.

Within Africa, the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), in which Rwanda is a member, has called for the transformation of agriculture through its Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP). CAADP aims to boost sustainable agricultural growth throughout the continent, and calls for a minimum commitment of 10 percent of national budgets to agricultural investment (CAADP, 2009). NEPAD has further formed a working group on gender that is tasked with ensuring all poverty reduction strategies take the specific needs of poor women into account. NEPAD prioritizes gender empowerment as one of several crosscutting issues central to its work to enhance women's rights in Africa. Its focus is on mainstreaming gender throughout its programs. Rwanda adopted the framework of the CAADP into its own National Agricultural Transformation Strategy (PSTA), which will be discussed further below (Twesigye-Bakwatsa, 2010). NEPAD and the African Union Commission have also joined forces with the World Economic Forum to support the goals of CAADP and promote private investment in African agriculture. The new program, *Grow Africa*, works with member countries to help build private investor interest in agriculture, address important issues, including resource management and climate change, and create a sense of shared commitment through the exchange of best practices. Rwanda is one of the first member countries to complete an investment blueprint with *Grow Africa*, and offer investors a package of policy proposals (MINAGRI, 2013). Rwanda is also a member of the Common Markets for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the East African Community (EAC), both of which are designed to facilitate regional integration to promote economic development. EAC member states have adopted the Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy for the East African Community, and committed to the establishment of a common market (MINAGRI, 2013; Alinda and Abbott, 2012). Trade linkages within the region offer new opportunities for growth which Rwanda's agricultural strategies are designed to promote.

#### **NATIONAL POLICIES PROMOTING AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Rwanda's Vision 2020:** Rwanda's *Vision 2020* is a

statement of the aspirations and guiding principles governing Rwanda's development into a middle-income country. It sets targets of increasing per capita income to at least \$1240 USD (from \$220 USD in 2000), and reducing poverty from 60 percent to 30 percent. It also anticipates a shift from a primarily agrarian economy and rural population to a more urban one, in which agriculture is moved from subsistence to commercial production, and the economy is highly diversified. One of the pillars of *Vision 2020's* economic growth strategy is thus the "transformation of agriculture into a productive, high value, market-oriented sector[.]" In order to achieve its goal of replacing subsistence farming with a "fully monetized, commercial agricultural sector," *Vision 2020* identifies building extensive research and extension services as one of its key priorities (Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning - MINECOFIN, 2000: 4.5). Notably, *Vision 2020* also identifies gender equality as a key cross-cutting issue, and commits Rwanda's policy-makers to integrate gender into all development policies and strategies (MINECOFIN, 2000, 5.1).

#### **Economic Development and Poverty Reduction**

**Strategies:** EDPRS guides implementation of the objectives of *Vision 2020* as well as the MDGs. The first EDPRS established targets for the medium term (2008-2012) that included increasing agricultural productivity and improving food security. EDPRS 2 takes the lessons learned from the previous four years and builds on them to guide program development for the 2013-2018 period, or the final stretch before 2020. Initiatives that engaged and empowered local communities in problem solving were found to be the most effective and efficient, and are scaled up and supported in EDPRS 2. Likewise, so-called "homegrown" concepts that incorporate local cultural elements, such as *Imihigo* performance contracts, were found to strengthen EDPRS programs and therefore form an integral part of EDPRS 2, as does the use of information and communication technology to support service delivery, one of the most significant successes of EDPRS 1 (MINECOFIN 2013, 2-4).

EDPRS 2 continues the focus on rural development and poverty reduction through increased agricultural productivity. In order to accomplish this, it prioritizes, among other things, increasing private investment in agri-processing facilities and value chains, developing rural infrastructure to improve farmers' access to markets, greater support for entrepreneurship and agricultural financing, institutional development to

improve service delivery, and transparency and increased local participation. Particularly relevant to agricultural extension, EDPRS 2 calls for enhancing skills with irrigation techniques and land husbandry, and improving access to advisory services for crops and livestock (MINCOFIN 2013, pp. 21-25).

But the EDPRS also acknowledges the necessity of including women in development efforts. Noting that Rwanda's innovative approaches to gender equality have "transformed the socio-economic and political lives of the men and women of Rwanda," EDPRS 2 also recognizes that despite progress, women have not fully participated in economic development. It commits the government to mainstream gender in planning, budgeting, and project development at the national and local levels (MINCOFIN 2013, pp. 6.44, 6.46).

**National Agriculture Policy and Strategic Plan for the Transformation of Agriculture:** The strategic interventions in the agricultural sector called for by the EDPRS are regulated by Rwanda's NAP, adopted in 2004. NAP is oriented primarily toward ensuring food security by modernizing and professionalizing agriculture. It envisions a major role for extension services, especially those supporting market-oriented production and innovations. The National Agriculture Policy and Strategic Plan for the Transformation of Agriculture (PSTA) guides the implementation of NAP. The focus of PSTA has been on programs and activities that shift the agricultural sector from subsistence to commercial production through production intensification, farm mechanization, development of agro-processing facilities, technology enhancements, and infrastructure development (MINAGRI 2013).

The Rwandan Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry (MINAGRI) credits successful land consolidation, expansion of areas receiving irrigation, increased soil conservation efforts and expansion of terracing for the gains in agricultural productivity between 2008 and 2012. MINAGRI also cites farmers' increased access to financing for agricultural improvements, wider use of fertilizers and improved seeds, and improvements in infrastructure and transport for market goods as reasons for increased production of maize, wheat, soybeans, and a host of other products (MINAGRI, 2013).

In July 2013, Rwanda adopted its third PSTA, which calls for a continuing focus on building a well-informed, professionalized agricultural sector through expanded

extension services. PSTA III sets specific goals to strengthen and improve extension services for all farmers, primarily by expanding skills training for extension service providers and increasing their numbers so that more farmers can have easier access to support services. Included in its proposed lines of actions are a number of steps designed specifically to benefit women farmers. Among the programs that PSTA III prioritizes are the following:

- Extending Farmer Field Schools (Belgian Development Agency, 2014)<sup>1</sup> with season long training programs and new supervision and coordination of training programs for trainers;
- Training for agricultural entrepreneurship that includes training for women's organizations on how to develop business plans, and accounting, cost control, and marketing skills;
- Facilitating relationships between cooperatives and farm advisors, where government helps farmers make direct links with specialized advisors;
- Expansion of agricultural advisory services, including a permanent training program for extension agents, and increased efforts to expand the number of female agents and agronomists;

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<sup>1</sup>The Farmer Field School is an informal, adult education program that gives trainee farmers the chance to experiment with and compare farming techniques in the field. It was first used widely in Rwanda in 2009 as a way to promote the use of Integrated Pest Management. The Farmer Field Schools are implemented by the Rwanda Agricultural Board with support from the Belgian Development Agency. The latter reports that, since the chance to experiment with and compare farming techniques in the field. It was first used widely in Rwanda in 2009 as a way to promote the use of Integrated Pest Management. The Farmer Field Schools are implemented by the Rwanda Agricultural Board with support from the Belgian Development Agency. The latter reports that, since 2009, 80,000 Rwandan farmers have joined an FFS group, which now cover 12 different commodities. Ninety-two percent of the FFS groups reported an increase in production of more than 50 percent, and the average income of participating farmers has more than doubled. The FFS program has also generated a "quick-win spinoff" called Community Mobilization Campaigns. When an agricultural intervention has proven successful in the FFS program, Community Mobilization Campaigns allow it to be rapidly scaled up and shared with non-FFS participants.

- Establishing local forums for farmers and agricultural stakeholders that allow for the exchange of relevant information among farmers and service providers.

The program also includes steps to build the capacity of farmers' organizations and cooperatives to promote management and entrepreneurial skills, with special attention given to promoting rural women's organizations.

#### **National Agricultural Extension Programs and Programming**

*"Only when the majority of farmers have access to appropriate and quality proximity service provision will they be able to exchange experiences and express their needs through a demand driven process for extension service provision."*

*MINAGRI, 2013, SP 2.2*

Rwanda's experience with agricultural extension predates all of the policy interventions described above. Agricultural extension programs have been in place in Rwanda for many years, and have taken a variety of forms. During the colonial period and for nearly two decades after, the agricultural sector was focused on export crops, e.g. coffee and tea, among others. The extension system in place required farmers to follow certain regulated production methods set by colonial authorities. There was very little dialogue between farmers and extension workers, and very few of the latter. In 1982, Rwanda launched a new national extension system – the National Agricultural Extension Strategy (NAES). It prioritized building partnerships with farmers, and improving collaboration between extension workers and local leaders. For the first time extension commissions were established at all administrative levels, and new workers hired (MINAGRI, 2009).

After the 1994 genocide, the government's priorities were directed at rebuilding the country, leaving little space for further development of the extension system. A number of new farmers' associations were formed but more for the purpose of receiving aid than benefiting from extension. Although international and national NGOs continued to provide limited extension services, they were poorly coordinated and did not reach significant numbers of farmers. In order to ensure a system is in place that can support Rwanda's goals for agricultural development, Rwanda began a fundamental re-thinking of agricultural extension services that led to the 2009 adoption of NAES.

NAES defines and operationalizes the role of extension services in achieving the goals of *Vision 2020*. The objective of the Strategy is to assist the professionalization of agricultural producers and support the adoption of agricultural innovations to diversify and intensify agricultural production (MINAGRI, 2009). It is based on the following guiding principles:

- Participatory extension – stakeholders define the vision, analyze constraints and needs, and plan together for implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
- Multi-approach and multi-method – the Strategy recognizes and adopts a variety of methods that are proven to be both effective and complementary;
- Demand-driven and market-oriented – strategic interventions must be led by farmers as well as market objectives to ensure local conditions are considered and promote project ownership and accountability;
- Process and result-oriented extension – planning for services must include consideration of the process as well as expected results;
- Multi-actor extension – the Strategy recognizes that multiple actors should be involved in agricultural production and extension, including farmers' organizations, research institutions, public and private entities, national and international NGOs, and others;
- Building on existing initiatives – the Strategy intends to build on initiatives like *Imihigo*, *Ubudehe*, *Girinka*, and others to accomplish sustainable development.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>*Imihigo*, discussed further *infra*, is a tradition newly institutionalized as performance contracts in which Rwandans publicly commit themselves to completing a particular task. *Ubudehe* is a program to reduce rural poverty that draws on the Rwandan tradition of mutual solidarity. The *Ubudehe* program allows communities to collectively define priorities and pursue joint development activities like water culture and construction, with funds administered at the grassroots level. The *Girinka* program likewise takes inspiration from Rwandan culture and aims to allow every poor household to own and manage a dairy cow. Very poor families receive a dairy cow free of charge. When that cow calves, the calf is passed on to a neighbor, also free of charge, and so on. The objective is to provide new sources of income and nutrition as well as natural fertilizers (MINAGRI, 2009).

The Strategy capitalizes on the strengths of the systems already in place in Rwanda, such as the large number of farmers' organizations, the existence of qualified extension workers and trained technical staff in certain institutions and locations, the presence of micro-finance facilities, and the political will to support agriculture, while acknowledging the challenges extension has faced over the years, such as lack of collaboration among actors in the agricultural sector and failure to harmonize approaches and development initiatives, weak capacity of farmers' organizations, and lack of training opportunities for extension staff (MINAGRI, 2009). It sets four specific objectives:

- a. To promote farmers' organizations and encourage their participation in stakeholder forums;
- b. To strengthen the technical capacities of producers;
- c. To improve service delivery to farmers while shifting from a public to private system of extension;
- d. To promote a system of participatory research adapted to the needs of farmers (MINAGRI, 2009).

Extension services under the Strategy follow a decentralized model that emphasizes local involvement in planning and decision-making. Since 2004, responsibility for coordination and planning of agricultural development programs has been held by MINAGRI, but direct delivery of extension services is under the control of the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC) at the sector, district, and province levels (MINALOC, 2011). The objective of decentralization is to build capacity within local governments and enhance local involvement in program development, execution, and evaluation. As of 2011, there were 30 districts, 416 sectors, and 2148 cells providing extension services to 14,876 villages across Rwanda.

One example of how decentralized authority and extension services interact in practice is the *imihigo* process. *Imihigo* begins with a consultative process in which farmers and local authorities discuss agricultural production priorities while taking into account the farmers' needs and interests as well as national priorities. Once the discussions produce agreement on a local strategy and a set of production targets, the district mayor signs a performance contract in which the community commits to meeting that target. At that point, extension services are mobilized (USAID, 2011) to support the district's farmers and ensure they can produce enough to meet the target (MINAGRI, 2009).

Despite the strategic emphasis on extension services at the national and local level, numerous challenges have limited their effectiveness to date. At the national level, the public extension program has just over 1200 staff members managed by a senior staff of fewer than 100 (USAID, 2011). As of 2011, only one staff member had a Masters of Science degree; the rest had studied at the Bachelor level. An additional 175 subject matter specialists were available to offer support, but none of these had a graduate degree. Field level extension workers make up the majority of the staff, and 87 percent of them hold a two to three year agricultural diploma at most. Very few of the extension staff are women; they make up just 36 percent of the senior management staff, and fewer than 30 percent of the field level workers (USAID, 2011).

Extension professionals receive limited training, in part because Rwanda's universities do not offer the kind of general agricultural training that includes extension methods and program management. Instead, most graduates have technical skills in specialized agricultural fields like crop production or horticulture, but not the kind of process skills field workers need. Once working in extension, staff received no systematic training in extension methods or agricultural fields beyond those they may have already studied. Many field workers are also assigned a range of duties within their respective districts or sectors, leaving them little time for extension activities. In some cases, high school graduates on short-term contracts, who lack the expertise necessary to be truly effective, replace extension workers (USAID, 2011). In many cases, the limitations of existing extension services have a significant impact on Rwanda's women farmers, preventing them from receiving the benefits of such services and limiting their ability to participate in Rwanda's agricultural development. The role of women in Rwanda's agricultural economy and the unique barriers they face as women farmers are discussed in the following section.

### **Women's Role in Agricultural Development**

*Bringing women out of the home and fields has been essential to our rebuilding. We are becoming a nation that understands that there are huge financial benefits to equality.*

*Dr Agnes Matilda Kalibata, Minister for Agriculture, quoted in (Faiola, 2008)*

Women are critical partners in agricultural development around the world. Globally, women account for nearly

half of all farmers but in many places make up much larger percentages of the agricultural labour force. Yet around the world, women do not share fairly in resources typically available to male farmers, like land, financing, and access to technology. The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) estimates that if women had the same access as men to agricultural resources and services, they would produce 20-30 percent more food, and their families would enjoy better health, nutrition, and education (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2011).

In Rwanda, where gender equality is enshrined in the *Constitution* and consistently identified as a priority in public policies, including those discussed above, gender powerfully shapes the experiences of women farmers. Eighty-two percent of women work in agricultural occupations, either as independent farmers or farm labourers and women small-scale farmers outnumber men by almost two to one (National Institute of Statistics Rwanda, 2010). Women work longer hours in agriculture than men, even before taking account of their domestic work, and are more likely than men to be dependent on their farm for income (National Institute of Statistics Rwanda, 2010). Women are also primarily responsible for producing food for the household. More than 90 percent of those who derive their livelihoods from agriculture in Rwanda are poor, and 70 percent of them are women (Twesigye-Bakwatsa, 2010). For Rwanda to achieve its far-reaching goals to reduce rural poverty and improve food security, it must take action to ensure that its women farmers have meaningful access to agricultural services and resources.

As a preliminary step, Rwanda's Gender Monitoring Office (GMO) and UN Women partnered to conduct a baseline study of women farmers that included interviews with farmers in two different districts, as well as key policy-makers and public administrators. The study indicated that though women make up the majority of Rwanda's farmers, they still face significant barriers to participation in the development strategies intended to promote agricultural growth, particularly when it comes to accessing the services they need. These include:

- Low literacy levels – literacy levels among women in farming households are less than half those of their male counterparts, making women less able to access information regarding farming techniques, among other things;

- Weak organizational and managerial capabilities – women’s organizations tend to be too weak to mobilize effectively, and advocate for equitable delivery of services;
- Lack of time – women and girls bear the responsibility for nearly all household work and childcare, leaving them little time to attend training programs or engage in learning opportunities outside the household;
- Limited decision-making authority – socio-cultural barriers limit women’s voice within the household;
- Ineffective public extension systems – access to extension services is difficult for both men and women, but especially women, who face additional challenges accessing private alternative service providers;
- Communication barriers, including limited access to transportation that restricts women’s mobility, and ability to access modern means of communication;
- Unreliable funding of service providers;
- Lack of training on gender issues among service providers;
- Inadequate numbers of extension personnel;
- Too few women among extension service providers;
- Sectoral and institutional coordination weaknesses;
- Household health and HIV/AIDS affects women’s labor, income, and health(Twesigye-Bakwatsa, 2010).

The interviews with women farmers, farm workers, and extension officials revealed that women farmers shared a number of priorities, including to improve seeds/breeds(Twesigye-Bakwatsa, 2010).The farmers indicated that extension services in their districts were rare, and they only saw the local field worker on limited occasions. They cited a need for extension services focusing on terracing techniques, establishment of backyard gardens, tree nurseries, and hand-held irrigation techniques, as well as affordable long-term financing for agro-enterprises, access to technology like grain mills, small pumps, animal traction, project design and management, and better information regarding weather patterns and disaster avoidance(Twesigye-Bakwatsa, 2010).Rwanda’s policy-makers are taking affirmative steps to address some of these challenges.

**Policy Framework Promoting Gender Equality:** Rwanda has put in place comprehensive strategic

framework promoting and mainstreaming gender equality. The 2003 *Constitution* commits to ensuring the equal rights of women and men, and sets quotas requiring that a minimum of 30 percent of positions in decision-making bodies be held by women. The *National Gender Policy*, first adopted in 2004 and revised in 2010, establishes a process for mainstreaming gender across all sectors of development with guidelines for the design, implementation, and evaluation of such programs. It is administered by the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF), with support from GMO, a national constitutional body tasked with monitoring progress toward gender equality, and the National Women’s Council, which offers forum for women grassroots leaders to have input(MIGEPROF, 2010).The Government has also put in place a Gender Responsive Budgeting Project that ensures budget allocations to government-run programs are gender sensitive.

In addition to these, a number of national laws have significantly improved women’s legal status. The Law on Matrimonial Regimes guarantees women inheritance rights equal to those of men, overriding traditional norms by which only men had the right to inherit, and allows women who marry the option of maintaining separate property. The 2005 Land Law guarantees married women rights to land equal to those of their husbands, and prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any matters concerning the ownership or possession of land. The Labour Code prohibits discrimination in employment, and the Civil Code entitles women to open bank accounts, appear in court, and sue or be sued.<sup>3</sup>

Despite the national commitment to gender equality, many of these strategic interventions have had limited effect to date, especially at the local level. In many cases, implementation requires the coordination of multiple actors, few of whom have experience or training in gender-sensitive program development, budgeting, or execution. Gender advocates likewise have limited capacity and in some cases lack the organizational strength to push for inclusion or more active policy

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<sup>3</sup> GMO report; Rwanda’s 2007 report to the CEDAW Committee, the Single Report Equal to the Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Reports on the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (July, 2007), contains a comprehensive listing of the national laws and policies promoting gender equality.



implementation. Powerful social and cultural forces also constrain women's ability to access the rights to which the law entitles them.

But using the implementation of the *2005 Land Law* as an example, it is possible to appreciate the potential effectiveness of concerted political action to translate policy into action. In addition to granting women the same rights to acquire land as men, the *Land Law* makes land registration mandatory. At the national level, there is one land registrar supported by five deputy registrars, and 30 district land bureaus to handle land registration across the country (Hoza Ngoga, 2012). There are also land commissions in each district. Two of the five deputy registrars are women, and at least 30 percent of land commissioners at the national and district level are women (Hoza Ngoga, 2012). Teams formed to survey land for registration and adjudicate disputes are also comprised of both women and men. During the land registration process, community meetings are held for both men and women together, and often for women separately, to educate them about the law and their rights under it. Both men and women are required to be present when land is registered to ensure that married couples are both registered as joint owners of their land, and before a sale can be made, both registered owners must consent and sign the transfer document in a public land notary's presence (Hoza Ngoga, 2012).

As a result, as of 31 March 2012, 83 percent of privately-owned land in Rwanda is jointly-owned by married couples, and women independently own an additional 11 percent of land (Hoza Ngoga, 2012). Landowners have the ability to use their land as collateral for loans to make investments, and have much greater security when making improvements to their land, collectively enhancing Rwanda's ability to achieve the agricultural growth it is planning for. Customary law continues to be practiced alongside the *Land Law*, acting to preclude women in rural communities from gaining ownership of land, and education about the law remains limited in rural communities, and especially among women (Alinda & Abbott, 2012). But on the whole, the law has been transformative in giving women the tools they need to be active participants in Rwanda's economic development and contribute to sustainable agricultural growth. Similar interventions specifically designed to improve women's access to the means for agricultural development are outlined in Rwanda's Gender Strategy for Agriculture, discussed in the following section.

**2010 Gender Strategy for Agriculture:** Rwanda's Gender Strategy for Agriculture is the result of a participatory process that prioritized building a shared understanding of gender and gender equality among the various actors in the agricultural sector. Planners collected data from representatives of multiple organizations and conducted focus group discussions in six districts with a total of nearly 400 participants, of whom the majority were men. Reflecting this input, the Strategy begins with an acknowledgement that despite the legal framework promoting gender equality, gender disparities were a strong factor in Rwanda's continuing struggle to achieve sustainable agricultural development (MINAGRI, 2010). It identifies the following as key challenges to development:

- Poor women make up the majority of agricultural workers and have the lowest literacy rates, which has limited them to subsistence farming, reduced the amount of income they earn from their products, and limited their ability to participate in agricultural businesses.
- More than a third of households are headed by women, and most of these are extremely poor, and particularly vulnerable to agricultural crises due to weather, pests, or market shocks, as they have limited access to outside resources.
- Women make enormous contributions to the agricultural value chain and household food security through labor on the farm and in home gardens that often goes unrecognized in national statistics (MINAGRI, 2010).

Recognizing the critical importance of including women in economic development, the objective of the Strategy is to ensure that the modernization process does not reinforce male dominance but rather creates a firm foundation that reflects and supports the equal rights of women and men in the agricultural sector.

The Gender Strategy incorporates a thorough analysis of the gaps in women's access to agricultural services and resources, including extension services. It notes that women's access to training opportunities, in particular, are limited for a number of reasons. Many of the training programs, including the Farmer Field Schools discussed above, target lead farmers, who are then tasked with training other farmers in their communities. But given the power dynamics in rural communities and households, designated lead farmers tend to be male heads of households, in part because men tend to be the

first to hear about training opportunities and do not share that information with their wives, but also because women are required to do household duties as well as agricultural labor and do not have the time to attend training programs. Many women also defer to their male spouses, even if the women do the majority of the farm work. Trainers are not required to ensure that an equal number of men and women participate in trainings, and performance targets tend to be expressed as numbers of farmers trained, without being disaggregated by sex (MINAGRI, 2010). Most extension staff are men, and interviews suggest they find it easier to communicate with male farmers. As a result, there is little incentive to recruit women participants.

Training programs are also often designed without regard to the particular needs of women with respect to childcare and household duties, among other things. Training programs are often scheduled at times when women are preparing meals or managing childcare, making it difficult for them to attend. Training centers rarely offer childcare, leaving even women who can attend likely to be distracted and unable to participate. The centers are also frequently far from rural communities, which creates problems for women who need to ask permission from their husbands to travel or stay out at night.

Finally, many women farmers tend to be illiterate with little or no ability to read, write or count. For some, embarrassment over their limited skills keeps them from attending meetings or training programs in which they feel they cannot keep up. For others, their limited skills make it difficult to retain what they learn or hear in meetings.

In the absence of trained personnel familiar with these challenges and experienced in designing and executing gender-sensitive programs, as well as gender-sensitive guidelines and strategies for program monitoring and evaluation, women farmers have been left out of many of Rwanda's strategies for agricultural development. The Gender Strategy thus institutionalizes a system of gender responsive program planning and budgeting, implementation, and reporting to achieve greater equality. It commits MINAGRI and its partners to take the following steps:

- Establish a structure for gender coordination, beginning with recruiting a Gender Specialist to Ministry staff
- Mainstream gender into all human resource and

operational policies, manuals, guidelines, and procedures;

- Establish gender focal points in key departments and programs;
- Develop tools for extension staff and others to mainstream gender into planning for trainings, meetings, workshops, and the like;
- Provide training to Ministry and extension staff at all levels on gender-sensitive planning and program design, and offer similar training to civil society organizations and farmers' associations;
- Raise awareness at the implementation level so that program participants understand what rights they have, and what channels they can use to address complaints or concerns;
- Take steps to ensure specific programs focusing on crop intensification, livestock, value chain development, and others respect and promote gender equality within the household and community by seeing that women have equal access to seeds and fertilizers, are recognized as joint owners of livestock, and have equal access to agricultural credit facilities.
- Include women in decision-making processes and build leadership capacity and governance skills among women farmers (MINAGRI, 2010).

In order to accomplish these goals, the Strategy calls for the establishment of a Gender Steering Committee with representatives from key government ministries as well as international and national NGOs and others in the private sector. Most importantly, the Gender Strategy recognizes the key role that women play not only as agricultural producers and labourers but also as participants in policy development, implementation, and enforcement: "gender equitable development is impossible without women's empowerment; both women and men need to participate in and influence the pattern of socio-economic development" (MINAGRI, 2010).

Rwanda's political commitment to gender equality and poverty reduction have made it a world leader and attracted support from the international community to aid its objectives to achieve sustainable agricultural development and include women in its growth. Three innovative projects specifically directed at women's empowerment in Rwanda's agricultural sector are discussed briefly below.

## **SPECIAL PROGRAMS FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN AGRICULTURE**

**USAID/Higher Education for Development Women's Leadership Program:** Beginning in the spring of 2014, Michigan State University (MSU) and Rwanda University (RU) plan to offer a gender-sensitive Master of Science program in agribusiness that focuses on women's leadership in agriculture. The \$1.2 million three-year project will promote women's leadership in agriculture, and train agribusiness professionals with strong analytical and business development skills that include a major gender component. The graduate program will prioritize accessibility for women and mid-career professionals, incorporate extensive experiential learning opportunities, and focus on producing graduates with highly employable knowledge and skills. It is also designed to prepare women for leadership and entrepreneurial roles, as well as promote engagement with underserved communities. The project is being supported by Washington State University, which is building a Career Development Office at the RU's College of Agriculture, Animal Production and Veterinary Medicine and implementing an internship program for graduate students(USAID, 2013).

In 2013, the project team developed a curriculum for the new Masters program that is expected to begin in spring 2014. The team also held a research and grant development workshop for MSU and RU faculty members that facilitated collaborative research between the two institutions. This workshop included training on integrating gender concerns into research design and proposal development. Several of the faculty teams who participated in the workshop will be awarded seed grant funding to pursue pilot studies, all of which are required to include a significant gender component.

The project is being funded by USAID, in partnership with the Duke University Higher Education for Development – Rwanda: Women's Leadership Program in Education.

**Empowering Women in Agriculture:** In the fall of 2012, UN Women, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), and the World Food Program (WFP) announced a five-year program to empower women in rural communities and improve food security. The project, has four goals:

- a. improving food and nutrition security
- b. increasing incomes

- c. enhancing women's leadership and participation in rural institutions
- d. creating a more responsive policy environment at national and international levels(UN Women, 2012).

Rwanda is one of seven pilot countries for the program. A launch workshop was held in Kigali in May 2013, and included representatives from relevant government ministries and agencies, international and national NGOs and development partners, including the World Bank and USAID, and a host of financial institutions and farmers' organizations(Gender in Agriculture Partnership, 2013?).

**Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index:** Developed by USAID, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative, the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) is a survey-based tool designed to capture the empowerment and inclusion of women in the agricultural sector. WEAI measures the extent of women's engagement in the agricultural sector across five domains:

- decisions about agricultural production
- access to and decision-making power over productive resources
- control over use of income
- leadership in the community
- time use.

It also measures women's empowerment relative to men in their households(International Food Policy Research Institute, 2012). The objective of the WEAI is to assess changes in women's empowerment over time, and assess where policy interventions may be most effective in improving gender parity in agriculture. Rwanda is one of 19 focus countries of USAID's Feed the Future Initiative in which WEAI data is being collected. The first data set from Rwanda is to be published in 2014.<sup>4</sup>

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Rwanda's impressive achievements in reducing rural poverty and improving food security for its population alone make it a model for others to follow. But its efforts to ensure that women are equal participants in economic development and are represented at all levels of public decision-making structures are what truly set Rwanda

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<sup>4</sup> Communication with Chiara Kovarik, Senior Research Assistant, IFPRI (February 21, 2014).

apart, and offer the best indication of its future stability and the sustainability of its development initiatives.

Leaders in Rwanda recognize as few others do that without women's effective involvement in development and equal access to resources, poverty will continue to plague large numbers and many will continue to suffer from food insecurity and malnutrition. Rwanda has shown strong leadership in removing barriers to women's participation and inclusion, and is likely to enjoy the results for years to come.

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## ACRONYMS

CAADP	Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
COMESA	Common Markets for Eastern and Southern Africa
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
EAC	East African Community
EDPRS	Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy
EICV	Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey (French)
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FFS	Farmer Field School
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMO	Gender Monitoring Office
GoR	Government of Rwanda
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus infection / acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IPAR	Institute for Policy and Research
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MEAS	Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services
MIGEPROF	Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion
MINECOFIN	Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning
MINAGRI	Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry
MINALOC	Ministry for Local Government
MSU	Michigan State University
NAES	National Agricultural Extension Strategy
NAP	National Agricultural Policy
NEPAD	New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD)
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NLP	National Land Policy
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PASNVA	National Agriculture Extension Support Project (French)
PSTA	National Agricultural Transformation Strategy
UR	University of Rwanda
UN	United Nations
UNIFEM	United Nations Fund for Women
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
WFP	World Food Program
WEAI	Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index