



Vision 2020, EDPRS and PSTA: their Impact on Women Small Farmers

Women Small Farmers Today

Women small farmers are generally dissatisfied with their lives and concerned about the long hours they have to work and the struggle they face in feeding their families. They recognise improvement since 2000, that their economic situation has improved and that they have benefited from the Government's investment in health and education. However, their views on the extent to which they and their households have benefitted from agricultural policies are more mixed.

The Government's vision for agriculture is set out in Vision 2020; the country's long-term development strategy is to transform farming from low productivity and subsistence to a highly productive commercial sector producing market niche crops for local, regional and international markets. The priority in the mid-term Economic Development and Policy Reduction Strategy, (EDPRS-1) was for the sector to contribute in a sustainable manner to increased and diversified household incomes while ensuring food security for all the population. EDPRS-2 places more emphasis on the need to modernise and commercialise the sector as well as to increase non-farm employment so as to free land for scaled-up agriculture.

There are four strategic programmes in agriculture: intensification and development of sustainable agriculture; support to the professionalization of producers; promotion of commodity chains and agribusiness development; and institutional development. Small-scale farmers are mainly beneficiaries of interventions under Programme 1 - social erosion control, water capture and management and improved inputs, as well as land consolidation - and Programme 2 - the up-skilling of small-scale farmers through the agricultural extension service.

The 2003 Constitution guarantees gender equality, and gender is a cross-cutting issue in the EDPRS. A Gender Agricultural Strategy was agreed in 2010 and launched in 2012; gender is mainstreamed in Strategic Plan for the Transformation of Agriculture in Rwanda, (PSTA III). Women have the same rights to own land as men, and married women have the legal right to be co-owners of the family land. The Government is aware, however, of the need to make up women's historic deficit in order to ensure that the gender policies fulfil their transformative potential. A lack of published gender-disaggregated data makes it difficult to track progress, however.

Women's Lives and Work in Agriculture

Farming is dominated by women in Rwanda and it provides the main source of employment for women. Women are both more likely to work as small farmers than men and to do significantly more of the work on the family farm than men, as well as being responsible for domestic work including collecting wood and water, looking after children and cooking. In total 88 per cent of women are small farmers; 31 per cent are independent farmers and 57 per cent are unpaid dependent family workers. Women farmers want their husbands to share the work on the family farm more equitably with them (Abbott and Malunda 2014).

Given systematic changes in Rwanda's agriculture, this Brief looks at whether women small farmers are benefiting and will benefit from government policy and financing in the agricultural sector.

- Do women independent farmers benefit from agricultural policy and financing to the same extent as men?
- Do women dependent family workers benefit from the policy and financing?
- Do agricultural policy and financing have a negative impact on women's ability to carry out what are generally accepted to be their domestic responsibilities and specifically to feed the family?

The Financing of Agriculture

The budget has been allocated broadly in line with the Government's policy and plans. The highest allocation of funds has been to the direct support of producers, including the Crop Intensification Programme, the Girinka programme and irrigation.

The Government's budget allocation to agriculture does not meet its commitment to the Common Africa Agricultural Development Programme Compact of allocating 10 per cent to the agricultural ministry; in 2013/4 the specific allocation is only five per cent, having declined from just over six per cent in 2009/10. However, the overall budget for the sector has increased, and on a broader definition of agricultural spending the amount allocated in 2013/4 was 15 per cent, in line with budget allocation in recent years. The Agricultural Sector Investment Plan (see FAO 2010) identified a significant funding shortfall in the predicted funds available for the period 2009-12, however, and the actual budget allocated to the sector suggests that this shortfall was not made up. Kathriesan's analysis in 2012 shows that investment in agriculture needs to be increased under EDPRS-2 if Vision 2020 targets are to be achieved.

Women and Girinka

The Girinka programme is a social protection initiative designed to help lift the poor sustainably out of poverty and to reduce malnutrition - especially amongst young children, given that 44 per cent of under-fives are stunted. Expenditure on Girinka averaged 40 per cent of the direct expenditure on producers. Cows are given to families that can provide a shed and have sufficient land to grow fodder to feed them. Beneficiaries in each community are selected through a participatory process. By November 2013 about 180,600 poor families had benefited from the One Cow Programme.

Women small farmers we have interviewed including both the FinScope and Senate Surveys (Abbott et al 2014) were all very satisfied with the Girinka programme. Women farmers told us that the entire village benefitted from the programme because they were all able to get milk, and those households that get a cow (or other small animal) are able to use the dung to make organic manure. We have found no statistical data on the extent to which female-headed households have benefitted from the programme, but the women farmers we interviewed told us that some widows had done so. The Ministry of Agriculture told us that 50 per cent of the beneficiaries of the programme are women, but the general view of national-level stakeholders was that women farmers are disadvantaged because it is the men who are generally seen as responsible for looking after cattle, and specifically for milking, and certainly for the marketing of farm produce, including milk.

Women and the Crop-Intensification Programme

The CIP was designed to increase production of high-potential food crops, and its implementation includes

- A Land Consolidation Policy to make the most efficient use of small plots by farmers combining their land and farming it cooperatively;
- local advisory services to farmers;
- inputs (e.g. fertiliser); and
- distribution and post-harvest technologies.

It focuses on six priority crops - maize, wheat, rice, Irish potatoes, beans and cassava - with farmers growing these crops being eligible for subsidised seeds and fertilizers until the demand for them becomes higher and more stable in the absence of subsidies.

Finance was provided under a number of schemes to enable farmers to get credit for investment in agricultural enterprises and agroprocessing, generally given at preferential rates. The government also introduced the Umurenge SACCOs (savings and loans cooperatives) to increase access to formal financial services in rural areas. However, the proportion of farmers of either gender getting access to credit is very low, with little difference between male- and female- headed households.

The Government budget has increased significantly since the start of EDPRS-1, with a significant proportion of the increase going on irrigation projects, but there were also efforts to increase agricultural productivity through increased financing for the CIP. Over RWF 13 billion has been expended on purchasing chemical fertilizers and improved seeds since 2006, about 254,000 ha of land have been consolidated and 30,000 tons of fertilizers has been distributed for use on priority crops. Expenditure on inputs has accounted for over 60 per cent of direct expenditure on producers over the last seven years.

Plans for agriculture under EDPRS-2 and PSTA III mark a shift in emphasis, with a greater focus on growth in the agricultural sector, privatisation, professionalization and production for the regional as well as local market, as well as environmental sustainability, soil erosion, and water management. There is also an emphasis on creating more non-farm employment in order to free land for the scaling up of agricultural production and increasing field size to make agricultural production efficient. This suggests that land consolidation as presently practiced is not seen as a long-term solution to obtaining a viable farm size.

The women farmers had benefited from the CIP through access to improved seeds and chemical fertilizers and participating in land consolidation. Virtually all of them sold at least some of their produce on the market and in three sectors the crops are mainly produced for sale. Measures to prevent soil erosion (terracing /

tree-planting) had been undertaken in most of the sectors; irrigation systems had been introduced in four and rainwater harvesting in three. Women are actively involved in cooperatives and get training from farm extension workers. Although they thought that their life had improved over the last five years they felt trapped in poverty; they knew that in order to improve crop yields they needed to use improved seeds and chemical fertilisers but they could not afford to purchase them - the return that women farmers get on their crops is inadequate to meet the needs of their families and also purchase seeds and chemical fertilizers.

Around 70 per cent of farmer respondents to FinScope 2012 thought that land consolidation, crop intensification and terracing are good or fairly good interventions and 69 per cent are satisfied with access to markets. However, only 29.4 per cent are satisfied with the price they get for the produce they sell. There was no significant difference by gender. Land consolidation was seen as a problem because although yields had increased they were reliant on selling the crop and did not always earn sufficient to feed their families. Poor roads were also seen as making it difficult to get goods to markets.

Women Farmers and Non-Farm Work

Government policy is to increase non-farm employment to alleviate poverty and to free land for efficient agricultural production. The Vision 2020 target is for 50 per cent of workers to be employed in non-farm sectors. During this century there has been a reduction in dependency on agriculture and an increase in non-farm employment, with 1.2 million new jobs being created between 2000/1 and 2010/11. Women have little time to engage in non-farm income-generating activities, however, given that they are reported as spending between seven and 22 hours a week on reproductive work (housework, childcare and fetching wood and water), compared with between half an hour and six hours a week for men. Men in agriculture are more likely to be financially included and have access to loans than women although the use of credit from formal financial institutions is low for both men and women. Skill shortages remain a barrier, and the low level of savings is a bottleneck in terms of the development of the informal non-farm sector, the growth of which will be essential if the labour market is to absorb new entrants over the next 10 years.

This Briefing is based on research funded by ActionAid Rwanda and published as Abbott, P. and Malunda, D. (2014). Analysis of Three Rwanda Strategic Agricultural Policies and Programmes (Vision 2020, EDPRS., PSTA) with a Critical Gender Informed Review of their Implementation and Financing. Kigali: ActionAid International Rwanda.

Women's Role in Setting Priorities

The women farmers to whom we talked were aware of the main government policies, including those in the agricultural sector, but seemed to have few opportunities to be directly involved in policy development and implementation and the budget process. They, like other members of the community, learn about government policies at village meetings and are involved in discussions about how they can support their implementation. They are also involved in Imihigo. Opportunities to put forward views about national policies were seen as more limited and restricted to cooperative leaders. Some women said that they were unable to attend meetings or were not invited.

What Women Farmers Need And Want

Women farmers are not generally opposed to government policies but want to be supported and helped so that they and their families can benefit from the application of improved methods of farming. They want more training, more support in setting up cooperatives and better access to improved seeds and fertilizers. They have seen improvements in their lives in recent years but these are often due to policies other than in those in the agricultural sector, such as health and education. Women farmers express especial concerns about government policies to commercialise agriculture. They said that generally using improved seeds and chemical fertilizers has improved the yield of priority crops but that this varies from season to season. They were concerned about their ability to afford to purchase inputs; the return on commercial crops is not sufficient to cover the full cost of seeds and chemical fertilizers. They were also concerned that if they grow crops for the market it can endanger their ability to feed their families; while yields of commercial crops had improved, the price on the market had dropped, meaning that they do not earn sufficient to purchase enough food. Perhaps most telling of all is the fact that while the women had an accurate knowledge of the correct diet for infants and young children, most said that they did not have the means to provide this diet for their own children.

Women smallholder farmers experience barriers to effective engagement in the public accountability process as ordinary Rwandans, as economically disadvantaged and poorly educated Rwandans, and as women. Despite its progressive gender policy, Rwanda remains a strongly patriarchal society with women in rural areas not expected to participate in the public sphere. Women have limited avenues through which they can express their needs and views and low capacity to do so through the channels that do exist. Yet women play a central role in ensuring that food is produced to feed the household and their voice needs to be heard when decisions are being made about agricultural policies and the allocation of resources in agriculture at the national, community and household levels.

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