



Synopsis: Women’s Empowerment in Rwandan agriculture

A baseline assessment in the context of Rwanda’s gender and youth mainstreaming strategy and the fourth strategic plan for agricultural transformation

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Rwanda is a recognized leader in the region and the world in terms of women’s empowerment. However, no country has yet achieved full gender equality, resulting in untapped potential for improvement. The findings from the Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) baseline survey conducted in 2019 for the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI) indicate that women and men in Rwanda have both relatively high levels of empowerment across different agricultural domains, while many women are as empowered as men in their households, some gender disparities remain. Key findings include the following:

- Compared to other countries in the region, women in Rwanda have relatively greater access to financial services and a relatively lower time burden in agriculture.
- However, when compared to men in Rwanda, inequalities persist. Women are significantly less likely than men to access financial services, participate in the marketing of agricultural commodities, access extension services, and spend their time on productive (rather than reproductive) work.

Women’s Empowerment in Rwandan agriculture

Women’s participation in agricultural production, agricultural value chains, and food systems varies from country to country. Despite this, it is widely recognized that the empowerment of women in all aspects of agriculture—from decision-making on what to cultivate to how to market farm production to having control over income from these activities—can contribute to higher productivity and higher income, with the potential for further contributions to higher-order outcomes such as the health and welfare of entire households and communities (Alkire et al. 2013).

Rwanda's National Transformation Strategy (NST 1) recognizes that gender equality is a cornerstone of the country's social and economic transformation, especially if accompanied by a recognition of the intrinsic value of women's empowerment in all social, economic, and political spaces. Recognizing the importance of women's empowerment in agriculture, the Rwanda Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI) launched the Gender and Youth Mainstreaming Strategy (GYMS) in 2019 with the goal of "ensuring that women and men and youth benefit equally from policy action, programs, and activities, and that inequality is not perpetuated" (MINAGRI 2019) in the implementation of the Fourth Strategic Plan for Agricultural Transformation (PSTA 4) and the National Agriculture Policy (NAP).

The 2019 WEAI baseline survey conducted in Rwanda, revealed that women in rural household have relatively positive levels of empowerment with an overall WEAI score of 0.91¹. However, 28 percent of rural women still did not meet the threshold for "empowerment", while 24 percent of women were not as empowered as the primary adult male in their household. Among the five domains of WEAI², women were the least empowered in terms of workload, with 21 percent not reaching the empowerment threshold for this indicator. In terms of gender parity, the greatest inequality between men's and women's scores were in the resource's domain, most notably, in the sub-domain of asset ownership (IMC Worldwide 2020). WEAI results also suggest a much higher level of empowerment among women in agriculture in Rwanda compared to many other countries. For instance, in areas surveyed in Malawi and Uganda in 2012, 48 and 42 percent of women were not empowered, respectively (Malapit et al. 2014). However, this composite index score (WEAI) mask certain findings related to disempowerment and inequalities that bear closer examination.

This policy brief discusses the findings from the IMC Worldwide (2020) report³, and explores the underlying WEAI Rwanda data in greater depth and analyzes findings in the context of PSTA 4 and the GYMS. Therefore, it seeks to offer guidance to the mainstreaming of the GYMS in the various interventions, programs, and activities being implemented by MINAGRI, the Rwanda Agricultural and Animal Resources Development Board (RAB), the National Agricultural Export Development Board (NAEB), and their many partner organizations within government, Rwanda's donor community, and the private and civil society sectors.

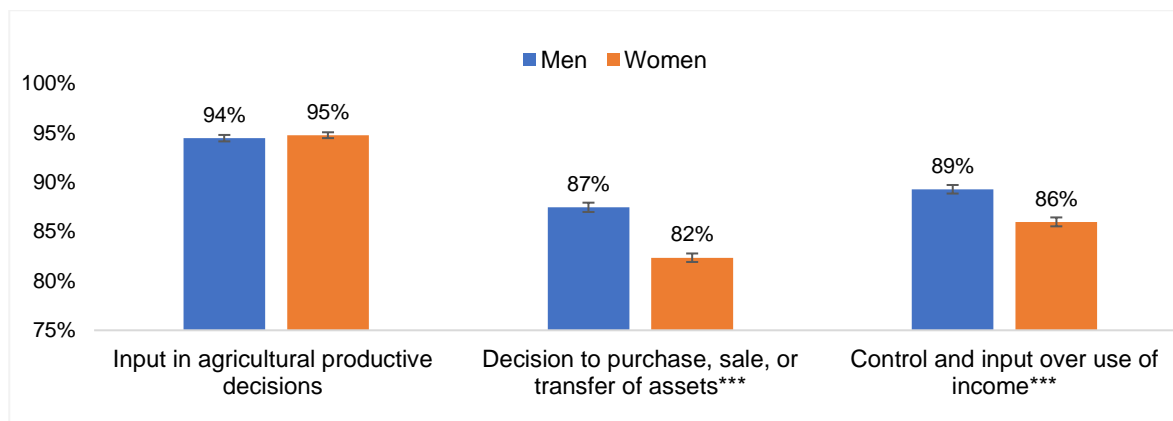
The GYMS policy aims to promote women's empowerment by enhancing their decision-making power over productive activities and assets, and by reducing the burden and drudgery of women's household labor, thereby creating opportunities for women to participate in other productive activities. The WEAI data confirm that both men and women have high levels of input into agricultural production decisions relating to food and cash crop farming, fisheries, and livestock (Figure 1). However, men were slightly more likely to make decisions on whether to purchase, sell, or transfer agricultural assets, as well as greater decision making over the use of income.

¹ The WEAI measures the empowerment, agency, and inclusion of women in the agricultural sector, and uses two indices in its measurement: the Five Domains of Empowerment Index (5DE) and the Gender Parity Index (GPI). The overall WEAI score is a weighted average of these two indices, with the 5DE accounting for 90 percent of the WEAI score and the GPI accounting for 10 percent (Alkire et al. 2013).

² The 5DE considers women's levels of empowerment in agriculture across five key domains: (1) production (input in agricultural productive decisions); (2) resources (ownership of assets; purchase, sale, or transfer of assets; and access to and decisions on credit); (3) income (control over use of income); (4) leadership (group membership and public speaking); and 5) time (workload).

³ In 2019, MINAGRI and the U.K. Department for International Development (now the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO)) commissioned IMC Worldwide to conduct a nationally representative baseline survey on women's empowerment in agriculture for the purposes of monitoring progress under PSTA 4. The survey adapted the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) to the Rwandan context.

Figure 1-Decision-making in agricultural activities, assets, and income; by gender, 2019



Source: Author's calculations using data from the 2019 WEAI Baseline Survey.

Note: Asterisks (*), (**), (***) indicate a statistically significant difference between men and women at $p \leq 0.1$, $p \leq 0.05$, and $p \leq 0.01$ respectively. Error bars indicate standard errors.

WEAI data also demonstrated that in several key areas of GYMS and PSTA 4, women in Rwanda still are not as involved as their male counterparts. These areas include access to financial services; participation in value chains; and access to agricultural information, extension, inputs, and technology. Moreover, women still face challenges related to voice and agency, as indicated by their unequal role in multiple aspects of decision-making, work burdens, control over assets, and contributions to key community activities. Many of these challenges are already recognized and articulated in PSTA 4 and in the GYMS's priority intervention areas. However, the measurement of their prevalence at baseline (2019), using the WEAI, suggests that continued measurement can provide a sense of whether progress is being achieved. Their measurement also reminds us of several intervention areas that may need greater attention.

To reduce the gender decision gap and subsequently, increase agricultural productivity, the results suggest the promotion of innovative time-saving technologies and gender-inclusive financial products, a shift of gendered cultural norms, and provision of extension to both household head and spouse. In addition, to better inform these strategies, sex-disaggregated data collection and analysis could be incorporated into the many agricultural surveys conducted by the National Institute of Statistics of Rwanda (NISR) and its partners to allow more intensive monitoring and analysis of PSTA 4 and GYMS. Realization of these outcomes will depend partly on the implementation of the Gender and Youth Mainstreaming Strategy and PSTA 4, and partly on coordination with other gender-transformative programs in Rwanda.

In summary, while Rwanda continues to serve as a global example of how to reduce persistent gender gaps through gender-transformative policies, there is still room for improvement (World Economic Forum 2022).

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