

International Women's Day

Women play crucial role in agriculture

Workforce. Women undertake the majority of agricultural work in addition to domestic or reproductive work and have limited control over their own labour.

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There are about 925 million undernourished people in the world today, according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations.

While many factors influence worldwide food security levels, the gender gap in agricultural production remains one of the most pressing issues and Uganda is not exceptional.

This observation was made by FAO Director-General Jacques Diouf in a recent statement about the crucial contributions women make in the agriculture sector.

A great deal of the food insecurity in Uganda can be traced to the challenges women face engaging in small-scale rural agriculture.

Women are responsible for an estimated 90 per cent of Uganda's total food output but they lack the resources and support necessary to effectively produce crops on a sustainable scale, whether for home consumption or for marketing and income generation.

Women undertake the majority of agricultural work in addition to domestic or reproductive work and have limited control over their own labour.

They are selfless, putting their children and household food security first, engaging in food crop production for subsistence using unimproved technology.

They lack secure access to land and are unable to provide the collateral that would secure access to credit for their independent agricultural activities. They are also ignored by some service providers when it comes to accessing agricultural loans. Women have limited control over the outputs from their labour and therefore, lack incentives to increase their production.

General perspective about women contribution in the sector

The head of the biotechnology laboratory at the National Agricultural Research Laboratories (NaRL), Dr Priver Namanya Bwesigye, says women still remain at the helm of agricultural production in the country.

When it comes to land preparation, planting seeds and general farm management, women are involved. Men will surface when it is time to harvest the produce and marketing the product because they want to get hold of the cash.

Citing an example of a project



Women attend to the garden recently. Women can prosper well in the agriculture sector if they can adopt high yielding plants.

PHOTO BY LOMINDA AFEDRARU

she was overseeing in distributing highbred banana plantlets for drought tolerance to farmers in the district of Ntungamo, she realised women are engaged in planting these crops and they are aggressively looking for seed for planting when the rains start.

Equally maintenance of the plantations and general agronomy is done by women.

Dr Namanya says she failed to get appropriate information about the yields of the plants because harvesting of banana bunches is done by men minus notifying the women.

In Kajjira in Western Uganda, one could notice men waking up early morning going to drinking joints.

"I think the government made a mistake by exempting men from paying graduated tax because it has made them become lazy, if there is a way of restoring it, it would be a good move to wake the men up so as to be hard working," Dr Namanya says.

To her, labour in the agricultural sector has become scarce because it has been left to women who are playing multiple roles.

"In farms where both men and women are involved, you will realise the production is reasonable good and the yields are high due to a concerted effort applied," she says.

She contends that in the past, homesteads contained granaries for storing food and fami-

lies were food secure but this is no longer the case because the burden has been left to women and it affecting yields and improved production in the sector.

When it comes to animal husbandry, men usually take the lead and since they are money minded, they end up selling all the milk and that is why Bushenyi District, which is a major cattle breeding region is the most affected with malnourished population.

As such, when it comes to research projects, scientists take a deliberate initiative to engage women and youth more than their male counterparts.

In identifying modal farmers in communities, scientists make sure women take the lead because they will do better work than when men are involved.

Dr Kenneth Akankwasa from NaRL who worked with farming communities in East and Northern region, says when distributing banana plantlets to people in this region, you realise during evaluation on field days more women participated compared to men.

He noticed that male farmers are more interested in commercial farming and they are better off owning heads of cattle than venturing into growing crops.

In his observation across the country, most men tend to venture into growing coffee because they know it is a commercial crop.

The number of women in-

involved in commercial agriculture to him is about 30 per cent because most of their focus is on growing food crops to feed their families.

To him, women can prosper well in the agriculture sector if they can adopt high yielding plant materials and they should not shy away during marketing of the produce.

Once they take agriculture as a business, they will contribute more in the improvement of the country's economy.

Statistics

In a report by social institutional and gender index it is indicated that more than 80 per cent of Uganda's populations leave in the rural areas and rural employment constitutes mainly agriculture.

Women constitute 76 per cent of agriculture labour force compared to 65 per cent of men and subsistence farming is by far the main source of employment.

Although women constitute the highest labour force in the agriculture sector, they are faced with countless challenges that are influenced by the gendered, social and geographical determinants for women's employment.

All these limit and constrain women's employment in the sector. The report further states that female agricultural workers earn lower wages for the same type of job compared to men.

Women have limited access

to land representing only one third of owners of land.

Only 24 per cent of women, compared to 33 per cent of men, use improved seeds and 18.6 per cent have access to extension advisory services compared to 81.4 per cent of men.

The global perspective

The international development community has recognised that rural women often manage complex households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies.

Their activities typically include producing agricultural crops, tending animals, processing and preparing food, working for wages in agricultural or other rural enterprises.

Many of these activities are not defined as economically active employment in national accounts but they are essential to the wellbeing of rural households. Women make important contributions to the agricultural and rural economies of all regions of the world.

According to the data, women comprise just over 40 per cent of the agricultural labour force in the developing world compared to 20 per cent in the Americas and 50 per cent in Africa.

Women constitute 50 per cent of the agricultural labour force in sub-Saharan Africa.

This leads to women producing 60 to 80 per cent of food in most developing countries and half of the world's food supply.