

SYNTHESIS REPORT

VALUE4HER

In preparation for International Women’s day, AGRA held a Value4her networking and advocacy event on March 30th, 2021 bringing together two hundred and six participants (19M, 187 F). Women entrepreneurs, other market actors, financial institutions, government agencies, and development actors attended the meeting which was held in Lilongwe, Malawi to foster stronger networks, identifying needs and opportunities to strengthen women’s involvement in Agri-enterprise, and increase awareness of the VALUE4HER initiative.

Background

Malawi has made a great step in its agricultural sector following the Government’s attention to food security and agriculture-led growth. Women in Malawi play an important role in agricultural development, accounting for 52% of labor in that sector¹. While a 2012 study found gender parity in entrepreneurship broadly, Malawian women are less likely than men to engage in agribusiness even though they produce over 70% of food consumed within the Country. As agriculture becomes more precarious due to climate change, both men and women face similar constraints and barriers to engaging in viable Agri-enterprise, notable challenges in accessing productive resources (land, labor, technologies), finances, markets, information, technical and business support. For women however, these challenges are further compounded by constraints and barriers rooted in how they are socialized, resources available to them and how society perceives them, which restrict their opportunities and performance.

Underlying constraints and barriers to women’s involvement in agribusiness

Low entrepreneurial motivation: How Malawian women (and men) are socialized, how society perceives them, and what roles they are expected to play strongly determines women’s business aspirations, confidence levels, and willingness to take risks in business activities. The strong tendency to associate men with the cash economy and women with the domestic economy tends to exclude women from horizontal and vertical linkages in agricultural value chains and relegates them to food crop-related production activities.

Notably, women’s responsibility for domestic and care activities due to gender roles as well as poor rural infrastructure and services severely limits the time they spend in establishing and expanding agribusinesses. Women’s business performance is also often constrained by their limited mobility that is closely linked to time poverty, gender discrimination, and sexual harassment in the business environment. Evidence suggests that approaches that engage with men, such as household methodologies, can help mitigate gender-based barriers women face at the household level.

Low levels of formal education and limited technical skills: According to AfDB, Literacy levels for women in Malawi remain at 44% lower than their men counterparts which are at 72%. Because of this, many Malawian women, particularly in rural areas, have limited access to information, markets, technologies, financial and business support services. Additionally, women producers are less likely than men to interact with extension and rural advisory services which hampers their access to

¹ Palacios-Lopez A, Christiaensen L, Kilic T. 2017. How much of the labor in African agriculture is provided by women? Food Policy. 67:52-63.

production and post-production technologies, knowledge and skills about markets, quality issues, packaging, and business management.

Limited access to land and other assets: Participants identified access to land and land tenure security as key constraints that discourage Malawian women from engaging in agribusiness and prevent them from having the necessary collateral to obtain loans from financial institutions.

Limited access to finance: While many programs in Malawi provide funding for entrepreneurship, women find it difficult to access finance not only to start and expand businesses but also to buy inputs and technologies. They are constrained by a lack of confidence for financial negotiation, collateral requirements, business management knowledge, and skills needed to apply for formal credit. According to a recent study, 27% of Malawian women compared to 37% of men had a bank account².

Limited access to networks and information: Organizing women producers into groups is a common approach used in Malawi, however, these groups often do not have contact with high-level networks and lack the collective bargaining power and resources enjoyed by larger producer associations which tend to be dominated by men. Limited access to information and communication technologies and channels along with poor digital literacy among women are some of the factors that prevent women from accessing market information. A 2016-18 study found that only 8% of Malawian women compared with 15% of men regularly accessed the internet³.

Opportunities

Malawi has a wealth of experience with promoting female Agripreneurship. Opportunities in this area include:

- Greater attention and investments by the Government of Malawi and development actors in climate-smart agriculture, post-harvest improvement, and product quality provide opportunities to address the specific constraints, women, entrepreneurs face in these areas.
- Greater awareness about the business case for involving women in agribusiness opens the door for increased private sector engagement with women-owned agribusinesses.
- Learning from and scaling up successful approaches used to develop women's agribusinesses.
- Exploring new institutional financing models such as the collective investments approach used by the Women Investment Cooperative (WINCO).

What needs to happen?

Capacity building: Train women entrepreneurs on the full range of business management topics, including financial literacy, applying for loans from financial institutions and utilizing these for business growth.

Improved access to ICTs: Promote interventions to increase women's access to digital technologies and strengthen digital literacy among women. This will enable women access information and services at convenience and broaden their knowledge base.

² Women's World Banking, 2017. In Malawi we bring the bank to her. https://www.womensworldbanking.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/WomensWorldBanking_PafupiCaseStudy_082017.pdf

³ Afrobarometer, 2020. African women have less access to the Internet than men do that's a problem <https://afrobarometer.org/blogs/african-women-have-less-access-internet-african-men-do-thats-problem>.

Harmonization of technical and business training content: Considering that business management trainings are not sufficient in addressing the capacity gaps of women entrepreneurs, it is proposed to involve stakeholders in harmonizing the existing training packages, to go beyond the business skills, to address their confidence and other soft skills needed for successful business leadership.

Gender-responsive extension and advisory services: implement multiple advisory approaches (e.g. community radio, mobile phones, learning events, etc.) to reach women Agri-preneurs more effectively. Extension and advisory services should go beyond production issues to address quality, packaging, branding, and certification.

Gender-responsive financial and business support services: Incentivize financial institutions and business support services to develop packages and products to meet the specific needs of agribusinesses and women entrepreneurs operating at different scales (micro, small and large enterprises) i.e. blended finance designs; Establish a dedicated platform for financial institutions to share experiences and learn about different approaches to strengthen women's financial inclusion and including digital financing to lessen the burden of women having to go to the banking hall for each transaction.

Research and Innovation: Conduct research on new and innovative approaches being used in Malawi to support agribusinesses (e.g. different types of crop insurance, different ICT tools) and ensure that all research collects and reports on sex-disaggregated data.

#VALUE4HER

VALUE4HER is AGRA's continental initiative, aimed at strengthening women's agribusinesses enterprises and enhancing voice and advocacy across Africa. The initiative is powered by [VALUE4HERConnect](#), Africa's first Women in Agribusiness digital marketplace, offering integrated business solutions to women companies, to enable them to build visibility, business networks, and collective capital across the continent while facilitating easier connections with buyers, financiers, and other service providers. To join this growing community of women agribusinesses, CLICK on the link <https://value4her.hivebrite.com/signup>

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