



12th Malabo Montpellier Forum

BRIDGING THE GAP: Policy Innovations
to Put Women at the Center of Food
System Transformation in Africa

June 8, 2023



is jointly facilitated by



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The 12th edition of the Malabo Montpellier Forum, taking place online on 8 June 2023, from 12:00–14:30 GMT will see the launch of the Malabo Montpellier Panel's next report "BRIDGING THE GAP: Policy Innovations to Put Women at the Center of Food System Transformation in Africa". Visit the [event page](#).

Women are pivotal to the transformation of Africa's agrifood systems and to the continent's job, growth, and health agendas. Almost two thirds of women in Africa south of the Sahara (SSA), are employed in agrifood systems as food producers, agrodealers, processors, distributors, and traders. In the majority of cases, they are also responsible for sourcing and cooking food for the health and wellbeing of their families.

Yet, women's capacity to contribute to efficient, resilient, and sustainable food systems and their transformation is severely curbed by a variety of social and systemic challenges that are yet to be fully addressed. Their productivity on the farm and beyond is hampered by a lack of access to land, inputs and technology, extension services, and finance. For example, when comparing women and men with similar sized plots in a similar context, the gender productivity gaps range from 23 percent in Tanzania to a striking 66 percent in Niger.

Beyond the farmgate too, women continue to receive poorer returns on their time and energy investments in agrifood systems than men. Discriminatory and entrenched social norms and systemic biases further undermine women's potential with detrimental impacts on food security, health, environmental sustainability, and economic growth. Proverbially, "women are in the ring with one hand tied behind their backs". Perhaps as a result, African and global efforts to alleviate hunger and malnutrition are yet to pay off.

If the trends continue, the sector's contribution to food security and economic growth is likely to fall. Ironically, women in Africa are the group that is most likely to be food insecure in the whole world. Particularly women in rural areas, in poorer households and those who have received no formal education are also experiencing a rapid rise in micronutrient deficiencies with intergenerational impacts, including anaemia.

Tackling the inequalities facing women is not just a moral imperative, it makes economic sense. If women had equal access to resources and services—that is, if agrifood systems were designed in such a way as to work better for women too—women could thrive in their roles in agrifood systems. Indeed, it is promising to see that several African countries have recognized the importance of empowering women, not only to contribute to a food systems transformation but also to deliver broader goals like poverty eradication and zero hunger. African countries have signed and ratified several sub-continental, continental, and international declarations, conventions, and

protocols to promote gender equality and advance women's economic empowerment. These frameworks are integrated into national constitutions and legislative processes, further grounding gender perspectives in establishing national development priorities.

These efforts have certainly realized some positive outcomes, in education, land registry, and political representation. Over the past two decades, girls in countries South of the Sahara have benefitted from substantial gains in educational development: they are more likely to complete primary education than boys and outperform boys in mathematics and sciences subjects. In addition, Rwanda leads the continent and the whole world in female representation in political participation and leadership. This success story combined with the rising uptake of a quota-based system has benefitted women's political participation on the continent. The continent has seen over 20 women in leadership positions since independence, seven of whom were in power at the time of writing. Furthermore, with one in four women starting or managing a business, the continent also boasts the highest percentage of female entrepreneurs in the world. In parallel, rapidly evolving digital technologies are making it easier for women to access information and finance.

It is clear that the status of women in agrifood systems in Africa is complex. While significant challenges remain, this report seeks to highlight areas of progress, it reviews the governance structure contribution to this progress, identifies opportunities for replication and scaling up successful interventions, as well as possible entry points for making food systems work (better) for women.

The first part of the Panel's report, therefore, provides an insight into the variety of continental and global frameworks that guide national ambitions and goals. This is followed by a review of the challenges facing greater participation of women in food systems, before showcasing opportunities and existing success stories where government action has indeed resulted in positive outcomes for women and food systems at the same time.

The second part contains four country studies: Ethiopia, Ghana, Rwanda, and Togo, considered amongst the most successful and active in terms of improving the outcomes for women in agrifood systems. Each case study reviews the institutional and policy innovations as well as programmatic interventions that contribute towards advancing gender equality among the actors in their agrifood systems.

The Malabo Montpellier Panel convenes 18 leading experts in agriculture, engineering, ecology, nutrition, and food security; its aim is to facilitate policy choices by African governments in order to accelerate progress toward food security and improved nutrition. The Panel identifies areas of progress and positive change across the continent and assesses what successful countries have done differently. It identifies the institutional and policy innovations and program interventions that can best be replicated and scaled by other countries. The related Malabo Montpellier Forum provides a platform to promote policy innovation; it uses the evidence produced by the Panel to facilitate dialogue among high-level decisionmakers on African agriculture, nutrition, and food security.



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