

Mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion in Rwanda's agricultural education and outreach services

Introduction

Women make up more than half of the agricultural workforce in Rwanda, but more than 60% of them are confined to subsistence agriculture.¹ Lower levels of education and access to knowledge and information are among the factors constraining women's productivity in agriculture. Supporting education institutions to address skills gaps among women and men can increase women's participation in lucrative parts of agri-value chains improving agricultural productivity and reducing gender disparities in the sector. Education institutions, with support of SEAD, are recognising these disparities and encouraging students to drive change. However, existing commitments and policies must translate into further action to help unlock the potential of girls and women – from education through to the workplace – and boost their contribution to the bold national vision for food security and prosperity.

This briefing paper highlights findings from SEAD's work on gender inclusion. These experiences have been drawn from programme documentation and research, discussion with the implementing team and key stakeholders, and national policy documentation and third-party research.

Key findings

Female students are underrepresented in TVET especially in STEM subjects

Despite relatively consistent parity in male and female enrolment at levels 1-5, by the time one gets to levels 6 and 7, female student enrolment decreases to less than a third, according to Rwanda's National Education Statistical Yearbook 2015-2019. The gender gap is most significant in STEM-related disciplines with only 10% female enrolment rate in science, engineering, manufacturing, and construction compared to just over 40% female enrolment in TVET on average. Less than a third of female students obtain a postgraduate degree and only 10% have received a PhD.²

The gender gap in agricultural productivity is significant

Women account for 80% of the smallholder workforce in Rwanda,³ but limited access to water, fertiliser and other tools, compounded by broader societal norms, means that a female-managed farm is 12% less productive than a male-managed farm,⁴ In addition, women tend to have less purchasing power than men and competing demands on time means they are usually unable to be involved in outreach services or sectoral meetings. For example, women made up approximately only

40% of over 800 participants involved in SEAD outreach training and approximately only 40% of over 200 participants involved in sectoral training of trainer sessions between July 2019 and August 2020.⁵

"I learned to be more understanding and supportive of female students and impaired students by helping them deal with specific problems."

Career Director, Huye Campus

Participants of gender training better understand how gender and inclusion barriers in education impact on agricultural production and food security

Over 100 people have participated in SEAD's gender training since 2019 – including teachers, administrators and senior leadership in education institutions. Of those who responded to a feedback survey (50 participants), many said they better understood how gender roles played out in their everyday lives and how to address these differences in a working context. 75% said they had shared their knowledge with colleagues and over 90% expressed an interest in increasing their knowledge through online courses.⁶

“We found that the point at which a girl’s journey to TVET school starts is at senior 3, where she makes her choices for advanced level. That’s why we invited these young girls [to] see what other girls have achieved so that they can get skills and motivation that will encourage them to create jobs for themselves and improve their lives...”

Welcome Ihabwicyubahiro, IPRC Musanze, Student and Gender Minister

Students are enthusiastic and powerful champions of inclusion in higher education

Building on the success and learning from the 2016 TVETGirl roadshow campaign (funded by the Netherlands government in support of the Workforce Development Authority), SEAD developed the Gender and Inclusiveness Fund to encourage institutions so **students could put what they had learned in gender training into practice.**⁷ Projects funded included community presentations where students spoke with younger girls about their options in TVET education (IPRC Musanze, Karongi and Huye) and the development of women-only safe-spaces on campus (CAVM Busugo). Despite the COVID-19 pandemic cutting short planned activities, the enthusiasm for the fund highlighted the further potential of this approach.

Recommendations

Progress so far has created a solid foundation for education institutions to play a central role in ensuring longer-term, meaningful change. This change needs to shift from a focus on enrolment numbers and staff representation to attainment and meaningful inclusion in education institutions, and the wider agricultural sector.

Within education institutions

Familiarise staff on gender equality and how they can take a more gender-responsive approach to their work: Education institutions should provide gender training for administrators as well as teaching staff to strengthen structures and processes within the institution beyond pedagogy. This includes supporting staff to understand the role of departmental budgeting and monitoring and evaluation in contributing to gender equality commitments outlined in institutional policies.

Ensure recruitment processes achieve greater representation of women in education institutions: More intentional interventions must be introduced if representation targets outlined in gender policies are to be achieved by 2025.

Education institutions and their leadership teams should ensure that recruitment and progression through academia accommodate issues of access as far as possible. For example, introducing gender quotas for senior management and adapting career development processes that accommodate more flexible work-life balance that accounts for the additional responsibilities of women in their home.

Encourage more equitable and inclusive enrolment in agricultural education, especially in STEM subjects: Higher education institutions should introduce processes that target those who are most under-represented and marginalised, for example ring-fencing scholarships for female students, engaging in more community awareness raising among feeder schools on the value of education for girls, people with disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, and ensuring institutions are more accessible and safe for these groups.

Within outreach and training

Motivate and equip trained farmers and cooperatives to share learning with their peers: Training providers and extension services should ensure that those who participate in training and outreach opportunities are equipped, and encouraged, to share what they learn with others so those who have competing commitments at home – often women – do not miss out.

Design gender-responsive research and outreach activities: Those responsible for designing and delivering outreach and extension should consider gender as they plan and design their activities. This includes prioritising women’s involvement in training and outreach through quotas or women-only cohorts, addressing challenges specific to female farmers and adapting logistics of the training to better suit women’s participation. Researchers must also capture disaggregated data to further investigate gender inequality.

Mobilise political will to strengthen commitments to gender equality in practice: MINAGRI, in collaboration with MINEDUC, should ensure that relevant activities noted in the PSTA4 to address women’s participation in the agricultural sector happen, and are monitored. These activities include skills development and training to increase women’s involvement in agribusiness, to develop their skills needed to run farming as a business (such as marketing and bookkeeping) and to increase women’s share in leadership and management. In particular, the new CAES should focus on reaching more women through extension services focused on productivity and resilience.

¹ Government of Rwanda (2018) *National Labour Force Survey (NLFS)*

² SEAD (2017) *SEAD Gender Audit Report*

³ Government of Rwanda (2018) *National Agriculture Policy*

⁴ MINAGRI (2019) *Gender and Youth Mainstreaming Strategy in Agriculture*

⁵ SEAD (2017) *SEAD Gender Audit Report*

⁶ SEAD (2020) *Feedback from SEAD’s gender and inclusion training*

⁷ TVETGirl Roadshow 2016 [Video]