Across Africa, agriculture is a primary sector of employment—and African women provide about 40% of the agricultural labor across the continent. Yet women farmers face systemic barriers to their success and productivity. For example, household responsibilities or cultural norms often prevent women farmers from attending trainings, or meeting with male agents. In agricultural productivity, gender gaps range from 23% in Tanzania to 66% in Niger. To help women farmers reach their potential, policymakers must find solutions to tackle these constraints. Below, impact evaluation evidence from the Africa Gender Innovation Lab can point toward policy solutions that can effectively address the needs of women farmers.

GENDER-SENSITIVE AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICES

Agricultural extension programs are a critical tool to boost farmer knowledge and techniques; designing them with the needs of women in mind can help them reach more women effectively and close the gender agricultural productivity gap. Increasing the number of female extension agents, providing gender-mainstreaming for extension agent training curricula, or targeting the training to both spouses can help to improve women farmers’ outcomes. GIL has tested several
interventions to make agricultural extension services more effective for women that can be incorporated into large-scale agricultural extension programs.

Ethiopia: Gender-Inclusive Design

In Ethiopia, gender-sensitive elements were incorporated into the agricultural extension service component of the government’s Rural Capacity Building Project. The program increased the number of female extension officers, and trained staff on specific gender issues so that agents would be able to spot potential differences in how female and male farmers respond to services. A GIL impact evaluation found that the program increased the overall area of cultivated land and the adoption of marketable crops by 10 percent. In areas covered by the RCBP, more people contributed to income-generating activities, which bolstered economic activity. More work was also undertaken off-the-farm. It is critical to note that the impacts of the program benefited men and women equally; while women saw benefits from the program, it did not close the gender gap.

Cote d’Ivoire: Couples’ Agricultural Extension Trainings

In Cote d’Ivoire, the Gender Innovation Lab tested several interventions to address critical issues in the sector: that women farmers are concentrated in low-value crops, lack access to critical productive inputs, and adopt agricultural technologies at lower rates. One intervention in the rubber sector included a couples’ training: the male rubber producer and their spouse simultaneously received trainings on agricultural practices, and together created a joint action plan to manage farm tasks---addressing possible behavioral barriers to cooperation. Recipients of the couples’ agricultural extension training had higher-quality agricultural planning, increased women’s management of cash-crop tasks, higher perception of women’s agricultural knowledge, and shared more agricultural decisions. Households who benefited from the training also saw substantial increases in the value of household agricultural production.

Understand Underlying Constraints

GIL works to understand the sources of the underlying constraints that women face

Synthesize

GIL brings together a body of evidence on a particular issue to help shift the agenda at a regional level

Innovate and Evaluate

GIL works closely with project teams to identify innovative solutions and test them rigorously

Advise on Program Design

GIL advises teams on how to design evidence-based programs

Taking What Works to Scale

GIL works directly with project teams to promote the uptake of effective gender policies
Uganda: Building Social Networks

In rural Uganda, an extension program used the power of female social networks to disseminate new agricultural information. In a first networking session for the program, each woman was paired with another female cotton farmer that she did not previously know. After the initial session, the women were encouraged to stay in touch and share new agricultural information about recently adopted cash crops. When compared to standard agricultural extension programs, the intervention significantly increased productivity for all women farmers except for those in the highest income quintile. In addition, there were significant spillover effects in productivity for male farmers. While further research is needed to determine what drove the increased productivity, the researchers found that women who were paired with another woman farmer had increased levels of agricultural knowledge, measured via tests. These gains in knowledge accounted for roughly 20% of the increase in yields.

Integrating Women into Cash Crop Value Chains or Enterprise Activities

Across the continent, women are often concentrated in low-value crops, which limit the potential economic returns on their farms. Evidence has indicated that when women do manage cash crop plots—and have access to the same inputs and resources as men—they are able to be as productive as their male counterparts. GIL has found evidence for two promising programs and policies that can help women shift into higher-value activities: behavioral nudges for male spouses, and cash grants to couples through community livelihoods programs.

Uganda: Couples’ Training and Incentives

Many women’s empowerment interventions target women directly, with mixed results. Evidence from Uganda indicates that engaging men and women together can help foster women’s participation in cash crop production. Couples participated in...
a workshop with topics centered on communication and cooperation between spouses, gender-sensitivity training, and women’s participation in cash cropping. A second intervention used a small incentive—project staff visited the households in-person, and then gave households a small thank-you gift—to encourage men to transfer contracts into their wife’s name. With the encouragement, about 70% of households agreed to transfer a block to their wife—and the couples’ training further nudged some households to transfer their contracts. Overall, registering the blocks in the wife’s name led to more women interacting with the purchasing company, and increases in the number of blocks held by women.

Nigeria: Cash Grants and a Community Livelihoods Program

A program in northwest Nigeria—a region of the country with deeply entrenched norms that restrict women from working—led to strong impacts on the likelihood that women shifted their time to non-farm enterprise activities. Participants received a large cash transfer and a community livelihoods program (the U.S. Agency for International Development’s Feed the Future Nigeria Livelihoods project). After receiving the services, women became more engaged in home-based activities, like petty trading or rice crop processing. In addition, the community emphasis of the program helped reduce potential backlash from giving cash grants directly to women.

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