

AFAAS GENDER POLICY BRIEF.

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MAKING AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION AND ADVISORY SERVICES MORE EFFECTIVE IN AFRICA: A GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION APPROACH

Key Messages

- Vast studies in Africa reveal the challenges of inadequate agricultural extension services and gender gaps in access to extension services and the adoption of improved technologies in the face of climate change.
- Inequalities in access to agricultural extension and advisory services are not limited to gender, but rather an interplay of multiple social identities such as age, social economic status, marital status, education, geographical location, and culture, among others.
- A gender equality and social inclusion approach to agricultural extension and advisory services attempts to reduce disparities by ensuring equal rights, opportunities, and respect for agriculture value chain actors in the access, use and benefit from agricultural extension and advisory services regardless of their social identity.
- Actions to strengthen the effectiveness of agricultural extension and advisory services in Africa through a gender equality and social inclusion approach include: explicit integration of gender equality and social inclusion in organisational policies and culture; development of clear systems and procedures to guide practitioners in its integration in programme cycles; building a knowledge base of agricultural extension and advisory clientele typologies; developing gender capacities of agricultural extension and advisory services practitioners; promoting partnerships and collective advocacy in gender equality and social inclusion in extension and advisory services; and supporting the increased enrolment and advancement of females in the agricultural extension and advisory services profession.

1. Introduction

This brief argues for and demonstrates the application of a gender equality and social inclusion approach to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of agricultural extension and advisory services (AEAS) for diverse agriculture value chain actors in Africa. The brief is based on an analysis of institutional and individual level findings of a gender capacity needs assessment that was conducted during February 2022 in 14 African countries among the African Forum for Agricultural Advisory Services (AFAAS) network.

2. Background

Despite the dominant contribution of the services and industry sectors to the gross domestic product of many African countries, agriculture remains a critical sector, owing to its importance in employing large numbers of rural populations; providing raw material for the industry sector; and providing food and nutrition for the growing populations that are increasingly becoming urbanised (Oyelami, Sololuwe, & Ajeigbe, 2022). Agriculture is also seen to have the potential to address the growing problem of youth unemployment and under employment on the continent by providing vast opportunities for youth engagement in agribusiness in diverse agriculture value chains (Mlambo, 2019).

Notwithstanding, agricultural production and productivity on the continent have been affected over the years by factors including the use of low input technologies; limited knowledge of and access to agricultural technology and innovation; inadequate extension services; limited availability of and access to agricultural credit; high costs of input technologies; limited knowledge of and access to lucrative markets; and poor agronomic practices; all of which are compounded by the effects of climate variability and climate change (Oyelami, Sololuwe, & Ajeigbe, 2022). Moreover, numerous studies have found gender gaps in access to extension and advisory services (Balasubramanya, 2019; Kosec et al., 2020); gender gaps in access to and adoption of improved technologies (Bamanyaki, 2020; Kurgat et al., 2020); and gender disparities in agricultural productivity (Backiny-Yetna & McGee, 2015; Mukasa & Salami, 2015), with males generally performing better than females. More recent studies underscore that inequalities in agriculture value chains are not limited to, or only an influence of one's gender, but rather an interplay of multiple social identities such as age, ethnicity, physical ability, marital status, education level, social status, and geographical location, among others (Kawarazuka et al., 2022; Fletcher & Reed, 2022).

In Africa, AEAS are very crucial because they are the main source of delivery of knowledge, information, and new technologies to resource-poor farmers. In the era where agricultural innovation is emphasised, AEAS providers play a critical role of facilitating the multi-directional flow of information and innovations among actors in the agricultural knowledge and innovation system, notably farmers, researchers, education institutions; and other actors in agriculture value chains, such as input suppliers, agro-processors, credit agencies, social entrepreneurs, and exporters (Franca, Dhamankar, & Salm, 2016). As such, AEAS providers are well-positioned to have a marked contribution towards accelerating agricultural growth and transformation on the continent. The adoption of a gender equality and social inclusion approach in service delivery will therefore enhance the impact of AEAS on the continent.

3. Demystifying Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in AEAS

AEAS may be defined as

“[...] systems that facilitate the access of farmers, their organisations and other market actors to knowledge, information and technologies; facilitate their interaction with partners in research, education, agri-business and other relevant institutions and assist them to develop their own organisational and management skills and practice” (Christoplos, 2010).

The inequalities in extension and rural advisory services manifest in differences in rights and opportunities to access, effectively participate and benefit from agricultural knowledge, skills, information, and new technologies among agriculture value chain actors. Various authors draw attention to barriers such as the selection criteria for beneficiaries; the approaches and techniques used to deliver rural advisory services; the content of training curricula; and human resources for extension and rural advisory services (Flanagan, 2015; Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, n.d.). Beneficiary selection on the basis of the head of the household, land ownership, farm income earners, scale of operation, and ability to pay for extension advisory services has led to the exclusion or disproportionate inclusion of women farmers, youth, migrant populations, the landless, and poor farmers (Flanagan, 2015). Similarly, approaches and techniques for rural advisory services that are suited for literate farmers with time and ease of mobility outside their farms and capability to utilise written material, tend to exclude many women (and other individuals) who are less literate and face time and mobility constraints due to daily workloads and responsibilities in the household (FAO, 2016). The training content of extension and rural advisory services may also exclude farmers with differing production priorities and interests, while the shortage of female extension workers prohibits female farmers who feel uncomfortable or are culturally restricted from interacting with male extension workers (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, n.d.).

Many of the inequalities described above are ingrained in cultural beliefs, social norms and gender relations, which determine critical factors for agriculture such as access to education and information, land use and property rights, access to productive resources, and decision making power in the household, community and society (Meinzen-Dick, 2019). Gender-blind formal policies, programmes and institutions may also perpetuate existing inequalities through gender-biased targeting and the use of gender-exploitative approaches. Besides one's gender, other social identities such as age, ability, wealth, religion, education, geographical location and ethnicity often intersect to create different experiences of privilege, power, vulnerability, and/or marginalisation for individuals (THET, n.d.), thereby affecting their inclusion and/or effective participation in extension and advisory services programmes.

Accordingly, **gender equality and social inclusion is an approach that attempts to rebalance unequal power relations and reduce disparities experienced by people on grounds of social identities (e.g. gender, age, wealth, religion, ability, education, geographical location) or an intersection of these identities.** The goal of gender equality and social inclusion is to ensure equal rights, opportunities and respect for all individuals in the provision of AEAS regardless of their social identity (XX,XX). The application of a gender equality and social inclusion approach would therefore ensure that agriculture value chain actors with diverse needs, interests and capabilities are reached and benefit from responsive AEAS.

4. Taking Stock of Efforts to Promote Gender Equality in AEAS in Africa

An online survey administered to members of AFAAS country fora in February 2022 sought to obtain perceptions of the status of gender equality in AEAS provision at country level, as well as the associated enabling and hindering factors. A total of 41 responses were received from stakeholders in 14 countries, namely Ethiopia, Guinea Bissau, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The respondents included representatives from non-government institutions, agricultural research institutions, government ministries and departments, extension and advisory service practitioners in the private sector, board members and staff of country fora and the AFAAS secretariat.

Across the 14 countries, there was a general acknowledgement among the respondents of strides having been made towards promoting gender equality in AEAS provision. Among the milestones mentioned by AFAAS country fora members included (i) the formulation/revision and enforcement of national laws, policies or guidelines that mandate the integration of a gender perspective in all development initiatives (including agricultural programmes, projects, plans and budgets); (ii) the institutionalisation of structures (gender units, departments) at national and decentralised levels in some countries such as Ethiopia and Madagascar that ensure that a gender perspective is mainstreamed in agricultural programmes/projects, implementation strategies, and monitoring and evaluation; (iii) the establishment of platforms on gender in agricultural development at national, sub-regional, continental and international levels that foster continuous engagement among actors in the agriculture sector, such as the Feed the Future supported Integrating Gender and Nutrition within Agricultural Extension Services (INGENAES); and (iv) the growing institutionalisation of gender research in agriculture at research institutes, universities, and other institutions of learning respectively.

The milestones notwithstanding, the respondents from different countries also expressed hindrances to gender equality in AEAS on the continent as follows: (i) outdated national agriculture policies, strategies and guidelines that are gender-blind and do not recognise the role of women in agriculture (Mali, Madagascar, Sudan); (ii) gender-insensitive agricultural technology that favours men more than women, thereby contributing to gender disparities in uptake and adoption (Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, Sierra Leone);

(iii) limited sex- disaggregated data to inform programme and project design, implementation and the tracking of impact (Sudan, Madagascar, Sierra Leone); (iv) gender analysis in the agriculture sector is highly fragmented and limited mostly to activity profiling of roles, workloads, access to and control of assets and decision making power (all countries); (v) limited gender awareness among policy makers together with diverse interpretations of gender among technocrats leading to policy evaporation at the stage of implementation (Kenya, Malawi, Mali); (vi) rigid culture, social norms and values in some societies that do not recognise women or prevent women from owning or inheriting productive assets or taking up leadership roles (all countries); and (vii) weak policy enforcement deriving from low political commitment to mainstream gender in programmes and projects (Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda, South Africa, Kenya, Madagascar, Zambia).

5. Investigating Institutional and Individual Level Gender Capacity Gaps in AEAS in Africa

The effective delivery of gender responsive and inclusive AEAS necessitates requisite knowledge, attitudes, and skills among AEAS practitioners and institutions in gender integration in AEAS programming and operations. The assessment of institutional and individual gender capacity gaps utilised a conceptual framework that was an adaptation of the Gender Equality Capacity Assessment Tool by the UN Women (2016) and a framework developed by the CGIAR International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI, 2019). At each of the capacity development levels (institutional and individual), the framework assessed six core capacities, namely (i) gender analysis and strategic planning; (ii) gender-responsive programming, budgeting, and implementation; (iii) knowledge management and gender-responsive monitoring and evaluation; (iv) partnerships and advocacy; (v) leadership and transformation; and (vi) gender at the workplace respectively.

Table 1 summarises the identified gender capacity gaps relating to each of the six core capacities at institutional and individual levels according to the study findings.

Table 1: Gender-related AEAS capacity gaps at institutional and individual levels

Core gender capacity	Institutional level	Individual level
1. Gender analysis and strategic planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Lack of clear systems, procedures, and toolkits to guide AEAS providers in gender analysis and gender integration in strategy and programme formulation and development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Low levels of familiarity with international conventions on gender equality and women’s empowerment. ·Limited understanding of gender concepts and gender analytical frameworks. ·Limited ability to apply gender analytical frameworks and tools to analyse gender dynamics in AEAS. ·Limited use of gender-related data to inform strategic planning.
2. Gender-responsive programming, budgeting, and implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Gender is not effectively and consistently mainstreamed throughout AEAS programme and project cycles. ·Lack of explicit funding for gender-specific or mainstream activities in projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Inadequate knowledge and technical skills to apply gender responsive planning, budgeting, and implementation in AEAS projects.
3. Knowledge management and gender-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Limited use of sex- and age-disaggregated information to analyse and track gender attributes in AEAS projects. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ·Inadequate skills to collect, interpret and report on sex- and age-

Core gender capacity	Institutional level	Individual level
responsive monitoring and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender-blind data collection tools, monitoring and evaluation systems. • Limited and inconsistent reporting of gender aspects in organisation documents or publications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> disaggregated data relevant for AEAS. • Limited skills to develop and work with gender responsive systems and tools for monitoring and evaluating AEAS.
4. Partnerships and advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited or weak partnerships established by organisations around advocacy for gender equality in AEAS among organisations/institutions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited knowledge and skills in advocacy and partnership building around gender in AEAS.
5. Leadership and transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of clear organisational visions regarding gender equality and transformation of gender power relations in AEAS. • Achieving gender equality in AEAS is not an explicit goal or objective in Organisational Strategy documents (i.e., strategic and implementation plans). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited knowledge and skills on gender transformative approaches in AEAS. • Absence of a shared commitment among all institution staff towards promoting gender equality and transformation of gender norms and relations in agriculture value chains.
6. Gender at the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender imbalance in AEAS technical staffing and leadership positions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer females than males holding technical positions in AEAS feel supported in personal career and leadership development.

Source: AFAAS Gender Capacity Needs Assessment Report and Competence Development Plan, 2022.

The institutional-level findings revealed that gender equality and social inclusion are predominantly not explicit in AEAS organisational visions, missions, goals, objectives, and strategic plans. Consequently, their explicit and consistent consideration and integration in lower-level organisational policy and strategy documents, as well as in AEAS programme/ project cycles (i.e., design, planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, reporting and knowledge management) is limited. Relatedly, the absence of clear systems, procedures, and toolkits to guide practitioners on gender integration in AEAS operations, notably the collection of gender- and age-disaggregated data, conducting gender analyses, interpretation of gender disparities, and the use of gender-disaggregated information to inform appropriate gender transformative responses is a hindrance.

At the individual level, the low levels of awareness and understanding of gender concepts and international conventions on gender equality and inclusion among many practitioners are constraints to their applicability in AEAS provision. Similarly, limited knowledge and skills in gender analytical frameworks and tools, gender responsive planning, budgeting and implementation, partnership building and advocacy relating to gender in AEAS, and gender transformative approaches in AEAS among practitioners have contributed to the low commitment towards gender integration in AEAS. Moreover, the low numbers of female professionals in AEAS compared to males prohibits the effective reach of AEAS to women farmers in some communities with stringent religious and cultural norms.

6. How can a Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Approach address the identified gaps?

The adoption of a gender equality and social inclusion approach to AEAS accentuates the recognition that male and female farmers have different aspirations and priorities for AEAS; and that male and female

farmers are not homogenous categories. Male farmers and female farmers as sub-categories differ along an intersection of dimensions such as geographical location (urban and rural); age (elderly, middle age, youth); socioeconomic status (wealthy, middle income, poor); education (educated, uneducated); physical ability; culture; ethnicity; and religion, among others. The explicit recognition and understanding of these intersectional dynamics would therefore strengthen the effectiveness of AEAS on the continent by ensuring that farmer sub-categories that were previously excluded or unfavourably included in AEAS programmes are targeted with extension and advisory services that are responsive to their specific needs, priorities, and capabilities. This is envisaged to increase the demand for and uptake of AEAS on the continent, thereby leading to improved productivity, incomes, resilience to climate change and overall wellbeing of farming households and other agriculture value chain actors.

At the institutional level, the successful adoption of a gender equality and social inclusion approach to AEAS would therefore require effective governance, political will and commitment, adequate financing, and efficient service delivery (GESI working Group, 2017). At the individual level, the necessary prerequisites include adequate knowledge, skills and positive attitudes and commitment towards gender integration in AEAS programme/project design and implementation among practitioners.

7. Implications for Policy

With an appreciation of the concept and importance of a gender equality and social inclusion approach to AEAS, this section suggests practical actions to inform the advancement of gender equality and social inclusion in AEAS for more effective and impactful service delivery on the Africa continent.

- 1) **Explicitly integrate gender equality and social inclusion in organisational policies and culture:** A revision of organisational missions, visions, development goals and overall strategies to integrate gender equality and social inclusion perspectives would ensure that organisational policies, strategies, programmes, and projects explicitly integrate gender equality and social inclusion principles in alignment with the overall vision. It would also ensure that gender equality and social inclusion in AEAS is ingrained in the organisational culture, both in operations and at the workplace.
- 2) **Institutionalise clear systems and procedures for integrating and tracking gender equality and social inclusion in AEAS:** The development and effective roll-out of organisational Gender Equality and Social Inclusion strategies and action plans, implementation guidelines, toolkits and checklists for gender integration would institutionalise, as well as guide AEAS practitioners in, integrating gender equality and social inclusion in programmes and project cycles. Gender equality and social inclusion indicators, targets, outputs, and outcomes should also be mainstreamed in organisational monitoring, evaluation and learning systems for systematic tracking, reporting and knowledge management. Additionally, the inclusion of gender equality and social inclusion targets in AEAS staff performance evaluations would also foster implementation of and accountability for gender equality and social inclusion in AEAS.
- 3) **Build a knowledge base of potential clientele typologies to inform AEAS interventions:** Context-specific gender analyses of agriculture value chain actors should be conducted to establish typologies of AEAS clientele in terms of their constraints, capacities, and priorities. The context-specific understanding of the diverse agriculture value chain actors would inform the appropriate design, targeting and delivery of AEAS interventions that address specific needs with added impact.
- 4) **Develop capacities of AEAS practitioners in gender equality and social inclusion:** Capacity development in form of training, experiential learning, mentoring, and coaching on gender concepts,

gender equality and social inclusion analytical frameworks and tools relevant for AEAS; gender transformative approaches in AEAS; gender equality and social inclusion-responsive planning, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and communication, among others, would foster knowledge, attitude and skills among AEAS practitioners.

- 5) **Promote partnerships and collective advocacy on gender equality and social inclusion in AEAS:** The formation of multistakeholder platforms and communities of practice on gender equality and social inclusion involving diverse stakeholders from government, private sector, research and academic institutions, civil society, women's rights, disabilities rights, and youth rights organisations at national, regional and international levels would foster the buy-in, acceptance and commitment among diverse AEAS stakeholders. Gender equality and social inclusion in AEAS may also be advanced through the leveraging of knowledge, information, and expertise of stakeholders in the design and implementation of gender-responsive AEAS interventions, resource mobilisation for the implementation of gender-specific activities; and collective advocacy to influence positive policy reforms relevant for AEAS.
- 6) **Support increased female enrolment and advancement in the AEAS profession:** This includes interventions such as advocacy campaigns in schools to encourage the interest and enrolment of girls and women in the AEAS profession; internship and mentoring opportunities especially for females at AEAS institutions/organisations; setting up special schemes or programmes that support women's career advancement at all levels within workplaces; and proactive recruitment, appointment and/or promotion of women to senior managerial and executive positions in the AEAS field.

8. Conclusion

Based on studies that widely affirm the existence of gender disparities in access to AEAS among agriculture value chain actors, this brief has elucidated that the inequalities in the access, use and benefit from AEAS are not restricted to gender, but rather an intersection of multiple social identities that render male and female agricultural value chain actors as non-homogenous categories. A gender equality and social inclusion approach to AEAS provision permits the context-specific understanding of the variety of potential AEAS clientele, thereby facilitating the design and implementation of AEAS that responds to the aspirations, priorities, and capacities of specific agriculture value chain actors. The development of responsive AEAS is envisaged to enhance the effectiveness of AEAS on the continent, thereby contributing to increased uptake and adoption of improved knowledge and technologies, and ultimately improved agricultural productivity, incomes, resilience to climate change and overall wellbeing.

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