



GENDER Impact
Platform

Gender responsiveness of Uganda's agrifood systems policies: gaps and call to action for improved food safety

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Summary

Food safety is vital for public health, economic growth, and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, yet gender disparities and fragmented policies hinder effective food safety practices. This study assessed gender considerations in Uganda's agrifood policies using the Women Empowerment in Agrifood Governance (WEAGov) framework. The findings indicate that while the agrifood policies recognize gender inequalities and commit to attainment of gender equality, they lack actionable targets, budgets, and mechanisms to ensure women's participation in food safety practices. The policies do not integrate gender-responsive food safety measures, missing opportunities to leverage women's roles in ensuring food safety. To enhance progress, policies must incorporate measurable gender-responsive actions, ensure adequate budgeting, establish mechanisms to track progress, and increase women's representation throughout the policy cycle.

Key results

- The agrifood policies acknowledge gender inequalities but lack gender-specific actions and targets, hindering the policies' effective implementation and monitoring of their impact.
- Few policies include measures to ensure women's participation and input in policy processes, limiting their influence in agriculture and other sectors.
- The policies lack adequate budgetary support and detailed frameworks to ensure effective resource distribution.
- The policies fail to integrate gender-responsive food safety measures, missing opportunities to leverage women's roles in ensuring food safety.

Background

Food safety is crucial for public health, but its assurance remains a significant challenge, particularly in regions like Africa and Southeast Asia. In Uganda, foodborne illnesses affect 1.3 million people annually, constituting 14% of all human ailments treated annually (FAO, 2022). Over 60% of known foodborne diseases worldwide result from consuming contaminated fresh and perishable foods (Roesel, 2014). Women, who play central roles in food production, distribution, and handling (Visser & Wangu, 2021), often lack access to critical resources and decision-making power, with impacts on food safety practices. Despite existence of

laws that ostensibly treat women and men equally, gender disparities persist due to the unequal access to resources and underrepresentation of women in policy processes. Further, literature such as Njuki et al. (2021) shows that gender roles and women's contributions are often not consistently recognized in policy design and implementation. The gender disparities in food safety are intensified by a fragmented policy framework and the lack of policy coordination. This policy brief highlights the extent of gender consideration in Uganda's agrifood policies and identifies opportunities for enhancing food safety through inclusive, gender-responsive policies and practices.

Methods

We applied the Women's Empowerment in Agrifood Governance (WEAGov) framework (Ragasa et al., 2023) to identify evidence of gender considerations in policy documents. Twenty-two policy instruments were considered and 10 were scored based on the WEAGov scoring rubric and tracked through an expert survey (Table 1) (for methodology see <https://www.ifpri.org/project/womens-empowerment-agrifood-governance-weagov/>). Thematic content analysis of the policies was also done to address two key questions with respect to food safety, that is does the policy include consideration for gender equality and rural women's issues in food safety? and does it contain measures to address gender equality and rural women's issues in food safety?

Table 1. Agrifood, gender and food safety policies, strategies, and plans reviewed in this study.

Name of policy	Year
Agriculture/food production	
National Agriculture Policy*	2013
National Agriculture and Extension Policy*	2016
The National Land Use Policy*	2006
National Fisheries and Aquaculture Policy*	2017
National Fertiliser policy	2016
Uganda Climate Change Policy*	2015
National Agriculture Extension Strategy	2016
Updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)	2022
The Animal Feeds Policy	2005
Uganda One Health Strategic Plan 2018-2022	2018
National Environment Management Policy for Uganda (draft)	2014
Agriculture Sector Strategic Plan 2015/16-2019/20	2015
Agriculture distribution and value chain	
Food and Drugs Act	1964
Markets Act	2021
Public Health Act	2000
Public Health Act (Meat) Rules	1935
Household consumption	
Uganda Food and Nutrition Policy*	2003
Uganda Food and Nutrition Strategy and Investment Plan*	2004
Uganda Nutrition Action Plan*	2020
Long- and short-term national plans	
Uganda Vision 2040*	2015
The Third National Development Plan (NDP III) (2020/21–2024/25)*	2020
Gender policies	
Uganda Gender Policy	2007

*Only 10 policies were scored for gender content analysis as per WEAGOv tool.

Results

Gender inequality is recognized but no specific targets or actions are defined for its tackling

Uganda's agrifood policies acknowledge gender inequalities and show a strong foundational commitment to addressing gender, social inclusion, and equity issues. Key national instruments such as the National Development Plan, Vision 2040, and the National Agriculture and Extension Policy emphasize gender equality objectives, particularly in agriculture and rural development.

However, translating these commitments into specific, measurable actions and targets remains a challenge. While many policies acknowledge women's distinct roles and challenges in agriculture, only 60% of them set clear gender-specific targets. For example, the National Agricultural Extension Policy highlights training opportunities for women but fails to define the outcomes or provide the resource allocations for women-led initiatives.

Sex-disaggregated data collection remains inconsistent, limiting the ability to evaluate policy impacts accurately. While some policies like the Food and Nutrition Policy recognize the relationship between gender and nutrition, they do not provide specific indicators to assess women's distinct contributions and challenges. However, the National Development Plan III effectively integrates gender by utilizing sex-disaggregated data across multiple sectors, particularly in agriculture, to evaluate women's roles in economic activities. Comprehensive data are crucial for understanding men and women's needs and assessing intervention effectiveness.

Strengthening policies with clear actions, gender targets and robust data collection would ensure Uganda's commitment to gender equality translates into tangible outcomes, fostering the thriving of an inclusive and effective agrifood sector.

Women's participation and input in policy processes are limited

The review of the policies points to a mixed landscape regarding women's involvement and leadership in agrifood policy processes. Only 30% of the policies reflect some level of intentional engagement with women and marginalized groups, despite the general recognition of women's vital roles in agriculture. However, even these policies lack mechanisms to ensure women's active involvement in policy formulation and implementation. This sentiment was echoed by most of the experts interviewed, who indicated that a formal consultation process was not in place and consultations occurred on an ad hoc basis. Structured consultation mechanisms such as surveys, focus groups, and community consultations are crucial for incorporating women's experiences and insights in policy-making.

The policies do not establish clear provisions for women's leadership in decision-making bodies. There is a need for formal platforms that guarantee women's representation in governance structures, allowing their perspectives to inform policy discussions. The exclusion of women in such forums has been noted in other studies such as Ampaire et al. (2017), who note that policy development is often dominated by government agencies with limited involvement of local communities.

Women's opportunities to influence policy design remain limited, with consultations often involving experts but providing few avenues for ordinary citizens, especially women, to provide input. Women's leadership in policy formulation is uneven. This highlights the need for more inclusive structures to ensure their participation in the policy-making process.

Gender-responsive budgeting is absent

Gender-responsive budgeting is used inconsistently. Some policies mention budget allocations for women's initiatives but they often lack detailed frameworks to ensure effective resource distribution for such initiatives. The Uganda National Agriculture Policy emphasizes the need for equity in resource access, but it does not specify the provisions to support rural women's needs such as access to seeds, fertilizers, and credit. Programs like the Agriculture Credit Facility could do a better job in addressing systemic barriers such as collateral requirements in accessing credit that disproportionately affect women. The Uganda Food and Nutrition Policy mentions the need to allocate funds for enhancing the capacity of gender groups, but its impact could be amplified by its active engagement with women in the budgeting process. This participatory approach is crucial for translating policy intentions into tangible outcomes, as many policies show gender inequity awareness, although they lack the consultative processes necessary for meaningful gender-sensitive budgeting.

Gender-responsive food safety measures are absent

Eight of the policies reviewed incorporate measures to ensure food safety throughout the food chain, from production to consumption, emphasizing the importance of enhancing the food storage, marketing, and distribution functions. For example, the Food and Nutrition Policy promotes modern processing techniques to enhance food quality, reduce post-harvest losses, and improve farmers' incomes. The National Agriculture Policy highlights the importance of collaboration among government ministries and stakeholders to develop food safety standards, including sanitary and phytosanitary measures. The health considerations within these policies aim to improve access to safe water and promote proper sanitation practices, ultimately reducing the health risks associated with contaminated water and poor hygiene.

Despite these efforts, there are notable gender-related food safety gaps. Women's roles in

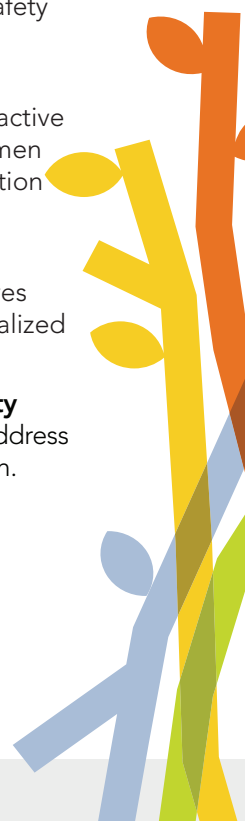
managing household food safety are not adequately reflected in the policies, particularly for informal food vending and production. The National Extension Policy, for example, overlooks gender equality in its food safety education guidelines, missing an opportunity to improve food quality and reduce losses. Other policies such as the Climate Change Policy acknowledge the need for improved food handling and processing to achieve food security but fail to prioritize women's involvement or address their specific challenges such as their limited access to storage facilities and processing equipment.

Conclusion

Uganda's agrifood policies have both strengths and gaps in gender inclusivity that are critical for the design of the national food safety policy. While most policies indicate a foundational commitment to gender equality, they lack measurable actions, specific targets, and sex-disaggregated data collection mechanisms, which undermines their effective implementation and evaluation. The policies do not adequately recognize the economic and social factors that influence men and women's roles in agrifood value chains that would ensure that they receive the necessary support to strengthen their roles in food safety and standards. Such factors would include structured channels for women's participation, setting of clear gender-specific targets, integrating of sex-disaggregated data in evaluations, and dedicating of budgets for implementing of interventions.

Policy recommendations

- **Develop gender-specific targets.** Policies should define measurable objectives, actions, and targets for gender equality in food safety practices.
- **Enhance women's participation in the policy process.** Create mechanisms for active involvement of and input by diverse women categories in policy design, implementation and evaluation.
- **Ensure gender-responsive budgeting.** Allocate dedicated resources for initiatives that empower women and other marginalized people in agrifood sectors.
- **Incorporate gender-sensitive food safety measures.** Tailor food safety policies to address the unique roles and challenges of women.



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Acknowledgments

This publication is a product of the policy innovation projects (PIPs) under the Gender Responsive Agriculture Systems Policy (GRASP) Fellowship. The GRASP Fellowship is a career development program growing a pool of confident, capable African women to lead the design and implementation of gender-responsive policies in Africa. Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the fellowship is implemented by African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD). The PIPs were partly funded by the CGIAR GENDER Impact Platform, which is grateful for the support of CGIAR Trust Fund Contributors (<https://www.cgiar.org/funders>).

This PIP also received partial funding from CABI. CABI as an international intergovernmental not-for-profit organization, gratefully acknowledges the generous support received from our many donors, sponsors and partners. In particular, we thank our Member Countries for their vital financial and strategic contributions.

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