



## Women's involvement in Uganda's agricultural finance policy processes: barriers and opportunities

**Dr Rosemary Emegu Isoto<sup>1</sup>, Professor Bernard Bashaasha<sup>2</sup>, and Mr Augustine Oloo<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Senior Lecturer, Department of Agribusiness and Natural Resource Economics, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Makerere University, P.O. Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of Agribusiness and Natural Resource Economics, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Makerere University, P.O. Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda

<sup>3</sup>Graduate student, Department of Agribusiness and Natural Resource Economics, College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, Makerere University, P.O. Box 7062, Kampala, Uganda

### Summary

Agriculture is vital for Uganda's rural economy, as 73% of the population resides in rural areas and 70% rely on agriculture for sustenance. Women, who are critical in agricultural productivity, face significant constraints, especially in accessing credit. This study, undertaken in 2024, employed the Women's Empowerment in Agrifood Governance (WEAGov) framework developed by the International Food Policy Research Institute to assess women's involvement in existing agricultural and finance policies and their gender focus. The study also used data from focus group discussions to assess the gendered access to credit. Results show that although Uganda's financial and agricultural policies recognize gender disparities, significant gender gaps exist in financial policy design, access, and implementation, with women disproportionately excluded. They also fail in implementing measurable gender-focused objectives. Furthermore, results show that women remain underserved by formal financial institutions and rely heavily on informal mechanisms. They are challenged by a lack of required collateral for credit, high interest rates, and limited financial literacy. To realize any impactful changes, agricultural and financial policies must undergo gender-responsive reforms targeting inclusivity, gender responsiveness in financial products, and enhancement of financial literacy programs.

## Key results

1. Uganda has implemented initiatives aimed at improving gender inclusion. However, these policies lack specific targets and measurable outcomes for women in agricultural finance.
2. The policies lack measures for inclusion of women in the policy process. The minimal representation of women in leadership roles within financial institutions exacerbates this challenge.
3. There are few clear gender equity goals in financial and agricultural policies, limiting the opportunities for sustainable and all-inclusive economic growth in the agricultural sector.
4. Women are less likely than men to be included in the formal financial sector, forcing women to resort to less resourced informal financial borrowing entities to cater for their capital needs.

## Background

In Uganda, where rural poverty is prevalent and agricultural production is crucial for economic growth, women are key contributors in agriculture. Despite this significant role, women face numerous obstacles in accessing resources including the credit essential for increasing agricultural productivity. This has contributed to Uganda's agricultural growth lagging behind targets, with current farm productivity increases at around 2.2%, which is below the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme goal of 6%, while the population growth rate is at 3% (IGC, 2017; African Union, 2021). Addressing these barriers is critical in achieving inclusive growth, economic empowerment, and sustainable development in Uganda.

The challenges faced by women in Uganda in accessing credit are partly due to systemic gender biases in financial services, women's lack of collateral, and social norms restricting women's ownership of assets. These issues constrain women's agricultural productivity, stifling overall sector growth and deepening gender inequalities, and they can partly be resolved through gender inclusion in the policies and participation of women in the policy process. However, the extent to which women are involved in the policy process in Uganda is not well documented.

This policy brief has two core objectives: to assess the level of women's involvement in the policy process in the financial and agricultural sectors of Uganda from policy formulation through implementation to monitoring and evaluation, and to assess the gendered barriers to credit access. Such evidence is crucial in unlocking women's economic empowerment, fostering inclusive growth, and achieving sustainable development in Uganda.

## Methods

This study used the WEAGov framework (for details on this methodology (see <https://www.ifpri.org/project/womens-empowermentagrifood-governance-weagov/>) to evaluate women's involvement in financial and agricultural policies and policy processes of Uganda (Kyle & Ragasa, 2024). WEAGov uses 17 operational indicators to evaluate women's inclusion, consideration, and impact across the different stages of policy processes, followed by scoring to gauge gender sensitivity in policies and the presence of women in governance structures. We analyzed 10 policy documents (see Table 1) and used content analysis of data obtained from focus group discussions with men and women conducted to assess the gendered challenges in accessing credit in Uganda.

Table 1. Policy documents reviewed using the WEAGov tool

Policy document	Year
Constitution of the Republic of Uganda	1995
National Agricultural Policy	2013
National Gender Policy	2011
National Financial Inclusion Strategy	2023
National Strategy for Financial Literacy	2013
National Adaptation Plan for the Agricultural Sector	2018
National Development Plan II (2020/21–2024/25)	2020
Agricultural Sector Strategic Plan	2016
Equity Promotion Strategy	2012
National Social Protection Policy	2015

## Results

### Key result 1. Inequalities are recognized but gender-specific targets or measurable outcomes are not provided

Although Uganda has implemented initiatives aimed at improving gender inclusion such as the National Gender Policy and the National Financial Inclusion Strategy, results obtained from the WEAGov framework evaluation indicate that these policies lack specific targets and measurable outcomes for women in agricultural finance. Moreover, implementation of the policies is hampered by inadequate budgeting and limited tracking of gender-related goals.

## Key result 2. Women's participation in the policy process is limited

Existing agricultural and financial policies lack measures for the inclusion of women in the policy process. The low representation of women in leadership within financial and policy-making institutions exacerbates this challenge. Despite the improvement in the numbers of women in positions of influence, only 44% of cabinet ministers and 33% of members of parliament are women, limiting their influence in policy development (Parliament of Uganda, 2024).

## Key result 3. Policy implementation is limited by resource constraints and lack of robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks

Implementation of policies is hampered by inadequate budgeting and limited tracking of gender-related goals. Despite their ambitions, the policies and strategies lack adequate financing strategies to ensure the implementation of gender-responsive programs. Gender-focused initiatives often compete with other priorities for limited resources. There are few mechanisms to hold implementing agencies accountable for achieving gender equity goals. Weak institutional capacity and lack of accountability mechanisms, coupled with the absence of robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track progress and impact, undermine the ability to measure success and address emerging challenges. Some policies are also limited in scope. For example, while the

National Gender Policy addresses women's issues, it sometimes neglects the broader concept of gender inclusion by leaving out the roles and needs of men and boys in achieving gender equity. This limits the impact that could be achieved with the policies.

## Key result 4. Women's inclusion in the formal financial sector in Uganda is limited

Women are less likely than men to be included in the formal financial sector, forcing them to resort to informal financial saving and borrowing to cater for their capital needs. These, however, often provide them limited capital. Structural issues such as high interest rates, lack of knowledge about financial services, and biases against women within communities that favor male ownership of assets further aggravate the problem (see Fig. 1). Women also face challenges in navigating the complex loan processes.

## Conclusion

Inclusion of women in the agri-finance policy process is vital in generating a gender-responsive finance policy that recognizes the unique contributions of empowered women in increasing agricultural productivity and, hence, boosting national economic development. Empowering women through financial inclusion would contribute to poverty reduction and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals by promoting gender equity in economic participation.

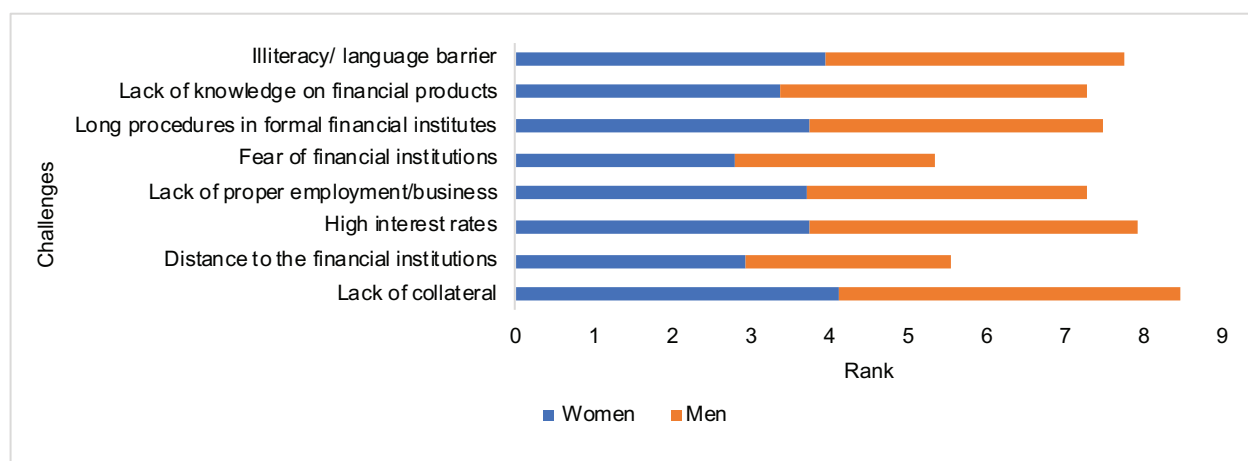


Figure 1. Ranking of challenges cited in focus group discussions on access to credit through formal financial institutions by men and women in Uganda.

## Policy recommendations

- **Improve inclusive participation.** Develop mechanisms and guidelines for inclusion and enhancement of women participation in policy processes.
- **Include gender-responsive resource allocation.** Gender-responsive budgeting should be integrated in planning across relevant ministries and departments, ensuring that resources are allocated to support the implementation of gender targets.
- **Enhance monitoring and evaluation to ensure gender goals and outcomes are achieved.** Monitoring mechanisms should be implemented to track progress on gender-inclusive goals within related agri-finance policies.
- **Amend financial policies.** The goal should be to ensure equitable access to finance and creation of feedback loops involving women stakeholders to guide policy adjustments.
- **Develop gender-responsive financial products, digital financial solutions, and gender-responsive financial literacy and training programs.** Partner with financial institutions to design products catering specifically for women's agricultural needs with flexible collateral requirements, flexible repayment terms, and low interest rates.

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### Technical review

Dr Margaret Najjingo Mangheni, Senior Manager Gender and Programs, AWARD

### Editing

Kellen Kebaara

### Graphic design

Conrad Mudibo