



GENDER Impact
Platform

Fostering gender responsiveness and inclusivity in Nigeria's agricultural seed policies: proposed reforms

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Summary

Nigeria's National Agricultural Seed Policy (NASP) 2023 has as an objective the need to address women and marginalized groups' vulnerabilities within the decentralized community seed production system. The Cassava Seed Entrepreneurs (CSEs) Initiative represents the outcome of this policy implemented by the National Agricultural Seed Council (NASC) in partnership with key stakeholders such as research institutes, farmer groups, and nongovernmental organizations. The Gender in Agricultural Policies Analysis Tool (GAPO) (Kaaria et al., 2016) was used to analyze the extent to which gender and social inclusion were integrated in NASP, strategic policy documents, and CSE policy guidelines. This brief presents the results and recommendations to inform and align NASP with gender equality and social inclusion goals, which include supporting gender research and using sex-disaggregated data in developing the pertinent strategy, and articulating gender and social inclusion considerations and actions.

Key results

1. NASP recognizes gender inequalities in access to certified cassava seed, but its measures to address the disparities are minimal and too broadly framed.
2. GAPO's five-level gender scale, which categorizes policies based on their approach to addressing of gender inequalities, places NASP at level 3 in regard to acknowledgment of inequalities, level 4 in regard to significant potential to progress to targeting inequalities, and at level 5 in regard to implementation of transformative measures that challenge harmful gender norms and power imbalances.
3. Advancing NASP to gender-responsive and transformative levels 4 and 5 requires integrating GAPO and socially inclusive indicators, implementing targeted actions to increase rural women's participation as CSEs, and addressing biased land inheritance laws and other restrictive practices. This should include allocating budgets for inclusive activities and ensuring alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 2, and 5, the African Union's Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality, and the national gender policy in agriculture.

Background

Gender-inclusive policies are recognized globally as essential for sustainable development, particularly in agriculture, where rural women play critical roles. In Nigeria, agriculture has a large contribution to the economy, yet disparities affecting the thriving of the sector persist across groups involved in it. Women encounter challenges that limit their access to resources and process information and to participation in decisions and benefits within the sector (FAO, 2023). A key challenge is the unequal access to certified improved seeds in the form of vegetatively propagated stem or tuber cuttings of crops like cassava, which hinders optimal productivity of these crops and accrual of high benefits from their value chain. Mobility restrictions disproportionately affect women, particularly widows and younger married and unmarried women, plus marginalized farmers, who often have to rely on informal networks such as spouses or neighbors for the seed and frequently replant older varieties. Male farmers have more direct access to certified seed through formal channels such as extension agents and research institutes (Madu et al., 2022).

Cassava is often considered a woman's crop owing to its low market value, less intensive cultivation requirements (Liani et al., 2023), resilience to drought, and flexibility in harvesting time (Olaosebikan et al., 2023). Gender research in cassava seed systems by Mwakanyamale et al. (2021) and Owoade et al. (2024) highlights disparities in access to certified seeds and non-equitable participation of young women and male youth farmers in cassava seed initiatives, which is partly reinforced by gender-blind policy guidelines. In Nigeria, women provide over 60% of the agricultural labor but own less than 10% of the land. Many women farm on jointly owned or rented land, limiting their eligibility for certification as CSEs. Between 2017 and 2019, only 19 out of the 87 CSEs were women (Bentley et al., 2020). This implies that women and marginalized farmers' limited access to certified cassava varieties can hinder their willingness to participate in CSE activities and training, which can affect their productivity, resilience and well-being.

The inequitable access to land and the prerequisite isolation distance as eligibility criteria for becoming a CSE, exacerbated by women's limited access to financial resources, further hinder their ability to meet the capital requirements for participation as CSEs. For example, only 7% of women have access to formal financial services compared to 18% of men (World Bank, 2017).

Policies like NASP must consider gender dynamics and inclusive strategies that address these challenges and provide equitable participation and access to certified improved seed varieties for women, the youth, and marginalized groups.

Methods

Utilizing GAPo, we analyzed gender integration and consideration of social-inclusion indicators within NASP, the Seed Act, the Seed Road Map, and two other seed strategy documents on policy reform (Table 1). GAPo's thematic gender assessment identified gender and social inclusion indicators yet to be considered in the strategy and policy instruments and the CSE eligibility criteria and certification guidelines that underlie the unequal participation as CSEs of women, the youth, and other marginalized groups.

GAPo's five-level gender grading scale was used to categorize the policies based on their responsiveness to gender inequalities. The levels are perpetuating inequalities (level 1), ignoring inequalities (level 2), acknowledging but not addressing inequalities (level 3), targeting inequalities (level 4), and implementing transformative measures that challenge harmful gender norms and power imbalances that are at the cause of the inequalities (level 5).

Using the thematic content analytical approach, we focused on the consideration of and measures to address gender inequality and rural women's issues within NASP and the CSE eligibility criteria and certification process and how they affect women,

the youth, and migrants. The insights were synthesized into gender-inclusive recommendations emphasizing the need for policy reforms.

Results

Gender considerations and strategic measures in NASP are too general

NASP aims to enhance seed accessibility for marginalized groups but its strategy and implementation guidelines may inadvertently favor owners of substantial landholdings and financial capital. The GAPo analysis revealed a lack of robust gender-responsive strategies within NASP and its strategy documents. Among the 14 gender integration indicators used to assess NASP, only four had been fully considered (Table 1). While NASP acknowledges women's vulnerabilities in accessing certified seeds, its provisions for addressing specific challenges are minimal and too broadly framed. Key indicators and issues such as discriminatory gender practices reinforced by biased inheritance land laws; rural women's limited participation affected by mobility restrictions and need for consent to access patriarchal land; climate change challenges; and policy non-alignment with international, regional, and national equality mandates remain unaddressed. The Seed Act, the Seed Road Map, and the CSE eligibility and certification guidelines are yet to incorporate GAPo indicators, underscoring the need for detailed, gender-responsive and inclusive strategies to complement and inform the seed sector policy and implementation.

Gender grading shows NASP to be at level 3 in progress towards gender responsiveness

When compared to other seed policy documents published between 2019 and 2023, NASP shows promise in progression on the GAPo gender grading scale. It is at level 3 in terms of gender integration, recognizing and addressing inequalities with limited and generic measures, but has potential to advance to gender-responsive and transformative levels 4 and 5. This potential reflects ongoing reform in Nigeria's seed policy, as NASP is committed to improving and updating NASP every five years, with the next update anticipated for 2027 or 2028. The upcoming reform cycle presents an opportunity to address gender gaps, particularly discriminatory gendered social norms, by integrating gender-transformative strategies. To achieve this, policy-makers must prioritize the collection and use of sex-disaggregated data for evidence-based, gender-responsive, and targeted actions. Gender experts should also be engaged in policy processes and practices to ensure that policies are inclusive in theory and practice and impactful in implementation and outcomes.

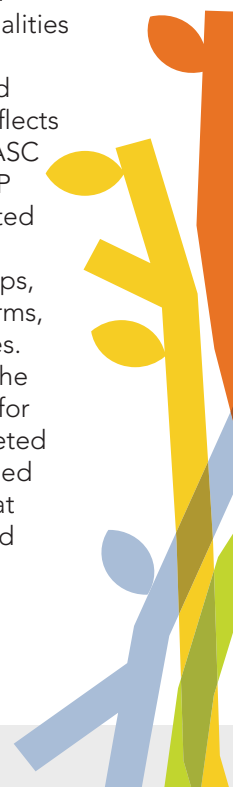


Table 1: Consideration of GAPo gender indicators in Nigeria's seed legislation and strategic, policy, and operation documents reviewed in this study

GAPo gender indicators	NASP		National Seed Road Map, 2020		Seed Act, 2019		The cassava seed system in Nigeria: opportunities and challenges for policy and regulatory reform. RTB Working Paper - 2020		How responsive is Nigeria's cassava seed system to farmers' demand? 2022	
	FC	NC	FC	NC	FC	NC	FC	NC	FC	NC
Women's roles and challenges in agriculture	√			√		√		√		√
Gender equality as explicit policy objective	√		√			√		√		√
Measures addressing rural women's agriculture needs	√			√		√		√		√
Rural women's participation in policy processes		√		√		√		√		√
Use of sex-disaggregated data for M&E		√		√		√		√	√	
Institutional capacities for gender-sensitive work				√		√		√		√
Budgeting for gender-specific activities		√		√		√		√		√
Gender indicators in M&E		√		√		√		√		√
National mandates for gender equality		√		√		√		√		√
International mandates for gender equality (e.g. SDGs)		√		√		√		√		√
Measures to address discriminatory gender norms		√		√		√		√		√
Gender and climate change considerations		√						√		√
Measures to address gender-based violence		√		√		√		√		√
Country specific agricultural gender policy or strategy	√		√		√		√		√	

Note:

- FC = fully considered, NC = not considered.
- The GAPo gender indicators partially considered were institutional capacities for gender-sensitive work, which was included by NASP, and gender and climate change considerations, which was considered by the National Seed Road Map, 2020, and the Seed Act, 2019.

Improving gender responsiveness and inclusivity in seed policies requires a multifaceted approach

Gender-focused research is essential to identify measures that improve rural women's participation in certified seed access initiatives and to address discriminatory norms and practices that hinder that. Tackling gender-based violence is critical, as it not only undermines women's participation in agricultural activities but also limits their ability to fully benefit from seed systems.

Developing strategies that respond to gender-differentiated climate challenges is essential, recognizing that women often bear the brunt of climate impacts owing to their limited resources, restricted mobility, and fewer adaptive options. Policy frameworks must integrate gender-inclusive climate resilience measures and training to enhance women's ability to cope with and adapt to climate-related stressors.

Ensuring the alignment of seed policy guidelines with international, regional, and national mandates for gender equality is critical. This includes adherence to the SDGs, particularly SDG 1 on eradicating poverty; SDG 2 on ending hunger, achieving food security, and improving nutrition; and SDG 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls. Alignment with African Union's Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality is necessary to reinforce commitments to gender responsiveness and inclusivity in agricultural systems.

The policies must comply with the National Gender Policy in Agriculture, which emphasizes the need for equitable access to critical farm inputs, including certified seeds, for all farmers regardless of gender. Such comprehensive alignment ensures that seed systems not only meet productivity and food security goals but also contribute to reducing inequalities and empowering women and marginalized groups within the agricultural sector.

Conclusion

Closing the gender gaps in Nigeria's seed policies and strategies is essential for advancing gender equity and inclusion within the agricultural sector. By addressing the shortcomings identified by the GAPo assessment and considering targeted social inclusion dimensions in policy analysis to achieve gender inclusivity, Nigeria can reform and implement seed policies and initiatives that not only support and increase women's participation but empower women, the youth, and other marginalized groups as key stakeholders in decision-making.

Policy recommendations

- **Incorporate gender-responsive and inclusive strategies.** Develop a supporting strategy document outlining evidence-based and actionable measures addressing marginalization of migrants and non-indigene persons, discriminatory gender norms such as biased inheritance laws, and patriarchal landholding. Outline measures to tackle barriers to women's access to certified seeds, including mobility restrictions, and to their participation as CSEs.
- **Integrate gender-responsive climate-resilience measures** by examining gender-differentiated climate challenges and formulating gender-sensitive adaptation strategies. Facilitate programs and measures that will empower women with resources and knowledge on the benefit of adopting and utilizing certified seed and climate-smart agricultural practices to mitigate climate-related risks and enhance resilience to climatic and social stressors.
- **Strengthen evidence-based decision-making.** Support gender research and the use of sex-disaggregated data to inform targeted actions. Conduct periodic gender assessments of seed systems' initiatives to identify gaps, track progress, and ensure that policy updates are evidence based and impact oriented.
- **Engage gender expertise and other relevant stakeholders in policy development, reform and implementation.** Institutionalize inclusion of gender experts, rural women representatives, and migrant groups in NASP reform and implementation processes. This will not only ensure that the policies and strategies are inclusive, practical, safe, and transformative, but also that they can contribute to NASP progression from level 3 to levels 4 and 5 on the GAPo gender grading scale.



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Acknowledgements

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. 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>).

Data collection support was provided by the IITA Cassava Breeding Unit and Programme for Seed System Innovation for Vegetatively Propagated Crops in Africa. IITA is a member of the CGIAR and a not-for-profit organization.

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