



Accelerating progress towards gender equality in food systems could help reverse recent spikes in hunger and poverty, finds new report

Experts highlight policies needed to position women as changemakers in Africa's food systems after recent setbacks in efforts to address gender inequality and eliminate hunger and malnutrition.

June 9, DAKAR – African governments must "urgently redouble" efforts to achieve gender equality in agrifood systems, which is critical to improving women's nutrition, health, and economic empowerment, according to a new report.

The continent has made progress in recent years by adopting a number of frameworks to support gender equality, according to the Malabo Montpellier Panel, but "slow and fragile" advances have been undermined by shocks like Covid-19 and conflicts.

The report, [***Bridging the Gap: Policy Innovations to Put Women at the Center of Food Systems Transformation in Africa***](#), posits that agrifood systems designed to work equally for women as for men can contribute to more equitable, resilient, and healthier societies. According to the Affirmative Finance Action for Women in Africa, women's inability to access finance is projected to reduce Africa's GDP by US\$ 316 billion by 2025; this setback, coupled with unequal access to land, finance, information, and decision-making, is curbing women's agency in Africa's food system transformation. To course-correct, the report provides recommendations to ensure that women are empowered in Africa's agrifood systems in research and science, extension services, food production, post-harvest handling and processing, distribution and trade, nutrition, and consumption, and, finally, at all levels of leadership and policymaking.

The authors of the report, launched at the [12th Malabo Montpellier Forum](#), analyze four success stories – Ethiopia, Ghana, Rwanda, and Togo – to highlight some of the policy and institutional innovations that can contribute to more equitable food systems that equip women with greater agency.

"With developments like the African Union's Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, it is clear that Africa has taken significant leaps forward in girls' education, women's political representation, and entrepreneurship, thereby building a strong foundation for harnessing women's potential in the future," said **Dr. Ousmane Badiane**, Executive Chairperson at AKADEMIYA2063, and Co-chair of the Malabo Montpellier Panel.

"This new report provides valuable learnings from some countries where progress towards gender equality has been most pronounced and effective, unlocking benefits for women, families, communities, and economies. And with the post-Malabo agenda on the horizon, I could not think of a more opportune moment to firmly anchor women's rights and gender equality in Africa's food systems."

The Panel reports an eightfold increase in the global gender food security gap since 2018, with recent [estimates](#) from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) indicating that closing the gender gap in farm productivity would reduce global food insecurity by about two percentage

points, or the equivalent of reducing the number of food-insecure people by 45 million. It would also add an estimated US\$1 trillion to the global GDP.

However, the Panel's report found evidence that women represent only 25 percent of agricultural scientists in Africa, while the financing gap for women on the continent is estimated at US\$15.6 billion in agriculture alone. In Mali, the report authors found just one female extension worker to support farmers with training and support out of a total of 302.

"We have so much work to do as a continent to ensure no child goes to bed hungry tonight. In the context of the work ahead, it doesn't make sense to deny ourselves access to 50 percent of the talent and brilliance available to solve the challenges facing the continent's agrifood system," said **Dr. Wanjiru Kamau-Rutenberg**, member of the Malabo Montpellier Panel.

"From ensuring that Africa's female agricultural entrepreneurs have the resources they need to produce our food to ensuring that agricultural researchers and their institutions deliver more gender-responsive innovations for African smallholder farmers, gender equality is at the heart of ensuring an end to hunger and malnutrition on the continent."

This report by the Malabo Montpellier Panel draws on the experiences of four systematically selected African countries to highlight key factors underlying their success in driving systems-level change to put women at the center of food system transformation.

In the case of [Ethiopia](#), for instance, the Women's Affairs Directorate under the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (MoANRs) established and coordinated an Ethiopian Network for Gender Equality in Agriculture (ENGEA) in 2015, with interventions focused on ensuring equal access to extension services through decentralization initiatives that have brought such services closer to farming households nationwide.

The government in [Ghana](#) also introduced a raft of measures in recent years to empower women in agriculture and address their needs. For example, its agricultural investment package, METASIP II, included more than US\$11 million dedicated to subsidizing agricultural technologies for women.

In [Rwanda](#), which leads the continent and the whole world in female representation in political participation and leadership, the National Women's Council oversees the election of Women's Committees from village to national levels. This ensures women from rural areas are included in policy and decision-making.

Meanwhile, in [Togo](#), recent legislative reform that guarantees women's access to land ownership and abolishes taxes that hinder women's entrepreneurship has helped put the country on track to achieving the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) target of ensuring that 20 percent of rural women have access to productive assets, including land, credit, inputs, and financial services and information by 2023.

Key recommendations from the Panel of experts call for inclusive behavioral change to accelerate the transition to non-discriminatory governance structures at all levels, to foster an understanding of why gender equality is mutually beneficial and the role that boys and men can play in promoting empowerment; political representation to address systemic inequalities, ensuring that women are equally represented at all levels of government, decision-making processes, food systems services; and a consolidation of African policy frameworks to follow through on commitments to the United Nations Food Systems Summit (UNFSS), notably under the framework of the post-Malabo agenda.

"Because Women are so deeply involved in food systems, they know a lot about how food systems can be transformed for sustainable development. Better access for women to the fruits of science and deeper involvement of women in the African innovation systems will make a big difference," said **Prof. Joachim von Braun**, Distinguished Professor, University of Bonn and Co-chair of the Malabo Montpellier Panel.

"Ensuring food systems work for women will be the lynchpin for so many of the continent's broader goals, from ending hunger and malnutrition to economic development and resilience under climate stress."

About the Malabo Montpellier Panel

The Malabo Montpellier Panel convenes 18 leading experts in agriculture, engineering, ecology, nutrition, and food security. Its aim is to facilitate policy choices by African governments in order to accelerate progress toward food security and improved nutrition. The Panel identifies areas of progress and positive change across the continent and assesses what successful countries have done differently. It identifies the institutional and policy innovations and program interventions that can best be replicated and scaled by other countries. The related Malabo Montpellier Forum provides a platform to promote policy innovation; it uses the evidence produced by the Panel to facilitate dialogue among high-level decision-makers on African agriculture, nutrition, and food security. The Malabo Montpellier Panel is jointly facilitated by AKADEMIYA2063 and the University of Bonn. For more information, visit www.mamopanel.org.

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