WALKING the talk

Learning exchange in Rwanda, July 2019
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FOREWORD

The centrality of the role of rural women in food systems and the inextricable link between the full realization of women’s rights, the promotion of gender equality and the eradication of poverty and food insecurity is increasingly recognized in Africa and globally. Gender equality is firmly acknowledged as integral and essential to all dimensions of inclusive and sustainable development and strongly enshrined in the development goals of the international community.

Africa has seen remarkable political commitments to improve women’s condition and status over the years. African states resolved to address gender issues in food systems as a matter of priority: Agenda 2030 recognizes the need to support women’s empowerment in all spheres, guaranteeing equal social, political and economic rights, and improve access to productive assets such as land, credit, inputs and financial services for rural women; and the 2014 Malabo Declaration orients agricultural policies and investment frameworks to encourage women’s participation in agribusiness and value chains.

However, persisting and growing social and economic inequalities between men and women continue undermining food and nutrition security and hindering development and growth in rural areas. Though challenges to gender equality are diverse and complex, social norms and structural barriers hindering the advancement of gender equality within food systems can and must be overcome. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased existing gender inequalities and vulnerabilities to disease, hunger, malnutrition and poverty.

We must end rising gender inequalities and pervasive discrimination to reach zero hunger by 2030 through strong political will and bold transformative actions. It is essential to formulate, implement and monitor policies, legislation and investment plans that guarantee more equitable and fairer food systems, where women and men enjoy equal rights and access to resources, services, decent employment and entrepreneurship opportunities and markets.

Within the African continent, wide-ranging development solutions for gender equality and women’s empowerment in the agrifood sector have shown considerable impact and potential to be shared, adapted and adopted in other countries of the region. Parliamentary alliances and networks can serve as powerful collaborative mechanisms to accelerate this process.

When it comes to mainstreaming gender in policymaking, our country, Rwanda has a wealth of experience to share, having enacted a set of important reforms in this direction, including constitutional enshrinement of gender equality and women’s rights, legislative and policy advances in women’s rights to land and productive resources, gender-responsive budgeting and the institutionalization of gender monitoring mechanisms at national level.

The learning exchange of the ECOWAS Network of Parliamentarians on Gender Equality and Investment in Agriculture for Food Security, held in Kigali in July 2019 thanks to the technical and financial support of FAO, IISD, OXFAM and WILDAF, provided a unique opportunity to building bridges between countries and peoples and contributed to enhance parliamentary perspectives to global governance.

It was a great honor for the Parliament of Rwanda to host and contribute to this learning exchange, with the participation of high-level government officials from Rwanda and active participation of members of the East Africa Legislative Assembly and the Secretariat of the East African Community.

It is with great pleasure that we share the outcomes of this initiative through the present report; with a view to further strengthening collaboration and synergies with the ECOWAS Network of Parliamentarians and other parliamentary networks committed to realizing the vision of a hunger-free continent with equal rights and opportunities for all women and men.

Donatille Mukabalisa
Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies
Rwanda
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Walking the talk in Rwanda is the result of ongoing partnership with ECOWAS Network of Parliamentarians on Gender Equality, Investments in Agriculture and Food Security, and its Advisory Group made of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), Oxfam and Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) to advance gender equality in efforts to accelerate progress towards zero hunger.

This first learning exchange aimed at exposing member of the ECOWAS parliamentarians to the comprehensive Rwanda model for gender equality and women’s empowerment in terms of governance, accountability, vision, and actions.

We commend Hon. Sidie Mohamed Tunis, Speaker of the ECOWAS Parliament, and Hon. Abdoulaye Vilane, Chair of the Network, and the Bureau of the Network for their continuous championship of this important initiative. We also thank all members of the ECOWAS Parliament for their contribution to success of the learning exchange.

Members of the advisory group would like to take this opportunity to express their appreciation and gratitude to the Government of Rwanda for warmly welcoming and hosting the learning exchange. Our gratitude goes to the members of the Parliament of Rwanda and especially to the Speaker of the parliament of Rwanda Hon. Donatile Mukabilisa, her Bureau and staff for their support and contribution to this important initiative.

Our deepest gratitude also goes to Hon. Christopher Bazivamo, Deputy Secretary General at East African Community (EAC) and members of the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) for their active participation in the learning exchange.

We also express our sincere gratitude to Mr Gualbert Gbehounou, FAO Representative in Rwanda for his leadership and tireless commitment to the smooth planning and organization of the learning exchange. We also thank all staff members from FAO, IISD and OXFAM who have contributed to the planning, organization and follow up of the events.

This report was prepared with the noteworthy contributions of the Advisory Group made of following: Francine Picard (IISD), Tacko Ndiaye (FAO), Martha Osorio (FAO), Jean Leonard Touadi (FAO), Stephanie De Buck (FAO), Ilaria Sisto (FAO), Katarzyna Kaskiewicz (FAO), Azara Remalia Sanago (Oxfam) and Kafui Kuwou (WILDAF) and Dr. Badou Senghore (ECOWAS Parliament) who conceptualized and designed the learning exchange.

The following experts and organizations contributed time, energy, and knowledge to this initiative; Milton Mwenda (Moderator), Juliana Kantegwa (Consultant), Christine Condo (Sustainable Growers), Rokhaïtotou Gassama (Conseil Consultatif des Femmes, Lois Addo (WILDAF), Dr Mariame Maiga (CORAF), Halima Tioussou (ROPPA), and Emmanuel Sulle (PLAAS). Our special thanks go to all the women and men from Twongere Umusaruro Wa Kawa, Conseil Consultatif des Femmes (COCOF) for their inspirations.

The development of this report was made possible through generous support from FAO, OXFAM, IISD and their partners.

The list of people and organizations who deserve our thanks is obviously a long one, and we apologize to anybody we have inadvertently omitted.

To everyone, our infinite gratitude.
The United Nations Food Systems Summit is an important reminder of the urgency to transform the way we produce, process and consume food to build inclusive, efficient, resilient and suitable food systems so that no one is left behind.

Women play an important role in food systems as producers, wage-workers, processors, traders, entrepreneurs, and consumers. It is therefore essential that the food systems transformation agenda takes full cognizance of their needs and priorities, so that they can contribute and benefit equally from

In ECOWAS countries, women still lag behind in accessing land, finance, technologies, services and markets. Their voices are not equally heard in the elaboration of policies, programmes and investment plans in the agrifood sector as their representation in leadership positions remains lower than that for men. The COVID-19 pandemic has increased existing inequalities and vulnerabilities affecting women in the region.

We believe that gender equality and women’s empowerment are key foundations for building prosperous societies and resilient food systems.

Given our legislative, budgetary, oversight functions, we can be important game changers in empowering women and advancing gender equality in food systems through progressive legislation, policies and budgets. In doing so, we undertook a learning exchange of members of the Network of ECOWAS Parliamentarians for Gender Equality and Investments in Agriculture and Food security to Rwanda in July 2019, so that we could learn from the best experiences in the region.

We thank the Government of Rwanda, the Parliament of Rwanda, the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) and the Secretariat of the East African Community who have partnered with us to organize this important learning opportunity.

We appreciate the invaluable support of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Institute for Sustainable Development and OXFAM for their invaluable support and engagement with the Network since its launch in 2018.

We are proud to release this report which captures the essence of the learning exchange. This report is very timely to remind us that our actions can enable multiple benefits on gender equality and women’s empowerment so that can build inclusive food systems and a prosperous future for the region.

Hon. Dr. Sidi Mohamed Tunis
Speaker of the ECOWAS Parliament
I. BACKGROUND OF THE INITIATIVE

Agriculture and food systems remain central in Africa for their potential to support the eradication of poverty, the improvement of food security and nutrition, and the empowerment of women. However, their impact depends largely on agricultural investments being inclusive, involving all actors and responding to their needs and priorities, especially women and smallholder farmers. Understanding the complexities and nuances of policy design and practice in this area is therefore vital for ensuring outcomes that contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda in an inclusive and sustainable way, leaving no one behind.

In Africa, women play a critical role in agriculture, food security and nutrition, rural transformation, and resilience building through their agricultural production, food processing, and marketing activities. However, they encounter greater obstacles than men in accessing natural and productive resources, assets, services, technologies, markets, decent employment, social protection, and other opportunities. They face excessive work burdens due to their multiple productive, household, and community roles.

Women also encounter discriminatory social norms that limit their participation in decision-making processes and leadership of rural institutions. These gender gaps undermine agricultural production and the well-being of rural households while also negatively affecting rural development, food security and nutrition, and poverty reduction. Ensuring gender equality while supporting women to reach their full potential will enable agricultural and rural development processes to be more effective and achieve long-term results in poverty reduction.

Smallholder farmers, many of whom are women, represent most of the investment in agricultural production and agricultural supply chains through their labour, income, and other productive resources. Therefore, investment in agriculture and food systems requires increasing support to smallholder farmers and addressing constraints such as lack of access to infrastructure, public services, and agricultural finance to enable viable livelihoods, reduce risks, and increase their resilience.

Similarly, closing the gender gap in agricultural investments would generate significant gains. Addressing women’s needs and priorities in agriculture and rural development will enhance the livelihoods of families, reduce rural poverty, and improve the economic and social empowerment of women.
In 2018, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Parliament launched a new network devoted to tackling gender and social inequality in agricultural investments and promoting best practices that protect land rights and facilitate inclusive local development. Known formally as the ECOWAS Network of Parliamentarians on Gender Equality and Investments in Agriculture and Food Security, it is designed to be a high-level permanent discussion forum shared by parliamentarians, policy-makers, institutions, civil society, farmers, and relevant experts. The Network aims to enable debate, allow for the exchange of experiences, and continue building a political commitment toward achieving transformative change at the regional and country levels. Its vision is to foster inclusive and gender-equitable agricultural investment in the ECOWAS countries that, in turn, supports improved food and nutrition security along with poverty reduction.

The Network defines its objectives as follows:

- Encouraging the adoption of effective national and regional legislation and policies related to gender, land, agriculture, and investment.
- Creating a dynamic coalition to influence regional institutions, policies, and research to transform and strengthen legal frameworks for empowering women.
- Building knowledge and skills among members of the ECOWAS Parliament on issues of gender-equitable agricultural investment.
- Identifying persistent roadblocks in addressing gender equality in agriculture and working with key stakeholders to take adequate legal and policy measures.

The Network is supported by an advisory group composed of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), Oxfam, and Women in Law & Development in Africa (WILDAF). The Advisory Group was established to provide expertise and orientation to the Network. It helps develop the Network’s programme and plan, design related activities, and secure the resources needed for implementation.
II. INTRODUCTION

Following the launch of the ECOWAS Network of Parliamentarians on Gender Equality and Investments in Agriculture and Food Security in 2018, ECOWAS Parliamentarians undertook a learning exchange in Rwanda to study best practices in empowering women in agriculture and food systems. The ECOWAS Parliament, FAO, IISD, Oxfam, and the Parliament of Rwanda organized the learning exchange from July 16 to 19, 2019, with the participation of the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) and the Secretariat of the East African Community.

The exchange focused on how to mainstream gender considerations into agriculture policies and legal frameworks as well as strategies for improving food security and nutrition while reducing rural poverty. To do so, it sought to draw on the experiences of ECOWAS member countries and the East African Community.

The learning exchange had the following objectives:

- **Facilitating a dialogue** between the ECOWAS Network of Parliamentarians and the Rwandan Parliament on the importance of addressing the gender dimension in agricultural investments for improved land governance and food security.

- **Building knowledge and skills** of ECOWAS parliamentarians on issues of gender-equitable agricultural investments, based on the experience of Rwanda in developing and adopting legislation and other policies related to gender, land, agriculture, and investment.

- **Identifying successes and challenges** to addressing gender equality in agriculture as well as legal and policy measures to remove bottlenecks.

Martha Osario (FAO) and Milton Mwenda (Facilitator)
III. COMPONENTS OF THE LEARNING EXCHANGE

The learning exchange undertaken by members of the ECOWAS Network of parliamentarians in Rwanda helped demonstrate that successfully addressing gender-related issues requires high political commitment and actions, with clear accountability mechanisms.

- A high-level policy dialogue involving Rwandan ministers (and other senior officials) and ECOWAS and EALA parliamentarians offered the opportunity to share experiences and learn from the successful Rwandan model for gender mainstreaming in all sectors. The dialogue provided space to discuss challenges in achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment in the agricultural sector, such as resource constraints, differences between customary and statutory laws, and prevalent gender norms.

- Field visits were organized so that members of the ECOWAS Network could learn from initiatives in which the Rwandan government has supported women’s participation and engaged in responsible investment in agriculture and value chains. For example, support from the Rwandan government and other local and regional organizations allowed for building important infrastructure for agricultural cooperatives producing coffee and soybeans, and for adding value to their products locally. The Rwandan government also played a key role in creating an enabling policy environment for these cooperatives and their members to prosper.

- Practical gender-analytical skills-building sessions showed participants ways to translate the new knowledge into action and advocate for gender equality in investment policy processes and legal frameworks in the agrifood sector.

Given this context, the programme of the learning exchange was designed to emphasize South–South dialogue and build the knowledge and skills of parliamentarians regarding those issues—sociocultural and otherwise—that relate to gender-equitable agricultural investments. The programme used a combination of approaches, described below.
IV. OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE LEARNING EXCHANGE

The first day started with a formal opening of the learning programme hosted by Hon. Furaha Emma Rubagumya, Chairperson of Political Affairs & Gender Committee/Chamber of Deputies Rwanda. Mr. Gualbert Gbehounou, FAO Representative in Rwanda and Hon. Abdoulaye Vilane, President of the ECOWAS Parliamentarians Network on Gender Equality and Investment in Agriculture and Food Security, gave the opening remarks. The guest of honour was Honourable Donatille Mukabalisa, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Rwanda.

During the meeting, Rwanda displayed its experiences in working toward becoming a model for gender equality worldwide, institutionalizing strong gender equality policies in multiple areas. For example, the government has taken constitutional and legislative measures to speed up the process of achieving de facto equality between men and women, recognizing that women are the backbone of the agriculture sector.

“The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality and gender equity.”

Hon. Abdoulaye Vilane, Chair of the ECOWAS Parliamentarians Network on Gender Equality, Investment in Agriculture and Food Security
Examples include land laws that prohibit discrimination based on sex, or gender-responsive budgeting across public entities and establishment of a Gender Monitoring Office to help ensure gender issues are being considered and mainstreamed across public, private, and religious institutions.

Participants widely acknowledged the Rwandan experience as a valuable example in promoting gender responsive laws, policies and investment plans in the agrifood sector and beyond. They considered the extent to which examples of policies and approaches in Rwanda could be adapted and replicated elsewhere. Members of the ECOWAS Network of Parliamentarians spoke with their counterparts from the EALA and the Rwandan Parliament to examine questions, ideas, and experiences on legislative and regulatory best practices in the following areas: accountability, data and institutional mechanisms for empowering women; securing women’s land rights; and empowering women in agriculture, value chains and food security.

“Let me articulate that it is well-known worldwide that Rwanda has made commendable progress in achieving gender equality and women’s empowerment by putting in place legal and policy frameworks to enforce women’s rights in agriculture, food security, and nutrition.”

Gaulbert Gbehounou, FAO Representative in Rwanda

“Women cannot be left out. Gender equality is not only desirable. It makes economic sense.”

Hon. Donatille Mukabalisa, Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies of Rwanda

Hon. Furaha Emma Rubagumya, Chairperson of Political Affairs & Gender Committee - Chamber of Deputies Rwanda

Ms. Alice Anukur, Country Director in Rwanda - OXFAM
V. BUILDING PARLIAMENTARIANS’ CAPACITIES

The Advisory Group developed a practical and tailored two-day capacity-development programme for parliamentarians. The objective of this programme was to help participants better understand issues surrounding gender equality in agriculture and value chains. The programme was guided by professional facilitators, who supported presenters as they outlined key issues, solicited audience feedback, and highlighted takeaways to consider. Participants were engaged in practical exercises and examples pertaining to each topic in the training that were designed to encourage critical thinking and analysis of their respective national contexts.

After the opening session, the facilitator and the organizers set the bases for the interactions and outlined the learning objectives of the two-day capacity building. The first training session was conducted by Ms. Tacko Ndiaye, FAO Senior Gender Officer, who outlined key gender and women’s empowerment concepts. She underscored the importance of building a business case for gender-equitable agriculture investments for achieving zero hunger and the other sustainable development goals (SDGs). This requires ensuring women’s equal access to productive resources including land, finance and technologies, and business development opportunities along agrifood value chains. This session ended with a lively discussion in which participants shared their personal experiences related to their first realization of existing gender differences in their families and communities.

Participants learned the foundations necessary for establishing a gender-sensitive policy environment related to policy coherence and participation of rural women in the entire policy cycle. Ms. Tacko Ndiaye and Ms. Francine Picard demonstrated the importance of robust gender context analysis and took the participants through the key features of a gender-responsive policy document. A presentation was then given by Ms. Nadine Umutoni, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion on the National Gender Machinery (NGM) in the country.
The session continued after the lunch break with a discussion of examples, good practices, and lessons learned from participatory policy-making processes moderated by Hon. Juliana Kantengwa, former Rwandan MP. Civil society organizations from across Africa were given the floor to share their experiences in influencing policy-making processes and advocating for women’s rights. The panel discussion involved: Ms. Halima Tiousso, President of the Women’s College, Network of Farmers Organizations and Agricultural Producers of West Africa (ROPPA), Ms. Rokhiatou Gassama, Présidente du Conseil Sénégalais des Femmes (COSEF), Ms. Lois Addo, Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF), and Dr. Mariame Maiga, Regional Gender and Social Development Adviser, CORAF/WECARD. Afterwards, a visit to the Kigali Genocide Memorial was organized.

The second day of the capacity development focused on gender-sensitive policy implementation processes. The morning session highlighted opportunities and challenges for gender-sensitive legal frameworks in contexts where legal pluralism prevails. Ms. Martha Osorio, Gender and Rural Development Officer at FAO, illustrated the importance of supportive legal frameworks for gender-equitable agriculture investment. Ms. Francine Picard familiarized participants with different tools that they can use to advocate for reforms for gender equality in legal frameworks, including regulations for agriculture investment contracts. The session continued with a focus on understanding SDG Indicator 5.a.2 on women’s legal land rights by Ms. Martha Osorio. The Director General in Charge in the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning of Rwanda gave an insightful presentation on the Rwandan experience in the SDG domestication process.

The training was concluded with an important session on strengthening accountability mechanisms for gender equality. This session outlined fundamental aspects for building gender-responsive institutions at all levels and areas and illustrated some good practices, and showcased the experience of the Gender Monitoring Office in Rwanda. The session ended with a presentation by Emmanuel Sulle of the Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS)/Oxfam on women’s land rights scorecards and how they can be used to monitor country progress in this area.
During the two-day training workshop, participants had ample opportunities for interaction, and vibrant discussions took place. Key messages from the discussions included:

**Reducing misinterpretation.** Gender is an important social construct that significantly shapes the lived experiences of men and women farmers. It also intersects with age group dynamics, ethnicity, religion, and social status etc. Gender therefore requires understanding the power dynamics between men and women, which are also affected differently by these other factors. Though women make essential contributions to agriculture in developing countries, their roles differ significantly by region. Gender norms tend to favour men, as they hold higher positions than women in the rural societies. This situation manifests itself in the allocation of roles and responsibilities in the agri-food sector, as well as the levels of access to and control over productive resources. During the discussion, participants understood gender equality as an opportunity for decision making and benefit sharing between women and men in agriculture and beyond.

**Actively empowering women.** Participants recognized that conservative gender norms, based on long-standing stereotypes, prevent the achievement of gender equality. There is still a long way to go to eliminate gender barriers and achieve the necessary transformation in norms, mindsets, and practice. Parliamentarians recognized that women’s confidence should be enhanced—through training and capacity building—to better enable them to take advantage of economic, social, and other key opportunities. This can include promoting women’s asset ownership, financial inclusion, and access to skills and services. Participants highlighted the importance of strengthening women’s organizational capacities and reinforcing their representation and participation in decision making.

**Closing the gender gap** in agriculture involves eliminating discrimination against women when it comes to access to agricultural resources, education, extension and financial services. It also requires promoting gender-responsive budgeting at the decision-making level, which should involve mainstreaming these considerations into agricultural initiatives and target-driven policies. This, in turn, could better enable women’s economic empowerment. Participants noted that even though most countries mention gender in their national and regional agricultural and food security policies, they generally lack suitable mechanisms to address gender inequalities given how their current national strategies are designed without due attention to women’s needs and priorities.
Land is a vital asset, and participants learned more about how to use SDG Indicator 5.a.2 to assess the extent of gender equality in country legal frameworks developed by the FAO\(^1\) to help countries monitor and report on progress in the status of women’s land rights. Participants also learned about a “scorecard”\(^2\) tool developed by Oxfam that can measure how committed governments are to women’s lands rights, how women are engaging with their governments on these issues, and the changes that have resulted from such efforts.

Making the invisible visible: The case of the farmer and her husband. Though women perform the bulk of labour and produce subsistence crops to feed their families, their role in family farming has not always been well protected in contract farming arrangements as has been shown by IISD.\(^3\) Participants learned how contracts can be tools for reinforcing women’s rights depending on their design and discussed concrete examples of how contract farming regulations could be strengthened.

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VI. HIGH-LEVEL POLICY DIALOGUE

After the two-day training, a one-day high-level dialogue focused on policy action took place. It built on the successful experience of Rwanda in policy and legislative changes for gender equality and women’s empowerment.

The high-level dialogue brought together top officials from the Government of Rwanda and the East African Community Secretariat, as well as parliamentarians from Rwanda, the ECOWAS Parliament, and the EALA. It also involved representatives of civil society organizations from East and West Africa discussing the multidimensional aspects of gender equality in the agricultural sector and identifying appropriate ways to tackle critical policy gaps. In so doing, they sought to learn from each other’s experiences and examine how to adapt these approaches to local contexts.

Hon. Rubagumya Furaha Emma, Chairperson of the Committee on Political Affairs and Gender of Rwanda, opened the policy dialogue, premised on Rwanda’s impressive progress in gender equality (as well as economic and social transformation) achieved through a conducive legal and policy environment.

For example, the country has moved to a system where the constitution now mandates that “at least 30 percent of government positions must be occupied by women.” Principles of gender equality and women’s rights are enshrined in the constitution. This has led the country to establish a political system and put in place various laws aimed at increasing the capacity of all Rwandan women and removing barriers that prevent their proactive participation in socioeconomic activities.

Hon. Nyirahabimana Solina, Minister of Gender and Family Promotion, gave a comprehensive overview of the progress Rwanda has made to achieve gender equality in all domains especially in agriculture and the rural sector.

“Neither gender equality nor environmental sustainability will be achieved automatically.” Clear progress can only be achieved by a transformative vision and determined policy action, leadership, commitment, resources, and engagement of all stakeholders.”

Hon. Christopher Bazivamo, Deputy Secretary at the East African Community Secretariat
Learning from Rwanda’s successes in legislative and policy advances in land rights

As the main asset for production and investment, land remains instrumental in contributing to women’s economic empowerment. Women’s control over productive resources and their access to loans often involve using land titles as collateral. Hon. Fatoumata Njie from The Gambia, a member of the ECOWAS Parliament, illustrated the situation in the ECOWAS member countries regarding women’s access to land. Several ECOWAS member countries have included gender equality provisions in their constitutions and other relevant laws, including primary and secondary laws that affect women’s land rights. Very few ECOWAS countries have encouraged joint registration and restricted the transfer of land by spouses without the consent of the other spouse. There are also ongoing efforts to support sensitization and dialogue programmes on women’s access to land.

Some countries have formulated new policies and laws to promote or protect the rights of women to land. Examples going in the right direction include Sierra Leone’s land policy and Ghana’s ongoing land administration project. Other good practices in some ECOWAS countries worthy of mention include efforts to enhance monitoring of gender issues in access to land, promote inclusive land and water governance, and improve legal frameworks articulated with prevailing customary laws.

Hon. Nyirarukundo Ignatienne, Chairperson of the Committee on Agriculture, Livestock and Environment of the Chamber of Deputies in Rwanda, presented Rwanda’s experience in legislative and policy advances in women’s land rights. Currently, Rwandan land policy provides joint ownership of land to married couples, with either party able to inherit land if the other dies.

Land ownership and women’s access to credit in Rwanda

- Increased land ownership has been very instrumental in contributing to women’s access to productive resources.
- Land contributed to 38 percent of women’s access to credits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Only by Women</th>
<th>Only by Men</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married couples</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
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Source: RNRA, Administrative data, 2019
Although these policies clearly place men and women as partners in a couple, in practice some sociocultural dynamics at the grassroots level can hamper women from equally benefitting from development opportunities. While policy change is important, implementation and buy-in are key to ensuring the success of any measure for realizing women’s land rights.

**Learning from Rwanda’s experience in gender-responsive budgeting and investments in the agricultural and rural sectors**

Gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) has emerged as an important tool in Rwanda for mainstreaming gender issues into government policy and strategy. In many countries, planning and budgeting fail to specifically address women and men’s needs and priorities, and this is a challenge for empowering women in agriculture and food systems. Hon. Ama Pomaa from Ghana, member of the ECOWAS Parliament, reiterated that budgets are key policy instruments that reflect administration priorities and demonstrate the government’s seriousness in responding to persisting development challenges such as gender inequality, poverty, exclusion, and economic injustice. ECOWAS member countries have adopted national gender policies to coordinate and implement gender mainstreaming in all sectors. They have also enacted laws to remove discriminatory barriers to women’s access to productive resources and opportunities. For example, in Ghana, there is a requirement by the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) for ministries, departments, and agencies to allocate at least 40 percent of their budget to gender issues; however, this is not always adhered to in disbursement.

H.E. Dr. Uzziel Ndagijimana, Minister of Finance and Economic Planning of Rwanda, gave an overview on the planning and budgeting process in the country’s agriculture sector. He informed participants that in Rwanda, all budget entities are required to submit a gender budget statement as an annex to their budget proposal. Participants found that GRB applied to the agricultural sector is an effective and sustainable approach for mainstreaming gender throughout the planning and budgeting cycle, though it is not a panacea and would need to be accompanied by the relevant flanking measures. Participants also highlighted the importance of ensuring that sector-specific plans and budgets are developed, implemented, and monitored in a gender-responsive manner.

**Lessons on accountability, data, and institutional mechanisms for monitoring progress toward gender equality**

Rwanda created mechanisms to ensure that the country meets its commitments on promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment. It did this as both an end goal in itself and as an effective pathway for combating poverty and stimulating sustainable development. The country has established different mechanisms and institutions mandated to ensure the promotion of gender equality and to fight gender-based violence.

Hon. Halima Mamane from Niger, Member of the ECOWAS Parliament, mentioned that the availability of sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators is improving in ECOWAS member countries because of recent censuses and surveys that addressed gender equality. However, while a large majority of ECOWAS member countries have established a ministry of gender equality and women’s affairs, most of them have limited capacity to deal with gender issues in the agricultural sector. Focal points for gender equality in line ministries and sector ministries often have limited capacity and budgets—and unfortunately, little influence on policy processes.
In Rwanda, as illustrated by the intervention of the representative of Ms. Rose Rwabuhihi, Chief Gender Monitor, the Gender Monitoring Office is mandated to monitor the respecting of gender equality principles, promote gender accountability, and fight gender-based violence and related injustices. The office serves as a national reference point for information and data on gender equality and accountability to inform effective gender-responsive decision making and planning. The office monitors how all levels of governmental, private, non-governmental, and religious institutions respect gender equality principles. It also monitors how the national gender policy is implemented in all spheres of national development as well as the domestication, implementation, and reporting on all regional and international gender commitments that Rwanda has ratified.

Main takeaways from the Dialogue

One of the recurring discussion themes across the interventions from ministers and other high-level officials was that—while developing the right legal and policy frameworks is important—the way in which these frameworks are implemented is critical to their success or failure. This, in turn, requires continued engagement with all stakeholders, including those not present at the event.

“The political will can be there, the policy can be there, the laws can be there, but the next phase and the most important one is the implementation. And the implementation requires ownership by the implementers.”

Hon. Solina Nyirahabimana, Rwandan Minister of Gender and Family Promotion

Key approaches used to promote gender equality in Rwanda

**Gender mainstreaming approach**
Aims at integrating gender issues into policies, programs, projects, activities & budgets in all sectors & at all levels

**Affirmative action approach**
Aims at correcting gender imbalances existing in various development sectors

**Institutional capacity development**
Aims at enhancing institutional & human capacity of NGM & stakeholders for effective implementation of the NGP

**Men engage approach**
Aims at involving men in addressing gender issues
The dialogue emphasized Rwanda’s successes and related lessons vis-à-vis legislative policy advances in land rights, GRB as well as investments in the agricultural and rural sectors. Along with highlighting the positive developments seen to date, the discussion highlighted some of the challenges still evident in mainstreaming gender, such as poor accountability, limited data, and insufficient institutional mechanisms for empowering women in agriculture, value chains, and food security.

The need to act swiftly, consistently, and effectively was consistently reinforced, with speakers noting that the lack of action on gender equality will adversely affect the country’s prospects for economic growth, poverty reduction, and export potential.

“When you speak about people, you speak about all components of the community. Here we know that women are 52 percent of the population, so capacity building [regarding women is] putting in place a strong foundation for socioeconomic development,” said Bazivamo.

Another recurring point from the high-level dialogue was the importance of women being represented at all levels of decision making. These included the legislative and executive levels of government, as well as in non-governmental roles, whether these be cooperatives or other important institutions in the agricultural sector.

After a day of discussions and brainstorming, the Network endorsed a set of recommendations for future work and made a series of statements to news media about the event’s key takeaways. Network members stressed the need to continuously ensure strong collaboration between lawmakers, civil society, international organizations, and other stakeholders.

“There is much that we shared: the way the policies in the programmes are implemented in Rwanda and the way the budget cycle is done in planning, but also in the implementation so that gender is taken into account.”

Edda Mukabagwiza, Deputy Speaker of the Rwandan Parliament’s Chamber of Deputies

“We should all encourage women to overcome the obstacles for our own good. Women should be represented in decision-making bodies, not just in cooperatives, but in other sectors as well.”

Donatille Mukabalisa with ECOWAS Parliamentarians

Hon. Fatoumata Njie from The Gambia, member of the ECOWAS Parliament
VII. FIELD VISITS

The aim of the field visits was to share success stories on the growth and achievements of two cooperatives in Rwanda and their impact on the livelihoods of female small-holder farmers. They allowed ECOWAS parliamentarians to learn from the experience of the cooperatives, and how in turn they can apply the lessons learnt to other sectors and value chains in the ECOWAS region, such as cocoa, rice, and milk, among others. These visits also highlighted how the cooperatives face various challenges and how to overcome them through enabling policy and legislative frameworks.

The Conseil Consultatif des Femmes

The Conseil Consultatif des Femmes (COCOF) is a women’s forum operating in four districts of Rwanda’s Southern and Western Provinces, with headquarters in Kamonyi District.

Created after the 1994 Rwanda genocide, the forum aims to strengthen social cohesion and improve the socioeconomic conditions of its members. Today, COCOF has 594 members, though its activities benefit more than 6,720 people indirectly, spread out over 13 cooperatives. COCOF works with both women and men using a two-fold approach. It sensitizes women to understand laws and regulations, including government-established policies. It also educates men on legal changes in the Rwandan legislature concerning gender equality and equity, family, and land tenure.

The cooperative also works at the household level using methodologies such as the Gender Action Learning System (GALS), with the goal of strengthening family bonds for more equitable and sustainable socioeconomic development. The organization of seminars allows participants to share their knowledge and experiences, and receive coaching in capacity development sessions that include game simulations and exercises. The results are positive, but more work is necessary to engage men to support women’s empowerment.

Twongere Umusaruro Wa Kawa (TUK)

The commitment and actions of the Government of Rwanda to increase coffee productivity and quality have transformed the lives of many low-income coffee farmers, especially women. Participants visited Twongere Umusaruro Wa Kawa, a cooperative in the Kayonza District. The cooperative is composed of 157 members, 93 percent of whom are female. This women-led cooperative in the traditionally male-dominated coffee farming sector is a notable innovation and represents progress for rural women’s empowerment.

Hon. Oulimata Guiro, Member of the ECOWAS Parliament with women from the Twongere Umusaruro Wa Kawa cooperative
The cooperative focuses on high-quality coffee production, processing, and marketing. Through key partnerships, especially with Sustainable Growers and the local government, members of TUK received technical assistance in coffee production and began the construction of their own coffee-washing station. This washing station not only acts as a processing facility, but also serves as a symbol of transformation, allowing the cooperative and its members to do value addition on site.

TUK successfully runs a business that involves both coffee harvesting and processing. The processed coffee includes specialty-grade beans, with recent cuppings of sample lots showing scores as high as 91 on the Cup of Excellence scale. The leaders of the cooperative sign contracts with buyers for the sale of the coffee on domestic and international markets. Cooperative members want to increase local consumption where possible, and the building of the cupping station aims to serve this purpose. They also raise awareness of the role women play in the TUK cooperative using a description of their leadership role on the coffee packaging.
VIII. ADOPTED RECOMMENDATIONS

At the end of the learning exchange, the members of the ECOWAS Network of Parliamentarians on Gender Equality and Investments in Agriculture and Food Security made the following commitments to improve food security through support to women’s economic and political empowerment:

• **Voice and decision-making power.** The representation of women at all decision-making levels in politics and government is decisive in making change happen. This participation of women in high-level positions needs to be ensured in all sectors, including agriculture and land ownership. This should also cover the private sector, including financial institutions. It is essential to foster women’s participation and leadership in female-led organizations and cooperatives that are mixed and women-only. This will help them access inputs, productive resources, and financial services (among others). Being organized will allow members of these organizations, including women, to increase their bargaining and contractual power as business partners and market actors.

• **Land laws and policies.** Land is essential for agricultural production and food security. In this light, land policies and land-related laws should be reviewed with a gender lens, and relevant action taken so that land tenure security improves. Within this context, in order to promote women’s land rights, ECOWAS parliamentarians commit to this objective, including through oversight of SDG 5.a.2 on women’s legal land rights. They will also endeavour to harmonize customary and statutory land laws and other related legal and regulatory instruments.

• **Budget.** We cognize the importance of GRB for ensuring the translation of our commitments into action. Gender issues will be mainstreamed in all sectors during the consideration and adoption of budgets in our National and Regional Parliaments.

• **Responsible investment.** Fostering inclusive, responsible investment from both public and private actors is vital for realizing the potential of countries’ agricultural sectors. This investment also has an important gender component, which must be acknowledged, recognized, and supported.

• **Trade and value chains.** Promoting the value addition of primary products of female farmers will help enable their participation and improve their competitiveness in national, regional, and international markets. It will drive greater investments in the necessary infrastructure for bringing these products to market, along with creating employment in high-value-added jobs and maintaining this employment in the longer term.

• **Continued exchanges and capacity development.** This partnership with Rwandan parliamentarians should be formalized with the support of IISD, FAO, and Oxfam.
Network of ECOWAS Parliamentarians on Gender Equality and Investments in Agriculture and Food Security

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) supports capacity development, knowledge generation and advocacy activities of the Network of ECOWAS Parliamentarians on Gender Equality and Investments in Agriculture and Food Security, drawing on its empirical evidence, tools, and approaches.

Through its programme “Promoting Sustainable Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems: Working with Governments and Parliamentarians,” the International Institute for Sustainable Development provides its expertise on economic law and policy to support stakeholders as they develop solutions that ensure that agriculture is a driver for sustainable development outcomes.

Oxfam brings its diverse experience in combating social injustices and gender inequalities in all social, political, and economic spheres, including the promotion of women’s rights in land, agriculture, and food security.
WALKING the talk
Learning exchange in Rwanda, July 2019