



REGIONAL BRIEF

PARTNERSHIPS AND POLICIES FOR IMPROVED MARKET ACCESS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA - REDUCING POVERTY AMONGST WOMEN AND THE YOUTH

BACKGROUND

Agriculture is the dominant economic sector in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), contributing up to 35 percent to its GDP. Women and the youth form a large proportion of the agricultural labor force in Sub-Saharan Africa and thus play a vital role in ensuring food and nutrition security. In southern Africa, agriculture continues to be a key engine for local and regional economies, representing a critical source of income and financial stability.

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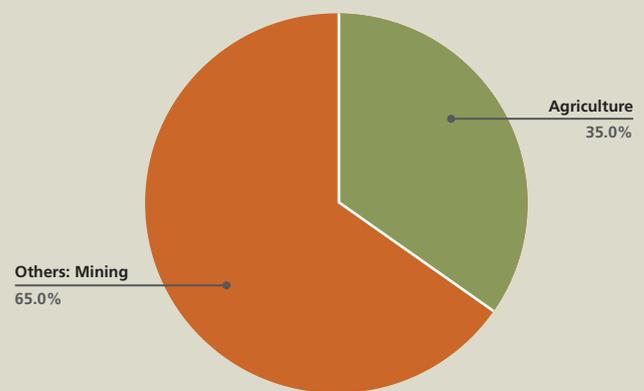
However, gender-based inequalities regarding access to and control of productive and financial resources inhibit agricultural productivity and reduce food security.

Oxfam Southern Africa (Oxfam SAF) in partnership with the Food, Agriculture and Natural Resources Policy Analysis Network (FANRPAN) implemented a project that focused on rapid-scoping studies of how poor women smallholder agricultural producers and rural and urban consumers in the four (4) Oxfam focus countries; Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Zimbabwe, are interacting with markets.

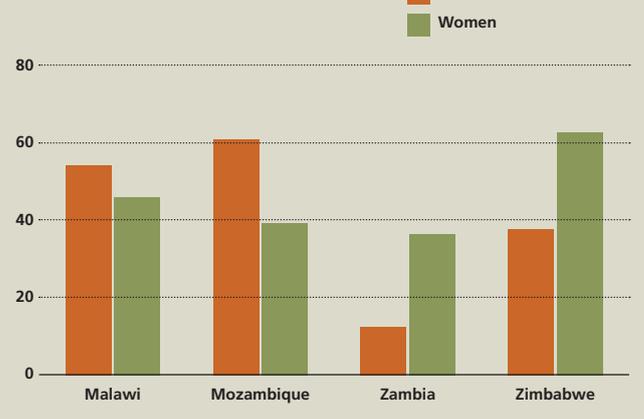
The study proved that despite WSHFs and the youth being the majority of agricultural sector players they derive the least value from their limited participation.

The adoption of Information and Communication Technology for Agriculture (ICT4A) is gaining precedence within the region proven by the 4 governments' interest to enhance their ease of doing business. However, WSHFs lack adequate access to knowledge, ICT4A, finance and credit to be able to fully enjoy the benefits of such technology.

SADC Agriculture GDP Contribution, 2018



Jobs in Agriculture



STATUS OF THE REGION

Approximately 70 percent of the population depends on agriculture for food, income and employment (World Economic Forum, 2016), with women and the youth comprising over half of the agricultural labor force (FAO, 2015).

Climate change continues to manifest through erratic weather, decline in soil fertility and resilience of crops and livestock and in the emergence of transboundary pests and diseases. This has ultimately threatened the already vulnerable food production rate amongst SHFs. During the last decades, lots of effort has been undertaken to reduce poverty, create employment, reduce food and nutrition insecurity through several agricultural initiatives in the region. However a clear and defined access to markets still remains a challenge amongst smallholder farmers, especially women and the youth.



Levels of poverty in Sub-Saharan African countries are alarmingly high, worsened by changing climate, pandemics and epidemics. It is estimated that over 40% of the population in the region is poor accounting for half of the world's extreme poor (World Bank, 2013). Southern Africa continues to be amongst the worst hit regions by COVID-19. The restrictions of movement and country lockdowns have worsened smallholder farmers' ability to access resources to improve their agricultural productivity and profitability.

MARKET GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE REGION

This study revealed and confirmed the following opportunities that exist in the region and the challenges facing WSHFs and the youth obstructing them from accessing fair and competitive markets.

1. Accelerated adoption of ICT in the region

Smallholder farmers have great potential to benefit from the rapidly growing ICT sector for knowledge and market information, and access to finance and credit. The region has witnessed a steady increase in ICT penetration over the past decade. However, without effective knowledge systems, most WSHFs still lack access necessary to agricultural information that has remained confined to particular ecosystems for example large-scale farmers continue to communicate with processing companies and exporters while smallholders are concentrated in informal markets where relationships and word of mouth remain the major information sharing channels.

Improved ICT infrastructure will improve access to market information and knowledge necessary for WSHFs to make informed choices on when, where and whom to sell their produce.

2. Policies

The four focus countries have various national agricultural policies and National Agricultural Plans and frameworks that are aimed at promoting the growth of agriculture. However, coherent and complimentary regional policies and frameworks are essential to establishing and maintaining macroeconomic stability, which is a prerequisite for confident savings, investment and consumption decisions.

The regional blocs must continue to work together to advocate for policies that promote free access to cross-border trade with the participation of women and youth smallholder farmers.

3. Infrastructure

Development partners have invested in creating safe and gender-favourable physical market structures for use by smallholder farmers. However, without connecting roads and other transport networks, smallholder farmers remain confined in their local markets that provide limited value to their products. The region must work together to develop the necessary infrastructure to connect farmers to markets.

4. Capacity Building of WSHFs for Policy Advocacy at local (by laws) and country level on WSHFs Access to Markets

Access to training and extension services is highly limited to WSHFs due to high levels of illiteracy, patriarchal systems and lack of proper organization amongst the farmers. Female farmers only received 5% of all agricultural extensions in 2018 across the 4 countries.

There is an urgent need for regional blocs such as ECA, AU, SADC and COMESA to further advance policy influencing to support WSHFs to build their own capacity to engage and influence the private sector and government to create an enabling policy and business environment.

Further, the regional blocs should ensure that all development programs prioritise the economically active group of women and young people aged 25-54.

WSHFs ought to be encouraged to form district, national and regional farmers associations to enable them tap into agricultural research for development.

Further development partners, regional economic bodies, governments and extension institutions should work together to create a regional Knowledge and Information Hub that will promote the centralization of market information.

ONGOING INTERVENTIONS BY OXFAM AND FANRPAN

Under the program; A Better Deal for WSHFs, OXFAM South Africa and FANRPAN are currently working to bridge the gap between WSHFs, the youth and commercial markets. Farmers in the 4 focus countries are now able to supply their horticultural products to supermarkets in the region.

This is a solid example of how cross sector partnerships can secure competitive and lucrative markets for WSHFs and the youth equipping them with bargaining power for their products.



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