



2024 STUDY BRIEF

Gender-Responsive Market and Value Chain Analyses of Maize, Beans, Soya Beans, Potatoes, Dairy, and Bee Products in Five Districts in Rwanda



Photo: WFP/Johnpaul Sesonga

Introduction

This document consolidates the findings and recommendations from two gender-responsive analyses of agricultural value chains and markets, carried out in 2024 in five districts in Rwanda: Gisagara, Nyaruguru, Kirehe, Ngoma, and Nyamasheke, constituting the target areas of the second phase of the Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress Towards Rural Women's Economic Empowerment, jointly implemented by FAO, IFAD, UN Women and WFP.

The two analyses focus on women's critical role in selected agricultural value chains, the systemic challenges they face, and the opportunities for greater economic empowerment. The value chains examined include beans, maize, potatoes, soya beans, dairy products, and bee products. The studies formulate recommendations to address specific gender disparities in market access and value chain participation.

These recommendations create equitable opportunities for women to benefit from agricultural production and commercialization, alleviate food security, support sustainable development, and contribute to poverty reduction.

Women's Role in Agriculture

Agriculture is a major sector of Rwanda's economy, contributing 25 per cent to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2022 (NISR, 2022). It is a major employment sector, especially for Rwandan women, who account for 79 per cent of the agricultural labor force, and actively participate along all stages of the value chain from production to processing¹.

Despite their essential contributions, women encounter significant challenges, including cultural norms constraining their roles, limited access to productive resources, and exclusion from decision-making processes. Addressing these barriers is crucial to fostering gender equality and creating inclusive value chains and markets that benefit women and the broader economy.





Beans

Women play a crucial role in the beans value chain, particularly in planting, weeding, and harvesting. However, their access to quality seeds and fertilizers remains limited, impacting productivity. They also face post-harvest losses due to inadequate storage facilities and limited bargaining power in market negotiations.

Strengthening women-led cooperatives and improving access to extension services could significantly enhance their participation in higher-value segments such as processing and export-oriented sales.

Market constraints further limit women's ability to profit from bean farming. Middlemen often control pricing, leaving women with lower returns.

Expanding access to market information and direct sales opportunities through cooperative-run aggregation centers can improve income stability. Additionally, investing in value addition, such as producing canned beans and fortified bean flour, could create new business opportunities for women.



Maize

Women's involvement in the maize value chain is concentrated in labor-intensive tasks such as planting, shelling, and drying, while men dominate mechanized farming and marketing. Women often sell maize at lower prices due to inadequate storage facilities, forcing them to offload produce quickly before it spoils. Without proper market linkages, they are unable to capitalize on peak-season price increases.

Investing in cooperative-run storage and drying facilities could enable women to retain their maize for better pricing. Additionally, training programs on aflatoxin compliance and value addition (such as maize flour and animal feed production) would help women move beyond subsistence farming into more profitable ventures.

Increasing access to financial services tailored to women farmers could provide capital for purchasing high-yield maize seeds and mechanization equipment.



Potatoes

Women are heavily involved in potato cultivation, performing tasks such as land preparation, planting, and harvesting. They face significant barriers in transportation and market access due to the perishability of potatoes and the high costs of logistics. Many women resort to selling their produce immediately after harvest at lower prices to avoid losses.

Establishing cooperative-owned cold storage facilities and affordable transportation networks could help women access better-paying markets. Training on value addition, such as producing potato chips and flour, would allow women to diversify their income streams. Market linkages with institutional buyers, such as schools and restaurants, could also create stable demand for their produce.



Soya beans

Women contribute significantly to soya bean farming, primarily in planting and harvesting. However, they face low production yields due to limited access to quality seeds and technical knowledge. Additionally, cultural preferences for other crops mean that soya farming receives less government support, further marginalizing women's participation.

Creating women-led cooperatives focused on soya production and value addition, such as soya milk and fortified flour processing, could increase profitability. Strengthening linkages between women farmers and institutional buyers would also enhance market stability. Government incentives for soya farming, including subsidies for improved seeds and machinery, could further encourage women's participation in this value chain.



Dairy

Women play a vital role in dairy farming, primarily handling livestock feeding, which consists of manually sourcing and/or purchasing water and fodder, and maintaining livestock hygiene.

Despite this, milking, milk transport to the milk collection centers (MCCs), sales, and profits are predominantly controlled by men, reinforcing gender disparities. According to the findings, many women from women-headed households hire men from the village to milk the cows and transport the milk for them to the MCCs.

Addressing these constraints requires expanding MCCs closer to farming communities, improving access to fodder markets, addressing discriminatory social norms, and promoting gender-responsive financial services to support women-led dairy businesses. Sensitizing men on the economic benefits of shared decision-making in dairy enterprises could also help shift traditional norms and increase women's control over milk sales and income.



Bee Products

Women's participation in beekeeping is limited to post-harvest activities such as honey packaging and processing, while honey harvesting is male-dominated due to cultural perceptions on the physical demands and clothing requirements. Additionally, a lack of access to modern beekeeping tools restricts women's ability to engage in honey production.

Providing women with protective gear, modern beekeeping training, and access to premium honey markets can increase their economic opportunities in this sector. Establishing women-led beekeeping cooperatives and linking them to sustainable supply chains for value-added products such as beeswax candles and medicinal honey could further enhance their participation and profitability.



Photo: WFP/Johnpaul Sesonga

Cross-Cutting Challenges

Despite sector-specific challenges, several barriers impact women across all value chains. These include limited access to land ownership, financial services, storage facilities, and market linkages. Additionally, cultural norms that restrict women's roles in decision-making and high-value market segments remain prevalent.

Addressing these issues requires integrated approaches, including implementing gender-responsive policies, investing in sustainable infrastructures, and challenging discriminatory social norms.

Key recommendations

...from the market analysis

- Enhance women's business skills for improved marketing strategies through targeted training in seeking buyers, planning sales, and identifying potential markets, as well as retaining existing market shares, in collaboration with national and local authorities.
- Improve women's bargaining power through cooperatives and collective marketing by forming groups to aggregate produce while considering government price controls to ensure standardized prices reflect local conditions.
- Strengthen women's capacity for value addition by supporting with technical and financial resources for small-scale processing to address perishability issues and increase product value, including investments in mini-processing equipment and capacity-building for products like chips from potatoes or soya milk from soya beans.
- Improve market linkages between buyers and suppliers by partnering with Private Sector Federation (PSF) and district officials to link buyers and sellers

through regular market scans and connecting institutional buyers like schools and supermarkets with local actors.

- Enhance women's capacity in post-harvest handling and quality control by providing capacity-building for proper handling, drying, packaging, and storage to reduce losses and maintain quality.
- Establish more milk collection centers by assessing milk production potential in villages and establishing more collection centers to reduce transportation burdens and maintain milk quality, promoting proximity and ease of access for women.
- Encourage and support women's cooperatives in higher stages of the value chain by forming cooperatives to aggregate production and enable value addition, raising awareness, and providing training in marketing and business management to motivate and enable women to move up the value chain.
- Raise consumer awareness and advertising to expand women's access to markets by addressing information asymmetry with support from public institutions and the PSF.

...from the value chain analysis

- Ensure availability of quality inputs, such as certified seeds and eco-fertilizers with particular focus on improving access to seeds for beans, maize, soya beans, potatoes, fodder for dairy farmers, and modern hives for beekeepers.
- Improve access to extension services for soya beans, dairy, and bee products while addressing gender-related barriers in training schedules and cultural expectations.
- Address the gender imbalance in labor division by recognizing and compensating women's unpaid work in farming, thereby freeing up their time for other income-generating activities.

- Challenge and change cultural norms which restrict women's mobility and limit their role to subsistence production, thereby promoting their participation in marketing activities.
- Provide access to alternative funding options, such as grants and business service providers, to address capital constraints in dairy, beekeeping, and potato value chains.
- Improve post-harvest infrastructure, including storage facilities and equipment, to reduce losses and support women in post-harvest handling.
- Promote value addition through processing, offering training and equipment for local processing activities like maize milling, potato chip making, soya milk and tofu processing, and honey refining.
- Strengthen cooperative management and marketing capabilities, ensuring better organization and enabling women to market their produce directly.

Conclusions

The value chain and market analyses conducted in this study highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions to address gender-specific challenges. In the beans and maize sectors, improving access to quality inputs and enabling women to engage in value-added activities can significantly enhance their economic outcomes. Potatoes and soya beans offer opportunities for women to diversify their incomes through better infrastructure, collective marketing, and localized processing units.

Deeply ingrained cultural norms in the dairy sector limits women's economic potential, which can be mitigated

by expanding milk collection centers, promoting women-led cooperatives, enabling their participation in value-added production, and sensitizing men to share decision-making and control over resources. Engaging men as allies in challenging traditional perceptions of milk ownership and women's roles within the dairy sector is crucial to unlocking women's full economic potential.

In the bee products chain, women's inclusion can be increased through access to modern tools and premium markets, fostering economic empowerment even in traditionally male-dominated sectors. Sensitizing men about the value of women's participation in beekeeping can further enhance acceptance and collaboration within this value chain.

Addressing systemic barriers—such as access to land, finance, and market linkages—through gender-responsive policies and investments in infrastructure is essential. Community awareness campaigns and involving men in equality efforts will further support women's full participation.

Transforming these value chains and markets not only benefits women but whole communities, strengthening Rwanda's agricultural sector and contributing to national development goals.

Contact details:

Silvia Lanzarini
silvia.lanzarini@unwomen.org

<https://jprwee.org/>



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

