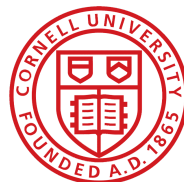


Equitable Seed Systems: An Analysis of Ugandan Seed Policy and Its Effect

on Women Farmers

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## Introduction:

Smallholder farmers in developing countries contend with a variety of hurdles in reaching seed security, which is defined by high levels of seed access, availability, quality, and benefits. One hurdle that affects all aspects of seed security is the dichotomy between the formal and informal seed systems. The formal seed system consists of seeds that are created by plant breeders, national gene banks, and research centers. The method of distribution is through public sources such as governmental agencies, or through private sources such as seed companies. The formal seed system is also characterized by robust quality control measures, registration of different varieties, and a narrow specialization in a small range of crop varieties that are determined by the market (Louwaars et al 2013). The benefits of the formal seed system are that the seed quality is more regulated and therefore more consistent, and the varieties it offers meet the most common genetic deficits in cash crops. The detriments are regional dissonance in seed regulations, inefficient movement of seeds, higher prices, and low reach to farmer networks (TASAI 2022). In contrast, the informal seed system is defined by trading of farmer-produced or farmer-saved seeds between other local farmers (AGRILINKS, 2020). The seeds traded in the informal system are generally more adapted to the local environment and provide a wider variety of cultivars than the formal seed system. Most importantly, the informal seed system has a much wider reach within the farming community than the formal seed system. However, the informal system's decentralized nature also makes it difficult to regulate and verify seed quality (Sperling et al 2013).

The hurdles presented above are only magnified for women farmers in Uganda. From restrictive gender norms that prevent socioeconomic mobility to gender-blind practices that perpetuate the exclusion of women from extension services and credit, there are a wide array of systemic barriers that women face

in accessing resources. This literature review presents scholarly recommendations on how to improve gender equity within seed systems and frameworks for evaluating the efficacy of gender-focused policies, and compares them to the current methods of achieving gender equality within Ugandan seed policy.

#### Methods:

A review of key scholarly works in the fields of seed systems, gender, and policy was performed to select some of the most effective methods improving gender equity within seed systems, and frameworks to evaluate progress. Methods for increasing gender equity can be categorized under the reach-benefit-empower framework. Reach is when a policy makes an active effort to include women such as providing transportation to information sessions, benefit is when the policy is aimed at meeting specific gendered needs to increase wellbeing such as making sure women can access seeds, and empower is when it increases women's autonomy and ability to make life-decisions such as starting a business (Johnson et al 2018). Methods that fall under "reach" are the most basic application of policies to increase gender equity, while methods that fall under "empower" are the most advanced and desirable.

A review of the five Ugandan seed policies (Uganda National Seed Strategy, Seed and Plant Regulations, National Seed Policy, National Agriculture Research Act, and Uganda Seed and Plant Act) was conducted to categorize the gender-focused policies within them under the reach-benefit-empower framework to gauge their utility, efficacy and commitment to gender equity. This was done by analyzing the policy wherever the words "gender" or "woman" were mentioned to catalog what actions were being prescribed.

#### Results:

Out of the five Ugandan seed policies, two policies (Seed and Plant Regulations, and Uganda Seed and Plant Act) did not mention women or gender at all. The National Agriculture and Research Act of 2005 mentions gender twice and women once; it mandates that when creating a governing council to oversee agricultural activities, the council must have at least two women representatives on the council (out of four), and that there must be a balance of genders on the council. The National Seed Policy has a few

more mentions of gender and women; it promises to promote adult literacy and provide business training to promote women's involvement in business, to use gender for beneficiary targeting, to make seed quality more available, and to promote gender-friendly seed technology. The Uganda National Seed Strategy is the most comprehensive; it spells out programs such as demonstrations, training, and agro-input dealer recruitment that is projected to help 20% of women. Using the reach-benefit-empower framework to categorize these policies, the National and Agriculture Research Act falls under the "reach" category, the National Seed Policy and Uganda National Seed Strategy fall under the "benefit" category, and none of the policies fall under the "empower" category. This means that Ugandan seed policy puts a large focus on including women in seed systems, but needs to work on expanding policies that would provide women with more autonomy and decision-making power.