

UN Women

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Enabling rural women's economic empowerment: institutions, opportunities and participation

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Decent and Productive Employment and Income-Generating Opportunities for Rural Women

Expert paper prepared by:

Margaret Odyek*

Uganda National Farmers Federation
Uganda

Northern Uganda is a post-conflict rural region in which women depend entirely on subsistence farming for their livelihood. For over 20 years, the land in this war-torn region has not been used. And now that the population is resettling from internally displaced persons' (IDPs) camps, the soils are very fertile. If these soils are put to proper use, we can not only become the food basket of Uganda but also the entire Eastern Africa region.

Rural women in Northern Uganda include those living with HIV and AIDS, single mothers whose husbands died during the war, elderly women, adolescent mothers and married women. These courageous mothers saw the need to cater for the proper nutrition of their families, which caused them to leave the IDP camps and start a new life in their formerly abandoned home areas.

These important stakeholders of rural development and family food security are organised in small women's groups, which help them to share challenges they face during their struggle:

* The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

- The majority of these women are illiterate. They have only a hand hoe to start with, using the traditional farming practices most of which do not address the current economic needs of their families. There is a need for proper training on how to scale up productivity, and access training resources on productivity in agriculture for sustainable development.
- They also lack basic knowledge of financial management. Therefore they cannot evaluate situations and foresee the window of income generating opportunities. For example, a few of them acquired loans in a bid to scale up their productivity, but due to poor financial management they ended up failing to repay the loans thereby losing their property such as land.
- Agriculture is their only employment, with the hand hoe as the only farming tool they can afford. This is a far cry from decent and productive employment. Uplifting productivity to a good level of income generation in this sector requires mechanisation and adapting to modern farming practices. This can be achieved through grant schemes that can avail to them tractors, ox-ploughs and other relevant farm technology.
- Good seeds are not readily available to rural women. On many occasions, women end up buying fake seeds, which may fail to germinate when planted or result in low yields.
- Pesticides, fertilisers and other important chemicals are also duplicated. There is a great need for suppliers of genuine products.
- Rural women need to be sensitised of their rights. For instance, very few men engage in agriculture. This noble duty is left to women; meanwhile men spend their time drinking. Even the little money that women collect from agriculture is taken from them by their husbands who use it to drink alcohol.
- There is no ready market for their produce. This leaves a great need for the development of systems and infrastructure to increase easy access to markets.

Much as rural women play a great role in enhancing agricultural and rural development, their role will remain insignificant if they are not exposed to other income-generating opportunities such as: small shops, women's investment groups, food processing plants, transport business and agri-business, among others.

This will empower rural women to effectively fight poverty and hunger and therefore change the lives of the future generations.