

A Call for Equal Rights for Women Farmers



Bread for the World
An anti-hunger group says women farmers lack access to agricultural resources

This is the VOA Special English Agriculture Report.

A new report says if women farmers had the same rights as men, more could be done to reduce world hunger. The report, "Empowering Women in Agriculture," is from the anti-hunger group Bread for the World. Bread for the World says equal access to agricultural resources would help increase food security and economic growth.

Faustine Wabwire is the group's foreign assistance specialist.

FAUSTINE WABMIRE: "Women constituted half of the agricultural labor force in not just Africa, but the developing countries as a whole. And when you think of Africa alone, it's more than sixty percent of the total agricultural labor force being provided by women."

The report says in most countries, women working in rural areas are more likely than men to hold seasonal, part-time and low-wage jobs. They also receive less pay for the same work.

Ms. Wabwire says women farmers often cannot get seeds, fertilizer, proper tools, credit and, especially, land.

FAUSTINE WABWIRE: "For most of Africa, we have about eighty percent of the population living in rural areas and they subsist on agriculture. Now women make sixty percent of the agricultural labor force and they have no access to resources. So, for example, land is one good example where less than twenty percent of all landholders are women."

This is often because of legal as well as cultural reasons. She says women who have lost their husbands may have no legal rights over their land. The only way to keep the land, she says, is to marry, say, the brother of the dead husband.

FAUSTINE WABWIRE: "So constraints like this are still very prevalent in most African societies and they continue to impede women's ability to fully enjoy their human rights."

However, Ms. Wabwire says women in agriculture are getting more attention these days. For example, Kenya's new constitution gives women the right to own land. But she says there is still a long way to go. Bread for the World is urging the United States government to increase development assistance, or at least not to decrease it.

FAUSTINE WABWIRE: "This assistance through programs such as Feed the Future, which is the U.S. government's agriculture program, is helping to elevate the status of women. It's enabling women to access productive resources such as seeds. They are able to have access to extension services, which will enable them to produce more and contribute to healthy societies."

But Ms. Wabwire says more African governments must recognize the major role that women play in agriculture and elsewhere. The report says, "Putting more income in the hands of women translates into improved child nutrition, health, and education." It gives women a way to "transform the economic life of the communities and countries in which they live."

Just how much could hunger be reduced if women had equal access to agricultural resources? The report estimates that hunger could be reduced for an extra one hundred to one hundred fifty million people.

And that's the VOA Special English Agriculture Report. You can find a link to the Bread for the World report at voaspecialenglish.com. I'm Jim Tedder.

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