

Women lead the way

How female smallholder farmers are leading climate-smart agriculture in eastern Africa



Women lead the way

Women do much of the work on eastern Africa's farms, yet receive a fraction of the support. In 2026, the International Year of the Woman Farmer, it's time to change that. Farm Africa places priority on supporting women within its sustainable agriculture projects across eastern Africa. Not just because it's fair, **but because it works**. This paper summarises new evidence revealing that women-led households supported by Farm Africa adopt new practices earlier, stick with them longer and achieve higher yields and incomes than male-headed households.

In Kenya, Tanzania and Ethiopia, when we put women at the centre of our programmes, adoption of climate-smart agriculture practices accelerates and results improve. This is a consistent pattern seen in our varied programmes covering a diverse range of soil types, crops and delivery modalities.

There is a clear case for agriculture programmes across eastern Africa to implement gender-responsive designs: not just for the sake of equity, but to optimise results. As the primary drivers of increases in the adoption and productivity of climate-smart agriculture, reaching female farmers increases effectiveness.

This does not mean excluding men from agricultural programmes. Land ownership and decision-making are largely controlled by men, making joint engagement with both women and men critical for the sustained uptake of climate-smart agriculture.

Barriers for female farmers

Too many women are denied access to the land, loans, seeds, skills and voice they need to make a success of farming. In most countries in sub-Saharan Africa, women receive only 7% of agricultural extension services, which provide the technical advice, inputs and services needed for farming.

Despite women providing a large share of the labour in farming in Africa, bearing the brunt of arduous field work, men tend to ultimately own the crops that women produce – and the fields women work in.

There are specific crops that women can own, including beans and vegetables: crops that are grown to feed their families. But women usually can't take ownership of cash crops that are grown

to sell, such as sunflowers, coffee or sorghum. As women do not own the crops they produce, they do not have permission to take the crops to market to sell.

Farm Africa projects

Farm Africa runs projects across eastern Africa that support farmers, both women and men, to restore their land, grow more food and earn a reliable income.

We work to understand the challenges that women face in their local contexts and adapt our programmes accordingly. This means:

- › Involving women in selling their produce, giving them more financial independence and a better idea of market prices so they can adapt their farming businesses accordingly

Mary Temu (left), a sunflower farmer from Babati District in Tanzania, with Farm Africa gender specialist Helena Lawi (right).



“Women in our area are highly attached to the forests. I believe our contribution to the protection of such resources is way bigger than men.”

Momina Adem

Chair of the Biftu Beri women's group, Bale, Ethiopia

well as in their farming businesses.

Better harvests and more reliable incomes mean mothers can feed their children, send them to school, access healthcare and confidently plan ahead, rather than simply surviving from one harvest to the next.

When women thrive, everyone thrives

It's time to invest in female farmers so they can grow a better future. For themselves. For their families. For whole communities.

“Self-confidence plays a big part in empowerment. We see women developing their self-confidence by taking part in women's groups, being inspired by other women who have had success and hearing how they have overcome discrimination.”



Helena Lawi
Gender specialist, Farm Africa
Tanzania

Farm Africa's evidence

Across Farm Africa's programmes in Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania, we see a consistent pattern: women are leading the uptake of regenerative agriculture practices that build resilience to climate change. Female farmers adopt new practices earlier, stick with them longer and achieve higher yields and incomes.

Women are earlier adopters

Women farmers adopt new climate-smart farming practices earlier and at a higher rate than men. Where programmes are built around women, uptake of climate-smart agriculture practices can be near-universal.

- In Farm Africa's Strengthening Regenerative Agriculture in Kenya (STRAK) project, funded by AGRA, female-headed households adopted regenerative agriculture technologies at 56% compared to 31% for male-headed households.
- In the Climate Resilience and Work and Opportunities for Women (WOW) project delivered by Farm Africa for the Waitrose Foundation in Kenya, 98% of participants (64% of whom were women) adopted a climate-resilience practice, including tree planting, water management and climate-resilient crop varieties.

Women stay the course

Across Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania, women-led households working with Farm Africa are more likely to continue using climate-smart farming practices longer than households led by men.

- In the Bale Eco-region of Ethiopia, the share of female-headed households using three or more climate-smart practices rose from 10% to 75%.

Women achieve higher yields

Our evidence shows women growing crops either match or out-produce men working on similar pieces of land.

- Female-headed households taking part in the STRAK project in Kenya produced an average of



Judith, a farmer producing sorghum in Dodoma, Tanzania.

700kg of crops each vs 430kg for male-headed households.

- In the Climate-Smart Agriculture project in Dodoma, Tanzania, funded by the World Food Programme, women farmers produced 750 kg drought-tolerant sorghum per acre against 669 kg for men.

Women's incomes rise faster

Women build climate-resilient businesses, and they grow fast. Farm Africa's agricultural development programmes closing the gender income gap, and in some places reversing it.

- In the Forests for Sustainable Development programme in the Bale Eco-region of Ethiopia, funded by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Ethiopia, female-headed households earned

92,030 Ethiopian Birr (ETB) from crops and livestock compared to 82,724 ETB for male-headed households. Among local people not participating in the programme, the pattern was reversed, with male-headed households earning 56,762 ETB against 44,790 ETB for female-headed households.

- Women's goat rearing and cookstove enterprise groups, also in the Bale Eco-region of Ethiopia, tripled their revenue, from 117,000 to 391,202 ETB.

- In the Growing Futures youth horticulture programme in Kenya, funded by Aldi, women's average annual household incomes rose by 41% over the project.

Women access markets

- In the Climate-Smart Agriculture project in Dodoma, Tanzania, 720 women smallholder farmers secured guaranteed sales through formal buyer contracts, linking their harvest directly to a paying buyer.

- In the Growing Futures project in Kenya, a higher share of women than men reached financial services, with 69% of women in Village Savings and Loan Associations against 39% of men.

Women farming advisors extend reach

Women don't just take part in Farm Africa's projects, they deliver the model, and are among the most effective advisors to other farmers.

- Female Village-Based Advisors taking part in the Climate Resilience and Work and Opportunities for Women project in Kenya built on average 10 fuel-efficient cookstoves each against seven for male advisors, and engaged more farmers than their male counterparts.

- Women make up more than half of the Village-Based Advisors who took part in our Regenerative Agriculture project in Kenya, reaching 76% of the project participants in Makueni and 62% in Embu.

700kg

average crops produced by female-headed households taking part in the regenerative farming project in Kenya

430kg

average crops produced by male-headed households taking part in the regenerative farming project in Kenya

“Since I joined Farm Africa, I use all the regenerative agricultural practices and my yields are always high.”

Juliet

Farmer and Village-based Advisor, Kenya



Meet the women leading the way

Felista
Kirinyaga, Kenya



“The main reason I do farming is because of these three key things. One, I feed my family. Two, agriculture now is business. I do it as a business because I make money out of it. Three, I create employment.”

Felista is transforming sustainable farming into a thriving business that is creating a decent living for other farmers in her community without destroying the earth they rely on.

As a Village-based Advisor (VBA) trained through Farm Africa’s SAVES project, funded by AGRA, Felista helps local farmers grow more, earn more and farm more sustainably. She supports over 100 farmers directly and reaches more than 200 more with training sessions and practical farming advice delivered at demonstration plots.

Read more: www.farmafrica.org/felista

Teluvina
Dodoma, Tanzania



“The best training I have received from Farm Africa is learning how to use improved-quality seeds. Since using them, my yields are higher and my crops are less affected by pests.”

Teluvina is leading the way to a better livelihood, by turning farming into a thriving business. With support from the NOURISH project funded by Norad and led by SNV in partnership with Farm Africa, she has increased her income by growing and selling sorghum, vegetables and other crops, while also keeping livestock and running a soap-making business.

With the money she has earned, Teluvina has bought more land, invested in a power tiller and, after ten years of waiting, finally completed her family home.

Read more: www.farmafrica.org/teluvina

Judith
Kamuli, Uganda



“By empowering women, we help families, especially children to have a better life. Now their mothers will be able to take them to school and have food on the table.”

Judith is leading the way for a more climate-resilient future. With support from Farm Africa and AGRA, Judith has received training in savings and credit, as well as sustainable farming practices.

Facing unpredictable rainfall, she uses farming practices such as composting and mulching to protect her soil and strengthen her harvests.

As a community women’s leader, Judith shares her knowledge with other women and young people, helping them build stronger, more sustainable livelihoods. Together, they’re proving that farming can support families, empower women and protect the land we all depend on.

Read more: www.farmafrica.org/judith

Fabiola
Kakuma, Kenya



“I feel very happy when I empower the community, especially women who are very vulnerable. They have trusted my product and therefore, I look forward to selling the porridge flour more.”

Fabiola is leading the way for women by turning determination into opportunity. As the founder of Amazing Food Company, she has built a thriving porridge flour business that is tackling malnutrition while creating job opportunities for fellow refugees. Fabiola received guidance from Farm Africa’s Displaced and Refugee Youth Enabling Environment Mechanism project in partnership with the Mastercard Foundation and World University Service of Canada (WUSC).

Fabiola’s leadership is helping create a future where women can build successful businesses, support their families and strengthen their communities.

Read more: www.farmafrica.org/fabiola

When women have the resources and opportunities they need, they can grow more food, earn more reliable incomes and build stronger futures for their families and communities.

“I have the most goats of anyone in my village and this motivates others, I am seen as an example.”



Agnes, a farmer supported by Farm Africa in Karamoja, Uganda
Photo: Farm Africa/Bertha Lutome

Women lead the way

It's time to invest in female farmers. Not just because it's fair, but because it works.

Farm Africa research reveals that given the opportunity, female farmers adopt climate-smart farming practices earlier, stick with them longer and achieve higher yields than men.

But too many women are denied access to the loans, seeds, skills and voice they need to farm.

Women farmers have been overlooked for too long. It's time for change.

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