1. INTRODUCTION

Although Ethiopia is not on track to meet the Malabo Declaration commitments, the country has made notable progress in how it is addressing inequalities between men and women in the agricultural sector, with dedicated policy innovations and programmatic interventions that gradually level the playing field between them. In both the 2019 and the 2021 Biennial Reviews of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), Ethiopia, achieved perfect scores of 10 for Performance Category 4.4 measuring women’s participation in agribusiness. Within the overall commitment to eradicate poverty through agriculture, Performance Category 4.4 commits governments to promote initiatives that facilitate preferential entry and participation for women in gainful and attractive agri-business opportunities (AU 2022). The country is also performing better (31.4) than the African average (40.5) on the overall OECD’s 2023 Social Institutions & Gender Index which evaluates laws, social norms and practices that
restrict women’s and girls’ rights and access to empowerment opportunities and resources, with lower scores reflecting lower discrimination (OECD 2023).

Despite progress in formal systems to address inequalities, including in agrifood systems, discriminatory social norms combined with low implementation and monitoring capacity mute the impact of these institutional reforms and policies on women’s empowerment. While this case study provides an overview of the progress made in the country in strengthening the opportunities for women in agrifood systems, efforts must be redoubled for Ethiopia to meet national and international commitments that will ensure women have the same social and economic opportunities as men. Future efforts must include emerging challenges facing women’s participation in agrifood systems such as climate change and conflict. The recent conflict in Tigray disproportionately affected women who experienced exponentially higher rates of severe malnourishment arising from destroyed farmlands, loss of livestock, looting of farm equipment, and restricted or no access to humanitarian aid and critical farm inputs, such as seeds and fertilizer (UN World Food Programme 2022).

2. INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATIONS

Ethiopia’s government has taken a variety of steps to address women’s affairs and gender inequality, including ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the rights of women in Africa in 2003, and signing the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995. The Constitution adopted in 1995 also amplified the provisions given to women and assures women of equal rights with men in every sphere, laying the foundations for affirmative actions (FAO 2019). Most recently, women’s participation in politics gained significant momentum with the appointment of the first female president in 2018, the first female chief justice, and the first female head of the national electoral commission. The cabinet at the time was also composed of equal numbers of men and women (Drucza, Rodriguez and Birhanu 2020).

In parallel, Ethiopia has undergone extensive social and economic reforms over the last three decades. Two phases of decentralization have devolved administrative and political functions closer to communities. Economic restructuring has been rooted since 1991 in its Agriculture Development Led Industrialization (ADLI) strategy, an approach that focuses on rural development and transformation, particularly through agricultural growth, supported by an expansion of infrastructure. The sweeping changes to its agricultural sector have been the focus of several previous case studies produced by the Malabo Montpellier Panel, providing an overview of the efforts being deployed in addressing food security and nutrition, agricultural mechanization, irrigation, energy, and livestock sectors (Malabo Montpellier Panel 2017, 2018a, 2018b). Women have benefitted from affirmative action during these processes, including receiving training and improved access to credit to establish alternative employment opportunities.

This section provides an overview of the institutional innovations that facilitate increased participation of women in Ethiopia’s agrifood systems by creating opportunities to exercise their agency.

2.1. Ministry of Women and Social Affairs

The leading public institution overseeing women’s affairs in Ethiopia is the recently restructured Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MoWSA). Previously the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs (MoWCYA), in 2021 it was merged with the Social Affairs department of the previous Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. MoWSA’s mandate is to ensure equal participation of all citizens (including women, youth, children, older persons and people, with disabilities) in development, good governance, and democracy, and to secure the benefits and social protection for all from these processes.

MoWSA traces its history to the Women’s Affairs Office (WAO) created in the Prime Minister’s Office in 1991 to promote gender equality in areas of development. Among its early successes was the formulation of the National Policy on Ethiopian Women in 1993. WAO was mandated to execute and coordinate the policy’s implementation across government and sectors. To do so, WAO drove the establishment of a comprehensive
2.2. Gender mainstreaming across government

The Ethiopian government, in line with its national goals and objectives aligned to the global commitment, has established a firm commitment to integrate a gender equality perspective across all line ministries, agencies, private institutions, and communities, as well as policies, programs and projects.

Following the adoption of the NPEW in 1993, Ethiopia has established an extensive framework of women and gender-focused institutions across all levels of government to allow women to contribute to and benefit from development processes. For example, line ministries, including the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources (MoANRs), instituted Women’s Affairs Directorates, gender focal persons, or Women’s Affairs Desks to investigate and address gender gaps and to develop strategies to reduce inequalities between men and women in the activities of the line ministries and their subsectors. In some cases, the gender-focused units at the line ministries have been integrated with the management team of the ministry to more effectively influence operational and resource allocation decisions (EU-Ethiopia 2021).

In addition, Women’s Affairs Bureaus or Offices have been created as local coordination and implementation bodies at regional, zonal, district, and woreda levels1, with the heads of the Bureaus (and the minister of MoWSA) assigned a seat at the cabinet at their respective administrative levels (UNICEF 2012). Their responsibilities focus on improving local service provision to women, including agricultural extension services (Cohen and Lemma 2011).

Joint planning, monitoring, and evaluation at sub-national levels and with grassroots organizations is done via quarterly meetings of gender stakeholders convened by the Women’s Affairs Offices or Bureaus. Meanwhile horizontal coordination of gender-focused activities across ministries, other government agencies, the judiciary, and development partners is done through an annual Women’s Conference and a Gender Forum. These meetings create opportunities among the stakeholders for

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1 Woredas are comparable to districts, while kebeles are the lowest administrative units in Ethiopia. A woreda is composed of 20 or more kebeles. A kebele generally is composed of about 1,000 households.
2.3. Gender mainstreaming in the agriculture sector

Gender mainstreaming and women and youth empowerment in the agriculture sector are the focus of the Women’s Affairs Directorate at MoANRs. The directorate works with other departments in the ministry and with regional gender bureaus to ensure that women benefit equally from agricultural services and support. With funding from the Agriculture Transformation Agency (ATA), the MoANR’s Women Affairs Directorate took the initiative in 2015 to establish, lead and coordinate an Ethiopian Network for Gender Equality in Agriculture (ENGEA). ENGEA is a network composed of different stakeholders, including government, research institutions, and civil society with the objective to create synergies and promote information sharing and networking on gender in the agriculture sector. The aim is to increase the efficiency in the implementation and delivery of policies, strategies, programs, and projects (Cohen and Lemma 2011, Hailemariam 2020). The Women’s Affairs Directorate developed Gender Mainstreaming Manual (GMM) for gender mainstreaming in the policy, programmatic, and project-based interventions in the agricultural sector, as well as guidance on the collection of sex-disaggregated information and data at all levels (MoA 2011). In addition, the Gender Mainstreaming Manual provides guidelines to enhance equality and women’s empowerment within the ministry itself. The document also provides guidance on the collection of sex-disaggregated information and data at all levels (EU-Ethiopia 2021).

Specifically on agricultural extension, the government of Ethiopia seeks to ensure that women have equal access as men to such services. In these efforts, government decentralization initiatives have contributed to bringing such services closer to farming households across the country. Two waves of decentralization—in the early 1990s and the second about a decade later—resulted in an increased devolution of responsibilities to the regions and a network of institutions to bring service provision, including agricultural services, closer to all citizens. Agricultural information in Ethiopia is conveyed through the MoANRs, regional and woreda Bureaus of agriculture, down to the kebeles and finally frontline extension agents, also called Development Agents (DAs) (Cohen and Lemma 2011).

During the second round of decentralization in the mid-2000s, the federal government significantly expanded agricultural extension services so that they would be more responsive to the needs of farmers, in particular women farmers. Where kebeles often only had one Development Agent per farmer training center, this number was tripled in many with these reforms. The DAs would provide local farmers
with training in crops, livestock, and natural resource management, respectively (Cohen and Lemma 2011).

This expansion in agricultural extension service provision was boosted by the Rural Capacity Building Project, which provided training, field visits, technical and managerial support, and equipment, like furniture and transportation, at the woreda, regional, and federal levels. In addition, the project increased the number of female extension officers at all levels, provided training on gender mainstreaming through a mandatory gender and development curriculum at Agricultural Technical and Vocational Education and Training (A-TVET) Colleges, and employed equality specialists to support gender mainstreaming. A-TVET colleges also provided additional tutorial classes, counseling services, and income generation schemes to female students to ensure that they complete the courses. As a result, the proportion of A-TVET graduates that were female nearly doubled between 2007 and 2011 (N. Buehren, M. Goldstein, et al. 2019).

The increase in the number of extension agents in each kebele has enhanced knowledge within the agriculture sector of localized challenges, while also improving access to extension services for both male and female farmers. It also has provided increased opportunities for women to become Development Agents (Cohen and Lemma 2011). The Rural Capacity Building Project resulted in an increase in the adoption of high-value crops, the area of land cultivated, and the commercial activities of farming households, benefitting both male and female-headed households equally (N. Buehren, M. Goldstein, et al. 2019).

3. POLICY INNOVATIONS

Since the early 1990s, the Government of Ethiopia has formulated major policies and implemented development plans aimed at promoting gender equality. This section reviews those that are directly relevant to easing the obstacles that disempower women and to strengthening the participation of women in Ethiopia’s agrifood systems.

3.1. National Policy on Ethiopian Women

The 1993 National Policy on Ethiopian Women (NPEW) set the stage for a country-wide response to address the disproportionate disadvantages that rural and urban women face relative to men; it aimed to create and facilitate equality between men and women. It was the first policy in the country’s history that solely focused on women’s affairs and formed the basis upon which Ethiopia institutionalized the political and socioeconomic rights of women. The policy acknowledges the challenges that women from all walks of life face and proposes principles and steps to be taken to eliminate norms and biases that hinder women’s participation in Ethiopian society, particularly in economic domains, and to accelerate the achievement of greater equality between men and women. Specifically in the context of food systems, the policy emphasizes women’s rights to own property and to benefit from their own labor; it promotes women’s access to basic social services; and it calls for the eradication of customs that hinder women from taking on leadership roles.

In effect, the NPEW initiated the institutionalization of women’s political, economic, and social rights in Ethiopia (FAO 2019). All major government programs designed since then have been required to be gender sensitive or to have gender components (Teshome 2018). Although NPEW set gender-sensitive targets to advance equality, it fell short of assigning resources—both human and financial—to achieve the targets or even to measure progress made toward their achievement (Taye, Hussen and Mengistu 2021). Thus, in 2006 a National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2006-2010) and the complementary Ethiopian Women’s Development and Change Package were adopted to facilitate the implementation of the policy, focusing on enhancing rural women’s equal access to and control over productive resources and services; and improving the lives of women and girls (FAO 2019, MoWA 2006). The Ethiopian Women’s Development and Change Package also supported selected agricultural extension services from which women would benefit, including farm input use, uptake of labor-saving technologies, horticulture, nutrient-dense crop production, irrigation, soil management, agro-processing, and access to electricity and potable water to reduce the time women spend fetching...
water. At the same time, staff across ministries benefitted from training on gender-sensitive planning, programming, and service delivery to better serve women farmers (N. Buehren, M. Goldstein, et al. 2019).

A Women’s Development and Change Strategy was introduced in 2017. Its strategic objectives build on the NPEW and added provisions to address multiple and intersectional discrimination. The strategy aims to instigate attitudinal change; foster women’s participation and benefit in the political, economic and social spheres, including pastoralist and agropastoralist women; secure the rights and benefits who need special protection such as homeless women, women with disabilities, women facing violence, women living with HIV/AIDS, migrant and returnee women, women in prostitution and women (FDRE 2019).

Bearing in mind that the NPEW was produced in 1993 before the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, it reflected incredible foresight from the government. However, given the evolving nature of the global discourse on women and gender and the changing circumstances under which women continue to face prejudice—such as climate change, displacement and migration, human trafficking, conflict, and violence—the policy is due for a review and update. Even so, a recent evaluation of the policy concluded that it had “undoubtedly shifted the landscape for women in Ethiopia in a positive direction” (Includovate 2021); the policy successfully initiated long-term transformative changes in Ethiopia’s approach to women, including the establishment of the institutional infrastructure described earlier, and the development and implementation of a variety of gender-sensitive and equitable public policies.

3.2. Gender in national development plans

Agricultural development has been at the center of Ethiopia’s poverty reduction and development strategies for over 30 years. At the same time, the Ethiopian government has also made significant gender commitments in the sequence of national development plans it has designed and implemented.

The Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) (2005/06-2009/10) signaled a decisive move to create a conducive environment for women to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from economic, social, and political development processes. PASDEP contained eight strategic pillars, including one dedicated to women’s empowerment. The objective of this pillar was to address inequality in access to schooling and education, health, and rural telephony. In the context of food and agricultural systems, PASDEP included targets to improve water provision—liberating women from unproductive hours spent fetching water, to enhance agricultural productivity by intensifying the availability and uptake of agricultural extension services,
microcredit, and sustainable natural resource management techniques, and to promote small business creation. Though these targets were not measurable in a sex-disaggregated way, PASDEP was nevertheless considered a pioneering policy in that it was the only national plan at the time that had a specific budget line for women—641 million birr (about USD 74 million) was allocated for activities related to gender and development (Taye, Hussen and Mengistu 2021).

Following PASDEP, the Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) I (2010-11-2014/15) reiterated women's empowerment as a development priority, this time adding a measurable target to increase the number of female-headed households accessing agricultural extension services to 4 million, equivalent to 30 percent of beneficiary households. However, in doing so, GTP I did not specifically reach women in male-headed households (Taye, Hussen and Mengistu 2021).

GTP II (2015/16-2019/20) raised the bar by again addressing women’s empowerment as a development priority, adding consideration of inclusivity and equity (FDRE 2016). Gender considerations were integrated across all six major pillars of GTP II, while a seventh pillar was added that focused on women and youth empowerment. GTP II contained commitments to address a broad range of hurdles faced by Ethiopia's women—from education to political participation, employment to land and resource ownership, and gender-based violence. The plan targeted women in both female and male-headed households. Importantly, GTP II also included gender-sensitive targets and indicators for measuring outcomes, including in agriculture and for rural economic transformation. GTP II aimed to increase the share of women engaging in agriculture from 27 percent to 50 percent, to provide extension services to all women in female-headed households and to half of the women in male-headed households, and to ensure that women farmers made up a minimum of 30 percent of the beneficiaries of the provision of other agricultural services, such as the distribution of improved seed and fertilizer (Taye, Hussen and Mengistu 2021).

The latest ten-year national development plan, the Homegrown Economic Reform and Scope of the Ten-Year Plan: A Pathway to Prosperity (2021-30), contains within ten strategic pillars one pillar dedicated to gender and social inclusion. This pillar aims to develop the overall capacity of women to facilitate, and benefit from, participation in economic, social, and cultural affairs. Adopted by parliament in 2021, the latest plan sets out gender-focused targets on land ownership, entrepreneurship and income generating activities, the prevalence of anemia in women in reproductive age, education, political participation, and physical and moral safety and security (Planning and Development Commission 2021).

3.3. Gender Equality Strategy for the Agriculture Sector

Taking its direction from GTP II, the Women’s Affairs Directorate at of MoANRs produced a Gender Equality Strategy for the Agriculture Sector in 2017. The strategy provides a national framework to ensure gender equality as a means of transforming agriculture and increasing its role in Ethiopia's economic development (WAD 2017). Produced in consultation with a multi-institutional task force, the strategy identifies five systemic barriers to gender equality in the agricultural sector—inadequate accountability, inadequate capacity, inadequate collaboration, inadequate economic empowerment, and unequal power relations—and outlines targeted interventions, such as strengthening policies, institutional structures and systems, programs, procedures, and budgeting; generating gender-responsive data, information, and evidence; and recognizing outstanding gender-transformative achievements by individuals or work teams (Teshome 2018). Specifically, it includes a comprehensive range of proposed interventions to enhance capacity among ministerial staff and regional equivalents to improve service delivery and accountability, as well as targeted changes within the delivery of services to women farmers, pastoralists, and agropastoralists. The national consultation to create the agricultural gender strategy was the first of its kind for women in Ethiopia and resulted in the most comprehensive gender assessment of the agricultural sector at the time (Druca, Rodriguez and Birhanu 2020). The strategy was formulated following a systemic, participatory, and representative approach to designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating gender equality
interventions. It prioritizes capacity building within gender-focused agencies and institutions in Ethiopia's agricultural sector to ensure that policies, programs, and services are resourced with sufficient funds and staff with the requisite knowledge, skills, and commitment levels to promote gender equality in the sector and not exacerbate existing inequities (Teshome 2018).

While the strategy assigns budgeting responsibility for the strategy to the Ministry of Finance, responsibility for implementation and coordination of activities is assigned to the Women’s Affairs Directorate within MoANRs which, in turn, is to take strategic direction and guidance on the implementation of the strategy from a Gender Equality Steering Committee drawn from relevant ministerial and government agency representatives. In this context, the strategy acts as a framework for collaboration and coordination across ministries involved in agricultural policy and vertically to the implementing bodies from federal to woreda level including civil society and other relevant women and men’s organizations at each level.

Although the strategy was among the more advanced such documents globally, it falls short of presenting a costed timeline for delivery on its objectives. Nevertheless, it provides an overview of the priorities that MoANRs identified concerning the role of women in Ethiopia's agricultural sector.

### 4. PROGRAMMATIC INTERVENTIONS

The Government of Ethiopia has implemented numerous programs to strengthen female farmers so that they play an effective role in Ethiopia’s battle against hunger and malnutrition. The programs below have clear links and benefits for women’s empowerment in agrifood systems.

#### 4.1. Land Certification Program

One approach to improving the land rights of women is through joint land certification for both husbands and wives. Joint land certification can boost women’s awareness of their land rights, empower them to better confront deeply rooted gender stereotypes, norms, and perceptions, strengthen their bargaining power over land-use and household decisions, and improve access to finance and other inputs (Holden and Bezu 2014, Melesse, Dabissa and Bulte 2018). In 1998, the Government of Ethiopia embarked on a land registration program to certify the long-term user rights of rural households in Tigray, Amhara, Oromia, and the SNNP. The program aimed to increase tenure security by certifying long-term land use rights for rural households, with a particular focus on women the (USAID-Landlinks 2021). Over a period of 2-3 years, the program registered over twenty million plots and gained global accolades for its speed, participatory nature, low cost, and effectiveness in strengthening women's land rights (Deininger, Holden and Zevenbergen 2008).

During the subsequent phases of the program, the government worked with different partners to strengthen the program, including through computerized digital mapping of parcels (using GPS devices), cadastral registration, and the issuance of land certificates. These elements were done under the auspices of the Ethiopia Strengthening Land Tenure and Administration project from 2005 to 2008 and the Ethiopia Land Administration project, between 2008 and 2013. In 2013, a follow-on project that ran until 2021 scaled up these efforts significantly, the Land Investment for Transformation (LIFT) project (USAID-Landlinks 2022). The LIFT project added complementary services for those who had received land certificates to improve their access to credit and agricultural inputs and to participate in land rental markets (Alvarado, et al. 2022).

Notably, under LIFT, instead of a single certificate for a plot of land being issued to one household, certificates were issued to each landholder in the household, including female spouses. This reflected the evolving emphasis of the Land Certification Program on women’s land rights and empowerment. To increase women’s participation and benefits in the program, LIFT also designated Social Development Officers in each woreda to design a plan to address the persistent challenges related to women’s access to and ownership of land and to identify possible violations of women’s land rights. LIFT also organized public awareness activities to sensitize women, men, and kebele leaders and institutions on women’s rights and ways to better engage women in certification processes. These activities included holding women-only meetings and meetings at the sub-kebele level.
The project also developed guidelines for how to certify land in polygynous households (Mekonen, et al. 2019).

Impact evaluations of the projects supporting the Land Certification Program found a significant increase in women’s empowerment, particularly through second-level certification as promoted under LIFT. The program resulted in an 11-percentage point increase in the likelihood of a wife possessing land in her name, a one-third hectare increase in the amount of land wives held, and a 44-percentage point increase in the likelihood that a wife makes decisions about the type of crops grown on her land. Moreover, a 2019 evaluation of LIFT found that 77 percent of certificates issued through the support of the project listed women as landholders, either jointly with their husbands (55 percent) or individually (22 percent) (Mekonen, et al. 2019, Alvarado, et al. 2022).

4.2. Joint Program for Rural Women’s Economic Empowerment (JP RWEE)

Improved access and control by women over productive assets can create opportunities for more viable and sustainable livelihoods. Despite rapid economic and agricultural growth, Ethiopia’s women in rural areas continue to face discriminatory hurdles in their control over household finances and in their access to financial services. Without access to cheap and reliable financial resources, Ethiopia’s women farmers, pastoralists, or agropastoralists are unable to tap their productive potential. To address these financial constraints, the Government of Ethiopia in partnership with IFAD, WFP, FAO, and UN WOMEN initiated in 2014 the five-year, USD 3 million Joint Programme for Rural Women’s Economic Empowerment (JP RWEE). Aligned with the goals of GTP II, a variety of other national policies, and the Sustainable Development Goals, JP RWEE employed a multi-faceted approach to accelerate the economic empowerment of women farmers and agropastoralists in Afar and Oromia regions. The program focused on improving women’s access to productive assets, farm inputs and technology, credit services, and non-financial services to improve food security and nutrition, raise incomes, give women a stronger voice in decision-making, and create a more gender-responsive policy environment.

Working with MoWCYA, MoANRs, the Ministry of Finance, and the Federal Cooperatives Agency, the program combined capacity building with the provision of inputs and extension services. The program also established a revolving fund scheme to provide women with micro-credit to start or grow their businesses. It also organized
broader community conversations on women’s rights to advance social change. Crucially, women engaged in agribusinesses in the project areas benefitted from skills development to scale their operations, while finance and non-finance service providers benefitted from capacity building to grow their product base to better cater for women (FAO, IFAD, UN Women, and WFP 2016).

By 2018 the program had recorded positive outcomes in productivity, food security and dietary diversity, income, and participation in local administrative functions for over 2,000 women and over 14,000 members of their households. Women beneficiaries reported eating more often, including more diverse diets that included fruits and vegetables and animal-sourced products. With improved access to inputs and labor-saving technologies, women farmers and agropastoralists gained from a rise in productivity in crop production, livestock rearing, and dairy production, and were able to pursue more income-generating opportunities, including through access to new markets. In Oromia region, 86 percent of women had access to start-up capital at the end of the program compared to 38 percent at the start, and they were able to borrow between 4,000 to 15,000 Birr (USD 145 to 500) for their income-generating activities. Beneficiaries were also able to purchase additional assets. Overall, the average income among beneficiary women more than doubled (Hando, et al. 2018, FAO, IFAD, UN Women and WFP 2022).

4.3. Women’s Empowerment: Improving Resilience, Income and Food Security (WE-RISE) program

Improving access to and control over productive resources, assets, markets, and inputs is key to addressing food insecurity and malnutrition challenges among women. When coupled with gender-responsive service provision and opportunities to participate in political and administrative processes, women can thrive in agrifood systems. This was the theory of change for The Women’s Empowerment: Improving Resilience, Income and Food Security (WE-RISE) program, implemented by CARE Australia in Sidama Zone of the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples region (SNNPR) from 2011 to 2016. The program sought to enhance food security and empower women in vulnerable households in three woredas in a maize-growing zone. The program introduced Village Savings and Loan Associations; facilitated business opportunities by providing training, assets, and livestock; and provided capacity strengthening on farming and nutrition to nearly 11,000 households. An evaluation at the end of the program found that beneficiary households improved the diversity of their diets. Most women in these households had equal access to food and the households increased the number of food groups that they consumed by 32 percent on average (FAO and CARE 2019). Households also gained assets, including cell phones and both farm and non-farm equipment, and successfully diversified their income sources. Moreover, participation in the Village and Savings Loan Associations resulted in a doubling of savings over the project implementation period. With improved access to finance, women were also more likely to be engaged in a variety of income-generating activities and small businesses, like beekeeping and honey production, small ruminant rearing and fattening, and poultry production. As women’s businesses became successful, they gained greater decision-making powers within their households (Sutter, Sutter and Brown 2016).

5. CONCLUSION

Ethiopia is forging a progressive pathway to reform women’s affairs in the country. Over the last three decades, the government of Ethiopia has established a comprehensive network of gender-focused institutions and implemented wide-reaching policy innovations to drive forward positive change for Ethiopian women. The Government of Ethiopia has integrated gender across national development plans and ascribed gender-related objectives in sectoral targets, providing much-needed impetus for impactful programs to address the challenges that women face in Ethiopia’s agrifood systems. Its pioneering Gender Equality Strategy for the Agriculture Sector is commendable for the

2 This case study has relied extensively on third party analysis of developments in Ethiopia because websites for ministries and other Ethiopian government agencies were largely not accessible during the process of compiling (April-June 2023).
inclusive and participative nature in which it was formulated, as well as its foresight. The Land Certification Program similarly is notable for its transformative approach to securing women’s land rights.

However, challenges persist. Institutions remain under-resourced, both financially and in terms of qualified staff, thereby paralyzing their ability to deliver on their mandates. One potential avenue to address this would be to revive and implement the gender-responsive budgeting guidelines developed by the Ministry of Finance and Economic Cooperation in 2012 (Taye, Hussen and Mengistu 2021). This would facilitate an all-of-government approach to reducing gender inequality and release significant funds towards the goal of equality and women’s empowerment. Additional funding would also allow an extension of vertical institutional structures to provide support beyond woreda levels, to kebeles too. In addition, ENGEA would benefit from capacity strengthening to enable it to meet its potential and achieve its objectives (Hailemariam 2020). Complementing this with national awareness-raising—for example, through a “Year of the Ethiopian Girl and Woman”—could accelerate broader social change.

Secondly, while the policy frameworks around gender in Ethiopia have supported a robust enabling environment in the past decades, they no longer serve the emerging needs of women in Ethiopia’s evolving agrifood systems, nor do they reflect changes in discourse on gender. In this context, a new generation of policies on women in agrifood systems ought to transcend a purely productive view of women and address the economic opportunities that they might pursue beyond farming and agriculture.

Over recent decades, Ethiopia has set a bold stance on women’s affairs, leading the way within Africa in increasing women’s participation at high political levels. It now should raise the bar further with an updated agenda that brings men and boys into the dialogue too, ensuring that the next iteration of policies is wholly inclusive, tolerant, and sustainable.

6. REFERENCES


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