1. INTRODUCTION

According to the 2017/18 Ghana Agriculture Census Report, women smallholder farmers contribute close to 50 percent of the agricultural labor force in Ghana (GSS 2020). The report indicates that a slightly higher proportion of female farmers (69 percent) are engaged in crop farming than male farmers (66 percent), while men slightly dominate the more lucrative tree crop farming sub-sector with 32 percent of men involved, compared to 28 percent of women. As such, women play a key role in Ghana’s agrifood systems.

Ghana reported a perfect score of 10 in the 2021 Biennial Review Report on the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) for Performance Category 4.4 measuring women’s participation in agriculture, committing governments to promote initiatives that facilitate preferential entry, and participation for women in gainful and attractive agri-business opportunities (AU 2022). This achievement reflected continued strong performance in Ghana, as the country had achieved a score of 9 on this indicator in the earlier 2019 CAADP Biennial Review Report. With a score of 38.5 in 2023, the country is also performing better.
than the African average on the OECD’s 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 (OECD 2023).

Over the years, women in Ghana have emerged as important participants in the national economy through their creativity and entrepreneurship. The 2021 Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs ranked Ghana third globally in terms of women business owners (Mastercard 2022). According to the Ghana Statistical Service’s 2022 Labour Survey Report, 54 percent of the female employed population are engaged in the services sector, compared to 36 percent for their male counterparts (GSS 2022). Food markets in Ghana are largely managed by women traders organized into groups according to commodity (Scheiterle and Birner 2018). These women play a crucial role in both rural and urban food security.

However, women in Ghana still face obstacles to be on equal footing with men, including unequal access to opportunities and productive resources, such as land, technology, and finance. Women constitute less than 15 percent of the members of parliament (IPU Parline 2023). Furthermore, women still struggle to receive the same remuneration for the same work as men. According to the Ghana Statistical Services, the unadjusted gender pay gap is 37 percent—women earn a mean hourly pay of GHS 6.90 (USD 0.59), while men earn on average GHS 11.00 (USD 0.94) (GSS 2022).

Over the years, the Government of Ghana has initiated several policy reforms to create an enabling environment so that economic and social policies work better to enable girls and women to harness their potential and expand their economic and social opportunities. Ghana has put in place the necessary legislative frameworks and institutional architecture to promote gender equality, including the preparation of a gender policy, the establishment of a Ministry of Gender, Children, and Social Protection (MoGCSP), and gender desks in government ministries, departments, and agencies to mainstream gender issues in sectoral plans and programs. Ghana has also adopted several international gender conventions and treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action, the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, and the Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. Already in 1998, an administrative directive on affirmative action was issued, providing guidelines to achieve a target of 40 percent–female representation in political life and public service (ACET 2022).

2. INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATIONS

A variety of institutional frameworks have been put in place in Ghana that aim at ensuring women’s rights and equality. This section explores how the institutional arrangements in Ghana have evolved to better empower women across sectors through changes in policy and policy implementation as well as through increased political representation. Our focus is on institutions whose mandates are in line with women’s empowerment in food systems.

2.1. Shaping policy: Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection

On 5 July 2000, Ghanaian women took to the streets in protest against violence and political and economic marginalization (Participedia 2017). The protests created momentum and incentives for politicians to tackle issues affecting women in the presidential elections of 2000 (Amoah-Boampong 2018). The creation of a standalone Ministry of Women and Children’s Affairs (MOWAC) in 2001 marked an important achievement in the efforts of women's rights coalitions in Ghana against inequality and to improve women's representation in key decision-making spaces. Under the auspices of MOWAC gender desks were created across all government ministries, departments, and agencies and a Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit and a Legal Aid Scheme were established. MOWAC also collaborated with Ghana’s Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice to protect the rights of women.

The positioning of MOWAC in the cabinet and government’s policy responsiveness on socio-economic issues affecting women and girls was further reinforced by a favorable environment created by advocacy efforts of civil society that included the development of the Women’s Manifesto for Ghana in 2004 and women’s rallies conducted across the country (CWMG 2004). The Manifesto documented and provided evidence on challenges affecting women’s well-being and socio-economic development and recommended policy actions to address women’s specific disadvantages in all sectors of the economy. The Manifesto also highlighted the particular
challenges faced by women in the agriculture sector and how women’s time obligations restricted them from equal participation in food systems. In the same year, MOWAC launched the National Gender and Children Policy to mainstream matters affecting women and girls in national development processes to improve their social, legal, civic, economic, and cultural conditions (MOWAC 2004).

In 2013, MOWAC was merged with several departments of the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare—namely, the Department of Social Welfare, the National Council on Persons with Disability, and the Social Protection Division. As a result, the ministry was renamed the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection (MoGCSP) and its mandate extended to oversee and spearhead social protection programs alongside issues of gender and children (MoGCSP 2023). After the merger, MoGCSP led a multistakeholder consultation process to formulate a standalone National Gender Policy to maintain progress on matters related to women and girl child empowerment in Ghana (MoGCSP 2015).

The ministry is now structured around three departments—the Department of Gender (DoG), the Department of Children, and the Department of Social Welfare. DoG is responsible for the implementation of policies to drive the empowerment of women, the protection of their rights, and their access to economic and social resources. The Department of Children implements activities aimed at safeguarding the rights and welfare of children, including the implementation of Ghana’s Early Childhood Care and Development Policy and programs across various sectors. The Department of Social Welfare is responsible for managing the social protection programs of the Ministry through the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty Programme (LEAP).

At the strategic level, MoGCSP is supported by a Ministerial Advisory Board, composed of gender experts, and a Cancer Board, composed of experts on women’s health. The Boards were set up to provide MoGCSP direction on policy direction, planning objectives, and operational strategies to achieve gender equality. Further, the Boards are to promote constant interaction between the Ministry, other government entities, and other stakeholders in line with the needs and demands of women. They also support the Ministry in the mobilization of funds and advocacy efforts to support the government’s efforts to deliver on the women’s empowerment agenda (MoGCSP 2018). Between 2019 and 2022, MoGCSP’s budget almost doubled from just under GH¢ 600 million (USD 50 million) to GH¢ 1.14 billion (USD 97 million), signifying the importance given to its mandate (MoFEP 2022). It is worth noting that out of the total budget, administrative expenditures were fixed at 1.14 percent in 2022 (GH¢ 13 million or USD 1.2 million). The bulk of the budget was allocated to social sector development, followed by child rights protection, domestic violence reduction, and gender mainstreaming.

2.2. Execution: Department of Gender (DoG)

The main objective of DoG is to ensure that gender issues are mainstreamed across government policies and programs. Particularly, DoG is in charge of the implementation of the policies and programs to ensure that Ghanaian women enjoy equal economic, social, political, and cultural rights (MoGCSP 2017). The Department is also responsible for ensuring that Ghana respects the international commitments on women’s rights to which it is a signatory. DoG is the department of MoGCSP in charge of the full implementation of Ghana’s National Gender Policy. DoG has offices in all of Ghana’s administrative regions and receives financial support from the government and its development partners to support the implementation of its programs (MoFEP 2022).

Capitalizing on its decentralized structure, DoG organizes regular gender dialogues on women’s rights and empowerment in cooperation with central, regional, district, and local government entities and different stakeholders, including chiefs and other traditional leaders, civil society organizations, women’s and men’s groups, and the media. In 2020, DoG held 30 gender dialogues and five He-For-She Campaigns, which proactively engage men to deepen their understanding of gender equality. DoG also implemented seven programs aimed at preventing adolescent pregnancy and a mentorship program for girls to build their self-esteem and strengthen their leadership skills (MoFEP 2021). In 2020 and 2021, over 5,000 girls were mentored, and 20 girls’ leadership clubs were established. The target is to reach 9,200 girls by 2025.

To ensure that women’s needs are considered in planning and budgeting, DoG conducts training for gender desk officers. These officers function as focal points on women’s issues in government
ministries, departments, and agencies and coordinate the implementation of women-focused activities within each (Akalbila, et al. 2020).

DoG also is responsible for an initiative to improve the health of female head-porters, known as kayayeis, and to eradicate the practice through alternative livelihood programs. Kayayeis are mainly involved in carrying food and other items within major urban markets. There are about 100,000 in Ghana with over 70 percent concentrated in Accra (Zeto 2023). In 2020, the Kayayeis Assistance Project, funded by UNFPA Ghana, provided the first cohort of 500 kayayeis from Tema Station in Accra with food items, dignity kits, sexual and reproductive health education, and vocational training in shea butter-making, beading, yogurt-making, baking, and soap making. All the beneficiaries also were enrolled in the National Health Insurance Scheme (UNFPA Ghana 2020).

2.3. Agrifood systems: Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA)

The Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) leads the implementation of government policies to promote sustainable agriculture by creating a thriving agribusiness sector through research and technology development and supporting improved livelihoods for farmers, processors, and traders through the provision of effective extension and other support services (MoFA 2021a). While public investments made by MoFA are geared to reach all members of the general farming community and agro-industries, women, in particular, derive benefits from different initiatives to improve the provision of extension services and inputs and their access to improved markets and to irrigable land.

The delivery of the agriculture agenda of MoFA is structured around three flagship programs (MoFA 2021b):

- Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ) aims at improving crop productivity through extension and input supply and investments in infrastructure, such as irrigation, post-harvest storage and processing facilities, and rural roads.
- Planting for Export and Rural Development aims at developing and regulating the tree crop sub-sector. The program focuses on supplying quality planting materials, primarily for cashew, coffee, coconut, oil palm, mango, and rubber.
- Rearing for Food and Jobs aims at developing the livestock industry by disseminating quality breeding stock, strengthening the animal feed sub-sector, and investing in animal disease control.
In addition to these programs, MoFA, in partnership with the National Insurance Commission and local private insurance providers, since 2011 has been implementing the Ghana Agricultural Insurance Pool, a large-scale agricultural insurance scheme targeting smallholder farmers (MoFEP 2022).

With a steadily increasing budget—from USD 76 million in 2018 to USD 96 million in 2022 (MoFA 2021a)–MoFA operates through seven technical directorates mandated to build sustainable food systems:

- Directorate of Crop Services,
- Directorate of Agricultural Extension Services,
- Agricultural Engineering Services Directorate,
- Plant Protection and Regulatory Services Directorate,
- Veterinary Services Directorate,
- Animal Production Directorate, and
- Women in Agricultural Development Directorate.

Ghana’s past and current national agricultural plans consider the importance of integrating women into promoting agricultural growth. Gender mainstreaming has been part of MoFA’s activities since the 1970s. At that time, work on gender was carried out by the then Women in Food and Agriculture Directorate—this has since been renamed the Women in Agricultural Development Directorate (WIAD). WIAD aims to enhance the livelihoods of women in agriculture value chains by ensuring that policies promoting the delivery of improved technologies and information on sustainable agricultural production and postharvest activities are not only gender-inclusive but also actively benefit women.

WIAD is responsible for implementing the Gender and Agriculture Development Strategy (GADS II) (MoFA 2015) and contributes to nutrition education, value addition, food safety, and gender mainstreaming across policies, programs, and projects. The Directorate ensures that appropriate extension technologies and information reach women farmers, processors, and other value chain actors by coordinating operations with regional and district WIAD officers. WIAD also collaborates with the research and extension services to identify challenges specific to women, such as those related to their integration into food value chains. To overcome these challenges, WIAD offers training on food processing and preservation, as well as on the safe production and handling of vegetables (Malabo Montpellier Panel 2021).

Through WIAD, MoFA ensures that women benefit from the large-scale investments undertaken by the Government in the agricultural sector. As an example, the Medium Term Agricultural Sector Investment Plan (METASIP II) of 2014-2017 saw over USD 11 million invested in the provision of subsidies to women in agriculture for technology adoption. This included subsidies on the purchase of tractors and combines by women and assistance in developing the skills for their profitable operation (Malabo Montpellier Panel 2021).

2.4. Girls’ Education Unit in the Ghana Education Services

The Government of Ghana through the Ministry of Education has initiated various reforms to enable more girls to enroll in school and to improve their completion rate, including the elimination of school fees for basic and secondary education and grants to cover some additional costs linked to schooling. In addition, to ensure that girls thrive in a safe and violent-free school environment, the government’s Safe Schools Initiative aims at preventing gender-based violence in schools, including corporal punishment (DevTech Systems, Inc. 2004). Those efforts contributed to narrowing the gender gap in schools—since the early 2000s, girls have consistently enrolled in primary and secondary schools at higher rates than boys, closing the gender gap in school enrollment (MoE 2021).

In 1997, the Girls’ Education Unit (GEU) was created as a specialized unit of the Ghana Education Services to promote girl child education advancement. The objectives of GEU are to increase the enrolment and retention of girls, particularly in science, technology, and mathematics (Girls’ Education Unit 2001). GEU works with various stakeholders, including the private sector, to improve the quality of teaching and learning for girls focusing on:
Increasing national enrolment of girls in primary schools to equal that of boys and developing and implementing strategies to ensure girls continue into junior secondary;

Reducing the dropout rate for girls in primary and secondary schools; and

Increasing the participation of girls in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects by improving the quality of teaching and enhancing perceptions on the value of these subjects.

Under GEU, a Girls’ Education Officer is deployed in each district. The GEU has also initiated a plan to empower these officers to ensure a safe learning environment for girls. From 2012 to 2016, the unit trained almost 900 district gender officers in guidance and counseling, while almost 95,000 in-service teachers were also trained.

2.5. Prioritizing women’s health: Ministry of Health and Ghana Health Service

The Ministry of Health (MoH) has been instrumental in targeting investments and programs that contributed to the improvement of maternal and child health and nutrition. As a result, the number of pregnant women who made at least four antenatal care visits during pregnancy increased from 65 in 2019 to 68 percent in 2020 (MoH 2021).

Championed by the First Lady of the Republic of Ghana, the Ghana Health Service has led efforts to reduce maternal mortality to 70 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, as per Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 3.1 (WHO Africa 2018, Ameyaw, Dickson and Adde 2021). In 2017, the Ghana Maternal Health Survey estimated the maternal mortality rate at 310 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births (GSS, GHS, and ICF 2018). To reduce maternal deaths, the Ghana Health Service has invested in building capacity and infrastructure, has increased the number of health providers, and has provided free maternal care under the National Health Insurance Scheme. From 2014 to 2019, the number of midwives nationally more than tripled to 10,000 (MoGCSP 2019).

Despite commendable political will on promoting women’s health, progress to minimizing micronutrient deficiencies and maternal mortality rates has been slow. The Ghana Micronutrient Survey of 2017 revealed anemia as a severe public health problem with nearly half of all women, including pregnant women, suffering from anemia and iodine deficiency (UNICEF 2017, Food Fortification Initiative 2023, GHS, GAIN, and UNICEF 2017). To address micronutrient deficiencies, the government has put in place fortification standards for iodine in salt; iron, zinc, B-vitamins, and vitamin A in wheat flour; and vitamin A in vegetable oil (UNICEF 2017). The Iodine Survey Report of 2017 showed improvements in the iodine-sufficiency status of the population from 48 percent in 2010 to 62 percent in 2015 (GHS, GAIN, and UNICEF 2017).

3. POLICY INNOVATIONS

Ghana has initiated several policy and legislative reforms in line with the provisions of the Constitution to promote women’s equal access to economic opportunities through education, healthcare, and decent employment, among others. Such initiatives include the National Gender Policy, the Gender and Agriculture Development Strategy, the National Social Protection Policy, and the Health Sector Gender Policy. Ghana’s Constitution requires the state to demonstrate a high level of commitment to protect and enforce women’s rights (Skinner 2020). It serves as a reference document for women’s rights advocates pursuing legislative reforms aimed at ensuring equal access to opportunities and enhancing women’s participation in the national economy. The Constitution makes provisions for special legislation or policies to address discriminatory sociocultural, economic, or educational imbalances. The rights to property, equal education and free basic education, and maternity leaves are also guaranteed by the Constitution.


The National Gender Policy was adopted in 2015 (MoGCSP 2015). It followed the adoption of the 2014 National Child and Family Welfare Policy which focuses mainly on children’s well-being and health (MOWAC 2004). MoGCSP’s Department of Gender is responsible for guiding the implementation of the policy. This is being done through:
The Gender Policy, though broad in its mandate, outlines specific policy actions aimed at addressing women’s rights concerns through mainstreaming gender in the country’s national development plans and gender-responsive budgeting in public investment planning. The policy outlines five high-level commitments which seek to improve the condition of Ghanaian women. Two specifically are crucial for women’s empowerment in the agrifood systems:

Policy Commitment 1—Women’s empowerment and livelihoods seeks to design measures and investments aimed at creating a healthy environment and to fully tapping the potential of women in all sectors of the economy. Those include, among others, dedicating a budget and resources to increasing girls’ school enrolment, retention, and completion rates through various incentives, including free basic education and a school-friendly environment. To promote women’s health, the policy prioritizes investments to improve access to reproductive health and to reduce anemia prevalence and maternal mortality.

Policy Commitment 4—Improving access to economic opportunities for women aims at creating a conducive policy and legal environment for women’s participation in economic activities. This commitment includes measures to enable more women to move from informal to formal sectors.
of the economy. Some of the actions include providing trade and taxation literacy training to women's businesses in the informal sector and ensuring their compliance with prevailing commercial rules and regulations.

Since 2019, MoGCSP has been involved in the development of the Affirmative Action Bill and its Communication Strategy Plan, both of which are still pending approval (MoFEP 2022).

### 3.2. Gender and Agriculture Development Strategy II (GADS II)

GADS was first adopted in 2001 and was then revised in 2015 to address barriers to women's empowerment in food systems, such as access to land, education, technologies, and finance. The strategy provides a framework to mainstream women's roles and needs in agricultural value chains (MoFA 2015). The strategy is implemented by MoFA's WIAD Directorate in collaboration with DoG in the MoGCSP. Most crucially, the strategy aims at including more women in extension services and ensuring that research and extension service delivery is tailored to women's needs. In addition, the strategy seeks to improve women's access to time-saving and productivity-enhancing technologies. This includes through targeted mechanisms in special government programs for the provision of subsidized agricultural inputs, whereby 40 percent of beneficiaries will be women.

### 3.3. National Social Protection Policy

The National Social Protection Strategy was adopted in 2015 after multiple stakeholder consultations. The strategy outlines policy actions targeting support to those living in situations of extreme poverty to enable their graduation into productive members of society. More importantly, the policy serves as a guiding document on the country's approach to the coordination of various social protection policies and programs implemented by several ministries (MoGCSP 2015). Currently, the policy is implemented under five flagship programs—Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty, Labour-Intensive Public Works, School Feeding Programme, National Health Insurance Exemptions, and Basic Education Capitation Grants. Some of the policy actions include the provision of free maternity care services, while the Labour-Intensive Public Works program offers seasonal employment, including in the agriculture sector, to over 50,000 women, representing almost 60 percent of all beneficiaries (MoGCSP 2019, MoFEP 2022). The Ghana School Feeding Programme provides one meal each day for about 3.5 million beneficiary pupils in public basic schools. The program is designed to strengthen domestic production by sourcing locally produced food from smallholder producers, including women (MoFEP 2022).

### 3.4. Health Sector Gender Policy

Under the auspices of the Ministry of Health, the Health Sector Gender Policy was developed in 2009 to complement the Health Policy. Its focus is to address all socio-cultural barriers that delay or prevent women from accessing quality healthcare services (MoH 2009). Considering that women's time poverty limits their access to healthcare facilities, the policy outlines measures aimed at ensuring improved access for women to healthcare and behavioral change communication initiatives in underserved areas, particularly rural areas. The policy also highlights several interventions to address the factors leading to maternal mortality, the prevalence of non-communicable diseases, and sexually transmissible diseases, such as HIV and AIDS (Ghana AIDS Commission 2020).

Some of the achievements under the Health Policy, although intended to benefit the general population, have improved women's health in particular. These include improving the nurses to population ratio from 1:727 in 2019 to 1:700 in 2021 and the share of the population covered by the National Health Insurance Scheme from 40 percent in 2019 to 53 percent in 2021 (MoH 2021). In addition, access to care in pregnancy has reached almost universal levels, with more than 90 percent of women currently making at least one contact during pregnancy and 87 percent making a minimum of four contacts (MoGCSP 2019). In addition, 79 percent of infants are now delivered in public health facilities.

### 4. PROGRAMMATIC INTERVENTIONS

Several policy, legislative, and institutional reforms implemented by the government have resulted in programmatic interventions and investments in support of strengthening the rights and position of women, particularly in rural communities.
4.1. Women in Production: Planting for Food and Jobs Program (PFJ)

The Planting for Food and Jobs (PFJ) program is one of five modules of a national flagship agricultural campaign of the same name (Malabo Montpellier Panel 2021). The PFJ module was launched by the President in 2017. It aims to address low agricultural productivity, low use of agricultural inputs, and weak market linkages. The program is founded on five pillars—provision of subsidized and improved seeds, fertilizer subsidies, agricultural extension services, establishment of markets, and expanded use of e-agriculture. PFJ aspires to modernize the sector, improve food security, create employment opportunities across food value chains, and reduce poverty. Since its inception, the number of PFJ beneficiaries increased from 202,000 in 2017 to 1.7 million in 2020, coupled with an increase in fertilizer usage from 8 kg/ha in 2017 to 20 kg/ha in 2020. There also has been a notable improvement in the usage of certified seeds from 4,400 mt in 2017 to 29,500 mt in 2020. The number of agricultural extension officers also increased from under 1,600 in 2016 to over 4,200 in 2020 (MoFA 2021b).

Currently, PFJ focuses on four key commodity clusters or value chains: cereals (maize, rice, and sorghum), legumes (soya bean, cowpea, and groundnut), vegetables (tomato, onion, pepper, cabbage, cucumber, lettuce, and carrot) and roots and tubers (cassava and orange-fleshed sweet potato). These crops were selected because they are adaptable to almost all agro-ecological zones of the country and also have a high propensity for income generation and export earnings (MoFA 2021a).

One of the flagship projects implemented by MoFA in line with PFJ is the Savannah Zone Agricultural Productivity Improvement Project. Through a package of technology extension and infrastructure development, the project aims at increasing rural incomes and crop productivity for 50,000 smallholder farmers, half of whom are women (AfDB 2023). The targets of the project include raising the incomes of rural households by USD 3,000; producing an additional 150,000 mt of maize and 35,000 mt of rice; and enabling more than half of all children aged 6 to 23 months to regularly consume more than four food groups. As of 2021, the project had increased incomes by an additional USD 500, increased maize production by 85,000 mt and rice production by over 28,000 mt, and one-third of children were consuming more than four food groups. In addition, the project developed a total of 1,500 ha of rice fields to enable 2,000 farmers to increase rice production.

Another flagship project implemented by PFJ is the Driving Seat Program, initiated in 2018. The
program was implemented in anticipation of the Government’s plans to import and distribute various farm machinery and tractors in rural areas as part of the agricultural modernization efforts of PFJ (MoFA 2021b). To ensure that women were prepared to benefit from the business opportunities arising from the program, the Agriculture Engineering Services Directorate and WIAD Directorate jointly initiated the program. It seeks to empower women through practical training and certification to be able to use and maintain farm machinery and engage in mechanization and machinery businesses (UNESCO 2018). The training modules include equipment operation, maintenance, business opportunities, and bookkeeping. The program is available to women aged between 18 and 40 years with basic literacy and numeracy skills. Practical training takes place in government-owned Agricultural Mechanization Training Centers. In 2018 and 2019, 180 women participated in the training and received certifications. Sixty percent of the women who received training found employment in commercial farms, training institutions, or agricultural mechanization service enterprise centers (Cele, et al. 2020).

4.2. Social protection: Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP)

The Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) Programme is a cash transfer program established in 2008 as part of the implementation of the National Social Protection Policy to increase consumption, improve nutrition, and enable improved access to social services (LEAP Programme 2016, MoFEP 2022). The program falls under the auspices of the MoGCSP and is administered by the LEAP Management Secretariat. LEAP targets those 65 years of age and above who have no support, orphans and vulnerable children, persons with severe disabilities who cannot work, and pregnant women or mothers with children under the age of one. In addition, through the program, 73 percent of all LEAP beneficiaries have been registered with the National Health Insurance Scheme (MoFEP 2021).

Between 2014 and 2019, LEAP provided cash grants to just under 1.8 million beneficiaries, of whom 56 percent were women (MoGCSP 2019). To achieve its commitment on shared prosperity, as per the Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies (2017-2024), the Government of Ghana has pledged to expand by 2024 the coverage of LEAP cash transfers to all 2.5 million people considered to live in extreme poverty in Ghana (MoFEP 2022).

The early impact evaluations of LEAP showed improved access to health care and education (Davis, et al. 2014). In particular, LEAP cash grants enabled school enrolment rates among secondary school children by 7 percentage points and reduced grade repetition by children of primary and secondary school age. Among primary school children, LEAP reduced absenteeism by
10 percentage points. The evaluations also noted an increase in school attendance for girls. More interestingly, the evaluations showed that every Ghanaian Cedi (GH¢) transferred through LEAP has the potential to raise local income by GH¢ 2.50 (Davis, et al. 2014). LEAP beneficiaries were found to be nearly 11 percent more likely to save money than non-beneficiaries.

Owing to the encouraging achievements of LEAP, the Government designed an expanded program, LEAP 1000, focused on women and children under the age of 12 months. LEAP 1000 started in 2015 as a pilot with over 6,000 households in 10 districts in the Northern and Upper East regions. It was later mainstreamed into the larger LEAP program (MoGCSP 2018). The LEAP 1000 impact evaluation report found that beneficiary households witnessed an improvement in food consumption, food security, and well-being as households were better able to diversify and maintain levels of consumption of nutritious foods, such as cereals, dairy products, eggs, vegetables, and oils and fats, in comparison to households that were not part of the program. The LEAP 1000 evaluation also showed that the program had a positive impact on the livelihood of beneficiaries and increases in savings, in the use of health services for adults, and in social support. LEAP 1000 households were 5.6 percentage points more likely to report owning livestock than comparison households, and there was a positive impact on spending by households on agricultural inputs of around GH¢ 35 (USD 3.00). As far as child health is concerned, LEAP 1000 increased the likelihood that children aged 3 to 5 years were enrolled in preschool by 7.2 percentage points (MoGCSP 2018).

4.3. Access to finance: Microfinance and Loans Centre (MASLOC)

The Microfinance and Small Loans Centre (MASLOC) was established by the Government of Ghana in 2006 to provide credit to small businesses to facilitate poverty reduction, job creation, and increased wealth for small businesses (MASLOC 2023). MASLOC provides micro-credit or group loans, small or individual loans, and wholesale lending to its beneficiaries for a short period not exceeding one year. The loans must be repaid within that period at a subsidized 12 percent interest rate (Kyerewaa and Saben-Fosu 2022, MicroCapital 2019). Between 2017 and 2020, approximately USD 25 million was disbursed by MASLOC in the form of credits to small businesses. The Government is particularly committed to improving access to finance for women-led businesses by ensuring that 50 percent of loans under MASLOC are allocated to female applicants (Modern Ghana 2017). Between 2014 and 2019, MASLOC had over 24,500 beneficiaries, 87 percent of whom were women (MoGCSP 2019). Since its inception, MASLOC disbursed has USD 629,000 to agribusiness projects (MASLOC 2023). MASLOC also conducts training in basic skills, such as accounting and bookkeeping, to support credit recipients in their entrepreneurship journey.

5. CONCLUSION

As this Ghana case study shows, the Government has demonstrated considerable political will to ensure women have equal access to opportunities to lift themselves out of poverty. These opportunities include access to microcredit, social protection schemes, training on the use and maintenance of farming machinery, and significantly increasing MoGCSP’s budget. The Women in Agricultural Development (WIAD) Directorate within MoFA ensures that gender is mainstreamed across policies and programs targeting the agriculture sector and food systems.

Moreover, the government’s Coordinated Programme of Economic and Social Development Policies (2017-2024), currently under implementation, represents a high-level guiding document on future national planning and programming (RoG 2017). Through the program, the government targets its investments in priority sectors to drive growth, including transforming the agricultural and industrial sectors of the economy and strengthening social protection and inclusion. This program is an opportunity for ensuring that women equally benefit from such interventions.

Significant efforts have also been made by the government to ensure sustainable and equitable food systems transformation. It should be noted that the Gender and Agriculture Strategy (GADS II) is jointly implemented by MoFA and MoGCSP. Following the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021, Ghana committed itself to increase the national Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index score by 20 percent —currently it is 0.71. Doing so will involve making gender equity a critical consideration in food system operations, as constraints or barriers to opportunities may be
gender-specific, gender-intensified, and gender-imposed. It also will require further facilitating the engagement of youth and the empowerment of women in agribusiness (GCFSD 2022).

However, despite commendable efforts in policy, legislative, and institutional reforms, several bottlenecks still hinder the translation of the political will into tangible actions that sustainably improve the socio-economic standing of Ghanaian women. This includes an increased focus on socio-cultural rules and responsibilities, which remain at the heart of women’s inequality in Ghanaian society.

Women still struggle to get their voices heard and are less represented than men in food systems decision-making organs and leadership. Women dominate agricultural produce marketing and processing. Therefore, large-scale public programs and projects should focus on those stages of food and agricultural value in which women already are actively involved, while creating opportunities in the other segments of these value chains in which they are underrepresented. Similarly, access to land, technology, skill development, and finance is considerably more constrained for women than it is for men. Closer coordination and ensuring accountability on gender mainstreaming among government institutions is urgently needed. This includes placing greater responsibilities on the gender desks placed across ministries and government agencies to address these challenges. Lastly, a rigorous gender-disaggregated data and analytical system will likely allow the government to better track progress on initiatives aimed at empowering women across all sectors of the economy.

6. REFERENCES


CASE STUDY

Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)

GHANA

www.mamopanel.org


