BRIDGING THE GAP:
Policy Innovations to Put Women at the Center of Food Systems Transformation in Africa

1. INTRODUCTION

In both the 2019 and the 2021 Biennial Reviews of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), for performance category 4.4 on 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, Rwanda achieved perfect scores of 10 (AU 2022). The country is also performing better than the African and global average on the 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 (OECD 2023).

As far as food systems are concerned, women represent 57 percent of the agricultural workforce in Rwanda (NISR 2021). Rwanda’s report on national dialogues held in the leadup to the UN Food Systems Summit in 2021 states that
the country seeks “diverse and inclusive food systems that contribute to the national economy while ensuring food and nutrition security in a sustainable and resilient manner” with a specific aim of increasing the proportion of women engaged in the production aspects of food value chains—production, agro-processing, marketing, and export (MINAGRI 2021).

Over the years, the Government of Rwanda has designed and implemented targeted policies and legal and institutional reforms to empower women to better contribute to the country’s economic transformation. Women’s empowerment is promoted at the highest level of government and is mainstreamed in major national development agendas. Affirmative actions taken by the Government increased women’s representation in decision-making. Women currently make up 61 percent of the members of parliament and 45 percent of cabinet members (MIGEPROF 2023b).

Moreover, investments in promoting the education of girls are contributing to bridging the gender gap in schools. Currently, 97 percent of girls of primary school age are enrolled in primary schools. Girls and women make up 44 percent of the students enrolled in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and 43 percent of those enrolled in tertiary education (MIGEPROF 2023b). Female ownership of businesses increased from 27 percent of all businesses in 2017 to 34 percent in 2022 (Ashimwwe 2023). To promote women-led businesses participation in the public procurement of the RWF 1.0 trillion (about USD 900 million) worth of goods and services sourced through public tenders every year, the Rwanda Public Procurement Authority conducts specific training for women entrepreneurs on bidding processes to ensure that women constitute 40 percent of the bidders invited to submit tenders for any government procurement (RPPA 2021).

Rwanda has been one of the fast movers on the continent in adopting, domesticating, and implementing regional and international treaties, conventions, and agreements that promote gender equality (RoR 2020). These include, among others, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), the Sustainable Development Goals (2015), the Kampala Declaration on Sexual and Gender Based Violence (2011), the Maputo Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the rights of women in Africa (2003), and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (2004).

Despite the political will and affirmative policies to improve the socio-economic condition of women in Rwanda, women still struggle to tap fully into the opportunities offered by a favorable and enabling environment. These constraints are due in part to societal norms limiting women’s time to engage in economic activities. The Labor Force Survey of 2018 showed that women in Rwanda do more unpaid care work than their male counterparts—women spend on average 25.3 hours per week on unpaid care work, while men spend 13.5 hours (UN MPTF 2021). Compared to men, women also face persistent capacity gaps with more restricted opportunities for training and more constraints on their taking on full-time employment.

This case study provides a systematic narrative review of the major institutional and policy innovations and programmatic interventions that have been taken to address many of these social and economic constraints on Rwandan women, resulting in the increased participation of women in Rwanda’s food systems.

2. INSTITUTIONAL INNOVATIONS

The Government of Rwanda has established several institutions to promote women and girl-child empowerment through policy, program implementation, and monitoring. These include the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, the Gender Monitoring Office, and the National Women’s Council. In part because of the favorable environment that emerged through the efforts of these government institutions, advocacy groups have formed to ensure women’s voices are heard in policy-making. These civil society organizations include, among others, the Rwandan Forum for Women Parliamentarians and the Local Government Women’s Network (Mbonyinshuti 2018).
In 2003, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Finance (MINECOFIN) issued guidelines on gender-responsive budgeting. These have since been reinforced through the Organic Law on State Finances and Property (RoR 2013). The law requires government institutions to issue disaggregated gender expenditures through Gender Budget Statements (MIGEPROF 2020). According to the Budget Implementation Report issued by MINECOFIN, in 2021/22 an equivalent of RWF 65.4 billion (USD 58.3 million) was spent to provide key services to women by key ministries, including those for Agriculture and Animal Resources, Health, Education, Local Government, and Infrastructure (MINECOFIN 2022). Such public investments supplied clean drinking water to over 630,000 people, of whom 52 percent were females, and provided access to family planning services for almost 16,000 women.

2.1. Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF)

The institutionalization of the women’s empowerment agenda in Rwanda began in the early 1990s. At that time, work on gender was conducted by the then Ministry in Charge of Family and Women Promotion (MIFAPROFE). With the government pushing to actively involve women and address women’s needs in national reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of the Genocide Against The Tutsi in 1994, the institutional setup of the Ministry evolved. In 1997, the Ministry’s mission was expanded to cover social affairs and was renamed the Ministry of Gender, Family, and Social Affairs (MIGEFASO). In 1999, the name changed to the Ministry of Gender and Women Promotion (MIGEPROF). In 2005, it became the Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion, but kept its MIGEPROF acronym. To ensure gender mainstreaming across Government policies and programs, until 2013 MIGEPROF was under the Office of the Prime Minister (MIGEPROF 2023a). However, since then the Ministry has enjoyed full financial and administrative autonomy.

Currently, the mission and responsibilities of MIGEPROF are delineated through the Prime Minister’s Order and focus on the implementation and coordination of national policies and reporting on international commitments on women’s rights to which Rwanda is a party (RoR 2020). The responsibilities of the Ministry include among others:

- Developing and implementing policies, strategies, and programs regarding gender, family promotion, protection of children’s rights, and child development.
- Drafting laws related to gender and family promotion.

The Ministry has two Directorate Generals—the Directorate General of Gender Promotion and Women Empowerment and that of Family Promotion and Child Right Protection.

The Directorate General of Gender Promotion and Women Empowerment guides the development of policies aimed at promoting women’s rights and empowerment. The Directorate has advocated for major policy and legislative reforms to uplift the socio-economic conditions of women and girls, such as the revised Land Policy of 2019 (RoR 2021). The Directorate also coordinates women’s empowerment through multistakeholder platforms. The most prominent of these is the National Gender and Family Cluster, which has several sub-clusters, including those for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment; Family Promotion and Gender-based Violence Prevention; Child Protection; and Early Childhood Development (MIGEPROF 2018a).

The Gender Equality and Women Empowerment sub-cluster is a multistakeholder platform led by MIGEPROF that includes various government institutions, development partners, civil society organizations, faith-based organizations, representatives of the private sector, and the media. The sub-cluster serves as a forum for information sharing and policy dialogue to foster synergies among partners (MIGEPROF 2018b).

In addition, the Ministry, in collaboration with the Rwanda National Police, oversees the Isange One-Stop Centers that are aimed at preventing gender-based violence (Cousins 2018). Isange—which means “You are among yours”—centers are found across the country and provide a 24-hour service to victims of gender-based violence (MIGEPROF 2023c). The centers are to ensure
the safety of women and girls in rural areas who often walk alone for long distances to fetch water and firewood or to access nearby markets.

2.2. National Women’s Council

Established in 2011, the National Women’s Council (NWC) is one of the few institutions in Rwanda provided for in the country’s Constitution (RoR 2015, 130). The objective of NWC is to ensure women’s equal access to opportunities and active participation in decision-making. The Council operates under the supervision of MIGEPROF (National Women’s Council 2023, RoR 2011).

To ensure that government policy reflects the complex needs of women, the NWC, in collaboration with the National Electoral Commission, oversees the election of Women’s Committees at all government levels from the village to the national. These Women’s Committees provide a mechanism for women to directly feed their priorities into political processes at the various political and administrative levels (Haguruka 2022). A committee of seven women representatives is elected at each level. By including women from rural areas directly, their needs with respect to food systems and agriculture are better heard and can be better addressed in national-level policy and decision-making. To enhance women’s participation in local economic development decision-making, the elected local coordinators of the NWC are part of the councilors’ committees at the cell, sector, and district levels (RoR 2023). Their participation is in addition to the constitutionally-mandated 30 percent reservation for women in government decision-making processes at all levels in Rwanda (RoR 2015).

At the national level, NWC is governed by a General Assembly and an Executive Committee. The General Assembly serves as a decision-making body, while the Executive Committee, assisted by a Secretariat, implements the decisions of the General Assembly and ensures day-to-day management of the Council’s plans and budgets. The General Assembly is composed of members of NWC Executive Committees at national, provincial, and Kigali City levels, the district coordinators of the NWC, and representatives of national women’s associations (National Women’s Council 2023).

To improve women’s financial literacy and to reduce the risks they face in operating their businesses, the NWC in partnership with saving cooperatives (SACCOs) initiated a revolving fund to provide small loans at a zero percent interest rate to the informal businesses of women.
in cities and to cooperatives of women farmers in rural areas. Among other beneficiaries, the fund provided financing to cooperatives made up of female mobile street food vendors in Kigali. These cooperatives established selling points and stalls to comply with city regulations. So far, 730 street vendors grouped into 44 cooperatives have received small loans. In rural areas, the fund has supported 840 women in 39 cooperatives in their crop and livestock farming and trading (National Women’s Council 2017).

2.3. Gender Monitoring Office under the Office of The Prime Minister

The Gender Monitoring Office (GMO) was established in 2007 under the Office of The Prime Minister to serve as an accountability office on women’s rights to ensure that public, private, and civil society agencies comply with gender mainstreaming principles (GMO 2018a). The Office has been capacitated by Government to support its efforts on women’s empowerment by developing tools for disaggregated gender data and analytics. From these efforts, GMO published in 2019 a report on the State of Gender Equality in Rwanda to inform policymakers of the progress made and the challenges continuing to confront efforts to foster greater socio-economic inclusion for Rwandan women (GMO 2019). In parallel, GMO produced gender reports for 25 districts across the country and for key sectors of the economy, including infrastructure, agriculture, access to finance, job creation, social protection, governance and security, and ICT. In addition to providing evidence on progress and gaps, the reports advised on best practices for effective gender programming (GMO 2018b).

To raise awareness on gender issues, the Office holds regular engagements with leaders in the public and private sectors, civil society, and religious leaders to ensure gender accountability and promotion through Gender Accountability Day each year.

In 2023, GMO collaborated with Rwanda Standards Boards to develop and launch the National Gender Standards. These standards provide guidance on best practices for organizations and companies to adopt and implement gender-sensitive policies and practices in their workplaces. The standards allow businesses and organizations complying with gender principles to acquire a Gender Equality Seal Certification, which serves as an incentive for gender promotion and women’s inclusion. So far, 11 companies, including three large companies in food processing, that promoted gender equality through their policies, practices, and culture were awarded Gender Equality Seal Certifications (Rwanda Standards Board 2023).

2.4. Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources

The Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI) is the main institution responsible for the policies and programs that seek to improve food security, agricultural productivity, diversification, and growth. MINAGRI introduces policies and programs to facilitate sustainable agricultural transformation through market-led agricultural growth (Malabo Montpellier Panel 2021).

To ensure women’s participation in food systems, in 2019 MINAGRI formulated a Gender and Youth Mainstreaming Strategy to ensure that women’s concerns receive adequate attention and consideration in the development of agricultural value chains (MINAGRI 2019). The structure of MINAGRI places responsibility for monitoring gender mainstreaming in programs and projects to dedicated socio-economists. Existing frameworks, such as gender-responsive budgeting and Gender Budget Statements, allow MINAGRI to mainstream women’s needs and concerns in its policies and investments, including for extension services, infrastructure, and markets to benefit women. These policies include the fourth Strategic Plan for Agriculture Transformation 2018-2024 (PSTA4) and its predecessors, which outline a comprehensive strategy for improving the productivity, competitiveness, and resilience of the agricultural sector to climate change. The PSTAs were developed in line with Rwanda’s Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategies, including the current National Strategy for Transformation (NST1), and its national development vision, Vision 2050. MINAGRI’s budget has increased from...
RWF 106.2 billion (USD 98.5 million) in 2018/19 to RWF 125.9 billion (USD 112.5 million) in 2021/22 (MINAGRI 2022).

MINAGRI operates through two implementing institutions, the Rwanda Agriculture and Animal Resources Development Board (RAB) and the National Agricultural Export Development Board (NAEB). Established in 2010, RAB’s purpose is to ameliorate food insecurity and poverty by transforming agriculture into a smart, resilient, and productive sector. The vision for RAB’s success is centered on research and knowledge sharing, the adoption of innovative technologies, and private sector participation. RAB is responsible for the implementation of key agricultural policies focused on animal husbandry, agricultural technology innovation and adoption, training, extension services, and the coordination of stakeholders in agricultural programs and policies. In parallel, NAEB promotes economic prosperity and diversification by strengthening Rwanda’s agribusiness and export activities (Malabo Montpellier Panel 2021).

3. POLICY FRAMEWORKS

Rwanda has initiated a broad range of policy and legislative reforms to empower women. Here we focus on policies that directly enhance the participation of women in food systems.

3.1. Rwanda’s Vision 2050

Launched in 2020, Vision 2050 represents an overarching blueprint for how Rwanda will achieve its aspiration of becoming an upper-middle-income country by 2035 and a high-income country by 2050 (RoR 2020). The document is structured around five pillars and highlights investment avenues for inclusive economic growth to improve the quality of life for all Rwandans. As far as enhancing women’s participation in food systems is concerned, Pillar 1 on human development and Pillar 3 on agriculture are the most relevant of the five.

- Pillar 1 on Human Development seeks to direct investments in human capital development and economic reforms to ensure that Rwanda has a healthy and skilled labor force. To achieve these goals, the investment priorities in Vision 2050 include universal access to high-quality health care and education. To improve women’s health for effective participation in the growth process, Vision 2050’s targets include reducing the fertility rate from 4.1 total births per woman in 2020 to 3.0 in 2035 and to 2.3 in 2050. Vision 2050 also seeks to sharply reduce maternal mortality rates from 203 per 100,000 live births to less than 50 in 2035 and to less than 20 in 2050 (RoR 2020).
• Pillar 3 on Agriculture for Wealth Creation aims at equally equipping women and men to participate in food systems transformation. Specific investment priorities under this pillar include, among others, developing a modern market-oriented and climate-resilient agriculture, improving the use of modern inputs and technologies to maximize productivity, increasing access to agriculture finance and risk-sharing facilities, and integrating within global value chains of higher-value products Rwanda's agricultural producers and processors of those products (RoR 2020).

3.2. National Gender Policy (2021)

The Gender Policy adopted in 2021 is a replacement for the 2010 National Gender Policy. The revision was done to keep pace with changes in the national development agenda and to align with global and regional commitments to which Rwanda is a party, such as the African Union Agenda 2063 and the HeForShe commitment of 2015 (MIGEPROF 2021). The 2021 Policy highlights actions for the effective engagement of men and boys in gender promotion, accelerating gender mainstreaming in the private sector, and, most importantly, recommitting the Government to strengthen the access of women to productive resources and opportunities.

The gender policy is structured around eight priorities, of which the first three are most pertinent to this case study:

• Priority area 1: Strengthen gender mainstreaming and accountability across national sector policies, planning frameworks, and strategies in the public and private sectors. This includes ensuring that national planning frameworks, sector policies and strategies, programs, and other development initiatives in both the public and the private sectors all consider the impact those plans in their implementation will have on gender issues.

• Priority area 2: Ensure equal access and control of productive resources and economic opportunities for women and men, boys and girls. The focus here is on accelerating women’s economic empowerment by putting in place a supportive economic system that will allow women to grow their businesses. Some of the proposed policy actions under this priority include improving access to finance and leveraging affirmative procurement to allow women-owned businesses access to public tenders. To enhance women's participation in food systems, the policy proposes increasing the participation of women in agricultural extension, cooperative leadership, and engagement in remunerative value chains.

• Priority area 3: Improve gender equality in education, health, and social protection programs. Continuous promotion of gender equality and equity to ensure equal access for all to basic social services.


The National Strategy for Transformation (NST1) is a medium-term, seven-year, development framework to advance the achievement of Vision 2050 (RoR 2017). NST1 outlines several priority investments in food systems that contribute to increasing the productivity of farming and livestock sectors, as well as promoting sustainable management of natural resources and the environment.

• The economic transformation pillar of NST1 proposes sustaining and expanding progress made in agricultural modernization by increased investments in agricultural extension, expanding access to quality farm inputs, post-harvest crop management and value addition, and soil conservation, and scaling up infrastructure coverage, including rural roads and irrigation.

• NST1’s social transformation pillar seeks to enhance support to vulnerable groups to eradicate extreme poverty. This includes
expanding Public Works programs nationally, with a focus on female-headed households caring for young children. The strategy also commits to improved management of the Girinka one cow per poor family initiative as well as expanding other social protection programs that support poor households in acquiring small livestock. Implementation of NST1 is guided by sector and district medium-term strategies and annual plans.

- Under NST1’s transformational governance pillar, existing initiatives, such as gender-responsive budgeting processes, will be built upon to strengthen and promote gender equality and to ensure equal opportunities for all Rwandans through mainstreaming gender across sectors, district strategies, and investments.

3.4. Land Policy (2019)

The Land Policy was revised in 2019 to replace that of 2004 to take into account emerging issues in land use and land management raised by the national development agenda on urbanization, settlement, and agricultural modernization (Ministry of Environment 2019). Building on the achievements of the 2004 policy, such as Land Tenure Regularization, the 2019 Land Policy reconfirms equal rights for women and men on land access and paved the way for the revision of Land Law in 2021. The revised Land Law guarantees and enforces equal rights on land access, ownership, and utilization to both men and women.

The 2019 Malabo Montpellier Report on Food Systems provides extensive documentation on the drivers of Rwanda’s Land Tenure Regularization (LTR) program (Malabo Montpellier Panel 2021). Started in 2004, the LTR program sought to issue legal titles to every landholder in the country. Land registration was done between 2009 and 2013 at a cost of USD 70 million. The process clarified and documented the rights of all landholders across Rwanda. Certificates were issued each that offered land security and enabled the use of land as a transactional asset. The main objectives of the program were to improve livelihoods, reduce poverty, and establish social security in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide. Assessment of land ownership after the LTR program shows that, while 60 percent of registered land is owned by married couples, 25 percent is owned by women, and only 14 percent is owned solely by men (RoR 2019). About 77 percent of female-headed households have the right to sell or use their land as collateral against 80 percent of male-headed households.

3.5. National Social Protection Policy

The National Social Protection Policy was adopted in 2020 to replace that of 2005 (MINALOC 2020). It mandates safety nets for Rwanda’s vulnerable population, including pregnant women. Under the policy, social protection programs have been extended to enable financial and asset transfers to poor households that will support their investments in income-generating activities, such as small-scale farming and livestock operations. In 2021/22, over 105,000 households received small livestock while over 53,000 received seed and fertilizer (MINALOC 2022). Through the Social Protection Strategic Plan 2017-2024, the Government aims to expand social protection provided to vulnerable populations to reduce poverty from 38 percent in 2016 to 17 percent in 2024 (MINALOC 2018).

Implemented by the Ministry of Local Government, the policy is structured around four main pillars namely:

- The pillar on social security focuses on delivering cash transfers to vulnerable individuals and households and on enrolling members of key vulnerable groups in health insurance programs and subsidizing their participation.
- Pillar 2 on social care services promotes social inclusion and offers support to the most vulnerable—including women, children, people with disabilities, and the elderly—through services that prevent and respond to violence, abuse, and exploitation.
- The pillar on short-term social assistance focuses on the provision of relief in times
of shocks and emergencies. Depending on needs, the support may include, among others, food assistance, shelter, and healthcare.

- Pillar 4 on livelihood and employment support engages beneficiaries in productive activities for income generation and asset accumulation.

In 2021/22, over 1.46 million people, or 12.6 percent of Rwanda’s population, were enrolled in some type of social protection scheme (MINALOC 2022). Women are the main beneficiaries of social protection programs. Of the almost 110,000 people employed in public works, 55 percent are women, while, of the over 100,000 people enrolled in the expanded public work program, which is reserved for people without the physical capacity to perform manual work, 70 percent are women. From 2013 to 2018, 58 percent of direct support beneficiaries were women (MIGEPROF 2021).

3.6. Fourth Strategic Plan for Agriculture Transformation 2018-24

To provide a comprehensive action plan for addressing the multidimensional aspects of food systems, the fourth Strategic Plan for Agriculture Transformation 2018-24 (PSTA4) outlines four priority areas that address food security, resilience, economic opportunities, and wealth creation (MINAGRI 2018). MINAGRI leads the development and implementation of the plan, which adopts a food systems approach and acknowledges the holistic nature of ensuring food security and nutrition, agricultural growth, environmental protection, and economic prosperity for sustainable agricultural and economic growth across Rwanda.

The ambitious USD 1.5 billion plan aims to commercialize Rwanda’s agriculture value chains and stimulate increased productivity and improved livelihoods. Through a gender-sensitive budgeting process, PSTA4 outlines the government’s commitment to providing infrastructure, proximity extension services, research, and social protection from which women will benefit. This fourth agricultural sector strategic plan centers on market-led growth of the sector, looking to facilitate a sustainable food systems transformation. National objectives for sectoral growth include the creation of an enabling environment for greater private sector participation and raising agricultural productivity. Enhanced productivity is particularly supported through greater uptake of mechanization and the diversification of production to improve nutrition. All of these efforts are aimed at increasing household
incomes, contributing to agricultural growth, and ultimately eradicating rural poverty. PSTA4 incorporates initiatives for women and youth that are integrated throughout all of the priority areas of the plan (Malabo Montpellier Panel 2021).

A midterm assessment of the economic contributions of PSTA4 showed that each USD 1.00 spent on agriculture led to a USD 2.05 gain in Rwanda’s GDP (Aragie, et al. 2022). This PSTA4 spending enabled 1.1 million persons to increase their consumption above the poverty line, mainly in rural areas.

4. PROGRAMMATIC INTERVENTIONS

As per the Gender Policy, the government’s inclusive approach to women’s empowerment is done through gender mainstreaming in development programs rather than through standalone projects focusing on women. Here a review and analysis of flagship programs and specific projects mainstreaming gender in food systems is provided.

4.1. Crop Intensification Program

The Crop Intensification Programme (CIP) is a flagship program initiated by MINAGRI in 2007 to improve crop productivity. It enables smallholder farmers grouped in cooperatives to access farm inputs, such as fertilizer and improved seed, through a network of village agro-dealers. Through consolidated smallholdings, CIP better enabled small-scale commercial farmers to access agricultural extension services and markets through investment in support infrastructure, such as rural roads and post-harvest processing facilities. Across the country, CIP focuses on eight priority food crops—maize, rice, wheat, bean, soybean, cassava, Irish potato, and banana.

An assessment in 2017 found that 65 percent of CIP farmers surveyed were satisfied with the services provided through the four components of CIP, and 75 percent believed CIP had helped them to attain household food security (Ndushabandi, et al. 2018). While no gendered impact assessment has been done on CIP, women should benefit from improvements in agricultural extension services and infrastructure development under CIP. Women constitute 34 percent of the membership of agricultural cooperatives in Rwanda (MIGEPROF 2021). Further, the 2021/22Budget Implementation Report states that RWF 28.5 billion (USD 25.4 million) was spent by MINAGRI to subsidize agricultural inputs for 1.5 million farmers, of whom 39 percent were women (MINECOFIN 2022).
4.2. Girinka—one cow per poor family program

Girinka is a pass-on-the-gift social protection program in agriculture that aims to improve the livelihood of poor families by distributing dairy cows to produce milk for home consumption and market sale; improve soil fertility through increased use of cow manure, and strengthen community cohesion from the gifting of cows (Harris-Coble, LeBeau and Colverson 2018). The program was initiated by the government in 2006. By 2022, over 425,000 cows had been distributed to poor families under the program (MINAGRI 2022). Girinka beneficiaries are selected from among the poorest households in a community. They are given training on basic animal husbandry and a starter package that includes veterinary drugs and free veterinary care until the cow calves.

Girinka has been instrumental in transforming smallholder dairy production in rural and peri-urban areas and increasing milk production—national annual milk production increased from 142,500 mt in 2005 to 933,000 mt in 2021. Almost half, 46 percent, of the milk produced is consumed by the farming household, while the rest—about 1.4 million liters per day—is available for sale (RAB 2019). The Girinka program resulted in milk consumption by beneficiary households being three times higher than that of non-beneficiary control households—9.3 versus 3.6 liters per day (Harris-Coble, LeBeau and Colverson 2018). Annual income increases for Girinka beneficiary households are estimated to be between USD 150 and USD 800 (Harris-Coble, LeBeau and Colverson 2018).

Though no gender assessment has been done on the Girinka program, women may benefit from use surplus milk to supplement household consumption and to obtain additional income (Tavenner, Saxena and Crane 2018). Women also benefit from the manure the cow produces to fertilize their kitchen gardens, which further improves the nutrition of household members. Women now constitute one-third of dairy cooperative members in Rwanda.

4.3. Umugoroba w’Ababyeyi—“Parents’ Evening” and “ Inkubito z’Icyeza” Programs

In 2010, the National Women’s Council initiated the Umugoroba w’Abagore (Women’s Evening) program as a forum in which women within a community meet and discuss their concerns and needs. The activities of the initiative were later expanded to cover family issues and gender-based violence, so the initiative in 2013 was renamed Umugoroba w’Ababyeyi (Parents’ Evening). The community-led initiative aims is to foster dialogue among men and women on family issues and to prevent domestic violence. Umugoroba w’Ababyeyi committees have been established at the village level to coordinate program activities, including determining the agenda and time for local meetings. NWC, through MIGEPROF, has issued guidelines on implementing Umugoroba w’Ababyeyi at the community level (Mbabazi 2015, MIGEPROF 2016).

According to the 2018/19 NWC annual report, over 119,000 women and over 89,000 men participated in Umugoroba w’Ababyeyi in 1,871 villages that year (National Women’s Council 2019). Over 80 percent of respondents for a study in Nyamagabe District, attributed the reduction in domestic violence in the district from 2016 to 2019 in part to the Umugoroba w’Ababyeyi initiative (Nsabimana and Rutsibuka 2022).

Similarly, NWC, in collaboration with the Imbuto Foundation led by Her Excellency Jeannette Kagame, the First Lady of Rwanda, promotes the Inkubito z’Icyeza program, which is aimed at instilling leadership skills and self-esteem in girl children. The program awards school kits to best-performing schoolgirls in rural areas and provides mentoring (National Women’s Council 2019).

4.4. Accelerating Progress Towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women program

The Accelerating Progress Towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women program was jointly initiated by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United
Nations, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the World Food Programme, and UN Women to enhance the capacity of female smallholder farmers to improve their food production. This was done by facilitating their access to an integrated suite of services, including agricultural extension, financial and business advisory assistance, health, marketing, and capacity building (UN MPTF 2021). The project ran from 2014 to 2021 at a cost of USD 3.5 million. Fifty-one primarily women’s cooperatives or farmer groups in eight districts across Rwanda were targeted. Over 18,000 direct beneficiaries (57 percent women) and over 87,000 indirect beneficiaries were reached. The final project evaluation found improvements in the livelihood of rural women and improved food security that could be attributed to the project, particularly by improving their access to credit through the establishment of local village savings and loan associations.

5. CONCLUSION

The Government of Rwanda has demonstrated political leadership and strong stewardship to ensure women’s equal access to opportunities and to uplift the most vulnerable through its significant social policy actions. The enforcement of gender-responsive budgeting guidelines promotes the further mainstreaming of women’s needs and concerns in public investments. In addition, the constitutional requirement of a minimum quota of at least 30 percent of women in the makeup of decision-making bodies across Rwanda has increased consideration of women’s perspectives and needs in political and administrative decisions and their access to productive resources.

Closer coordination among institutions on how they address gender gaps and increased collection and analysis of rigorous gender-disaggregated data will allow for the further consolidation of achievements in women’s empowerment in Rwanda and guide public investment to expand their agency and participation in all sectors of the economy including in food systems transformation.
6. REFERENCES


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