Farming First

Rural Women: Policies to help them Thrive

To create the key policies a rural woman needs, we must consider the many roles a woman plays. She is a farmer and a mother. She is a bread winner and probably a bread maker. She is ready to invest in her children and to steward her land.

She has a wealth of knowledge and skills that are essential for nurturing and managing the environment, agriculture, local economy, family, community and culture. Yet frequently she is not consulted about policies, development interventions or education programmes that will impact her life.

She faces economic and social constraints. Women account for 60 to 80% of small holder farmers and produce 90% of food in Africa and about half of all food worldwide. Yet in sub-Saharan Africa, only 15% of landholders are women and they receive less than 10% of credit and 7% of extension services. Policies that address gender inequalities could, conservatively, increase yields on women's farms by 2.5% to 4%. Women are key to food and nutrition security and sustainable development.

We need to empower rural women through policies that help them in Growing, Marketing, Adapting, Caring, Connecting, and Leading.

Growing

1) Develop a registration process for land tenure is local, cheap, rapid, transparent and accessible for women regardless of marital status
2) Support women smallholder farmers by providing them with agricultural extension services, grain storage, infrastructure, information and technologies that are adapted to their needs and farm sizes.
3) Localise the application of agronomic knowledge, pest-identification and meteorological information.
4) Provide microfinance services, especially to microcredit, to women farmers.
5) Ensure women farmers have access to agricultural inputs and services, including mechanical tools, breeding stock, seeds, fertilizers, and crop protection materials.

6) Encourage and co-ordinate multiple local actors to ensure information and supplies get into farmers' hands.

Marketing

1) Build local storage facilities and transportation mechanisms, including cold chain storage for food preservation.
2) Provide remote access to up-to-date market pricing information to improve women's ability to sell their product directly.
3) Develop well functioning markets through transparent information, fair prices, sound infrastructure and proper regulation.
4) Empower women farmers in organizational frameworks and encourage them to organise in marketing groups and co-operatives.
5) Improve women farmers' marketing skills through entrepreneurship training.
6) Reduce market distortions to improve opportunities for all strata of agriculture worldwide.

Conserving

1) Invest in women farmers who are engaged in conservation agriculture to prevent soil erosion and land degradation.
2) Support programs that help women farmers to manage watersheds and use water more efficiently.
3) Protect wildlife habitat and biodiversity through an integrated ecosystems approach that incorporates women's knowledge and leadership.
4) Promote sound management of chemical substances, including through the improvement of health and safety conditions for agricultural workers.
5) Invest in bioenergy where it contributes to energy security, rural development, poverty and create new income opportunities for women.

Adapting

1) Provide early warning systems such as community based disaster preparedness and management, and early weather forecasting systems that build on local knowledge and practices, to help them make decisions relating to sustainability and productivity.
2) Use a knowledge-based approach of best practices, commit to increasing support for farmer-to-farmer training, including specific programs for women farmers, and value their traditional knowledge.
3) Popularize new policies, extension programs, practices and technologies in beneficiaries' languages, while recognizing the need to adapt to local knowledge, education, and culture.
4) Ensure women farmers have access to stress, flood, or drought resistant seed varieties.
5) Support community-based, small scale renewable bio-energies.

6) Make adaptation funds, risk management programs, and training on climate change impacts available to rural women.

Caring

1) Increase food security by investing in infrastructure, which includes roads, hospitals, clean water facilities, warehouses, schools and other initiatives to keep rural families together.
2) Require mandatory school programs for girls and boys along with social protection programs and available childcare.
3) Provide educational support for girls and women through training facilities, scholarships, mentoring, extension services and other forms of technical assistance.
4) Ensure access to proper maternal health services for women and focus particularly on nutrition for the first 1000 days of mother and child.
5) Empower women in their roles as household managers and caregivers, which is a proven strategy for enhancing food security and nutritional outcomes especially for children.

Connecting

1) Promote the development of village-based knowledge centres.
2) Support women's cooperatives and their participation in mixed cooperatives.
3) Increase the number of women extension agents and train male extension agents to become more gender sensitive.
4) Prioritize women's access to information communication technologies.
5) Establish open and transparent two-way exchanges that capture the 'voice of the farmer' in the process of policy formulation and implementation.

Leading

1) Enhance capacity for leadership and alliances among rural women to build confidence, strengthen mutual support, and develop advocacy and public speaking skills for influencing decisions that affect their lives.
2) Facilitate meaningful participation of women farmers in decision-making processes through mandatory quotas, benchmarks and indicators.
3) Foster the engagement of farmer organisations in policy making on agriculture and rural development at international, national, and regional levels.