

Female farmers 'need support to compete'

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THOUSANDS of female farmers in Tanzania, Malawi and Uganda could escape a life of poverty if better policies were adopted to bridge a yawning gap in agricultural productivity between women and men, according to a World Bank and UN report.

The study says women measured the economic costs of female farmers in the three east African countries as having less access to land, labour, fertiliser, crop choice and machinery, which made them less productive.

Previous studies have found women farmers in Africa produce between 13% and 25% less than male farmers.

It found as many as 238 000 people in Malawi, 80 000 in Tanzania, and 119 000 in Uganda could be lifted from poverty if this agricultural gender gap was addressed, as studies show women reinvest 90% of income into families.

Agriculture is a key engine for most African economies, representing a critical source of income and ensuring food security and nutrition, with women comprising almost half of the agricultural workforce in sub-Saharan Africa.

"I'm very efficient when it comes to farming but since I don't have access to the land I'd need for irrigation, I often produce less as a result and the whole family suffers," Salima Nyan-



SOWING EQUALITY'S SEEDS: A UN report says gender issues were not fully reflected in Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda's agricultural policies and this needed to be addressed. PICTURE: GALLO IMAGES

tole, a female farmer from Morogoro in southern Tanzania said.

"If we had a system that gave us equal rights to use land as we please I am sure we would be better off."

The report, titled *The cost of the gender gap in agricultural productivity in Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda*, said

gender issues were not fully reflected in the countries' agricultural policies and this needed to be addressed.

Analysts estimated that the gender gap was wiping \$100m (R1.3bn) off the annual economy in Malawi, \$105m in Tanzania, and \$67m in Uganda.

"These estimates can help policy

makers understand the scale of the problem in helping design better policies to improve women's ability to use agriculture to lift themselves out of poverty," the report released this week said.

Caren Grown, senior director of World Bank's Gender Group, said she hoped the report would be used by pol-

icy makers to implement "gender-sensitive and environmentally sustainable agricultural policies and programmes".

The report found female farmers in the three countries have lower levels of education than men and are more often single.

In Malawi, 70% of women farmers are widowed, divorced, or separated, against 3% of male farmers while this figure is 67% in Tanzania compared to 9% of men.

In Tanzania, women farmers cultivate about 0.6ha of land on average while male farmers cultivate more than 1ha.

In Uganda, women farmers cultivate plots that are, on average, about 0.23ha smaller than those managed by men.

Women farmers in Malawi are less likely to grow cash or export crops with a 28% gap in the area of land devoted to export crops in Malawi by men or women.

Commenting on the report, Judith Kizenga, deputy director in Tanzania's ministry for Community Development Gender and Children, said the government was working on a number of programmes to better balance gender equality in agriculture.

"We are trying our very best to ensure that women are empowered so they can make a meaningful contribution to the economy," she said. - Thomson Reuters Foundation