



#### EVIDENCE EXPLAINER

## Raising aspirations is one way of empowering women in agriculture

authored by

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### Key messages

- Higher aspirations are a crucial indicator of rural women's empowerment, and essential to their well-being. Policy or development strategies and interventions that raise aspirations can empower women.
- Aspirations influence short- and medium-term decisions and have a role in people's choices about agricultural inputs and investments—and therefore productivity and profitability.
- These present a high-potential and low-cost way to alter gender and social norms and family roles, putting them on the path to becoming leaders in agriculture, and contribute to the sustainable development of agriculture and rural communities.
- If aspiration failure among rural communities is not addressed in a timely manner, this might be partly responsible for the failure to empower women.

## **Increasing male outmigration highlights women's extra agricultural work**

An increasing trend seen in global South is that of male members of farming households moving to metropolitan areas, particularly in regions heavily reliant on seasonal rains or susceptible to drought, in search of nonfarm jobs—called 'outmigration'—and leaving the women in their households to take care of the household and agricultural activities.

Recent empirical evidence (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41287-021-00362-8>) demonstrates that, in the absence of men and when women are restricted to move out of rural areas, women are increasingly engaged in farm-management decisions and labor, and women's aspirations are centered on profitable farming through technology adoption.

However, evidence (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1057/s41287-021-00362-8>) also shows that women's contribution to agricultural productivity could be much higher if they had equal access to essential resources, services and representation in decision-making.

## **Aspirations are critical in the well-being of rural women**

There is a need for consistent efforts to (1) understand the challenges experienced by women in farming, (2) understand their aspirations and (3) encourage their participation in decision-making.

The aspirations of rural women are increasingly being recognized as an essential dimension (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2017.03.039>) of their well-being. It is imperative to understand and nurture these aspirations if governments want to improve the well-being of rural women.

Populations with high aspirations visualize and engage in forward-looking behavior; whereas low aspirations among the rural poor, particularly farm women, lead to their reduced efforts and fewer investments for bringing about a prosperous future. When poor people are not supported to see a better tomorrow (in which their well-being would be much higher than it is today), they do not take action to improve their future, and consequently become even more stuck in a poverty trap.

The aspirations of farmers influence the agricultural inputs and investments they select which, in turn, affect their productivity. Aspirations play a role in influencing short- and medium-term decisions and have a potentially great influence on technology adoption. In the context of increased male outmigration, it is crucial to

understand aspirations of women to support their empowerment with appropriate development interventions and targeted policies.

## **Raising women's aspirations can contribute to their empowerment**

In our recent [systematic literature review](https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-021-00413-0) (<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41287-021-00413-0>), we found strong evidence that raising aspirations of the rural poor is one way of empowering women.

Husbands with higher aspirations support more egalitarian gender relations within their households. However, wives who have higher aspirations was an even better predictor of women's empowerment. Women's higher aspirations predicted a more egalitarian gender attitude for both the husband and wife, and also women's greater involvement in household decision-making.

Our analysis of 419 studies from 14 developing countries sheds light on the relationships between aspirations, agriculture and women's empowerment.

## **Insights for policy and agricultural research for development**

Higher aspirations are a crucial indicator of women's empowerment. Therefore, raising aspirations is one way to empower women. When development programs or governments fail to support women to raise and realize their aspirations, they may be partly responsible for the failure to empower women.

Development programs that aim to raise the aspirations of women—by implementing strategies such as encouraging women to take part in decision-making and leadership roles, providing equitable access to resources, and encouraging digital literacy—could be a high potential and low-cost way to alter gender and social norms and family roles, thereby widening opportunities for women.

Our analysis of 419 studies shows that, in general, there are significant gender gaps in aspirations; unlike their male counterparts, women fail to aspire to aspects that are personally important to them: income, asset ownership, education of their children, and social status.

Various discriminatory gender norms also discourage young women from aspiring to agriculture-related occupations. Norms that portray agriculture as a masculine job discourage women from learning about and trying innovative practices and restrict women's agricultural opportunities. These norms can turn women's aspirations away from agriculture. Opening avenues for young women in agriculture requires special attention to the inequalities that they face based on their

age and gender. Women leaders positively influence women's aspirations and educational attainment, especially in rural areas.

## **Strategies to encourage higher aspirations for women**

Development programs or policy interventions that aim to raise the aspirations of women could be a promising and low-cost way of changing traditional norms and family roles and expanding opportunities for women. During our literature review, we collated the following strategies to encourage higher aspirations for rural women:

- Role models and mentoring: connecting women in agriculture with women leaders—who can inspire and mentor them with guidance, support and encouragement—helps farming women envision and pursue their aspirations.
- Recognition and celebration of success: highlighting the achievements and success stories of farming women creates positive role models, motivates others to set ambitious goals, and fosters a culture of aspiration.
- Access to resources: ensuring equitable access to resources such as land, credit, technology and markets can allow women to pursue their aspirations, expand their agricultural enterprises and increase productivity.
- Social and economic networking: creating opportunities for farming women to connect with each other fosters a supportive community; and enables knowledge sharing, skill development and collective empowerment.
- Education and training: providing access to quality education and tailored training programs (such as for agricultural techniques, business management, financial literacy, leadership skills) enhances women's knowledge, skills, confidence and aspirations.
- Digital literacy and technology adoption: improving digital literacy of farming women and facilitating their adoption of agricultural technologies can increase their productivity, market reach and overall aspirations.
- Entrepreneurship: promotion of entrepreneurship can be a powerful tool for raising women's aspirations and empowering them to achieve their goals.
- Financial inclusion: providing women access to their own savings accounts, loans and insurance products that are tailored to their needs enables them to make investments, expand their agricultural activities and move toward realizing their aspirations.
- Elimination of gender biases and stereotypes: encouraging a shift in societal norms and attitudes, and challenging and eliminating gender biases and stereotypes that limit farm women's aspirations helps them recognize their capabilities and potential.

- Supportive family and community environment: fostering a supportive environment within families and communities that encourages and values the aspirations of farming women is critical.
- Policy support: encouraging governments and relevant organizations to create and implement policies that support women's aspirations, including access to education, land rights, participation in decision-making, and financial services.

By implementing these strategies, farming women can be supported to pursue their aspirations and become empowered—thereby putting them on the path to become leaders in agriculture and contribute to the sustainable development of agriculture and rural communities.

### **Suggested citation:**

Nandi, R. 2023. *Raising aspirations is one way of empowering women in agriculture*. Nairobi, Kenya: CGIAR GENDER Impact Platform.

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You can read this article at <https://gender.cgiar.org/news/raising-aspirations-one-way-empowering-women-agriculture> or frame the following QR Code with your mobile phone camera:



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