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Smallholder farmers produce more than half the global food supply from a small portion of the farmable land available. Women smallholders comprise an average of 43 percent of the agricultural labour force of developing countries. Of those women in the least developed countries who report being economically active, 79% of them report agriculture as their primary economic activity; the global figure is 48%.

Despite this, rural women rarely receive any attention in agricultural policies, programmes and budget allocations. Women own only 1 per cent of the land in Africa; receive only 7 per cent of extension services and 1 per cent of all agricultural credit. If women farmers in Africa had the same access to land as men, they would increase their farm productivity by up to 20 per cent.

Women smallholders face the added burden of juggling multiple responsibilities and systematic prejudice in land rights and political representation.

There are responsibilities that international community and national donors, at the households and community levels have to take if they want to revert this trend; in policy making and allocating public funds, governments and development actors must ensure that their investments and policy-making responds to the needs of women:

Agriculture policies tend to have little or no specific gender targeted interventions.

Excluding the primary producers of food from agricultural policy planning makes no sense. Some Governments have policies to address women's needs, but these tend to be marginal projects, and they are often not fully implemented or given the same political and technical backing for delivery. In Ghana, for example, strategies developed as far back as the late 1990s remain largely unimplemented; that all of the ministry's senior officers are men helps explain why women farmers continue to be neglected.

Where mention is made of women farmers, the actual agriculture budgets that are allocated tend to have very little investment specifically targeted at women. Often there are no specific budget lines allocated to women within the annual agriculture budget. For instance, in Kenya, the government said it was going to mainstream gender in agricultural policy in its 2007 strategic plan, but failed to mention women or gender at all in the 19-page budget that was attached to the plan.<sup>13</sup> Setting specific and measurable targets along with budget lines is the only way to ensure that gender is taken seriously.

At present, agricultural aid – at the multilateral, bilateral and national levels – is playing a major role in ensuring the continuing neglect of women farmers. Studies show that gender issues are incorporated into less than 10 percent of ODA to agriculture<sup>14</sup>. Of \$12.9bn in agricultural aid from 2002 to 2007, only 13 percent was reported by donors as including a focus on gender<sup>15</sup>. Very few donors have specific policies to promote women farmers within their agricultural aid support. The US is starting to address this by setting out a specific policy to address gender issues in agriculture and women farmers, which is a welcome shift.

The methods of analysing, monitoring and measuring these initiatives and policies also need to be developed. Women's work in agriculture is often not counted, measured or valued. Statistics on women's yields, women's technology adoption rates and women's use of inputs are rarely reported. The problem is not just that there is a lack of gender-disaggregated data, but also what is considered important and valuable in data collection methodologies and methods. Increasing the share of agricultural assistance that supports women farmers and spending will also require the use of tools such as gender budgeting and collection, and monitoring of sex-disaggregated data.