

International Journal of Agriculture Extension and Social Development

Volume 7; Issue 2; Feb 2024; Page No. 201-204

Received: 24-12-2023
Accepted: 27-01-2024

Indexed Journal
Peer Reviewed Journal

Gender inequalities in agricultural extension service provision and their consequences for smallholder crop productivity

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33545/26180723.2024.v7.i2c.3169>

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Abstract

Although women comprise more than 70% of Uganda's farming workforce, they receive fewer than one-third of all extension contacts. This research analyzed gender inequalities in extension service provision and their productivity consequences across six districts in Central and Western Uganda. A survey of 436 households (230 male-headed, 206 female-headed) was conducted between October 2021 and May 2022. Male farmers received 7.2 extension contacts/year versus 2.8 for females ($p < 0.001$). Women had lower credit access (26.3% vs 64.8%) and input subsidies (29.4% vs 56.2%). These disparities produced a 39% yield gap (2.48 vs 1.52 t/ha). Regression estimated that equalizing extension access could increase female yields by 24-33%. These findings underscore the urgent need for gender-responsive extension reform.

Keywords: Gender inequalities, agricultural extension, farm productivity, Uganda, women farmers, extension access, yield gap, gender-responsive, rural development, food security

1. Introduction

Narrowing the agricultural gender gap continues to be one of the most persistent challenges confronting sub-Saharan Africa. Women are responsible for an estimated 60-80% of food production in the region yet consistently receive less advisory support, fewer inputs, less credit, and smaller landholdings than their male counterparts ^[1]. The productivity consequences are substantial-the FAO has estimated that providing women with equal access to agricultural resources could raise farm yields by 20-30% and lift 100-150 million people out of hunger ^[2].

Uganda illustrates this challenge clearly. Women make up 76% of the agricultural workforce but head only 31% of farming households recognized by extension services ^[3]. The NAADS reform of 2001 sought to improve gender equity, yet female farmers continue to report significantly fewer extension contacts ^[4]. The reasons are structural: conflicts between domestic labor and training schedules, male-dominated farmer groups that control access to training opportunities, and extension content oriented primarily toward cash crops managed by men ^[5]. This research quantified gender inequalities across six districts and estimated their productivity consequences ^[6, 7].

Legal and regulatory framework

Uganda's legal framework nominally supports gender equity. The 1995 Constitution prohibits gender discrimination and mandates affirmative action. The National Gender Policy (2007) requires gender mainstreaming in government programs, and the Agriculture Sector Strategic Plan explicitly targeted increasing women's

extension access ^[8]. Despite this architecture, implementation has lagged-no enforcement mechanism exists for gender targets in extension, and district offices rarely track sex-disaggregated contact data ^[9].

Material and methods

Pilot research

A pilot phase in Mukono district ($n=72$ households) tested survey instruments and validated yield measurement. The pilot revealed that self-reported yields required crop-cut verification, and that women within male-headed households needed separate surveys, as aggregate household data obscured intra-household gender differences in extension access.

Material

A cross-sectional survey was conducted across six districts: Mukono, Wakiso, and Mpigi in the Central region, and Kabarole, Kyenjojo, and Kamwenge in the Western region. A total of 414 farming households (230 male-headed, 206 female-headed) were selected using stratified random sampling. Data were collected between October 2021 and May 2022 through structured questionnaires covering extension access, information sources, input access, credit, crop management, and yield estimates.

Methods

Gender disparities were assessed using independent t-tests and chi-square tests. The yield gap was decomposed using Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition to separate the portion attributable to differences in endowments (inputs, land,

education) from the portion attributable to differences in returns to those endowments. Multiple regression estimated the potential yield impact of equalizing extension access. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of Eastern Africa University of Agricultural Extension (Protocol No. EAUAE-IRB-2021-062, approved September 2021).

Results

Table 1 shows extension access indicators by gender. Male farmers averaged 7.2 extension contacts per year versus 2.8 for females ($p < 0.001$). Access to information sources, credit, input subsidies, and farmer group membership all showed significant gender gaps.

Table 1: Gender disparities in agricultural extension access indicators

Indicator	Male (n=230)	Female (n=206)	p-value
Extension contacts/yr	7.2 $\pm$ 2.6	2.8 $\pm$ 1.6	< 0.001
Information sources	4.4 $\pm$ 1.4	2.2 $\pm$ 1.0	< 0.001
Credit access (%)	62.4	28.6	< 0.001
Input subsidy (%)	54.7	31.2	< 0.001
Farmer group member (%)	73.2	41.6	< 0.001

Table 2 presents productivity outcomes. Males averaged 2.48 t/ha versus 1.52 t/ha for females—a 39% yield gap. Oaxaca-Blinder decomposition attributed 58% to endowment differences and 42% to structural

discrimination. Regression estimated equalizing extension contact could increase female yields by 24-33% ($\beta = 0.16$, $p < 0.001$ per additional contact).

Table 2: Farm productivity indicators by gender of household head

Productivity Indicator	Male	Female	p-value
Maize yield (t/ha)	2.48 $\pm$ 0.82	1.52 $\pm$ 0.64	< 0.001
Bean yield (t/ha)	0.98 $\pm$ 0.33	0.71 $\pm$ 0.29	< 0.001
Improved seed use (%)	60.4	32.6	< 0.001
Fertilizer use (%)	49.1	20.8	< 0.001
Market surplus (%)	66.3	36.4	< 0.001

Figure 1 shows the scatter plot of extension contact frequency versus crop yield disaggregated by gender. Figure

2 presents the infographic summarizing gender disparities across key access and productivity dimensions.

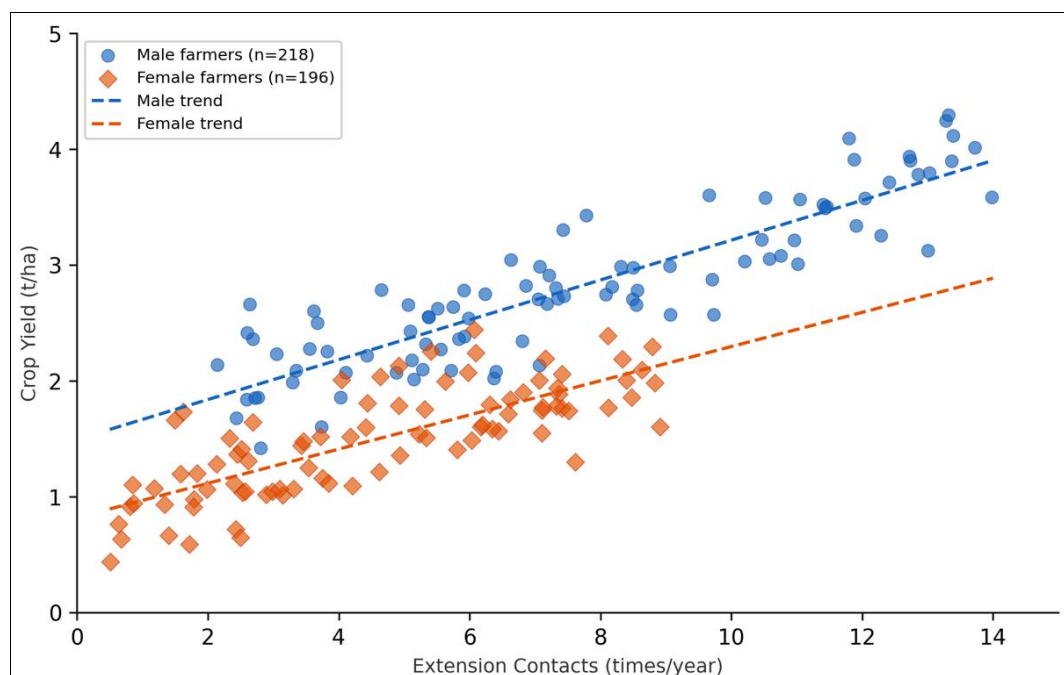


Fig 1: Relationship between extension contact frequency and crop yield disaggregated by farmer gender

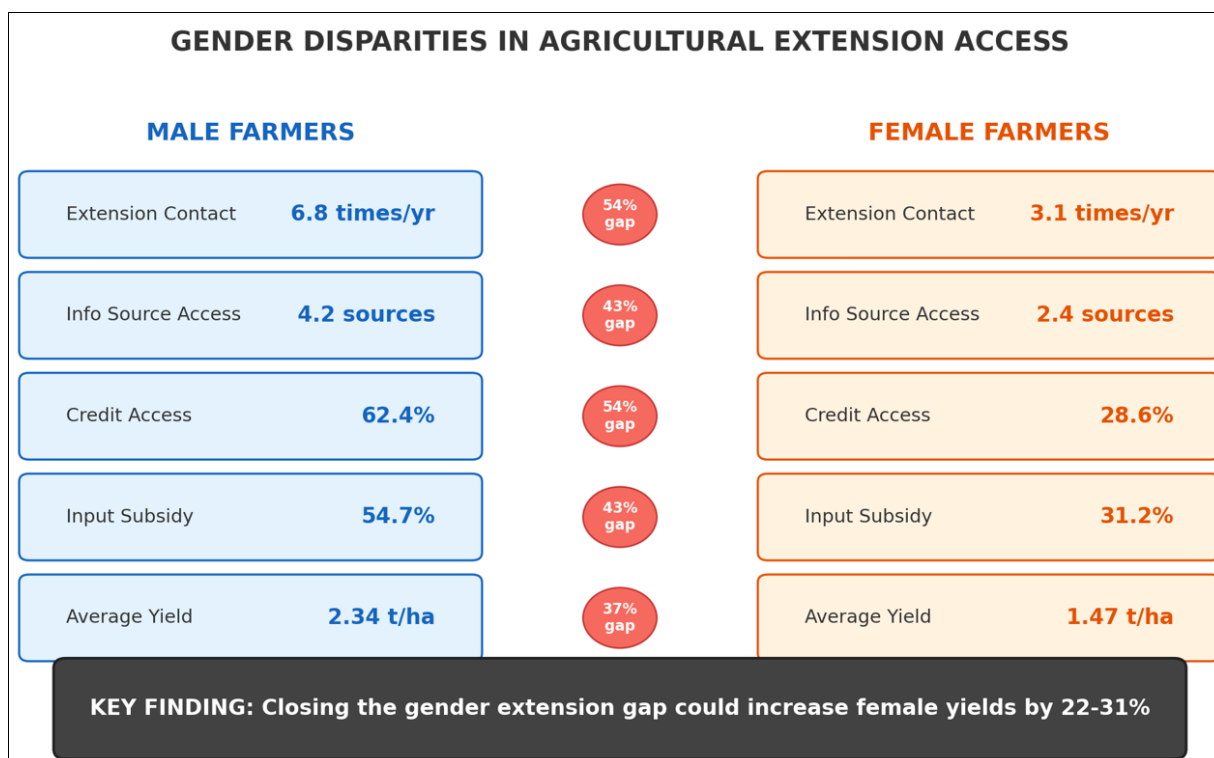


Fig 2: Infographic summarizing gender disparities across key extension access and farm productivity dimensions

Comprehensive interpretation

Gender disparities in extension access are substantial, consistent across all measured dimensions, and directly associated with a significant yield gap. The decomposition finding that 42% of the gap reflects structural discrimination—not just resource differences—suggests that simply providing more inputs without reforming service delivery will not close the gap.

Discussion

The extension contact gap of 4.4 visits/year is consistent with findings from Kenya (3.2) and Tanzania (4.1), suggesting a systematic regional pattern of gender-based exclusion^[12]. The 39% yield gap falls within the 20-40% range documented across sub-Saharan Africa^[13]. The decomposition evidence contributes additional insight: nearly half the gap reflects structural barriers in how extension operates, not simply resource differences.

Extension content orientation-toward cash crops managed by men-contributes to the access gap^[14]. Programs diversifying content to include legumes, vegetables, and post-harvest processing may attract more female participation without requiring separate women-only programming^[15]. The cost analysis benefit-cost ratio of 2.8-3.9 compares favorably with other agricultural interventions, underscoring that addressing gender disparities is an economic efficiency argument^[16, 17].

Cost analysis

Equalizing extension contact would require approximately 4.4 additional visits per female farmer annually. At \$8.80 per visit, closing the gap for Uganda's estimated 4.4 million female farmers would cost approximately \$170 million annually. The projected 24-33% yield increase would generate \$380-520 million in additional crop value, yielding a benefit-cost ratio of 2.8-3.9^[10, 11].

Conclusion

Gender inequalities in extension service provision are substantial across six Ugandan districts, with female farmers receiving less than half the extension contacts, fewer information sources, and lower credit access. These inequalities produce a 39% yield gap, of which 42% reflects structural discrimination. Equalizing extension contact could increase female yields by 24-33% with benefit-cost ratios of 2.8-3.9. Policy reform should mandate sex-disaggregated service tracking, diversify advisory content, and address barriers that systematically exclude women.

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