

Gender gaps: Bane of Africa's agricultural R&D

Africa's agricultural production is negatively affected by gaps in gender-responsive agricultural research, experts say. The gaps include fewer agricultural female researchers than male counterparts. Gender-responsive research addresses the distinct needs and priorities of men and women.

By [Gilbert Nakweya](#) 20 Mar 2018



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According to the experts, increased production and dissemination of gender-responsive research and innovations in agriculture could be a significant game-changer for Africa in realising food and nutrition security sustainably.

Partnership to increase women scientists, ensure a pan-African transformation of agriculture

The experts were speaking in Kenya last month (19 February) during the signing of a partnership between Kenya-based African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (Award) and France's Agropolis Fondation. The partnership will see Agropolis invest \$1m aimed at structuring fellowship activities such as building science skills through courses and development of leadership capacity that will increase collaborations between female scientists in francophone and anglophone Africa.

The partnership will see Award, according to its director, Wanjiru Kamau-Rutenberg, expand into Francophone Africa, the Pacific, South-East Asia and even Europe.

During the signing of the partnership, a new cohort of 28 fellows was commissioned from Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, Mali, Senegal and Togo, with mentors from across Africa.

"We want to increase scientific research collaborations and partnerships between francophone and anglophone women scientists to ensure a pan-African transformation of the agricultural sector," Wanjiru-Rutenberg said.

Closing the gap

Wanjiru-Rutenberg tells SciDev.Net that although gender-responsive agricultural research should address the distinct needs of men and women, their aim is to reach women as only one in every four agricultural researchers is female, a gap they aim to close. She added that francophone African women in research and scientific leadership are even fewer than their counterparts from anglophone Africa.

“The contribution of female agricultural researchers from francophone Africa is 15%, which is less than the continent’s average of 20%,” noted Wanjiru-Rutenberg, adding that the continent needs to build scientific systems and institutions that reduce this gap and help find sustainable solutions to agricultural challenges in Africa such as climate change.

Pascal Kosuth, director of Agropolis Fondation, added, “We want to support African agricultural scientists to advance on research fronts in agricultural technologies such as seed systems.” He noted that there is a need to increase the quantity and qualities of women in agricultural research as they connect more with the communities and could help preserve agricultural biodiversity.

Rosine Nzietchueng, head of higher education at the French Embassy in Kenya, said that the creation and sustenance of North-South and South-South links between scientists will help female scientists advance their knowledge and develop innovations that can spur food and nutrition security.

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