

# **Gender-Transformative Agroecology: Empowering Rural Women for Sustainable Food Systems**

## **A Case Study of Rural Women Cultivating Change (RWCC) Project in Tanzania**

**Anna Marwa (PELUM Tanzania)**

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## Abstract

This paper explores the concept of gender-transformative agroecology and its pivotal role in empowering rural women to drive sustainable food systems. It focuses on the Rural Women Cultivating Change (RWCC) project in Tanzania, showcasing how agroecological practices rooted in gender transformation go beyond enhancing women's roles in agriculture—they actively challenge and shift power dynamics to improve food security and climate resilience. Through this case study, the paper highlights that, when women gain equitable access to resources, knowledge, and decision-making power, they can lead the transformation toward more inclusive, just, and sustainable food systems.

## 1. Introduction

Agriculture has long been the backbone of many developing countries' economies, and in Tanzania, it is no exception. Agriculture contributes approximately 29.1% of the country's GDP and provides 65.5% of national employment. Within this critical sector, women play an indispensable role, comprising 69% of the agricultural workforce compared to 62% of men<sup>1</sup>. In rural areas, this figure rises to a striking 98%, highlighting the central role women play in ensuring household food security and sustaining rural economies. Overall, agriculture supports the livelihoods of 70% of Tanzania's 61 million people, yet women, who are the backbone of this system, face persistent systemic barriers that limit their productivity and empowerment.<sup>2</sup>

Despite their significant contributions, rural women in agriculture face disproportionately low productivity due to limited access to key resources. Most women cultivate between 0.9 and three hectares of land, often lacking access to modern machinery, agricultural inputs, and improved technologies. **Limited access to land** is a critical barrier, as only 2% of women have registered land rights, and they constitute just 19% of agricultural proprietors. Without secure land ownership, women have restricted decision-making power over agricultural investments, further exacerbating their vulnerability to poverty and food insecurity.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://openknowledge.fao.org/>

<sup>2</sup> [Agriculture Overview: Development news, research, data | World Bank](#)

Women also face **financial constraints** due to restricted access to credit and other financial services, limiting their ability to invest in agricultural activities or adopt improved farming techniques. Additionally, they encounter challenges in securing training, access to quality seeds, markets, and agricultural extension services, which perpetuates gender inequalities and diminishes their potential to fully contribute to sustainable food systems. These factors often relegate women to low-skilled, labor-intensive, and hazardous tasks on large farms. They frequently perform physically demanding tasks such as spraying agrochemicals, weeding, and irrigation, which expose them to long-term health risks and further reduce their productivity.

Moreover, the burden of **time poverty** is a major issue. Women disproportionately bear the responsibility of unpaid reproductive labor, including childcare, meal preparation, and other household duties. On average, rural women in Tanzania spend up to 10 hours per day on unpaid domestic work, leaving them with limited time and energy to pursue education, training, or leadership opportunities. This imbalance entrenches gender disparities, reduces their capacity for economic advancement, and prevents them from fully participating in decision-making platforms. Addressing these barriers is essential to unlocking the potential of rural women and ensuring more inclusive and sustainable food systems.

The **Rural Women Cultivating Change (RWCC) project**, a collaborative partnership between Participatory Ecological Land Use Management (PELUM) Tanzania and Tanzania Gender Networking Program (TGNP), with financial support from Global Affairs Canada through SeedChange-Canada, adopts a **gender-transformative approach** to address these entrenched challenges. By integrating **gender-transformative approaches** into agroecology, the project promotes sustainable farming practices while empowering women to become leaders and change agents within their communities. In Tanzania, RWCC project is implemented by PELUM Tanzania and TGNP.

For rural women farmers, agroecology is a key economic activity, offering opportunities on multiple levels by combining diverse tasks and specialized knowledge. This approach not only strengthens women's roles in the household economy but also challenges patriarchal structures within families and communities. Rural women, who traditionally bear the responsibility of unpaid household and

reproductive labor, often spend up to 10 hours a day caring for the nutritional well-being of their children, families, and communities.

However, despite their central role in agricultural production, many rural women lack secure land rights, limiting their access to credit and agricultural extension services. This lack of resources constrains not only their individual productivity but also the overall productivity and food security of households, given that women are often the primary producers of food for family consumption. In Tanzania, where agriculture serves as the primary livelihood for the majority of the population, women face persistent challenges related to limited access to land, financial resources, education, and participation in decision-making processes.

Agroecology offers a solution by promoting diverse, locally adapted farming practices that help maintain ecological balance, improve soil health, conserve water, and reduce reliance on chemical inputs. This holistic approach considers the environmental, economic, and social dimensions of food systems, making them more resilient and equitable. Agroecology not only enhances women's productivity but also contributes to creating sustainable food systems capable of providing nutritious, affordable food for all—particularly in the face of challenges such as climate change, market fluctuations, and population growth.

### **1.1. Gender-Transformative Agroecology**

Gender-transformative agroecology goes beyond simply including women in agriculture—it actively challenges and reshapes the underlying social norms, policies, and practices that sustain gender inequality. This approach promotes equitable access to resources, decision-making power, and benefits, ensuring women's meaningful participation in creating sustainable and resilient food systems. It is rooted in the core principles of agroecology, which prioritize diversity, environmental sustainability, and community-driven resilience.

By addressing the structural causes of gender inequality, gender-transformative agroecology seeks to shift power dynamics, redefine traditional roles, and foster equal opportunities. This approach encompasses:

- **Power Shifting:** Empowering women to have an equal voice and influence in decision-making processes related to agricultural practices and food systems.

- **Resource Redistribution:** Ensuring equitable access for women to critical resources such as land, credit, technology, and training, allowing them to contribute fully to agricultural productivity and sustainability.
- **Norm Change:** Challenging restrictive gender stereotypes and traditional roles that hinder women's participation and leadership in agriculture, creating an environment where they can thrive and lead.

Through these mechanisms, gender-transformative agroecology creates a pathway for social, economic, and environmental transformation, contributing to gender equality and the development of more inclusive and sustainable food systems.

## **1.2. Overview of Tanzania's Situation on Women in Agriculture and Food System**

In Tanzania, women represent 69.9% of the agricultural labour force and are a particularly vulnerable group. Many women continue working as unpaid family workers and face restricted access to important agricultural assets such as land and capital. According to research by the Tanzanian National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) 2023, 34 per cent of women own agricultural land compared to 47 per cent of men. Only 9% of women have sole ownership of land, and 25% have joint land ownership, whereas 30 per cent of men have sole ownership and 7 per cent joint ownership. Furthermore, when women own land, it's typically smaller than that owned by men, and it has lower yields.

With greater control over land, women can invest in more nutritious crops, more productive and sustainable practices and have more influence on how the family leverages land for both food and income. RWCC project in Tanzania experience clearly shows that women's land rights support women's bargaining power, decision-making over consumption and investments in children's well-being, and suggests a positive relationship with food security.

Therefore, access to and control of land is a major and powerful tool for empowering women to participate in agroecological production. When women are empowered to access and control land, they can enter contracts, access credit, and make long-term investments in that land for a reliable source of income.

Distribution of land ownership indicates huge gender inequalities that have a significant impact on access to financial and social resources such as bank credit, market, social empowerment and recognition. Legal and cultural constraints in land inheritance, ownership and use, prevent women from accessing loans and credit for agroecology investment.

In Africa, less than 20% of landholders are women; in North Africa and West Asia, women represent fewer than 5% of all agricultural landowners, while across Sub-Saharan Africa, they make up 15%. Giving women equal access to loans and financial credit could increase food production by up to 33%, eliminating hunger for 150 million people, and they will spend their extra income on health care, nutrition and education for their families. This could produce long-term positive results for families and their neighbours (FAO report 2018).

In East Africa, especially in rural areas where smallholder farming dominates the agricultural sector, agroecology is often seen as unpaid care work. This perception is primarily due to the fact that, most of those who practice agroecology are women from grassroots communities. Typically, agroecology requires knowledge and skills that are often passed down from one generation to another, and women play a significant role in teaching, learning, researching and innovating agroecological practices.

Furthermore, due to economic constraints faced by smallholder farmers, very few have the resources to purchase chemicals for conventional inputs. This further increases the hardships and unpaid labour that women are expected to undertake to sustain agroecology practices. Despite all this, agroecological systems have proven beneficial to smallholder farmers in terms of economic gains, environmental protection, and improved food security.

### **1.3. Policy Gaps in Regulating Agroecology**

The Tanzania National Agriculture Policy of 2013, Seed Act of 2003 (as amended) and Plant Breeders Act 2012, which are the main guiding and regulatory documents in agriculture, are all silent on agroecology. As a result, Agricultural Sector Development

Programme Phase II (ASDP II) developed with the intension of increasing productivity and profitability of the agricultural produce with the focus on transforming gradually subsistence smallholders into sustainable commercial farmers as well as promotion of few crop varieties that are being termed as priority crops, and the Tanzania Five Years Development Plan (2021/22 -2025/26) which has set out ambitious goals that are the foundation of the national long-term success, have not acknowledged the role of agroecology in achieving the goals of these two programs.

Tanzania's legal and policy landscape for the agricultural sector has progressively incorporated women dimension, although with varying levels of responsiveness. The challenge is that there has been inadequate implementation of laws and policies that uphold and protect women's rights in agroecology. At the same time, it remains the case that there is inadequate sex- and gender-disaggregated data that would facilitate a better understanding of women's issues and processes of gender inequality in Tanzania through responsive planning, budgeting and implementation.

The 2015 – 2025 Tanzania Climate Smart Agricultural Programme (TCSAP) seeks to sustainably increase agricultural productivity through the adoption of climate-resilient agricultural practices. The introduction of climate-smart agricultural practices is to be predicated on the adoption of a gender lens to better ensure the resilience of the food and agricultural system. However, as a relatively new programme, TCSAP is not yet fully operationalized.

Furthermore, the government has not made commitment to allocating budget in realization of the health food through agroecology. Developing the agricultural sector requires proper budget allocation that target major investments on Women agroecology. It is insisted that for the real empowerment of women in agroecology, the government should formulate policies in such a way that reflect efficient allocation of budget, resources, adequate planning, proper programme design and formulation (Goyal A 2005).

## **2. The RWCC Project in Tanzania: Background and Objectives**

The rural Women Cultivating Change (RWCC) project aims to shift cultural attitudes and strictures that limit young and adult rural women (particularly women smallholder farmers, female heads of households, and survivors of gender-based violence),

allowing them to take control of their own lives, advocate for themselves and others, and take their leadership within the community and beyond.

The RWCC project applies gender transformative and sustainable feminist approaches to raise awareness on agroecological methods, human rights and Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), as well as farmer market school and Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) approach to challenge patriarchal power relations and develop acceptance for women's respect for rights. The project targets young and adult women. However, it involves other stakeholders, including men.

### **3. Methodology**

This case study is based on field observations, interviews with key stakeholders, and secondary data from reports and publications related to the RWCC project. The study focused on the experiences of women participants, project facilitators, and local leaders to understand the impact of gender-transformative agroecology on women's empowerment and food security.

### **4. Key Interventions and Outcomes**

#### **4.1. Training in Agroecological Practices**

The RWCC project employs gender-transformative and sustainable feminist approaches to raise awareness about agroecological methods, human rights, and sexual and SGBV. It aims to challenge patriarchal power dynamics and foster respect for women's rights. While the project targets young and adult women, it also involves other stakeholders, including men.

The agroecology training workshops were designed to empower women in rural areas, both young and adult, along with other members of established farmer groups. The intended audience included women from both female-headed households, such as single mothers and widows, as well as male-headed households. However, priority is given to women from established women's agroecology groups.

The training's purpose is to impart knowledge and skills on transformative agroecological production methods and facilitate the sharing of experiences among farmers. The objectives include improving the capacity of both women and men in agroecological practices, raising awareness of the relationship between

agroecological approaches, climate change, and seed diversity within the community, and promoting women's voice, agency, and participation in both agroecological production and the control and ownership of land and other reproductive resources.

The agroecology training workshops were aimed at empowering young and adult women in rural areas, as well as other members of established farmer groups. The target audience included women from both female-headed households, including single mothers and widows, as well as male-headed households. However, priority was given to women from established women agroecology groups

The purpose of the training was to impart knowledge and skills on transformative agroecological production methods, share experiences in this area, and disseminate these methods among farmers. To improve the capacity of women and men on transformative agroecological production methods, to raise awareness of agroecological approaches and their relation to climate change and seed diversity in the community, to promote women's voice, agency and participation in agroecological production methods as well as to promote women's voice, agency and participation in controlling and owning land and other reproductive resources.

Women were trained in climate-resilient agroecological practices, such as crop diversification, organic composting, and water conservation, to enhance both food security and economic stability. In Kizungu Village, Same District, Kilimanjaro Region, women participated in gender-transformative agroecology training that utilized the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach. This method emphasizes leveraging local resources to create sustainable income opportunities.

For Fatuma and Eva (women farmers from Kizungu village), this training was more than just a pathway to financial independence; it was a means of reclaiming economic control and addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), which is often fueled by financial insecurity. Inspired by what they learned, they began cultivating high-value vegetables like cabbage, tomatoes, and amaranth, demonstrating that small-scale farming can be both profitable and empowering. Their dedication soon paid off—within just one week during the harvest time, they sold 50 cabbages at TSh 500 per kilogram, generating much-needed income for their households.

However, their journey was not without obstacles. Eva's husband was initially skeptical of her farming endeavors, doubting whether they could bring real benefits. However, as the increased income eased household financial pressures, his perception shifted, leading to greater support for her work. The training also introduced them to innovative agroecological methods, such as using natural pesticides and compost manure instead of synthetic fertilizers. These techniques enhanced soil fertility, improved crop yields, and reduced environmental harm, making their farming not only productive but also sustainable for future generations.

This success story highlights how gender-responsive agroecology can transform lives, empowering women to overcome economic barriers, challenge traditional gender roles, and contribute to resilient and thriving rural communities.

As part of the Rural Women Cultivating Change (RWCC) project, Farmer Market Schools (FMS) have been a transformative tool for empowering rural women with essential market and business skills. Through FMS, women farmers have gained expertise in market analysis, price negotiation, value addition, and cooperative marketing. This knowledge has enabled them to secure better prices for their produce and reduce dependency on middlemen.

In the Manyara Region, specifically in Mbulu and Babati Districts, women's groups have effectively leveraged their collective bargaining power to negotiate fair prices, ensuring that their labor and investments are adequately rewarded. The FMS approach has also strengthened solidarity and collective action, promoting a shift from individual selling to group-based marketing, which has increased their influence in the market.

Additionally, these FMS have provided a platform for women to exchange knowledge, explore alternative markets, and advocate for gender-responsive agricultural policies that support smallholder women farmers. By integrating gender-transformative and sustainable feminist approaches, the RWCC project—through FMS—has enhanced economic empowerment and contributed to shifting power dynamics. This has allowed women to take on leadership roles in market decisions and build resilient rural economies.

Women involved in agroecology groups have successfully mobilized financial resources by forming and participating in Community Microfinance Groups (CMGs). These groups play a crucial role in empowering women by providing accessible and flexible capital for investing in sustainable agroecological practices. Unlike traditional financial institutions that impose high interest rates and strict lending conditions, CMGs offer affordable loans, enabling women to expand their farms, adopt climate-resilient techniques, and diversify their income sources.

In addition to financial empowerment, CMGs serve as important platforms for women to meet, share experiences, and participate in collective learning. Members discuss critical social issues, including the prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), women's rights, and leadership development. Through these discussions, women strengthen their voices, advocate for their rights, and build solidarity, ultimately creating safer and more equitable communities.

As of the 2023–2024 period, 15 Community Management Groups (CMGs) in Gairo, Morogoro region, have collectively saved TZS 41,727,000 (approximately USD 15,285). This amount represents the combined contributions of 288 members, including 204 women and 84 men. This substantial capital allows members to access loans at reasonable rates, reducing their reliance on exploitative lending institutions. With these funds, women have been able to invest in sustainable farming, start small businesses, and improve their household economic stability, fostering greater financial independence and resilience within their communities.

#### **4.2. Addressing Gender Norms and SGBV**

Through community dialogues and workshops, the Rural Women Cultivating Change (RWCC) project has played a crucial role in challenging harmful cultural norms and addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in rural communities. By engaging traditional leaders, religious figures, and local government authorities, the project created safe spaces for open discussions about gender roles, power dynamics, and the importance of women's participation in decision-making at both the household and community levels. Among others, women in the project areas participate in deciding what to plant, the agricultural practices to use, and the sale of crops.

One notable success of this approach was witnessed in the Manyara Region, where male champions emerged as advocates for gender equity. These men, who initially held deeply ingrained traditional beliefs, gradually shifted their perspectives through continuous engagement in RWCC-led sessions. For instance, at Murray Village, Mbulu District Council, a male traditional leader, Mr. Lazaro Guriti, who once believed that women were not entitled to land ownership and had no say in family income, became an active proponent of giving his wife land and encouraging her to join other women in agroecology groups. Lazaro inspired other men in the community to do the same, challenging long-standing gender stereotypes.

In Mahheri Village, Mbulu Town Council District, another breakthrough occurred when a group of women, empowered by RWCC workshops, successfully approached the village office to advocate for the rights of women who had been raped while walking to the farm in the morning. This movement demonstrates the power of community-driven solutions in addressing SGBV and ensuring women's protection. Moreover, in Gairo District, Morogoro Region, women who previously had no voice in community meetings have, through RWCC's leadership training, gained confidence and secured key decision-making roles, including positions in village councils and farmer cooperatives.

### **4.3. Policy Advocacy**

The RWCC project actively engaged in advocacy to influence policies supporting women smallholder farmers. The project conducted policy dialogues to address unfair tax regimes and advocate for the recognition of women's land rights. This resulted in several local governments committing to allocating a percentage of public land to women's farming groups.

### **4.4. The 5Rs in Care Work and Agroecology**

A gender-transformative approach to care work in agroecology emphasizes the 5Rs: **Recognition**, **Reduction**, **Redistribution**, **Recognition**, and **Representation** of care responsibilities. These principles ensure that care work—both paid and unpaid—is integrated into agroecological practices in an equitable and sustainable way.

#### **Recognition**

The RWCC project emphasized the crucial role of women's unpaid care work in maintaining both household well-being and agricultural systems. Through community sensitization sessions, the project worked to recognize and value women's significant contributions to food production, child-rearing, and resource management. This effort fostered a cultural shift toward equitable acknowledgement of their roles and responsibilities. For example, in the monthly gender development seminar series, which held at the community level in all project sites, dialogues around unpaid care work and shared responsibilities within the households are among the issues discussed. The discussions led to the implementation of shared household tasks in some households in Mamire ward, Babati District Council, with men taking on responsibilities such as fetching water and meal preparation, allowing women more time to engage in productive agricultural activities and community leadership roles.

### **Reduction**

The agroecological practices introduced by the RWCC project, including water conservation systems and low-labour farming techniques, significantly reduced the time and effort required for daily agricultural tasks. For instance, in Morogoro Region, the implementation of water conservation practices and home gardens enabled women to save several hours previously spent on farming and searching for vegetables. This newly available time allowed them to engage in income-generating activities (IGAs) and leadership and decision-making roles within their communities. In Mkobwe village, women previously had to walk 57 kilometers to town in search of vegetables to feed their families. This long and exhausting journey not only consumed valuable time but also limited their ability to engage in other productive activities. However, with the adoption of agroecological practices, this burden has been significantly reduced. Today, most of the households in the village have own home garden, allowing women to easily access fresh, nutritious vegetables right at their doorsteps. This transformation has not only improved family nutrition but has also empowered women by giving them greater control over their food sources, reducing dependency on external markets, and freeing up time for other economic and social activities.

### **Redistribution**

The project sought to advocate for more equitable allocation of care tasks between men and women. By including males in training sessions and advocating for shared family chores, the RWCC project encouraged families to adopt a more balanced approach. In the Kilimanjaro and Manyara Region, male champions set an example by performing jobs such as fetching water and preparing meals, relieving their wives of certain tiresome and repetitive domestic duties.

## **Reward**

Recognizing and compensating unpaid care work through policies such as social protection programs, pensions, or wages is vital to ensuring value and respect within society and the economy. By formally acknowledging this work, it can be integrated into economic frameworks and contribute to gender equality. Progress on this aspect is ongoing through the RWCC project, particularly at the policy level. Efforts are currently focused on raising awareness and building understanding of unpaid care work among community members. The upcoming research aims to gather comprehensive evidence that will support advocacy efforts, with the goal of influencing policies and budget allocations to address gender equality and the recognition of unpaid care work.

## **Representation**

Ensuring that caregivers, particularly women, are included in decision-making processes and policy development related to care and labour issues is essential for promoting gender equality. When women are given representation, they can advocate for policies that address their unique challenges and prioritize their well-being. This representation enables them to influence decisions on resource allocation, social protection, and support systems for unpaid care work. For example, women trained under the RWCC project majority were able to participate in the 2024 local elections by vying for different positions and voting for the leaders they saw best to run their communities. Not only that, but also women have been able to take up leadership roles in different settings as well such as church, micro-credit groups, as well as different community committees.

## **5. Results and Discussion**

### **5.1. Empowering Women through Access to Resources**

One of the key outcomes of the RWCC project has been the improved access of rural women to critical agricultural resources. The application of agroecological practices, such as organic farming, agroforestry, and integrated pest management, has enabled women to increase crop yields while reducing reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Additionally, the project has facilitated access to credit, enabling women to invest in essential tools, seeds, and other necessary inputs.

Women's participation in agricultural cooperatives, groups and networks, a central feature of the RWCC project, has also strengthened their collective bargaining power. As a result, they have been able to negotiate better prices for their produce, further enhancing household income and food security. Following the training, the agroecology groups in Kisitwi village, Gairo District, Morogoro Region, successfully acquired a weighting measurement tool, allowing them to sell their cereal crops based on weight as opposed to selling based on volumes (buckets or tins). The standard measurement of cereals in Tanzania is weight. However, businesspeople have been using volume measurements which exploit farmers but benefit the business people. In Kungwe Village, Morogoro District, farmers have successfully increased the price of their rice from TSh 1,300 to TSh 2,000 per kilogram by leveraging their collective bargaining power. By organizing themselves and negotiating as a unified group, they have gained greater control over pricing, ensuring fair compensation for their produce. Previously, individual farmers had little influence over market prices and were often forced to accept low offers dictated by middlemen.

Additionally, the establishment of marketing committees in each village has played a crucial role in empowering farmers to take control of pricing and market access for their produce. These committees, composed of elected farmer representatives, serve as intermediaries between producers and buyers, ensuring fair pricing and transparent transactions. A total of 24 market committees were established each with 7 members representatives from agroecology groups.

## **5.2. Changing Gender Norms and Empowering Women Leadership**

The RWCC project actively promotes the involvement of women in decision-making processes at both the community and household levels. Through workshops and awareness campaigns, the project has fostered discussions on the value of women's contributions to agriculture and food security. This has led to a gradual shift in

traditional gender norms, where women were often relegated to the role of labourers rather than decision-makers.

In several communities where the RWCC project is implemented, women now hold leadership roles in agricultural groups, extension services, and local governance. For instance, before this project, one out of 24 villages had a woman village chairperson. But following the project interventions, the results of 2024 local government elections showed that 7 out of our 24 villages have women chairpersons these include helmets and village chairpersons. The project has shown that when women are empowered to participate in leadership positions, there is a noticeable improvement in agricultural productivity, resource management, and community cohesion.

### **5.3. Increasing Food Security and Resilience**

The integration of gender-transformative agroecology practices has significantly improved food security for rural households. By adopting diverse, sustainable farming methods, women have not only enhanced their food production but also contributed to the broader community food system. The diversification of crops and the adoption of climate-resilient techniques have enabled women to cope better with unpredictable weather patterns, thus improving their ability to withstand the impacts of climate change. Margaret Baso, for example, attended the Gender Transformative Agroecology Training in 2022, which was held as part of the Rural Women Cultivating Change project. This workshop covered innovative farming approaches that respect nature and increase biodiversity. Among other things, Margret learnt about crop diversification, intercropping, the Farmer Managed Seed System (FMSS), and how to utilize organic fertilizers and bio-pesticides.

Margaret was inspired by the training and adopted these practices on her farm for the 2023/2024 farming season. She expanded her farm size from one to five acres, growing maize, sunflower, cowpeas, peas, and millet, and used sisal ropes to ensure proper spacing during planting. When faced with insect pests, she applied the knowledge she gained from her agroecology training to create a natural biopesticide consisting of garlic, pepper, and soap that efficiently protected her crops while not harming beneficial insects.

The outcomes were astounding. Margaret collected 40 bags of local yellow maize, 10 bags of cowpeas, 10 bags of peas, and eight bags of sunflower seeds. She utilized some of the corn for household consumption and sold the remaining at TZS 50,000 (USD19) for each 100 kg bag, while the cowpeas went for TZS 150,000 per bag. Due to its nutritional benefits, yellow maize was approximately twice as expensive as white maize, particularly for those individuals with diabetes and children under the age of five.

A woman named Orupa Meja Sekajingo, from Mpirani hamlet in Same District Council, remarked, "Before the agroecology interventions, I used to favour the hybrid maize variety, but I never got good yields. After engaging in the RWCC agroecology interventions, I chose to implement these techniques. I also began utilizing local maize seeds known as 'kaptura,' which is a red-cob variety. I planted 'kaptura' on 2.5 acres and got 50 bags of corn. I sold some of the bags and bought a larger plot of land."

## **6. Challenges and Lessons Learned**

Despite the RWCC project's successes, several challenges remain. These include deeply ingrained gender biases, resistance to change, and limited access to higher levels of decision-making structures. Although the project has made progress in shifting gender norms at the community level, changes at the institutional level are still slow.

Additionally, access to resources, particularly land, remains a significant barrier for many women. While the project has facilitated access to some resources, women's land rights remain contested in many regions, limiting their long-term security and autonomy. For instance, out of 1,304 Certificates of Customary Right of Occupancy (CCRO) prepared in the Same District, only 377 (31.5%) were owned by women.

The key lesson from the RWCC project is the importance of an inclusive approach that combines grassroots empowerment, policy advocacy, and the inclusion of male champions of women's rights. Ensuring that women are not only empowered at the household and community levels but also have a voice in national agricultural policies is crucial for long-term success.

## **7. Conclusion**

Agroecology strongly emphasizes human and social values, such as dignity, equity, inclusion, and justice, all of which contribute to improved livelihoods. Agroecological approaches and practices empower people and communities to overcome poverty, hunger, and malnutrition while promoting human rights, including the right to access resources and environmental stewardship, so that future generations can also live in prosperity.

Addressing gender inequality in agroecology is essential to achieving a sustainable food system. Gender-transformative agroecology is one of the approaches that can be used in addressing gender inequality in agroecology.

## **8. Policy Recommendation**

- The Government of Tanzania, through the Ministry of Agriculture, should review laws and policies to support agroecology as well as recognize and promote women's roles and experiences in protecting biodiversity, genetic resources and agroecology in general. This legal framework should recognize and support gender-transformative agroecology.
- The Ministry of Agriculture should set aside a budget for refresher training on principles and practices of agroecology to government extension officers so that rural women get adequate agroecological extension services.
- Agroecology stakeholders in the country should join efforts and continuously advocate for pro-agroecology agricultural legal framework.

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