

INNOVATION LAB FOR FOOD SECURITY POLICY

Africa Great Lakes Region Coffee Support Program (AGLC) Policy Advocacy Roundtable on Challenges and Opportunities for Women in Rwanda's Coffee Sector

Backgrounder 9

June 2017

Guiding Question: What are the differences between male and female heads of household who produce coffee in Rwanda?

The Challenge

Constituting nearly 20% of the farmers included in AGLC's midline survey, female heads of household play a key role in supporting the growth of productivity and quality in Rwanda's coffee sector. While women working in coffee face many of the same issues as men working in the sector, female heads of household also face a unique set of challenges, which key policy players often struggle to understand.

Over 80% of female heads of households working in Rwanda's coffee sector are widows. As such, they are on average 9 years older than their male counterparts. Female-headed households are also typically smaller in size and have fewer adults than male-headed households. To overcome the challenges of age and household labor shortages, female heads of household typically hire outside labor to perform intensive activities, such as pruning, stumping, and fertilizer application. The costs incurred by hiring this labor further limits the net income these women earn from selling their coffee, and puts them at a disadvantage compared to male heads of household who perform these activities themselves.

Meanwhile, women who work in Rwanda's coffee sector while living under male heads of household struggle with their own, distinct challenges. Coffee farming requires significant investment in the form of land, money, and time. However, women often lack access to these resources and rely on their husbands for household decision making and resource access. Compounding this problem is the issue of training. While many of these women now attend trainings, such as those provided by Sustainable Harvest, their ability to implement the skills and knowledge they acquire is limited by the willingness of their husbands to participate. Without targeting the participation of husbands as well, these trainings thus have limited impact. Enabling women to access inputs and implement their knowledge could help boost the productivity of their coffee farms.

Questions to consider:

- How do the coffee farms of female-headed households differ from the farms of male-headed households?
- What challenges do women working in the coffee sector face? How do these challenges differ for female heads of household vs. women working in coffee living in male-headed households?

Key Issues

1. Female heads of household are more likely to hire labor to perform pruning, stumping, and fertilizer application. This added cost puts women at a disadvantage compared to male heads of household, who perform these activities themselves.
2. Female heads of household apply fewer inputs, especially pesticides, and apply less manure than male heads of household.
3. Despite possessing slightly less knowledge than men about antestia and Potato Taste Defect, female heads of household surprisingly report less incidence of antestia than male heads of household.
4. Productivity is lower on farms tended by female heads of household than on farms tended by male heads of household.
5. Coffee farming requires access to resources that women lack, including land, money, and time. This unequal access limits women's ability to invest in their coffee.

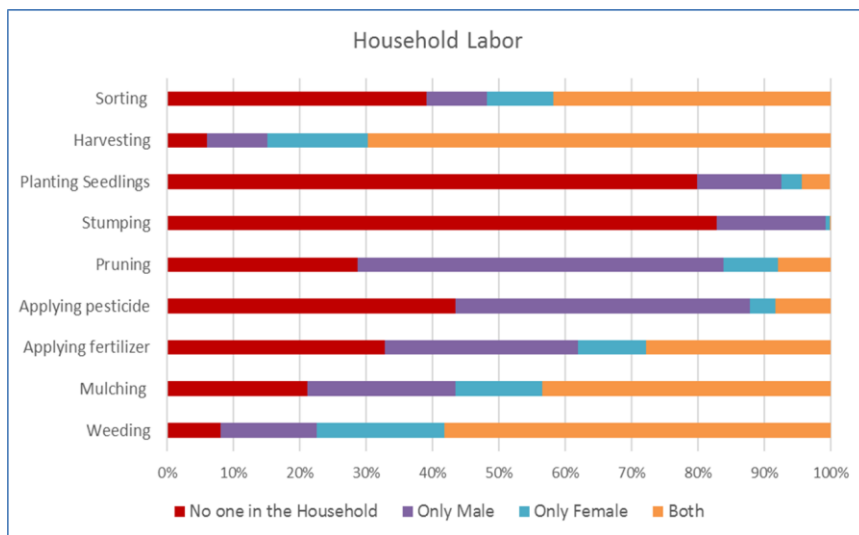


Table 2. Socio-demographic statistics

	Females				Males				p-value
	Total	Median	Mean	St Dev	Total	Median	Mean	St Dev	
Age		59.00	58.14	11.96		48.00	49.49	14.15	<0.001
Illiteracy	113		59.79		212		25.38		<0.001
Widow	147		77.8		17		2		<0.001
Household size		4	4.23	2.05		5	5.57	2.08	<0.001
Children under 16		1	1.46	1.31		2	2.24	1.53	<0.001
Adults older than 65			0.306	0.49			0.22	0.54	<0.001
Active Adults in Household		2.00	2.47	1.57		3.00	3.10	1.60	<0.001
Cooperative member	118				449				0.03

Note: p-value denotes significance of statistical test for differences in distributions across gender of the head of the household

Evidence from the Baseline, Midline, and Qualitative Data

- In the Rwanda coffee sector, the majority of female heads of household, at almost 80%, are widows. These women are on average 9 years older than male heads of household, and their household size is on average smaller by 1 person. Furthermore, these women often live in households with fewer children under the age of 16 and more adults over 65.
- Somewhat surprisingly, female heads of household are more likely than their male counterparts to be members of cooperatives. As a benefit of their cooperative membership, these women gain access to trainings on input application and best agricultural practices; market information on price and changing demand; and engagement with extension officers. Male farmers, meanwhile, often access these services through other means, including through the coffee farming community at large.
- AGLC survey data and key informant interviews point to coffee farming activities being divided by gender. Whereas men overwhelmingly perform activities such as pruning and applying pesticides, women are more active in harvesting and weeding.

Key Data and Quotes

- Most female heads of household do not know how to write or read.
- Over 90% of female heads of household worry about food shortages, compared to 78% of male heads of household.
- Female-headed households are smaller in size by one person, meaning they often hire more outside labor.
- “There are some roles that men play that are not played by women, including spraying and pruning. If a woman is a widow, she has to hire a man to do that for her.” – *Key Informant*

Outputs of Roundtable Discussion: Facilitators asked participants to discuss the challenges facing female farmers working in the coffee sector. Participants highlighted the fact that female heads of households and women living in male-headed households experience unique challenges, an issue that shaped much of the conversation. After identifying over 20 challenges facing women coffee farmers, participants voted on those challenges they considered most important. We defined “important” as: (1) if addressed, this challenge will have the greatest impact on female farmers’ productivity and livelihoods; and (2) this challenge is one that policy makers can begin to tackle quickly and relatively easily.

Most Important Challenges

- **9 votes:** A lack of access to or control of household resources limits women’s ability to invest in their coffee (e.g., through purchasing inputs).
- **8 votes:** We need to involve more young people, especially young women, in coffee to help address the issue of increasingly aging coffee farmers.
- **7 votes:** While trainings have supported women’s empowerment and the greater involvement of women in coffee farming, there is a need for organizations to train both men and women to ensure men are on board with implementation of best practices.
- **5 votes:** While groups like Sustainable Harvest need to continue training women on activities they can perform without their husbands, women lack the ability to purchase the equipment necessary to perform these activities (e.g., pesticide sprayers).