



**WOMEN
FORUM**

**Women in
Agriculture (WiA)
Conference**



Eastern and Southern Africa
Small Scale Farmers' Forum
ESAFF - UGANDA

Activity Report for The 6th Women in Agriculture (WiA) Conference 2024



Cultivating Change:
Building Collaborative Women
Voices Against Social Exclusion,
Poverty and Hunger



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BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

Since its inception in 2019, the Women in Agriculture (WiA) Conference has grown into a powerful Platform that elevates the voices and contributions of women in Uganda's agricultural sector. Organized by ESAFF Uganda, the conference has consistently addressed key issues affecting small-scale women farmers, such as social exclusion, poverty, and hunger, and has empowered women to become agents of change in their communities. In 2024, the WiA Conference took an even deeper step by integrating a climate justice perspective, recognizing that women small-scale farmers are disproportionately impacted by the effects of climate change. This conference was first conducted in different districts named Masaka, Mukono, Adjumani, Gulu, Kabale, Iganga, Kasese, Apac, Ngora, and Nebbi a week before the National event which were attended by 342 members in all the districts. The conference, coincided with the International Day of Rural Women, which served as a rallying point for building collaborative action among women farmers, encouraging the development of strategies to overcome gender disparities in agriculture and create more inclusive agricultural systems. The sixth WIA conference was conducted under the Theme: ***"Cultivating Change: Building Collaborative Women's Voices Against Social Exclusion, Poverty, and Hunger."***

Objectives:

1. Provide a platform for women to share experiences, exchange knowledge, and build their capacities as agents of change in their agricultural communities.
2. Promote collaboration among women small-scale farmers and create networks that will support advocacy and collective action against poverty, hunger, and social exclusion.
3. Advocate for climate justice by recognizing the disproportionate impact of climate change on women farmers and pushing for policies that address these challenges equitably.
4. Highlight the importance of women in agriculture and raise awareness about the barriers women face, including limited access to resources, lower productivity compared to male counterparts, and social barriers.
5. Recognize and celebrate the International Day of Rural Women by elevating the contributions of rural women to food security and environmental sustainability.



Community Women in Agriculture (CWIA) Conferences (7th to 12th October 2024)

Ten districts hosted local community conferences, engaging women in discussions on unique challenges and solutions. Representatives were selected to present district reports at the national conference in Mbale City during the climax event.

In Kasese district, women face issues such as abandonment of girl child education by fathers, dowries being paid by husbands, and economic disempowerment. Climate change has led to unpredictable weather patterns, reducing crop yields and exacerbating food insecurity. In Adjumani district, small-scale farmers are facing challenges with government-provided seeds that compromise the quality of their indigenous varieties. Women are advocating for durable, high-quality indigenous seeds to protect their agricultural systems from contamination and ensure food security.

In Iganga district, domestic violence is a significant barrier to women's productivity, and land ownership disputes complicate their ability to secure land for farming. The decline in agricultural productivity has led to food shortages, negatively affecting family health. In Nebbi district, nearly half of small-scale women farmers benefit from the Parish Development Model (PDM), but the changing climate poses a serious threat to agriculture.

Women in Masaka district acknowledge the support ESAFF Uganda has provided through agroecology training, which has helped them transition to organic farming and become more economically empowered. However, they express concern over the unpredictable climate, land ownership, and unequal distribution of benefits from farming. In Gulu district, women farmers also raised concerns about having no land for production, as male family members rent out their land to them. In Kabale district, women small-scale farmers were encouraged to actively participate in farmer groups to facilitate better access to markets for their agricultural products. In Ngora district, women are keen on preserving indigenous seeds and calling for collective efforts to locate and multiply local seed varieties to ensure the sustainability of organic farming practices in their communities.

Read more about the Community Women in Agriculture (CWIA) Conferences here:

<https://www.esaffuganda.org/post/community-women-in-agriculture-cwia-conferences-uniting-rural-women-to-tackle-social-exclusion-p>



School Engagement at Mulatsi Secondary School in Mbale District (14th October 2024)

ESAFF Women Forum leaders had an engagement with Mulatsi Secondary School in Mbale District on 14th October 2024, where women small-scale farmers connected with 74 schoolgirls to discuss critical issues impacting girls' futures, particularly in agriculture. This allowed girls to voice their challenges while the women leaders shared their experiences and guidance, framed by the conference theme: "Cultivating Change: Building Collaborative Women Voices against Social Exclusion, Poverty, and Hunger." The girls, members of the Agroecology Club, expressed various challenges they face, including sexual harassment, climate change, cultural practices, limited access to resources, corruption, personal hygiene, and technology. One girl shared a harrowing experience of attempted sexual abuse by her uncle, highlighting the trauma that such experiences inflict on their education and future. Another girl, Namunono Justine, spoke about the impact of climate change on her family's farming, recounting how floods devastated their crops and led to food scarcity. Cultural practices, such as early marriage and gender discrimination, further limit girls' opportunities, as illustrated by Joan Busingye's account of being told that education was her only inheritance since land was reserved for boys.

Read more about the School Engagement here:

<https://www.esaffuganda.org/post/empowering-the-future-esaff-women-forum-shaping-the-next-generation-of-female-leaders>



Women's Camp Fire (14th October 2024)

On the eve of the 6th WiA Conference, women from various walks of life and regions of Uganda convened in Mbale City for the Women's Camp Fire, a prelude to the Women in Agriculture (WiA) Conference. This gathering aimed to strengthen solidarity among women small-scale farmers through storytelling, music, skits and shared experiences. The atmosphere was vibrant, filled with traditional Ugandan music, dancing, and a feast that created a warm and beautiful ambience, allowing participants to connect and network. The campfire served as a safe space for women to share their stories, highlighting the challenges they face in agriculture. Many women recounted experiences of Gender Based Violence, which hinders their participation in agriculture and decision-making. They described domestic violence and harassment, which not only left them feeling vulnerable and marginalized but also limited continued production since they usually flee their homes for safety. The theft of crops was another significant concern, as women reported frequent losses that not only affected their finances but also their security. Social exclusion was also a major concern, where women often feel unrecognized and sidelined in agricultural leadership roles. The Women's Camp Fire was more than just a storytelling event; it celebrated resilience and collective action. Participants left with renewed solidarity, new friendships, and a determination to continue advocating for a more equitable agricultural sector. This promoted collaboration among women small-scale farmers and created networks that support advocacy and collective action against poverty, hunger, and social exclusion.

Read more about the Women's Camp Fire here:

<https://www.esaffuganda.org/post/reflections-from-the-women-s-camp-fire-building-solidarity-through-shared-stories>



Annual 6th Women in Agriculture (WiA) Conference (15th October 2024)

ESAFF Uganda held the 6th WiA Conference to celebrate all the women from all aspects of life in Mbale City. Uniquely, the 6th Women in Agriculture (WiA) Conference coincided with the International Day of Rural Women, underscoring the need for recognition and support for the vital role rural women play in sustaining families and communities. The Deputy Mayor of Mbale City, Hon. Kakai Harriet, during her official opening remarks, appreciated the ESAFF Women Forum for positioning women as drivers for development and society growth. She encouraged women to support each other and advocate jointly on issues affecting women through collaborative efforts.

Small-scale women farmers emphasized the importance of empowering women as a fundamental strategy to combat climate change, poverty, and hunger. Participants also acknowledged the significant contributions of rural women to food sovereignty and agricultural development while recognizing the ongoing challenges they face, such as limited access to resources, markets, and decision-making processes. ESAFF Women Forum also awarded three powerful women on “prestigious Star Women Award 2024” that is given to outstanding women in ESAFF Uganda. One of the awardees Ms. Jane Timbiti noted, “I am so grateful to ESAFF Uganda for recognizing my efforts and I pledge to always work with you and mobilize more small scale farmers to join our movement”

Read more about the Declaration by women small-scale farmers at the 6th Women in Agriculture (WiA) Conference 2024 here:

<https://www.esaffuganda.org/post/declaration-by-women-small-scale-farmers-at-the-6th-women-in-agriculture-wia-conference-2024>



The launch of the Report on Small-scale Farmers’ Perspectives on Women’s Land Rights (15th October 2024)

During the WiA Conference, the Deputy Mayor of Mbale City, Hon. Kakai Harriet also launched the Report on Small-scale Farmers’ Perspectives on Women’s Land Rights. This report was developed from a Land Rights Opinion Poll Study that was conducted in different regions of the country. This inaugural edition of the Land Rights Opinion Poll Series highlights the critical challenges faced by small-scale farmers, particularly women, in accessing, controlling, and owning land across various regions in Uganda. The report draws from data collected in 17 districts and offers an in-depth analysis of the status of land rights from the perspective of the most vulnerable small-scale farmers.

Read the Report on Small-scale Farmers’ Perspectives on Women’s Land Rights here:

<https://www.esaffuganda.org/post/new-report-reveals-women-s-land-rights-challenges-and-opportunities-in-uganda>



Women leaders hosted on Radio Talkshow (16th October 2024)

Women leaders participated in a radio talkshow on one of the radio stations in Mbale City, Christine Okot from Gulu district and Masudio Margaret from Adjumani district presented the Women declaration from the Women in Agriculture conference as well as commemorating the International Day of Action for People's Food Sovereignty and Against Transnational Corporations on the same day. The discussion revolved around food sovereignty, environmental degradation, and the urgent need for systemic transformation in agriculture. During the show, Okot underscored the unity of small-scale farmers, particularly women in Uganda, in their fight for food sovereignty. She emphasized the challenges vulnerable populations, particularly women and children face as they increasingly face food insecurity and malnutrition. *"It is heartbreaking to see our families suffer from hunger while we fight for a better future."* she said. She also noted that public policies have failed to protect basic rights like healthcare, housing, and food, leading to the monopolization of essential resources by corporate interests.

Read more about what the women leaders said during the radio talkshow here:

<https://www.esaffuganda.org/post/small-scale-farmers-demand-food-sovereignty-and-policy-reforms>







OUTCOMES

1. The conference aimed to strengthen collaboration and advocacy networks among women farmers, enabling continuous engagement on issues such as land rights, financing, and seed quality. This collaboration builds the foundation for sustained advocacy and builds the foundation for gender-sensitive climate policies. Policymakers and government representatives' participation enhanced their understanding of the challenges faced by women farmers, such as land ownership restrictions and climate vulnerability. The conference also emphasized the importance of inclusive land reforms for women to secure land access and control, essential for agricultural sustainability.
2. Youth empowerment through education and mentoring was a key focus, with schoolgirls at Mulatsi Secondary School connecting with experienced farmers to inspire them to consider careers in agriculture. The mentorship provided during the session addressed gender-based challenges and emphasized resilience and innovation in farming.
3. The conference placed a strong emphasis on food sovereignty and sustainable agriculture, emphasizing the need for small-scale farmers to reclaim control over their food systems. Discussions on food sovereignty urged participants to adopt agroecological practices and resist the influence of large agricultural corporations monopolizing inputs. Women were encouraged to preserve indigenous seeds, which play a critical role in maintaining biodiversity and ensuring food security, especially in the face of climate change.
4. The Star Women Award 2024 recognized three outstanding women leaders for their contributions to agriculture, serving as a motivational tool for other women to take leadership roles in their communities. The conference also highlighted the detrimental impact of domestic violence on women's participation in agriculture, emphasizing the need for stronger community-based interventions and laws to protect women. Building solidarity among women farmers will help them advocate for safer environments where they can thrive without fear of abuse.

THE WOMEN SMALL-SCALE FARMERS' DECLARATION

Declaration by women small-scale farmers at the 6th Women in Agriculture (WiA) Conference 2024

Preamble:

We, the women small-scale farmer leaders from 30 districts of Uganda, gathered for the 6th Women in Agriculture (WiA) Conference 2024 from 14th to 15th October 2024 in Mbale City, Eastern Uganda. The 6th Women in Agriculture (WiA) Conference, themed *"Cultivating Change: Building Collaborative Women Voices Against Social Exclusion, Poverty, and Hunger,"* has culminated in a powerful declaration emphasizing the critical role of women in agriculture and rural development. The main WiA Conference and other multiple Women in Agriculture activities in over 10 districts brought together over 450 women and girls alongside government officials and partners to develop strategies for building collaborative women's voices in the agricultural sector.

We emphasized the importance of empowering women as a fundamental strategy to combat climate change, poverty, and hunger. We also acknowledged the significant contributions of rural women to food sovereignty and agricultural development while recognizing the ongoing challenges they face, such as limited access to resources, markets, and decision-making processes.

Uniquely, the 6th Women in Agriculture (WiA) Conference coincided with the International Day of Rural Women, underscoring the need for recognition and support for the vital role rural women play in sustaining families and communities.

We commended the government for its efforts to promote gender equity in agriculture, including initiatives aimed at improving access to land, finance, and technology for women. However, we also urged the government to intensify its commitment to addressing the barriers that rural women encounter, such as cultural beliefs, unequal control over productive assets, and exclusion from critical decision-making forums.

We acknowledged the urgency of creating equitable and resilient food systems and called attention to the disproportionate impact of hunger and food insecurity on women farmers, who are essential to feeding families and communities. We stressed that achieving food security for all is unattainable without empowering women and ensuring their participation in agricultural value chains.

Call to action:

The conference concluded with a series of calls to action aimed at fostering gender-responsive agricultural policies. These include:

1. **Strengthening Gender-Responsive Agricultural Policies:** The government is urged to implement policies that ensure equal access to resources for women, addressing their specific needs, including healthcare and education.
2. **Sensitization of Citizens on Women's Rights:** There is a call for increased awareness and education regarding women's rights, particularly targeting men and boys through community engagement and media campaigns.
3. **Investing in Women-Led Agricultural Initiatives:** Financial institutions and donors are encouraged to prioritize investments in women-led initiatives, recognizing their potential to drive innovation and improve livelihoods.
4. **Reducing Social Exclusion:** Efforts must be made to eliminate discriminatory practices that hinder women's access to markets and decision-making spaces, ensuring inclusive policies that support all women.
5. **Promoting Agroecology and Climate Resilience:** The declaration calls for the promotion of sustainable agricultural practices that empower women to adapt to climate change and protect biodiversity.
6. **Celebrating Women's Contributions:** There is a strong call for the global community and national government to recognize and celebrate the contributions of rural women to agricultural development and food sovereignty.
7. **Fostering Solidarity and Collaboration:** The conference emphasized the importance of solidarity among women from diverse backgrounds, committing to collaborative efforts to advance women's rights and combat hunger.
8. **Developing Women's National Development Plan Structures:** The government is urged to create grassroots structures within the National Development Plan IV that prioritize women's voices and ensure their consultation.



CONCLUSION

The 6th WiA Conference 2024 successfully united women from across Uganda to address challenges in agriculture. ESAFF Uganda reaffirms its commitment to empowering women and building a future where they lead agricultural transformation.

Heading into the 7th Women in Agriculture (WiA) Conference 2025, the ESAFF Women Forum will focus on the development of a comprehensive ESAFF Uganda Women Agenda, which will give direction for engagement on different issues including climate justice, resource inequality, and poverty, among others.

The declaration from the 6th WiA Conference in 2024 serves as a rallying cry for collective action to advance the rights and opportunities of women in agriculture. The participants reaffirmed their commitment to advocating for gender equity, social inclusion, climate justice, and food security, emphasizing that together they can cultivate change and create a more just and sustainable agricultural future.

The members of the ESAFF Women Forum appreciated the technical and financial support provided by different friends and partners that made the WiA Conference an impactful event. The declaration is a testament to the resilience and determination of women in agriculture, who are poised to lead the way in eradicating social exclusion and hunger.



Eastern and Southern Africa
Small Scale Farmers' Forum

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