



## PRESS RELEASE

### **Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Key to Kenya's Economic Growth, Experts Say**

**Nairobi, Kenya – March 12, 2026:** Stakeholders from academia, research institutions, media, and civil society convened to mark International Women's Week 2026 with a high-level forum highlighting the critical role women play in Kenya's agricultural economy and the urgent need to address systemic barriers limiting their participation and productivity.

Held under the theme ***"Women Cultivating Opportunity"***, the event brought together leading experts and practitioners to examine the challenges faced by women farmers and explore policy and investment solutions to strengthen their economic empowerment.

Opening the forum, Zubeida Kananu, President of the Kenya Editors Guild, reflected on the often overlooked contribution of women in agriculture. She shared a personal story about her mother, whose daily labor supported both family and community despite facing barriers to land ownership, credit, and modern agricultural technologies.

"My late mother loved feeding people. Through her small kibanda she supported farmers, educated her children, and nourished a community. Her story reminds us that behind every thriving food system are women quietly feeding a nation." — Zubeidah Kananu

#### **Women Drive Agriculture but Face Structural Barriers**

Delivering a keynote presentation, Prof. Mary Mbithi - Team Leader at the University of Nairobi WEE Hub and a Professor of Economics at the University, highlighted the disproportionate role women play in Kenya's agricultural sector.

Women account for 70–80 percent of the agricultural labor force yet represent only 33 percent of formal wage employment in the sector. Even more striking, women receive less than 10 percent of agricultural credit, despite working longer hours on farms and in households.

Professor Mbithi emphasized that structural barriers, including limited land ownership rights, restrictive cultural norms, and limited access to finance, continue to hinder women's full economic participation.

"Addressing these barriers is not just a gender issue; it is an economic imperative," she noted. "Closing the gender gap in agriculture can significantly improve productivity, food security, and household incomes."

She called for policies that strengthen women's land and inheritance rights, expand access to affordable finance, and support women-led enterprises across agricultural value chains.

#### **Education and Policy Reform Critical to Women's Participation**

Also speaking at the forum, Dr. Lucy Wakiaga - Associate Research Scientist at the African Population and Health Research Center, underscored the role of education and policy reform in addressing gender inequality in agriculture.



Dr. Wakiaga pointed to persistent disparities in education — particularly in STEM fields — that limit women’s opportunities to adopt new agricultural technologies and participate in higher-value segments of the agricultural economy.

“Educational inequality directly affects women’s productivity and leadership in agriculture,” she said. “If we want inclusive economic growth, we must invest in gender-responsive education systems and remove the cultural stereotypes that discourage girls from pursuing science and technology.”

She further highlighted the development cost of gender inequality, noting that closing gender gaps could significantly boost agricultural productivity and strengthen national food security.

### **Recognizing the Invisible Burden of Unpaid Work**

Panel discussions also examined the disproportionate burden of unpaid care and domestic work carried by women, which limits their ability to participate fully in economic activities.

Participants emphasized the need for investments in social infrastructure, including childcare services and labour-saving technologies, to reduce the time women spend on unpaid domestic work and enable them to engage more actively in income-generating activities.

### **Partnerships and Inclusive Approaches**

Speakers called for stronger partnerships among governments, research institutions, development partners, and the private sector to scale technologies and innovations that respond to the needs of women farmers.

The forum also highlighted the importance of including men and youth in women’s empowerment initiatives to ensure sustainable progress within households and communities.

Innovative approaches discussed included youth- and women-led quality centers that connect farmers to markets, strengthen quality standards, and create opportunities along agricultural value chains.

### **A Call to Action**

The event concluded with a call for policy reforms, increased investment in women farmers, and stronger data collection to guide evidence-based decision-making.

Participants agreed that placing women at the center of agricultural development is essential to achieving inclusive economic growth, strengthening food systems, and building resilient rural economies.

“Empowering women farmers is one of the most powerful investments we can make in Kenya’s future,” speakers emphasized.

**-ENDS-**

**About the Kenya Editors’ Guild**



KEG is the professional organization for editors in Kenya, committed to upholding journalistic standards, defending media freedom, and strengthening newsroom leadership across the country.

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