

FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN AGRICULTURAL COOPERATIVES SUPPORTED BY AGRITERRA

Agriterra has developed a female leadership trajectory in order to contribute closing the gender gap in agricultural cooperatives. Why?

The representation and participation of women in cooperatives and farmers organisations is in most parts of the world low. Women constitute over 70% of the agricultural workforce and are a relatively overrepresented group in rural areas. Despite being the largest workforce, they are behind informal representation and decision making. They are often deprived of land rights, land ownership, access to finance, access to education etc. Cultural beliefs have women put in a backwards position where they are seen as the ones taking care of domestic affairs but not of economic affairs, though they invest lots of their time as labour in the agricultural sector, but not owning a fair share of the economic benefits from it.

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Agriculture offers good opportunities for development, and the economic relevance of the agricultural sector can still develop a lot especially in Africa. Research proves that if women have equal access to the resources needed, they produce 20 to 30% more compared to men; women reinvest the money for 90% back in society and families, whereas men only reinvest 45%. Cultural gender biases are affecting to a large extent the under-representation of women

in cooperatives. However, it is well possible to close the gender gap if both men and women, boys and girls are aware of this and realise the unlocked potential of women.

Female leadership trajectory

The female leadership trajectory of Agriterra aims to contribute to closing the gender gap, with a strong focus on Africa initially. The trajectory starts with the identification of organisations that are open towards addressing this subject and acknowledge that the current situations need to be changed.

Representatives (women and men) can participate in the 3 days **basic female leadership training**. The training focuses on understanding the current gender gap, make participants aware of this and their potential to overcome it. It focused much on creating more space for women to be seen as full-fledged and needed members of the cooperatives; empower the women to become more self-confident to stand up and become leaders and allow for opening the discussion on the subject also with the men. Action plans are made that often include actions like creating an enabling environment to increase the female participation in the Board; sensitisation of men and women on gender gaps; mobilisation of women to join the cooperatives as full members and leaders.

The most promising or talented female leaders or potential leaders were selected to attend the first Masterclass Female Leadership in Nairobi from 1 to 6 March 2020.





The 5 days [Masterclass Female leadership](#) was conducted for 14 cooperatives (potential) leaders all females from 3 countries and representing 11 organisations. The masterclass was designed by a consultant, Bert Overbeek, an experienced trainer/coach and specialist in diversity and leadership in co-creation with Bertken de Leede, business advisor Agriterra and programme manager female leadership and Stellah Nyagah, business advisor Agriterra Kenya.

All participants completed a [personality test](#) and their profiles were distributed and explained. This was an eyeopener for all, being the first time to be “analysed” “like this, allowing to understand themselves better and how they can make use of their personality characteristics in, for example, the board or as a group member.

The [MAFSAC model](#) (Message, Active listening, Further asking, Summarising, Agreement and Conclusion) is a communication tool to be used improving leadership skills. Participants realise that certain steps of MAFSAC are omitted (like further asking, summarising, conclusion). Endless [practising with the model](#) during exercises and role-plays addressing topics like leadership styles, motivation, convincing, feedback and negotiating resulted in a good understanding and internalisation of the power of the MAFSAC model. Through [storytelling](#), all participants shared their journey in life to where they are now as a woman, as a leader. This was inspiring and shows a better insight into the cultural and personal dimensions of leadership.

At the end of the masterclass, all participants presented their [SMART action plans](#). [Follow up](#) will be done by a buddy and/or mentorship system, a quarterly skype call with selected representatives from each country with Agriterra FL programme manager and follow up by the Business advisors at regular bases. Buddy and mentor duos are formed using a natural process as it is heavily based on trust and personal “clicks”.

Based on our own reflection, feedback and tips and tops from the participants, the masterclass training programme and materials will now be further fine-tuned. But I can confidently say that it is a well-developed programme, with the right approach for the target group. The result was a group of very happy, empowered and inspired women, with [self-confidence and ambitions that are converted into action plans](#), going back to their own cooperative with a suitcase filled with energy, ideas, tools and being part of a group of strong peers that they can always contact.

Bertken de Leede, business advisor Agriterra

