



Women's Empowerment as a Driver of Rural and Agricultural Innovation

Policy Brief

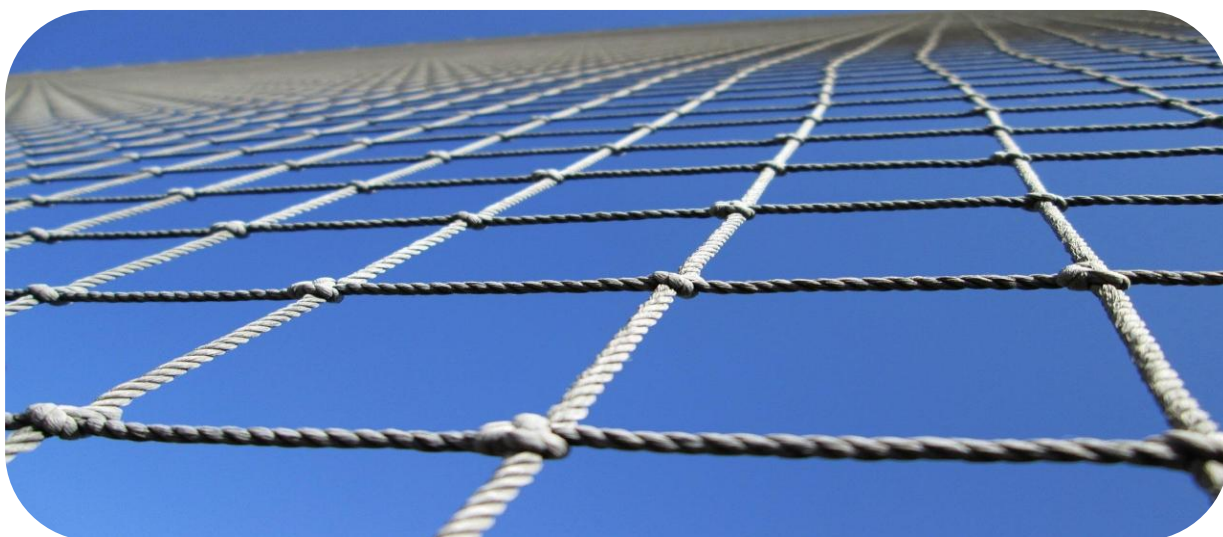
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Greater policy focus on issues of women's empowerment and breaking down barriers impacting equality between men and women is a key part of the policy mix to better support women-led rural and farm innovation.

Executive Summary

Women that successfully navigate a path towards rural and farm innovation still must break down barriers. Empowering these women to overcome barriers that hold them back, such as 'imposter syndrome', lack of supportive networks, local attitudes and expectations is a key part of the policy challenge to better supporting women-led rural and farm innovation. For women in more vulnerable and marginalised circumstances, limitations on their empowerment are even greater, leading to a call for integrated supports that address the range of unique barriers to innovation faced by them.

The Challenge

Women-led innovation is a source of economic empowerment for women in rural areas and farming. However, wider social and cultural issues impact women's empowerment.

- Gender based discrimination, traditional social norms and stereotypes can impact women becoming involved in innovation and during the development of their innovation.
- Women in rural areas and farming are key drivers of innovation, sustainability and community resilience. Yet they remain underrepresented, therefore require greater visibility within farm and rural innovation ecosystems.
- Addressing this imbalance is not only a matter of gender equality but of rural economic and social development.

Policy Solutions

Greater support for bottom-up community-led initiatives that address issues impacting rural and farm women's empowerment.

- 💡 Gender-responsive funding supporting improved gender equality would empower communities and women to develop initiatives that address the needs of local rural and farm women innovators.
- 💡 This is important so that women-led and centred initiatives are developed in response to local need. These should be accompanied by simplified application processes and grant-writing workshops.

Develop innovative interventions that can support a move away from reproducing traditional gender roles around farming and rural innovation.

- 💡 Potentially this could include initiatives that target the secondary or third level education sectors to highlight opportunities for women in farming and rural innovation, as well as success stories to encourage women in these types of careers.
- 💡 Better recognition for rural and farm women's innovative achievements, such as through local or national awards.
- 💡 Tackle the issue of women feeling 'imposter syndrome' and improve women's self-perception and sense of belonging in the spaces of rural and farm innovation. One potential route to assist change could be matching experienced and starting innovators to provide lived experience and peer to peer support.
- 💡 Finding ways to reach those that hold more traditional views or unconscious bias is important. This can be tricky but too often the message can more easily reach those who are already on board with the challenge and opportunity that improving gender equality holds.

Target support specifically towards women in more vulnerable and marginalised circumstances.

- 💡 Specific targeted supports appear needed otherwise supports may only reach those who are pre-disposed to success because they may not be impacted by wider socio-economic disadvantages.

Develop integrated entrepreneurial support hubs for rural and farm women

- 💡 Develop 'one-stop' hubs designed with a gender lens that provide business mentoring, digital training, childcare support and peer networking. These hubs would signpost other critical services, such as domestic violence, counselling and family support.

Establish inter-agency models to address barriers

- 💡 Promote coordinated local systems (e.g. combining legal, financial, educational, and farming supports) that address the unique barriers faced by rural women, particularly those affected by isolation or gender-based violence.

Supporting Evidence & Best Practices


While Ireland's FLIARA case study evidence highlights change happening around traditional cultural norms and gender roles, alongside this the persistence of more traditional ideas was also identified. For example, this could include negative local attitudes to women farmers, such as one woman feeling her farming was perceived as just a hobby and that she was not a serious farmer. Women involved in rural and farm innovation can also possess a lack of confidence and be impacted by the phenomenon of 'imposter syndrome'. The case studies highlight how this can

decrease in time. As women gain experience and success their comfort and confidence tended to grow. Women starting out on their innovation journey, therefore, may need greater support to overcome the 'imposter syndrome'. The FLIARA case study evidence from Ireland also points to the wider value of recognising achievements, such as through awards and media recognition. This can then also spill over to influence local attitude change. Increasing actions in this area should benefit further change.




Women can also be drivers of initiatives that develop in response to local needs. Motivations for women-led farm and rural innovation were often fuelled by tackling social, environmental and cultural concerns and issues. For example, one case study highlighted how a rural innovator had identified the need locally to bring women together and had established a network for women in agriculture. This brought benefits such as helping support each other and build confidence. Building capacities to do this through funding supports is therefore important to unlock an untapped capacity for rural and farm women innovators to become drivers of rural revitalisation and resilience.

FLIARA case studies focused on women that had successfully navigated a path towards rural and farm innovation. One standout source of support in both rural and farm contexts was at a personal level where family and close social networks emerged as part of the favourable conditions supporting innovation. Family support came in different forms such as providing innovators with advice, support and resources (e.g. land, loans). Potentially rural and farm women living in vulnerable or marginalised situations that do not have a similar support system would be disadvantaged in starting and developing innovations.

Longford Women's Link: An integrated model of service delivery

-  This award-winning model integrates social enterprise, gender-based violence supports and rural innovation to address complex barriers faced by women. It connects services across agencies, ensuring women are not left behind in rural development efforts.





FLIARA's report 'D4.3: Benchmarking Initial Report' also identified a number of promising measures:

-  Specific programmes to support more women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths) careers are identified in a number of countries, including Ireland (e.g. [THRIVE](#), [EXPLORE Engineering Alliance](#)). These programmes provide potential models for further assessment and to learn from. This could provide lessons for policy actions to empower more women to develop careers in rural and farm innovation.
-  To support more community-led initiatives that address local needs specific targeted calls for LEADER funding could be rolled out targeting women and addressing gender equality issues. The D4.3 report notes that in both Ireland and Italy calls for LEADER funding specifically targeting women are allowed for in their LEADER Programmes. It is important to ensure this is applied more widely in practice where local rural development needs require action on innovation and gender equality issues.
-  A potential promising practice also from Ireland's case studies was '[ACORNS - Accelerating the Creation of Rural Nascent Start-ups](#)'. This peer-led support network programme connects early-stage rural female entrepreneurs with 'lead entrepreneurs' to learn together and grow a business to accelerate their establishment and development. The capacity of this programme could be increased in Ireland so that it can reach more women.

Conclusion & Call to Action

The range of policy actions outlined here aim to target barriers impacting women's economic empowerment through rural and farm innovation. The case for attention to different policy domains is made in this policy brief, from entrepreneurship supports to community-led initiatives that address specific local needs.

Call to action

-  Fund and develop integrated women-specific rural and farm entrepreneurship programmes that address business and innovation issues as well as wider barriers facing women. More widely embedding a rural and gender equality lens into innovation and entrepreneurship strategies is also important to a wider and more fundamental policy shift.
-  Making gender-responsive funding available to support community-led initiatives is important so that women-led and centred initiatives can be developed in response to local, place-based needs and opportunities.
-  Actions are needed that improve the visibility of rural and farm women-led innovation as well as directly tackle the perpetuating of traditional gender roles and stereotypes in our communities and wider society.
-  Ensure strong and targeted supports are available to women in more vulnerable and marginalised situations to assist breaking down barriers that impact their economic empowerment through rural and farm innovation.

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Further Reading

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About FLIARA

The project is on a mission to create a more sustainable future by highlighting the role of women in agriculture and rural areas. FLIARA will boost understanding of the needs and challenges facing women leading innovative environmental and rural development practices in EU farming and rural areas.

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Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas

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