Empowering Women in Burundi's Agricultural Sector: A catalyst for sustainable development

Burundi
The Republic of Burundi is a landlocked country in the Great Rift valley at the junction between the African Great Lakes region and East Africa. Like in most African countries, agriculture forms the backbone of its economy, employing the majority of its workforce and makes up 40% of the country’s GDP (African Union, 2024). However, while agriculture is the primary livelihood for many Burundians, it’s crucial to recognise the often-overlooked role of women in this sector.

The Silent Contributors: Women in the Fields
In Burundi, like many other parts of the world, women play a vital but often invisible role in agriculture. They make up 60% of the agricultural workforce and are involved in every stage of the agriculture value chain, from planting and tending crops to harvesting and selling produce (UN Women, 2024). Despite their indispensable contribution, women face numerous challenges that limit their participation and hinder their economic empowerment.

Barriers to Women’s Participation
Unequal access to land and productive resources stands out as a significant obstacle for women in Burundi’s agricultural sector. Like in most African countries, Burundi’s land inheritance rights follow a patriarchal model where women have limited access to land leading to limited access to government agricultural assistance and loans. This imbalance not only restricts women’s ability to expand their agricultural efforts but also undermines their economic autonomy and decision-making power within the household and communities.

Harnessing the Potential of Women in Agriculture
Investing in women in Burundi’s agriculture is not just a matter of social justice but also a strategic essential for sustainable development. Studies show that closing the gender gap in agriculture can significantly enhance food security, reduce poverty and stimulate economic growth. By unlocking women’s potential, Burundi can unleash a wave of innovation, resilience and productivity that benefits entire communities.
As Burundi works towards inclusive and sustainable development, prioritising women’s empowerment in agriculture must be central to its strategy. By addressing the structural barriers that hinder women’s participation and providing them with the necessary support and resources, Burundi can harness the transformative power of its women farmers to cultivate lasting change and growth in its agriculture sector.

Christian Aid Week 2024

This Christian Aid Week, we focused on the work that we have been doing in Burundi, with a special focus on Aline’s story.

In Burundi, malnourishment and poverty affect more than 70% of the population, making survival a daily struggle. Jobs and food are hard to come by, and those who have homes often have no electricity or running water.

For Aline, life was a constant struggle. She was married young and gave birth to her first child when she was just 14 years old. Aline experienced constant abuse at the hands of her violent husband.

A few years later, Aline faced even more devastation. Her husband married another woman, forcing Aline to flee. He prevented her from taking their children with her, and in a further act of cruelty, told the local community that Aline was mentally ill and unable to care for her children.

We recognise the importance of utilising local infrastructures and Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs) are crucial in our work and approach. Aline was taught how to form a VSLA and establish a steady income. VSLAs mean people can save for the future and borrow money to start their businesses.

Aline was able to start a business trading peanuts and avocados locally, she earned enough money to rent a house and get her children back!

Investing in women’s agriculture and women’s business is a great way to ensure sustainable development for households and communities.

If you would like to help the work of Christian Aid in countries like Burundi, please email us at salt@christian-aid.org.

Building Bridges: How Collaboration Between Businesses, NGOs, and Governments is Driving Impact Investment in Developing Nations

As a global community, we are facing a number of challenges which include poverty and climate change. This means traditional and isolated efforts to mitigate these challenges are no longer sufficient. In response, businesses, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and governments are coming together and creating a powerful coalition that drives impact investment, particularly in developing countries. This collaborative approach is not only fostering sustainable development but also creating an ecosystem where all stakeholders can thrive.

The Rise of Impact Investment

Impact investment, defined as investments made with the intention to generate positive, measurable social and environmental impact alongside a financial return, has gained significant traction in recent years. This growing interest is partly due to increasing awareness of global issues and the recognition that traditional philanthropy and government aid alone cannot solve these problems.
The Role of Businesses
Corporations are at the forefront of this movement, leveraging their resources, expertise, and innovation capabilities. Many businesses are integrating environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria into their investment strategies, recognising that sustainable practices can lead to long-term profitability and brand loyalty.

For example, multinational companies are investing in renewable energy projects in Africa and Asia, not only to offset their carbon footprint but also to provide affordable energy solutions to underserved communities. These investments create jobs, improve local economies, and foster a healthier environment.

NGOs as Catalysts for Change
NGOs play a critical role in this collaborative framework by providing on-the-ground insights, local knowledge, and community connections. Their expertise in implementing and managing development projects ensures that investments are effectively utilised and aligned with the needs of the local population.

Organisations like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation have been instrumental in forming partnerships with businesses and governments. Their initiatives in healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation have attracted significant investment from the private sector, amplifying their impact.

Government Policies and Incentives
Governments in developing nations are increasingly recognising the importance of creating an enabling environment for impact investment. By implementing supportive policies, tax incentives, and regulatory frameworks, they are encouraging both local and foreign investors to contribute to sustainable development goals.

An example of successful collaboration is the Solar Sister initiative in sub-Saharan Africa, where businesses, NGOs, and governments have come together to provide solar-powered solutions to off-grid communities. This project not only addresses energy poverty but also empowers women by training them as entrepreneurs who distribute solar products.

Challenges and the Way Forward
Despite the successes, several challenges remain. Aligning the diverse goals and expectations of businesses, NGOs, and governments can be difficult. Additionally, measuring the impact and ensuring accountability requires strong monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

To overcome these challenges, continuous dialogue and transparent communication are essential. Establishing common goals and metrics for success can help align efforts and ensure that all parties are working towards the same objectives.

The abundance of para-statal organisations in developing countries poses a challenge whilst simultaneously creating interesting opportunities for collaboration. This is due to the fact that these organisations straddle the fence of serving the public using an NGO model and being government body. For example, the Malawi Technical Entrepreneurial Vocational Education and Training Authority (TEVETA) walks this line. This organisation has created various opportunities for private companies and organisations to partner with them on the delivery of programmes as they provide NGO expertise alongside government knowledge and influence.

In this case, partnership with the private sector is almost non-negotiable as businesses have to pay a levy as they inevitably benefit from the services provided by the organisation and this levy serves as a way of ensuring private entities are giving back to their communities.

However, the challenges posed are evident when implementing projects as they are often bound by government bureaucracy which can lead to slow or unsatisfactory results.

The collaborative efforts of businesses, NGOs, and governments in driving impact investment are proving to be a game-changer for developing nations. The question then lies in what is the best way forward. Do we trust the private sector to run their businesses ethically and give back to their communities or do we impose a levy system to ensure a collaborative effort towards development?
Could you take on the ultimate challenge for Christian Aid?

Christian Aid’s fundraising team is excited to announce that places are officially open for Team Christian Aid at the London Marathon 2025. If you are an avid runner, keen to achieve a personal milestone whilst also raising vital funds for a global charity, we would love to hear from you.

It’s a great way to connect with fellow runners, friends, family and colleagues and achieve something incredible together!

Bring your friends and family on the journey with you through sponsorship, fundraising events and joining us on the day to cheer!

To start your epic journey, contact events@christian-aid.org or state your interest via our website: https://www.christianaid.org.uk/events/london-marathon

Through initiatives like match funding, there are so many opportunities to maximise your fundraising, be the changemakers, be the peacemakers…join #TeamChristianAid.

Upcoming Events

14th June 2024 - Salt Conference

To register please visit: https://www.tickettailor.com/events/transformationalenterprisenetwork/1101343

The aim is to inspire Christians with a business background to use their skills and resources to alleviate poverty.

With guest speakers including Christian Aid CEO, Patrick Watt.

We look forward to seeing you there!

Upcoming Roundtable

19th September 2024 - Ethical Entrepreneurship

The Ethical Entrepreneurship Roundtable is a gathering of visionary business leaders, innovative entrepreneurs, and thought leaders dedicated to exploring and promoting the role of ethical practices in modern business.

To register your interest, please email us at salt@christian-aid.org