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## Why female farmers cannot farm their land to the full potential – intersectional causes for poverty

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### Abstract

In Zambia, poverty and food insecurity are still mainly a rural phenomenon, with three-quarters of the poor living in rural areas. Almost half of Zambia's population depends on agriculture for their livelihoods, with around 98 % of all farms run by smallholder farmers, cultivating predominately less than 2 ha of land. Moreover, with almost half of Zambian farmers being female, Zambia is among the countries with the highest proportion of women in agricultural employment worldwide.

A team from INEF, University of Duisburg-Essen, conducted focus group discussions with male and female farmers in Eastern Province. The aim of the study was to analyse the situation of smallholder farms, their needs, and the challenges they face. In line with the findings of previous studies conducted by the INEF team in Ethiopia, Benin, and Cambodia, the study showed that secure access to land and long-term use rights are a fundamental prerequisite for rural livelihoods and key to food security. However, in order to fully exploit its potential, access to agricultural financing for investments in farm inputs and implements, sufficient time to carry out agricultural activities and an adequate labour force are required. Yet gender-specific discrimination structures in Zambia, a country that is still strongly patriarchal, put women at a considerable disadvantage compared to their male counterparts in this respect. In addition to the double burden of unpaid domestic and care work, women in Zambia are significantly disadvantaged in terms of access to credit and mechanised equipment. Lacking decision-making power within the household, further contributes to them being side-lined. As a result, female farmers, especially single women, are less productive, affecting negatively their household income and food security.

The contribution aims to present the case study's findings with regard to the specific challenges female smallholder farmers in Zambia face. It further explores pathways to promote women's agricultural activities in Zambia and beyond.

**Keywords:** Agricultural finance, gender inequalities, intersectionality, land, smallholder farmers, Zambia