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“Reconcile land system changes  
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## Role of african women small-holder farmers in strengthening governance strategies across agro-ecosystems

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### Abstract

Smallholder farming is an important economic practice for rural communities in Sub-Saharan Africa, yet systemic barriers continue to limit agricultural productivity and the well-being of farmers. While the international standard classifies smallholder farms as less than 10 hectares, over 80 % of African farmers operate on significantly smaller plots. Women represent more than 50 % of the smallholder workforce but face limited access to land, credit, and extension services compared to men. Addressing these imbalances require affordable extension services, financing structures, and local governance systems that ensure equal representation for women smallholders in leadership roles within community-based groups for agro-ecosystem transformation. Lessons from community savings and farmer groups highlight the value of market unity and social cohesion in promoting equity, access to resources, and economic empowerment. Therefore, this discussion will explore approaches such as financial literacy initiatives to enhance economic stability at the individual, household and group levels; “Pay-as-you-go” business models for accessible and inclusive agricultural solutions as well as hybrid networking and collaboration among smallholders to facilitate knowledge sharing and best practices. Additionally, the role of social protection in risk management through group-based social services and assistance programmes will be examined as a means to enable long-term investments in sustainable agriculture, fostering year-round food production, soil conservation, and habitat preservation. Moreover, social protection mechanisms help smallholders achieve key livelihood objectives across different stages, including: building assets and stabilising household consumption to reduce vulnerability; establishing self-insurance methods and safeguarding essential resources; managing cash flow to stabilise household consumption and ensure financial security while expanding income sources by progressively growing assets to strengthen economic stability. By integrating these measures, smallholder farmers can navigate risks effectively while fostering sustainable agricultural development and long-term resilience.

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