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TOWARDS MORE GENDER-RESPONSIVE POLICIES AND BUDGETS FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

Authors:

Prof. Dr. Marina Nacka,
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje,
Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Food – Skopje

Prof. Dr. Andreas Drichoutis,
Agricultural University of Athens

Prof. Dr. Rodolfo M. Nayga, Jr.,
Texas A&M University

Prof. Dr. Dragi Dimitrievski,
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje,
Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Food – Skopje

Prof. Dr. Ivana Janeska Stamenkovska,
Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje,
Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Food - Skopje

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BACKGROUND

Empowering women in agriculture has the potential to significantly boost rural economies and foster rural development. The success of such interventions relies on inclusive and sustainable gender-responsive and employment-generating policies for long-term women empowerment. However, designed policies and measures to support agriculture and rural development often lack gender-responsive policy interventions that target rural women's needs.

The importance of gender equality has been recognized by the national institutions. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Water Economy of the Republic of North Macedonia has formed a *Working group for gender equality and women empowerment*. The Working group aims to support the monitoring and *ex-ante* or *ex-post* assessments (when *ex-ante* is not applicable) of the measures to propose subsequent gender-specific actions for women empowerment in agriculture in the forthcoming strategic policy documents for agriculture and rural development.

However, there remains a significant and enduring disparity between women and men in the agricultural sector and rural communities. Women in the agricultural sector are significantly disempowered compared to men in terms of ownership of assets, input in decision-making, control over the use of income, and their leadership potential (58 out of 100 women are disempowered compared to 33 out of 100 men; 66.6% of women do not achieve parity with their partner) (Dimitirevski, et al. 2019). Women also tend to have lower bargaining power in intra-household decision-making. Nevertheless, our research findings indicate that simply providing additional financial support to marginalized or disempowered women may not yield the desired policy outcomes unless they have already achieved a certain level of empowerment (Nacka, Drichoutis & Nayga, 2023).

This begs the question of whether current governmental programmes for support in agriculture and rural development are effective if there is a lack of *ex-ante* and *ex-post* assessments that will ensure that certain interventions can better address the long-term economic and social empowerment of the women in agriculture and rural areas.

In 2019, **the first gender-responsive measure** (measure 115) was introduced in the National Program for Financial Support of Agriculture and Rural Development in the Republic of North Macedonia. The measure aimed to support women in agriculture (active members of agricultural households) with financial support (3000 EUR) for an investment that will add value to their production and skills and perform income-generated activities. The measure comprehensively covers the upfront investment cost that the applicant is required to make initially. Out of 403 women who applied for the support, 61,04% were eligible to receive the grant but only 48% continued the application procedure. However, the payment realization of the measure was completed in September/October 2022 benefiting 131 women from the first call in 2019. In 2022, the second call was announced, increasing the financial support to 6,000 EUR.

The research aims to address the following questions: **a)** to elicit the effect of measure 115 from both a policy standpoint and the perspective of women themselves, **b)** to identify areas where policy interventions could be enhanced to ensure sustainable, long-term empowerment for women and **c)** to propose recommendations for implementing supplementary measures that adopt a participatory approach, enabling equal opportunities for various groups of women in agriculture and addressing their specific needs. The literature suggests that the approach to developing policy measures for women's empowerment should be strongly correlated with the interdependence of economic and social empowerment and the subsequent use of economic and behavioral research approaches, such as economics experiments. The importance of experiments relies on their evidence-based approach and ability to establish causality, which is valuable for decision-making in economic and policy analysis and provides high-quality evidence on the causal impact of policy interventions.

THE PROJECT GOAL

The project "Towards more gender-responsive policies and budgets for agriculture and rural development" aims to enhance the development and planning of agricultural and rural development policies in North Macedonia. The **overall goal** of the project is to support the future planning and development of agricultural and rural development policy and to contribute to an improved gender-responsive policy-making process for long-term women's empowerment in agriculture. The project has identified **three key outputs**. By providing government officials and policymakers with evidence-based research, **output 1** facilitates informed decision-making processes, ensuring that gender-responsive policy measures and budgets are integrated into national programs for agriculture and rural development. **Output 2** focuses on capacity-building efforts, equipping officials and policymakers with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively mainstream gender considerations and GRB within agricultural policies and programs. Finally, **output 3** targets the empowerment of women in agriculture and rural areas by enhancing their abilities to access and benefit from policy measures that offer support and assistance in agricultural activities.

METHOD

- **Women Disempowerment Index** in agriculture was measured in five domains: production, resources, income, leadership, and time allocation, with a survey-based standardized questionnaire (Alkire et al. 2013).

- **Testing policy interventions**: financial support from the newly introduced gender-responsive measure 115 and financial literacy training of agricultural households, including both women and men for further joint decision-making.

- **Lab-in-the-field economics experiment (Randomised controlled trials)** to elicit **Women's Risk and Time Preferences** (Holt & Laury, 2002; Andersen et al. 2008) in a two-wave experimental design:

  1. Wave I (December-January 2022/2023): Women Disempowerment Index and Women's Risk and Time Preferences measured **before** two policy interventions: the payment realization of measure 115 and financial literacy training of agricultural households.

  2. Wave II (April 2023): Women Disempowerment Index and Women's Risk and Time Preferences measured **after** two policy interventions: the payment realization of measure 115 and financial literacy training of agricultural households.

- **Analysis of the Gender-responsiveness of the Policies and Programs for Agriculture and Rural development,** to examine the policy and budgetary transfers, aiming to provide an overview of the key legal, strategic, and operational documents that outline developmental goals and govern the financial support in agriculture.

  - In addition, a **field research study** was conducted involving 100 women engaged in agriculture. The objective was to assess their perceptions regarding the accessibility and effectiveness of programs and measures outlined in the agricultural and rural development policies.

Sample

300 women in agriculture randomly chosen from different statistical regions of the country, divided into three groups (randomized control trials):

- **Group I (control):** 100 disempowered women who do not apply for the national gender-responsive measure 115;

- **Group II (rejected):** 100 women who applied for the measure 115 but they were rejected because of various criteria-related factors;

- **Group III (approved):** 100 women who applied for the measure and they received financial support.

Why Risk and Time preferences?

- Risk and Time preferences (RTPs) are fundamental preferences related to savings, investments, occupational choice, labor supply, farming decisions, entrepreneurship, and other aspects of everyday life;

- RTPs may be directly related to women's empowerment;
- If some women are systematically less prone to take risks or less future-oriented, we would expect that these women will be more likely to opt out of a wide range of economic opportunities (investments of capital, loans, entrepreneurial decisions, etc.);
- It would be more cost-effective to target interventions to the ones that need them e.g., women that are less prone to take risks or less future-oriented.

How do we elicit it?

- We use a set of well-established choice tasks from the experimental economics literature to elicit RTPs (Holt & Laury, 2002; Andersen et al. 2008);
- Risk preferences are elicited by asking subjects to make choices between lottery choice tasks (incentivized real money measures – 10 choices) that involve either a **lower risk - lower yield or a higher risk - higher yield;**
- Time preferences are elicited by asking subjects to make choices between monetary dated amounts of money;
- Elicited *stated* measures of risk and future orientation by asking subjects on a Likert scale to state how willing they are to take risks and how impatient they are;
- A person that averts risk-taking would prefer the blue lottery (lower spread), while a person that loves risk would prefer the yellow lottery (higher spread). Women were given various lottery choice tasks to get a clearer picture of how much risk-taking they are willing to take.

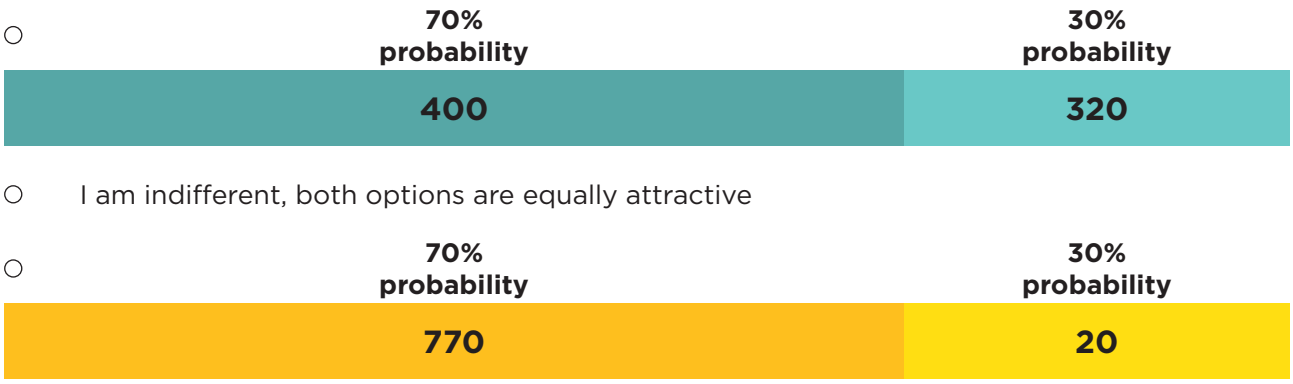


Figure 1 Example screen for lottery choices

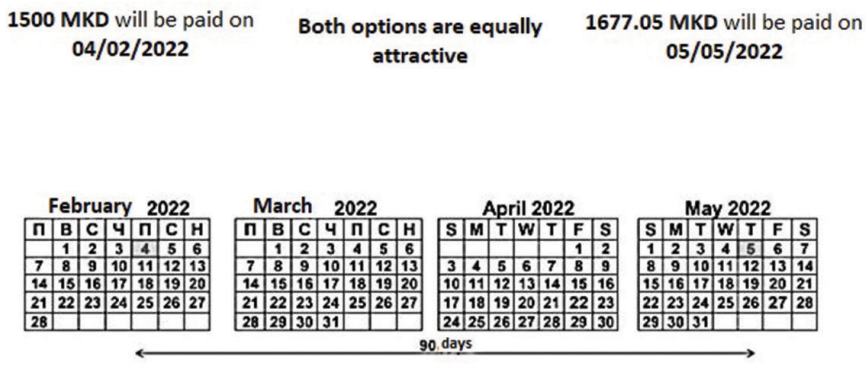


Figure 2 Example screen for time preferences choices

By correlating the **Women Disempowerment Index** and **Risk and Time Preferences** from the two waves of the experiment, we measure the effect of the interventions on women empowerment and their decisions and fundamental preferences to risk in economic opportunities related to farming decisions, investments, credit decisions, leadership, and entrepreneurship.

SELECTED RESULTS FOR THE WOMEN DISEMPOWERMENT INDEX

Table 1 Summary of the indicators and domain-specific/related results (n=300 women)

Five Domains	Indicators	Selected results		
		Control group	Rejected	Approved
Production	Input in productive decisions	1.5% feel they have no input in decision making	9.1% feel they have no input in decision making	. 1.4% feel they have no input in decision making
Resources	Ownership of assets	55.9% don't own at least one asset within the household	15.6% don't own at least one asset within the household	. 16.7% don't own at least one asset within the household
	Access to and decisions on credit	85.3% don't make at least one decision regarding the source of credit	64.1% don't make at least one decision regarding the source of credit	. 69.6% don't make at least one decision regarding the source of credit . After measure 115, the percentage raised to 78.7%
Income	Control over the use of income	. Most of the women, 60% have a share of 40% of the household income . 30% of the women have less than 30% share of the household income	. Most of the women, 47% have a share of 40% of the household income . 30% of the women have less than 30% share of the household income	. 61% generate income from the investment from measure 115
Leadership	Group membership	10.3% are members of at least one group/ association	14.1% are members of at least one group/ association	. 22.8% are members of at least one group/ association
Time allocation	Workload	66.2% work more than 10 hours per day	67.9% work more than 10 hours per day	. 63.3% work more than 10 hours per day

Our findings indicate that women who had higher index scores also tended to have higher RTPs scores. This suggests that interventions that focus on enhancing women's empowerment in agriculture, particularly in domains such as access to credit, decision-making power, and control over income, are likely to yield positive economic outcomes for households. Overall, the disempowerment index varies vastly between the three groups of our sample. For the control group, 53.6% of the sampled women do not achieve empowerment and the disempowerment score for them is quite higher than the overall average. In comparison, only 11.11% and 16.46% of the 'approved' and 'rejected' groups, do not achieve empowerment.

Table 2 Women Disempowerment Index

	Control	Approved	Rejected
% of women not achieving empowerment	53.60%	11.11%	16.46%
Disempowerment score	0.229	0.045	0.074
Patience score	8.71	8.05	8.73
Risk score	5.81	6.03	6.90

Our study also found that women who were less prone to take risks or less future-oriented were less likely to engage in entrepreneurial activities, even when given the opportunity. More risk-taking is associated with the approved and rejected groups as compared to the control while the patience score is approximately the same between the three groups. Therefore, policies that aim to promote women's empowerment in agriculture must take into account the differences in RTPs among women and provide tailored support to those who may require additional assistance to overcome their risk aversion.

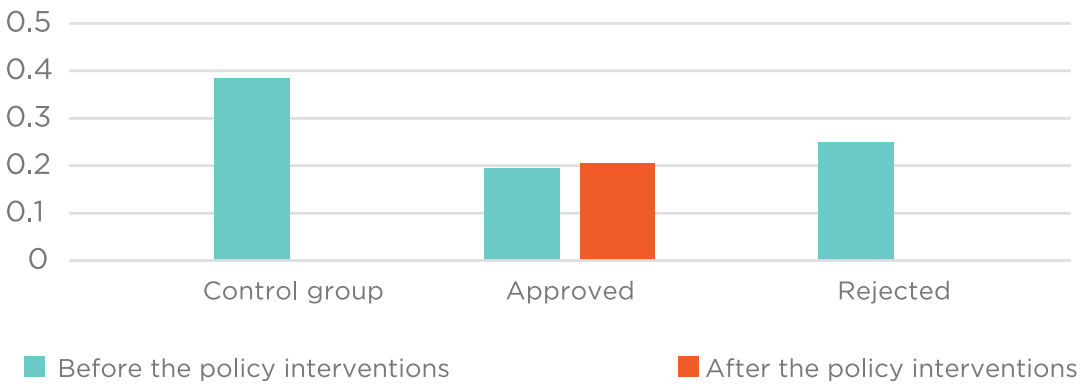


Figure 3 Women Disempowerment Index before and after the policy interventions

The domains that contribute most to women's disempowerment in all of the groups are **group membership, workload, and access/decision to credit**. These three indicators take around 80% of the value of the disempowerment index in agriculture. For the most disempowered women (control group), the domain ownership of the assets has a significant contribution to the disempowerment. Polog and Pelagonia regions show lower levels of disempowerment

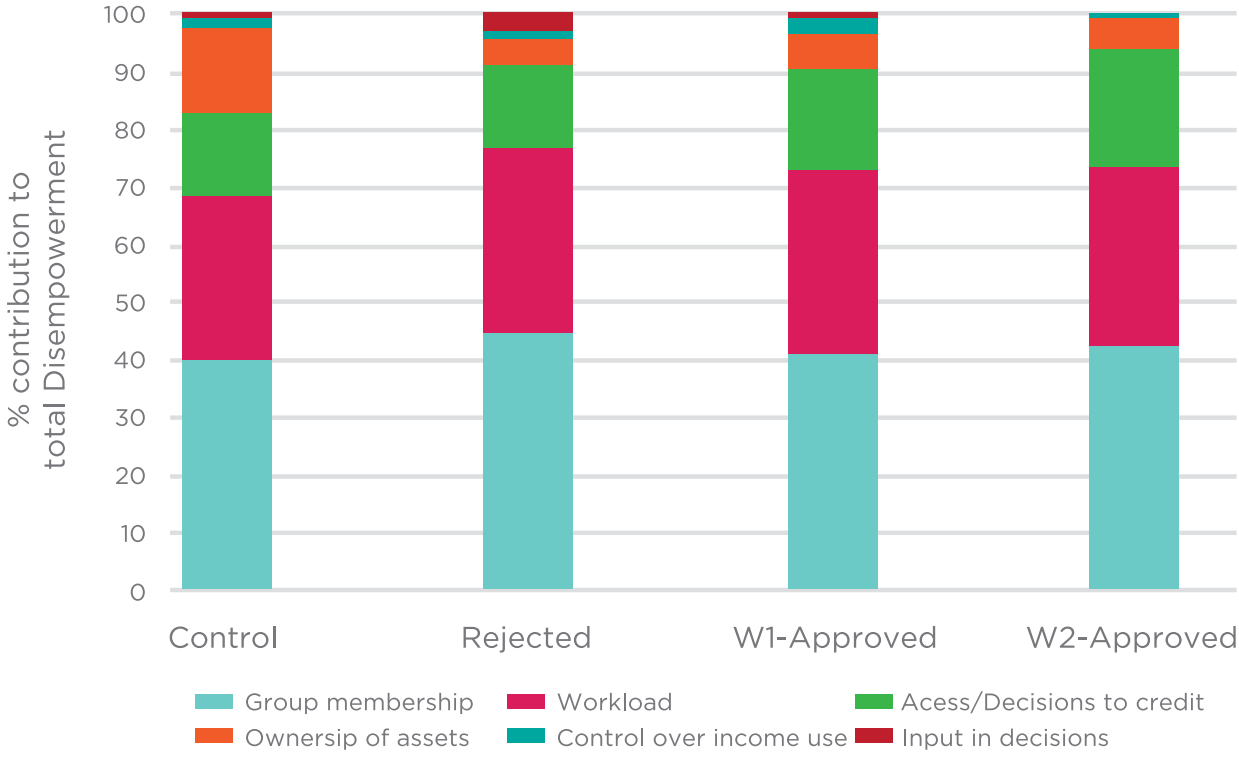
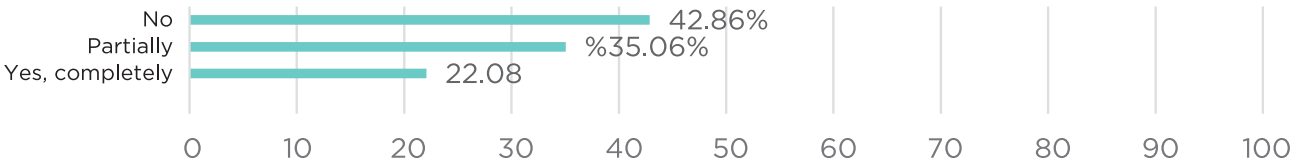


Figure 4 Contribution of the domain/indicators to disempowerment score:

II SELECTED RESULTS FOR THE POLICY INTERVENTION MEASURE 115

- 63.5% of the sample applied for the measure 115
- 66.4% received the grant
- 61% generate income from the investment from measure 115
- "I do not use the equipment" is the main reason for those who did not generate income yet
- 93.5% consider that measure 115 is successful in terms of strengthening their position
- "Low amount of financial resources to cover the investment" is the main reason for those who believe that the measure is not a successful empowerment tool
- Training for financial literacy has a positive effect on women's improved knowledge and skills. Certificate for training completion proves to be a motivational tool for the women's interest and patience to complete the training.

Did you achieve a return on investment from equipment use and product sales?



Women's Attitudes and Perceptions on Measure 115

- 13% from the approved group: The late payment of measure 115 has negative publicity on the success of the measure
- 2.6% from approved group: The late payment of measure 115 affects the reduction of the number of women applicants for the second call
- 13% from approved group: Better that I applied at the first call with an amount of 3000 euros than the second call and an amount of 6000 euros
- 13% from approved group: I would rather have applied to the second call with an amount of 6000 euros than the first call and an amount of 3000 euros
- 58.4% from approved group: It is necessary to find a way for additional support (business development) to equalize the difference in the amount of the first (3000 EUR) and the second call (6000 EUR) for those who applied for the first call

III SELECTED RESULTS FROM THE LAB-IN-THE-FIELD ECONOMICS EXPERIMENT (RANDOMISED CONTROLLED TRIALS) TO ELICIT WOMEN'S RISK AND TIME PREFERENCES

Risk preferences:

- We find that women between the different groups do not exhibit big differences in terms of stated risk-taking
- However, women from the *control* group exhibit *slightly* more risk aversion than other women (their distribution of responses is shifted more to the left of the scale)
- Most women rank average in terms of risk (i.e., close to risk neutrality).

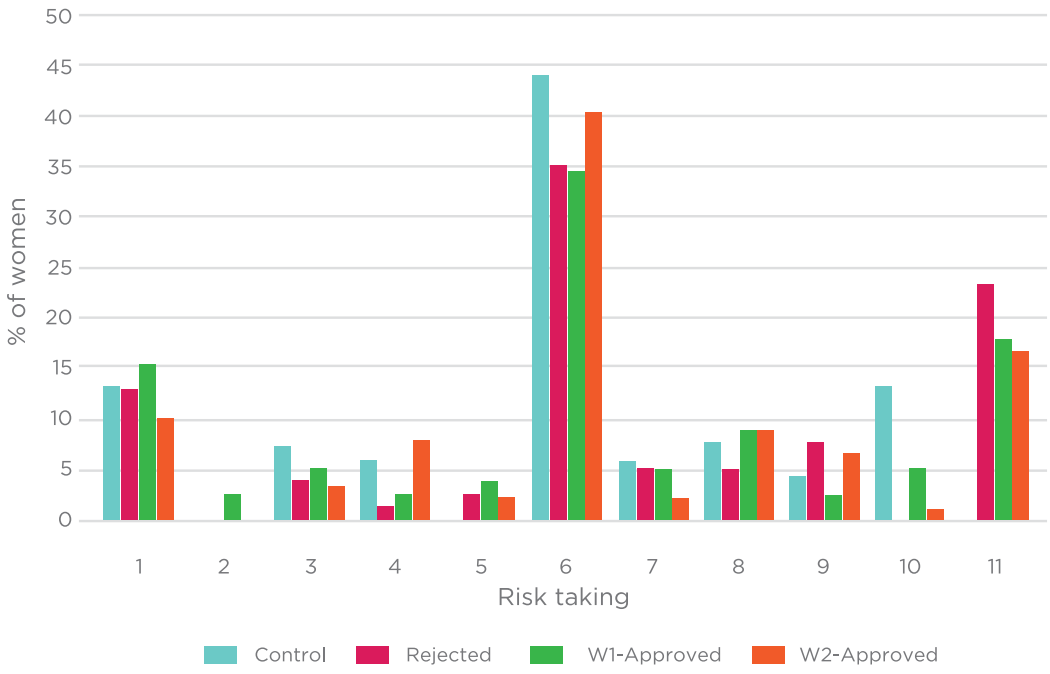


Figure 5 Distribution of the Risk scale among the three groups

Time preferences:

- We find that women between the different groups do not exhibit big differences in terms of stated future orientation
- Most women do not state to be present-oriented; this is irrespective of their group

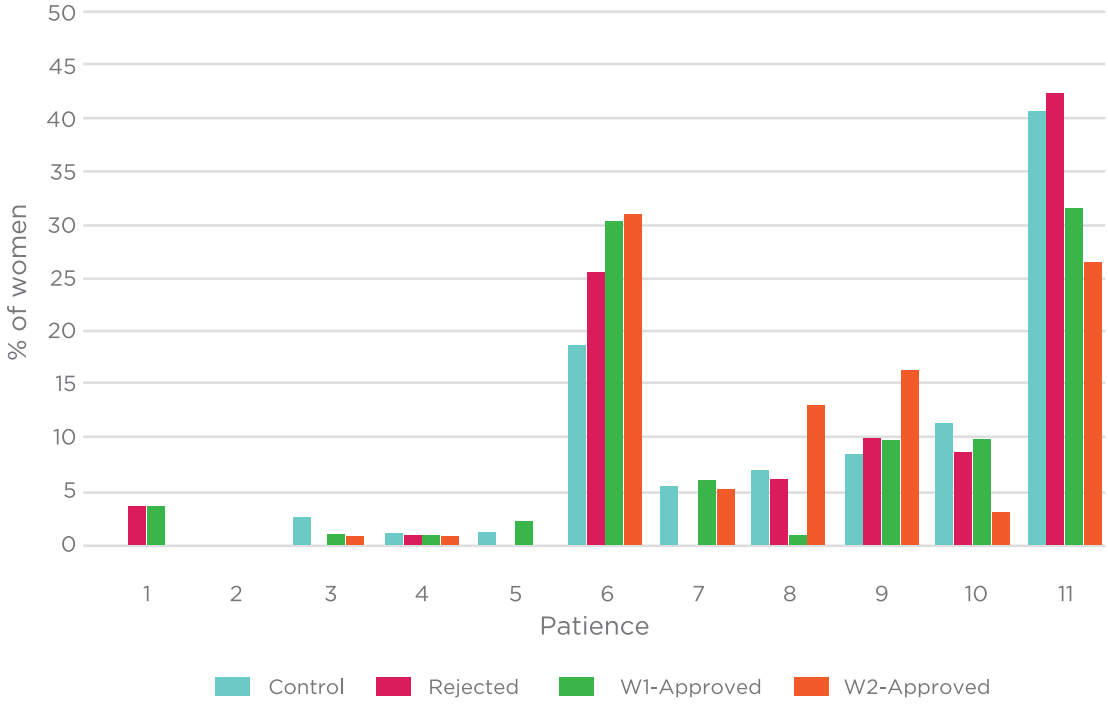


Figure 6 Distribution of the patience scale among the three groups

We find that women between the different groups do not exhibit significant differences in terms of *stated* risk-taking or patience. Most women rank average in terms of risk (i.e., close to risk neutrality), and they are generally more patient rather than impatient.

IV SELECTED RESULTS FROM THE ANALYSIS OF THE GENDER RESPONSIVENESS OF THE POLICIES AND PROGRAMS FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

North Macedonia is a signatory to dozens of United Nations and Council of Europe human rights documents (MLSP, 2021), including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), with which it has committed to advancing gender equality and empowerment in the country. The Convention specifically addresses the issues that rural women face and requires state parties to provide adequate resources and support them. The main legal framework for gender equality is provided by the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, which was adopted in 2006 and amended in 2012 to formalize the requirement for central and local governments to mainstream gender in strategic plans and budgets. Aside from that, the legal framework is comprised of the following strategic documents: The first National Strategy for Equality and Non-discrimination (2012-2015) and the Strategy for Introducing Gender Responsive Budgeting in the Republic of Macedonia (2012-2017) were both adopted in 2012; the Strategy for Gender Equality (2013-2020) and the National Strategy for Equality and Non-discrimination (2016-2020) enacted in 2013 and 2016 respectively; in 2021, the country adopted the Strategy for Gender Equality (2022-2027) on the basis of which the National Action Plan for Gender Equality (2022-2024) is prepared and the National Strategy for Equality and Non-discrimination (2022-2026) was adopted in 2022.

In terms of the institutional framework for gender equality, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy's Department of Equal Opportunities serves as the leading gender equality mechanism in the country. In addition, there is an inter-sectoral consultation and advisory group on gender equality for monitoring the adopted strategies for implementation of gender responsive budgeting. Furthermore, a Coordinator and a Deputy Coordinator for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men are appointed by each line ministry to mainstream gender in the strategic plans and budgets as well as to monitor the effects and the impact of their programs on women and men.

The agricultural sector is regulated by a number of laws and by-laws, among them the most significant is the Law on Agriculture and Rural Development (LARD, 2010). Furthermore, several strategic and operational documents define development goals and govern financial support for agriculture and rural development: the National strategy for agriculture and rural development 2021-2027, the National strategy for agriculture and rural development 2014-2020, the Rural Development Programs of the EU instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPARD) 2007-2013, 2014-2020, and 2021-2027, and the National programs for agriculture and rural development. These documents include gender equality and non-discrimination as principles. The analysis of the gender-responsive aspects in these documents is summarized in the Table 3 through the lens of the five main areas.

Table 3: Summary of gender-responsive aspects in the strategic documents structured by the five domains

Strategic documents	Production and resources	Income	Leadership	Workload
Law on Agriculture and Rural Development (LARD, 2010)	Gender is among criteria for user selection (Art. 91)	Additional aid for women as holders of Agricultural holdings (Art. 102,until 2012)	Civil society organizations (CSOs) promoting rural women recognized as MAFWE social partner (Art. 24) Women participation in LAGs (Art. 89)	
National Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy 2014–2020 (NARDS)	Prioritizes projects proposed by rural women by granting additional points	Proposed measure to provide "continuous support for active woman members of the agricultural holdings"	Supports women inclusion in LAGs decision making and in MAFWE working groups Supports establishment of producer groups of rural women	

Strategic documents	Production and resources	Income	Leadership	Workload
National Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy 2021-2027 (NARDS)	-Prioritizes projects proposed by rural women by granting additional points -Priorities in access to advisory services	-Supports projects for diversification of income, with additional incentives for rural women applicants. -Support of the economic activity of women farmers with additional direct payments, trough grant for processing activities at the farm and benefits in the ranking of projects from the new IPARD program	Supports the establishment of rural women cooperatives	
National Programs for Agriculture and Rural Development 2018–2020 (NPARD)		Operationalizes the above measure defined in NARDS, planned for 2020 (M. 115)		
National Program for Agriculture and Rural Development 2023–2027 (NPARD)		Operationalizes the measures defined in NARDS, for the period 2021-2027		
EU Instrument for Preaccession (IPA) Rural Development Program 2014–2020 (IPARD II)	Projects by women are granted additional points in the evaluation process in all measures		Women, through CSO, are involved in preparation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the program	
EU Instrument for Preaccession (IPA) Rural Development Program 2021–2027 (IPARD III)	-Projects by women are granted additional points in the evaluation process in all measures -Implementation of the LEADER measure will contribute to promoting equality between women and men in access to employment and career progression	-Implementation of the LEADER measure will contribute to promoting of women entrepreneurship	Networking: networking of LAGs, best practice exchange, and learning new approaches to rural development	

IVa WOMEN PERCEPTIONS ON THE CURRENT NATIONAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

- **Field research study** was conducted involving 100 women engaged in agriculture in order to assess their perceptions regarding the accessibility and effectiveness of programs and measures outlined in the agricultural and rural development policies.

Description of the sample

- Most of the interviewed women (94%) are farm managers and individual farmers among those women registered according to the Law on performing agricultural activity dominates the sample (40%).
- Still the high school education prevails among rural women (59% of the total sample), however also women with higher education are included (21%).
- For most of the interviewed women, the agriculture is the main source of income for the household (73%)

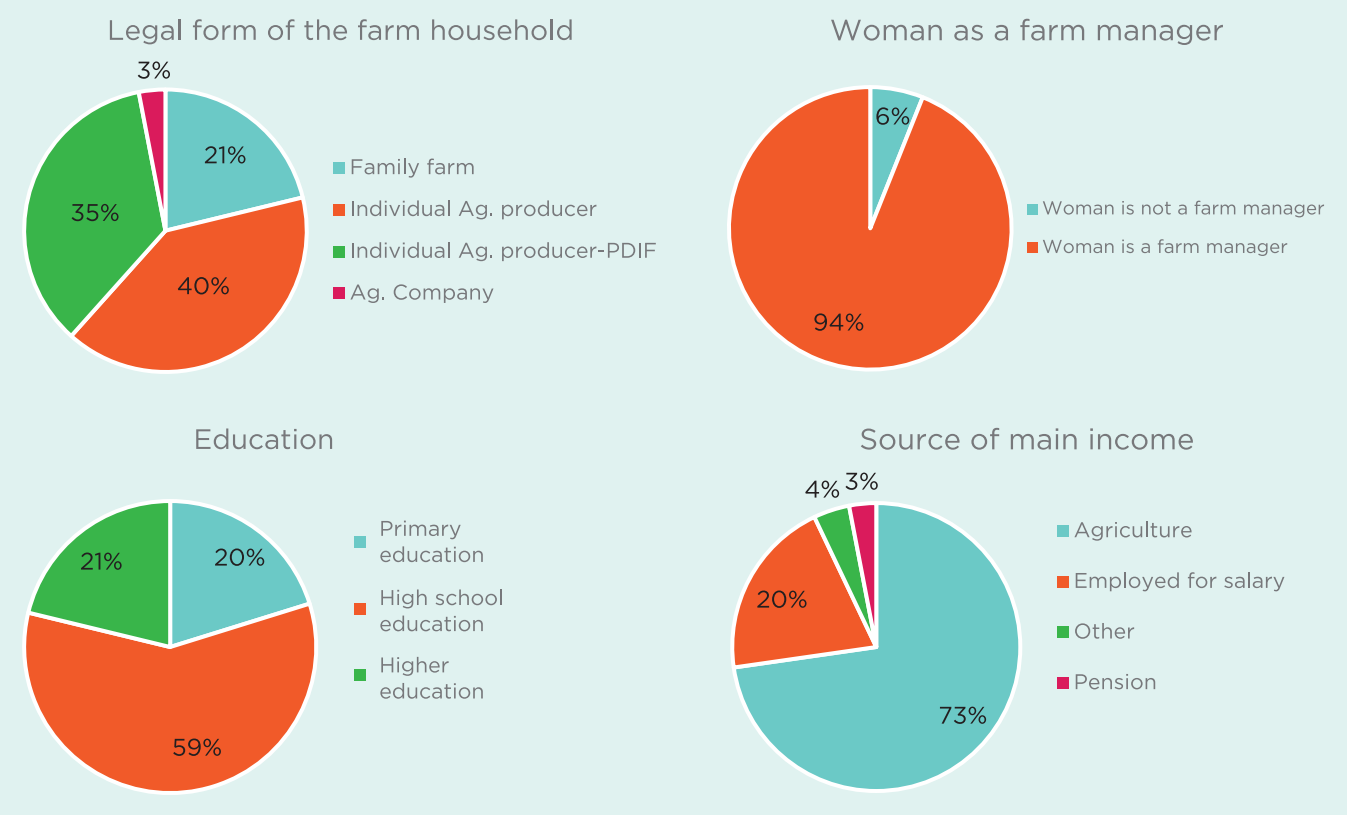
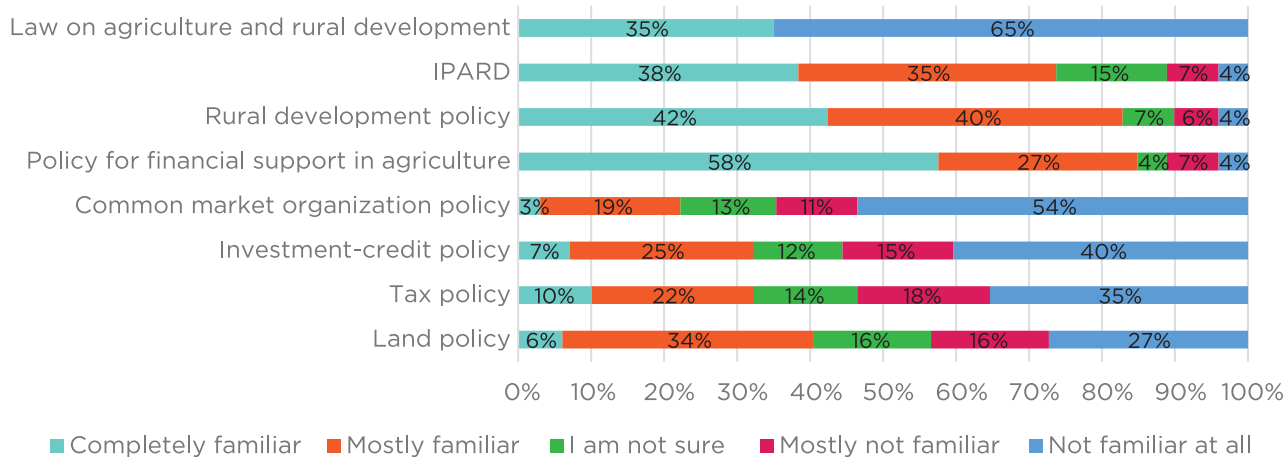


Figure 7 Distribution of women farmers according socio-economic aspects

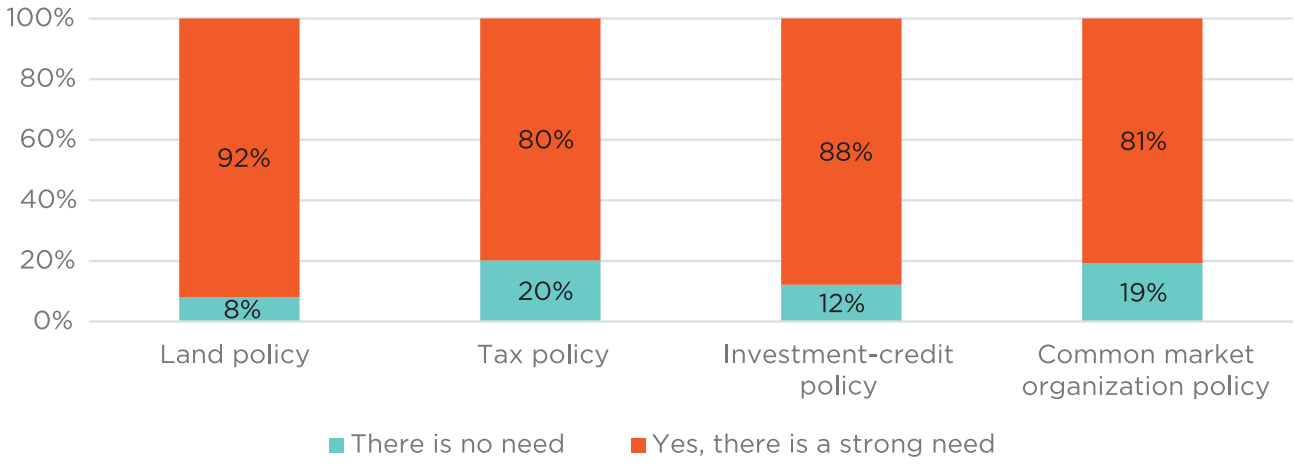
Women perspectives on different policies

- Most of the interviewed women are not familiar with the general policy for addressing the issues of rural women, including even the Law on agriculture and rural development.
- Most of the rural women are familiar with the policies and programmes they usually mostly benefit from, such as the policy and programmes for direct financial support in agriculture, policy and programmes for rural development and IPARD.
- On the other side, almost all of them consider that a gender-responsive measure should be introduced in the policies they are not fully familiar with.

Are you familiar with different policies and programmes tackling rural women?



Should a gender-responsive measure be introduced into these policies?



Policy for direct financial support in agriculture

- 99% of the interviewed women are familiar with the direct payments.
  - 94% do not participate in the development of new policy measures
  - 6% indirectly participate in the policy making through their participation in different groups of agricultural producers (associations, cooperatives, or membership in a working group within MAFWE, etc.)

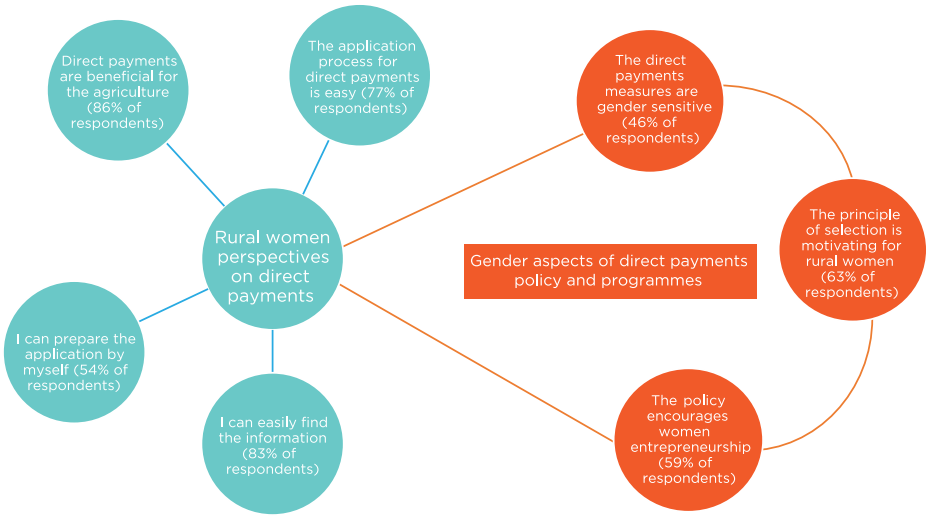


Figure 8 Rural women perspectives on direct payments

Rural development policy

- 99% of the interviewed women are familiar with the rural development measures.
  - 94% do not participate in the development of new policy measures
  - 6% indirectly participate in the policy making through their participation in different groups of agricultural producers (associations, cooperatives, or membership in a working group within MAFWE, etc.)

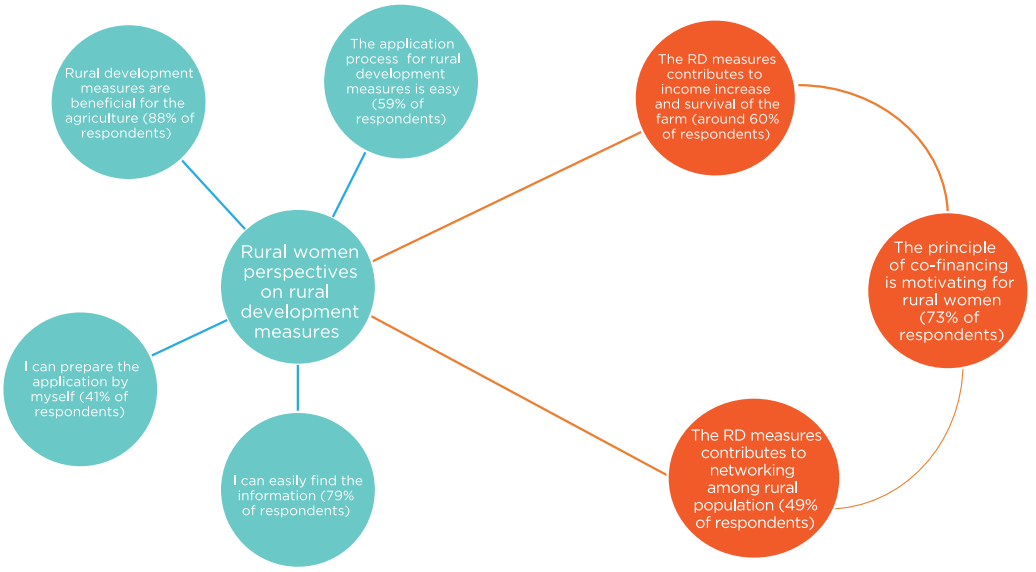


Figure 9 Rural women perspectives on rural development measures

The measure 115 from the perspective of rural women

- Most of the interviewed women (78.8%) are informed about the measure 115 for active woman member in the agricultural household. Some selected results are presented below:
  - 72% of them have applied for this measure.
  - 43% are users of the measure while 12% have been rejected
  - 11% of the respondents can not utilize the measure due to increased prices and long period of payment
  - 9% of them have not enough financial resources for the investment
- 42.4% of the women are familiar with measure 112 and 27.7% with measure 113, while 4% and 3% respectively have applied for these two measures.

KEY CONCLUSIONS

- No direct effect of the policy interventions on empowerment, but it has a positive effect on women attitudes, income generation, and strengthening their position in the household.
- The domains that contribute most to women's disempowerment in all of the groups are group membership, workload, and access/decision to credit.
- For the most disempowered women (control group), the domain ownership of the assets has a significant contribution to the disempowerment.
- Women in the agricultural sector are more likely to opt out of a wide range of economic opportunities related to farming decisions, investments, credit decisions, leadership, and entrepreneurship entrepreneurial decisions, etc.
- Women who were less prone to take risks or less future-oriented were less likely to engage in entrepreneurial activities, *even when given the opportunity*
- The policy interventions that have been introduced need to be regularly assessed to identify areas for necessary adjustments or refinements to the policy design to ensure their long-term impact on women's empowerment.
- In the short time interval between the Intervention and measurement of disempowerment, no effects of the intervention could be detected. Therefore, an ex-ante pilot testing of the policy measures is recommended, before they are implemented on a larger scale.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Continuously support and implement new measures:** Continually provide support and implement additional gender-responsive measures that adopt a participatory approach. These measures should ensure equal opportunities for various groups of women in agriculture, taking into account their specific needs. Targeted support for more disempowered women.
- **Enhance information sharing:** Increase efforts to disseminate information about financial support programs, to ensure that more women are aware of and can access these resources.
- **Invest in regional empowerment strategies:** Focus on regions with lower rates of active group membership and empowerment. Design targeted interventions to improve women's empowerment in these areas, tailored to their unique circumstances and challenges.
- **Strengthen institutional cooperation:** Emphasize the importance of harmonizing the system of mandatory and regular cooperation between policy institutions. This includes collaboration in policy design and monitoring, as well as unifying and simplifying the documentation required for the effective application of measures.
- **Enhance training initiatives:** Strengthen training programs to improve financial literacy, marketing skills, digital marketing, and other relevant areas. Use a methodology for assessing the training needs of women in agriculture and ensure the active involvement of women and men in joint training for mutual support and participation.
- **Regularly assess policy interventions:** Conduct periodic assessments of policy interventions to identify areas requiring adjustments or refinements. Consider conducting these assessments at intervals of 6 or 12 months, or longer depending on the specific nature of the introduced intervention.
- **Conduct an ex-ante pilot testing of the policy measures, before they are implemented on a broader scale, mid-term evaluation as continuous control, and ex-post analysis after the implementation of the measure or program**
  - The ex-ante pilot testing will allow simulation for the evaluation of the effectiveness and potential impact of the measures, identification of potential challenges, and refinement of the policies based on the feedback received. It will provide valuable insights and help ensure that the measures are well-designed and optimized before being rolled out on a larger scale.
  - Initiate an ex-post analysis to evaluate the outcomes and impacts of the policy measures implemented thus far. This analysis will serve as a starting point for the development of a new cycle of policy measures.
  - In line with contemporary policy-making practices, consider conducting a "mid-term" evaluation as part of ongoing monitoring and control processes. Apply this evaluation approach to measure 115 as a continuing measure, ensuring that its effectiveness is regularly assessed and adjustments are made as necessary for continuous improvement.

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More information

This policy brief is a summary of comprehensive empirical research to succinctly evaluate policy options regarding women's empowerment and gender responsiveness in agricultural and rural development policy-making.

The complete edition, published as a monograph, will be available at:
http://www.fznh.ukim.edu.mk/fznh_un_woman

Information about the project is available at:
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For any further information, please contact
marina.nacka@fznh.ukim.edu.mk