

## Funding: Supporting Women in Agriculture-Related Higher Education

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Funding has been identified as instrumental in ensuring women's access to education and the successful completion of their academic programs (Acker, 1999; Salmi & Basset, 2014). In the developing world, women comprise less than 40% of students enrolled in agricultural science programs, and in some regions like Asia and Africa this percentage drops below 25 (Zseleczky, Houweling & Christie, 2013, p. 2). In Latin America more women than men enroll in higher education overall, but less than a third are in science-related fields. The causes for such disparity include resource constraints, cultural norms, and lack of institutional support or outright gender discrimination (Quisumbing, et al., 2011). Securing funding support for women in higher education in the agricultural science programs has the potential to empower women, break pervasive cycles of poverty, and improve the livelihoods of families and communities.

### Social Inequality and Access to Higher Education

Social inequality has negative effects on access to education for marginalized populations. In sub-Saharan Africa, 80 percent of students enrolled in higher education programs are born to families in the richest quintile (Salmi & Bassett, 2014); whereas, marginalized women comprise approximately 60 to 80 percent of the agricultural work force. In agricultural science programs, women are notoriously underrepresented at the masters and doctoral levels and in research positions (Beintema & Marcantoni, 2009). Providing funding in agriculture-related fields is fundamental for curtailing inequality through the advancement of women and girls who often face onerous resource constraints and lack societal support to meet their educational goals.

To ensure not only the recruitment of women but also the successful completion of their agricultural science degrees, it is of utmost importance that funding opportunities meet the unique needs of women. Funding must go beyond covering basic expenses related to their course of study, food and housing, books, and transportation. Often households depend on women's income and unpaid work; therefore, their participation in educational programs might negatively affect the financial stability of the household. Funding opportunities must account for women's unique situation and provide an effective incentive to begin and finish degrees.

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## Examples of International Funding Programs

Funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the [Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World](#) (OWSD) works to increase African women's presence in agriculture-related fields through a fellowship program enabling them to pursue their doctorates in a developing country other than their own. In partnership with a host university, the fellowship provides three years of funding for travel, food, housing, visa expenses, tuition and registration fees as well as medical insurance. The OWSD has provided over 340 women with fellowships.

[Borlaug Fellowships](#) provide funding opportunities for researchers, policy makers and scientists in agricultural-related fields. Since 2004, the Borlaug Fellowship has sponsored over 700 fellows from 64 countries. Funded by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the fellowships are offered to mid-career professionals who have completed a master's degree or higher. Funded by USAID, the [Borlaug Leadership Enhancement in Agriculture Program](#) (LEAP) is designed to support agricultural researchers for up to 12 months through an internship with a member of the Consortium of International Agricultural Research Centers (CGIAR) or a U.S. University. Since its inception in 2005, 94 percent of LEAP fellowships have been awarded to applicants from Sub-Saharan Africa, out of which, 41 percent of fellows have been women. Fellows are awarded up to \$20,000 to support research needs and travel.

Supported by USAID, [Women's Leadership Programs](#) recognize the importance of providing funding support for recruiting women and helping secure the successful completion of their agricultural science degrees. Through the Women's Leadership program, universities in countries like Rwanda and [Afghanistan](#) offer scholarships for low-income and rural women to join agricultural science programs. In Rwanda, this scholarship program helped increase the numbers of women students so that in 2015, women comprised half the student body in a Master's of Science in Agribusiness. As OWSD and the Women's Leadership Program examples suggest, the long-term success of such initiatives depends on the development of partnerships with key local actors and international funders.

## Local Efforts

Participation of women in agriculture-related programs starts with increasing awareness among women students of international sources of funding. University administrators and faculty can advertise such opportunities on student informational boards, newsletters, intra-program updates, email list-serves, via text messaging or in their own departmental or university websites. By distributing information through a variety of media, women students can access funding information readily.

### Resources for developing scholarship applications and applicant selection process:

- [Developing an Educational Scholarship Program](#)
- [FinAid Scholarship Design and Management](#)

### Links to sources of scholarships:

- [Worldfish guide](#) to scholarships and fellowships
- Advance Africa: [Scholarships for Women](#)

In addition to funding opportunities for women offered by international entities, there are other sources of funding-related information including professional academic associations, universities and even academic journals. For example, the Journal of Gender, Agriculture and Food Security provides a [list of scholarships](#) available to women wishing to enter agriculture-related fields. Similarly, the University of California at Berkeley maintains a [Funding and Resource Guide for African Students](#).

Also, university administrators and faculty can use simple strategies to effectively support the funding needs of women once they are enrolled in their programs. An initial step is for academic departments to tap into the social capital generated by programs through their former students. This can be done by engaging former students in program activities and providing them with opportunities to donate funds earmarked for women students or by establishing scholarships and fellowships for women.

In contexts where funding support for higher education is limited, a grassroots approach may be appropriate. This approach may include organizing special events that coincide with national or international holidays such as International Women's Day. Such events are an opportunity to showcase the work of women students and faculty, engage local potential donors, and raise funds earmarked specifically to support women in achieving their educational goals.

The shortage of women in agricultural sciences higher education calls for action to provide adequate funding assistance. Generating awareness of available resources is a first step. Administrators and faculty can engage creatively with alumni and the community to generate additional local funding. The returns on such investments are increased access to education and improved livelihoods for families and communities.

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