



# Women in Agriculture

An Exploratory Study on Women and Gender Equality in  
South African Agriculture.



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# PROJECT PARTNERS

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**Western Cape  
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# ABOUT THE STUDY

This research study is prepared to allow brands and suppliers a glimpse into how women are represented within South African agriculture, the extent to which women have been emancipated and areas where improvements can be made to eliminate consequences of past injustices, cultures and other relegations.



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# OBJECTIVES & METHOD

The primary objective of this study is to determine how many women are employed in this industry and how they are represented. Furthermore, to allow for effective and practical support, the secondary objectives are to ascertain whether women are treated with dignity at all levels of the industry and to identify barriers toward gender equality in agriculture.

Data from the *Census of commercial agriculture 2017* report (CCA) is used to address the primary objective. In order to address the secondary objectives, both quantitative and qualitative data was collected through an online questionnaire (OQ) using convenience sampling from 4 to 24 February 2020.



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To gain a clear understanding of the industry's experience regarding women's dignity and gender equality at all levels, data from the *Census of commercial agriculture 2017* report, as well as an online questionnaire were collected.

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## QUANTITATIVE DATA

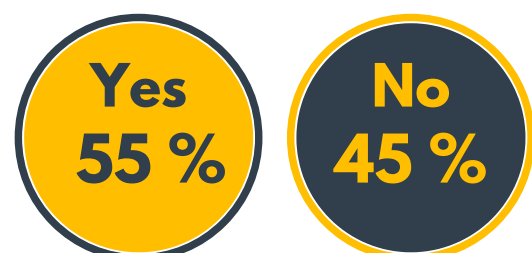
The gap between the total number of male and female employees, have nationally decreased slightly. On the whole, most women working in agriculture are 26 years or older.

Respondents show a preference for employing women and report that most women in senior positions are paid above industry benchmarks. Furthermore, the majority of respondents agreed that more women are needed in agriculture. With the adoption of new technologies, physical strength need not be the determining factor for future employment in agriculture.

**Are men & women treated equally?**  
(00)



**Does your business offer upliftment programs for women?**  
(00)



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

cont.

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## QUALITATIVE DATA

When asked why more women are needed in agriculture, respondents gave various reasons. Most responses included:

- Women are empathetic leaders
- Women are good problem-solvers
- Women are effective communicators

Respondents were asked to identify barriers for women in South African agriculture. The feedback received highlighted both abstract and practical barriers.

- Physical strength
- Perception
- Self-confidence
- Education & Training
- Motherhood & Childcare



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## HOW CAN ORGANISATIONS CONTRIBUTE TOWARDS WOMEN'S DIGNITY?

Respondents highlighted a diverse range of issues, including:

- Easy access to affordable training.
  - Specifically accredited online and video courses.
- Family and parenting support.
- Raising awareness of gender equality among men, women and children.
- Raising awareness of training and employment opportunities for women.
- Creating safe channels to report discrimination.
- Conducting interviews with women, at all levels, to understand their needs.





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# BACKGROUND

Women have an important role to play in the future of agriculture worldwide [1]. Although the role of women in agriculture enjoys more recognition than a few years ago [2], much more can be done to support women in the industry. It is ultimately not only about women, but about the wider industry and society at large. Gender equality is critical to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals identified by the United Nations [3] and was adopted as a top global priority by the G7 countries [4] and the G20 countries [5].

Preliminary research indicates women empowerment may increase productivity [6]. Moreover, studies have found that the impact of a woman's income has a much greater impact on her family and community than a man's income [7]. As more women work in crop protection, agriculture lending, soil science, veterinary practices, animal health and livestock nutrition [8], it is important to support and contribute to the dignity of women in agriculture.

According to the *Census of commercial agriculture 2017* report, the industry has seen a large increase in income, but a small decrease in employment nationwide [9]. Since horticulture is labour-intensive [10], it accounts for more than a third of employment in agriculture [11] and highlights the importance of promoting gender equality in this sector. Furthermore, the training and retraining of women in agriculture is paramount as new technologies like drones and sensors for climate-smart agriculture are adopted in the industry [12].

Contributing to the dignity of women in agriculture is much more than promoting gender equality. It's contributing to the health and wealth of agricultural in South Africa.



# RESPONDENTS

## A break down of the sample

To gain a clear understanding of the industry's experience regarding women's dignity and gender equality at all levels, a request was sent to all SIZA members across the country. A total of 192 members completed the online questionnaire.

- All online surveys were completed anonymously

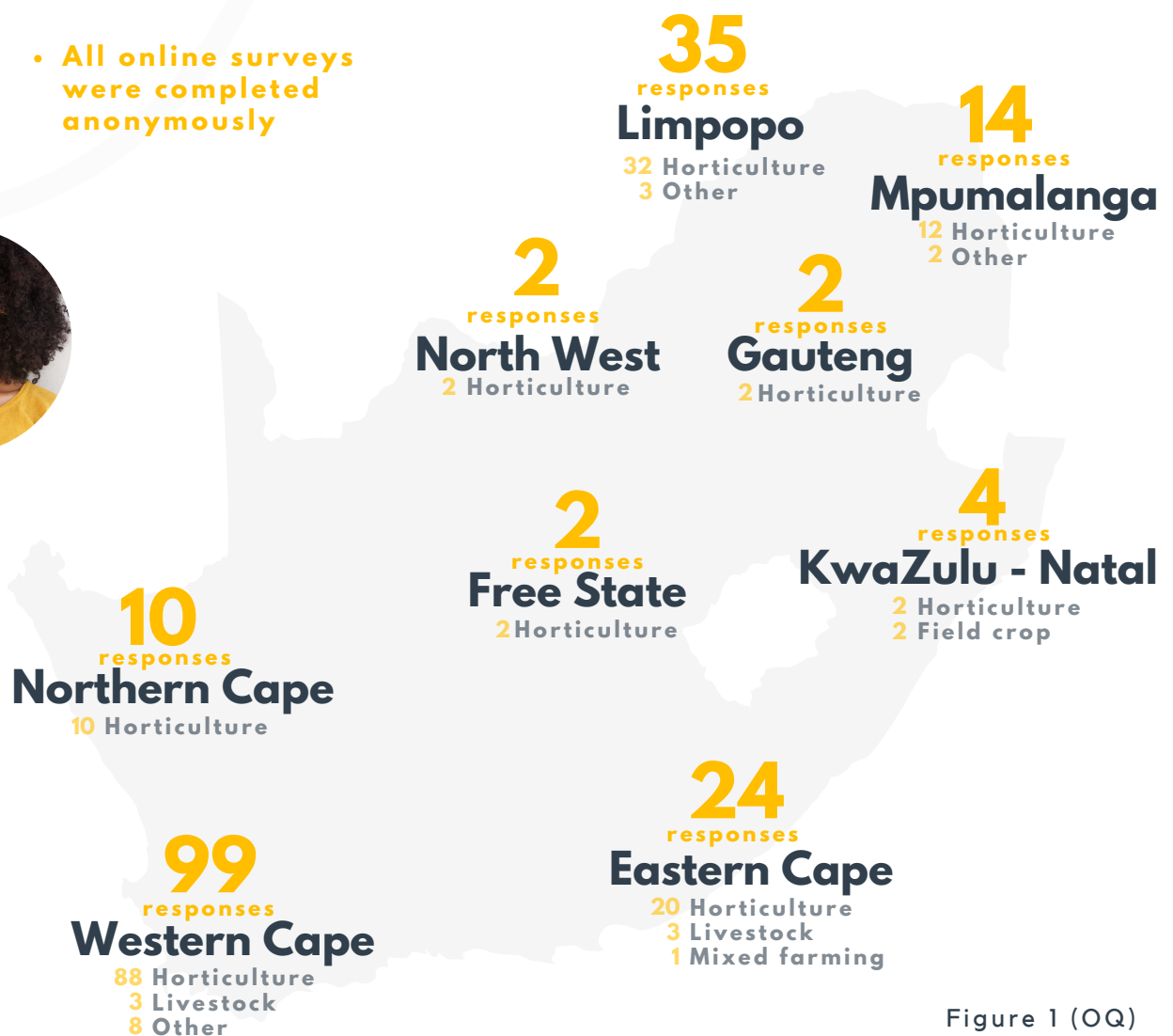


Figure 1 (OQ)

Responses were grouped in 5 categories: horticulture, livestock, mixed farming, field crop & other.

- Other: Does not produce a commodity e.g. packing facility



# QUANTITATIVE DATA

Data on employees, wages and position in business

## Owners who farm

See figure 2



	Male owner/farmer	Female owner/farmer
Western Cape	79%	21%
Eastern Cape	79%	21%
Northern Cape	80%	20%
Free State	80%	20%
KwaZulu-Natal	78%	22%
North West	80%	20%
Gauteng	80%	20%
Mpumalanga	79%	21%
Limpopo	79%	21%

Figure 2 (CCA)



From 2007 to 2018 female owners/farmers increased with 5% compared to male owners/farmers in the Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and the Free State [13]. During the same time a decrease of female owners/farmers was reported in the remaining provinces. Nationally, female owners/farmers increased with 1%.



## Paid employees

See figure 3 & 4

The majority of full-time employees are still male. However, from 2007 to 2018 full-time female employees increased with 3%, narrowing the gap between male and female full-time employees nationwide. Part-time or seasonal female workers also increased with 3% from 2007 to 2018, shifting the balance in favor of female workers.



Figure 3 (CCA)

In total, more than 10 000 less employees were recorded in 2018 compared to 2007, but full-time employees increased with more than 50 000 during the same period. Thus, while the gender gap flipped in favor of women employed for part-time or seasonal work, the number of part-time or seasonal employees dropped drastically. In the Western Cape alone, more than 34 000 less part-time or seasonal workers were employed in 2018.



Figure 4 (CCA)



**Are more women needed in agriculture, specifically in senior positions?**

Figure 5 (OQ)

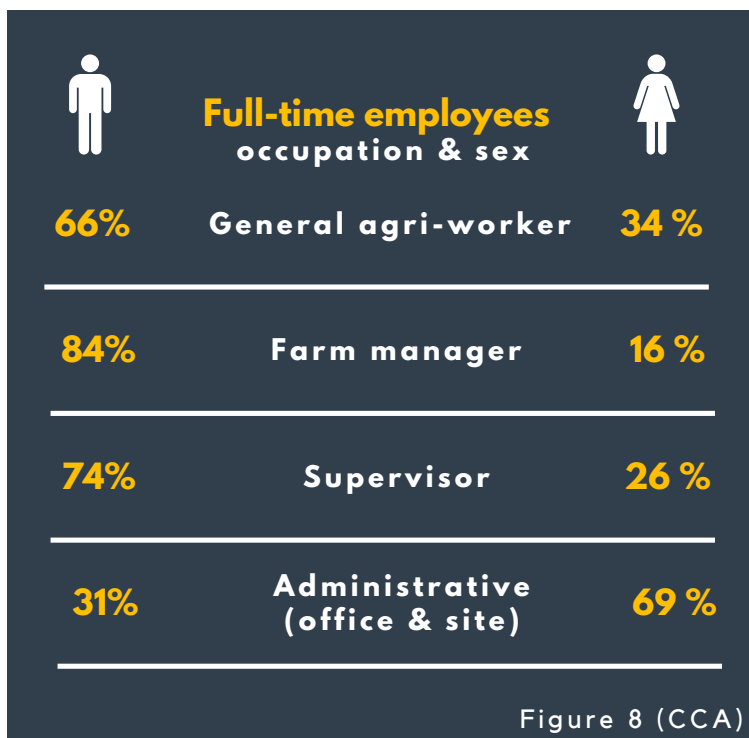
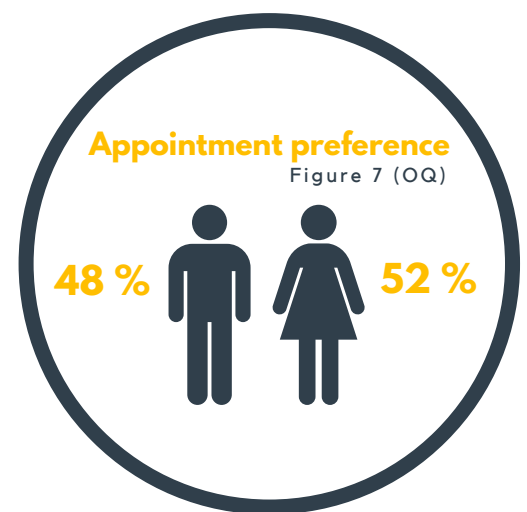
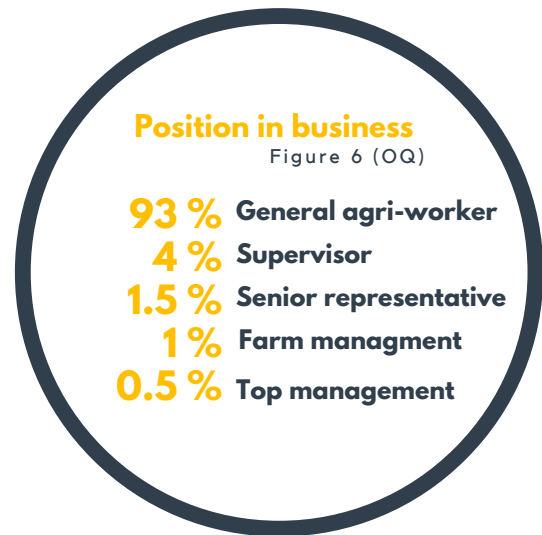




## Position of women in business

See figure 6, 7 & 8

The majority of women are employed as general agri-workers. Furthermore, the majority of respondents indicated a preference for female employees and that women are eligible for any position in the business. However, respondents mentioned education, training and a lack of confidence among women themselves as barriers for appointing women in higher positions.



Female general agri-workers, farm managers and supervisors increased from 2007 to 2018. An increase from 15% to 26% of female supervisors were reported nationally. Interestingly, male employees in administrative positions increased from 2891 employees to 4739 employees, while female employees in administrative positions increased by 2609 employees.

## Age of female employees

See figure 9

Among respondents there are very few young female employees, with the majority 26 years and older. Further research is necessary to identify why younger women do not form part of the workforce.

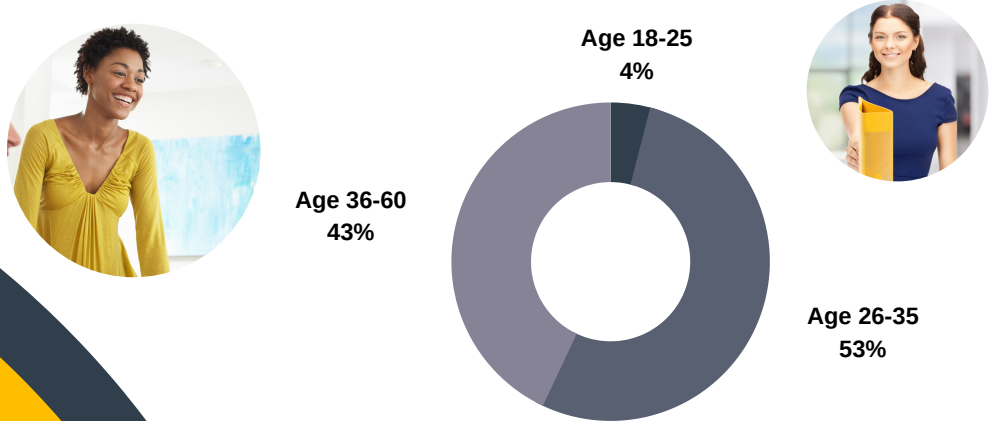


Figure 9 (OQ)

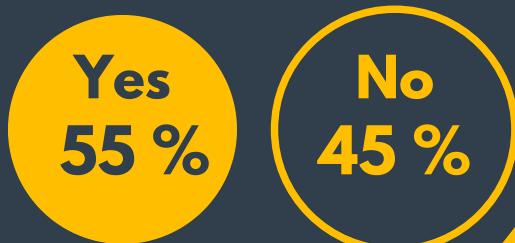
## Are men & women treated equally?

Figure 10 (OQ)



## Does your business offer upliftment programs for women?

Figure 11 (OQ)



## Equal opportunity

See figure 10 & 11

The overwhelming majority of respondents agree that men and women are treated equally. This, however, is based on respondents experience and may still be embedded in cultural norms and traditional understanding of gender roles.

Furthermore, while training is one of the main barriers towards upliftment of women in agriculture, just more than half of the businesses have existing training programs for their female employees specifically.

## Average salary

See figure 12

Respondents were asked to provide some indication of average salary and wages for different levels in their business.

The majority of managers and supervisors are paid above minimum wage and industry benchmarks. Nevertheless, female managers and supervisors still trail behind with fewer women paid above minimum wage and industry benchmarks.



Figure 12 (OQ)

For general agri-workers, the data shows a more balanced picture. However, more women than men are reported to earn only minimum wage, while more men than women are paid above minimum wage. This may be due to the pervasive perception that men are the breadwinners in the family.





# QUALITATIVE DATA

## Barriers & possible approaches towards gender equality in agriculture

### Barriers for women in agriculture

Respondents were asked to identify barriers for women in South African agriculture. The feedback received highlighted both abstract and practical barriers



1

#### Perception

The majority of respondents highlighted perception as a major barrier. This includes a wide range of aspects:

- Culture, patriarchal and traditional values influence gender roles. Women are expected to attend to household chores and are not encouraged to take up leadership roles.
- Women enjoy less respect than men from their male colleagues.
- Women view themselves as less than men and do not necessarily apply for higher position in the business.
- Prejudice, sexism, and discrimination, from both men and women, are generated by the idea that agriculture is a "man's job".



The barriers towards gender equality is deeply entrenched in society [14]. Root causes cannot be addressed by businesses alone. The UN identified four overarching systemic constraints towards the economic empowerment of women, namely "adverse social norms; discriminatory laws and lack of legal protection; the failure to recognise, reduce and redistribute unpaid household work and care; and a lack of access to financial, digital and property assets" [15]. Transformation requires commitment from commercial, social, political and legal stakeholders.



## 2

### Motherhood & Childcare

A high percentage of respondents reported that pregnant women do not necessarily influence productivity. However, mothers or women tasked with childcare are not able to work the same amount of hours as men. Furthermore, they are less dependable when they have to deal with sick children or getting them to and from school. They also find it difficult to travel for business or training.



Even though women may spend fewer hours on farm work, they work longer hours than men in total, because gender roles require them to take up more household responsibilities [16]. Furthermore, work schedules may also contribute to gender discrimination [17]. Short notice changes to orders may require overtime, which might mean traveling late at night, increasing threats to their physical safety. It also affects their families since household responsibilities cannot be attended to. Initiatives to support women in this regard can include flexible working hours and childcare facilities at the work place [18].



### Self-confidence

## 3

Seeing that agriculture is perceived as a "man's job", women do not apply for management of higher positions in the business. Moreover, women who do break through the barriers find that they have to constantly prove themselves worthy of the position.

## Women are physically not as strong as men

4



The physical strength of women is one of the biggest barriers for women in agriculture. Linked to this is the operation of heavy machinery and the hard labour involved with low skilled work. That said, development of new technologies render physical strength less of a barrier. Furthermore, physical strength is not a barrier for higher level positions in administration, management and supervision.



Social understanding of gender roles are influenced by media and advertising [19]. As such, media and advertising can be a barrier to gender equality or used to promote it on large scale.

5

## Education & training

Respondents highlighted two aspects with regard to education and training as a barrier. First, the low level of diversity in women's skill-set and training makes it difficult to adapt or move between different opportunities within the business. Secondly, women find it difficult to gain work experience, at any level. It is through work experience that skills, passion and motivation are generated to break through the barriers for women in agriculture. Additionally, not enough women study agriculture at tertiary level and these facilities are geared towards men.



Realising gender equality requires a shift in power relations and structures. It is therefore paramount that top leadership drives the initiative [22].

## 6 Other

Respondents also identified some diverse barriers:

- The oversupply of workers lead to a low interest in nurturing and developing talent.
- The safety and vulnerability to attack of women in farm management is a very practical barrier.
- Sexual harassment.
- Women in higher positions, who did not equal the task, serve as examples for why women should not be employed at higher levels in the business.



Sexual violence and harassment occurs in commercial agriculture when supervisors and senior managers have power to control non-standard, temporary and informal workers' income, working conditions and social standing [20].

Geographical factors may also play a role in upholding and enforcing labour rights in agriculture [21]. Devereux explains: "Farm workers in the export sector, especially wine, are relatively better off than those who produce table grapes and citrus fruit for local supermarkets, possibly because export farmers need to comply with international trade regulations and ethical audits." In his research, Devereux found that seasonal female workers on raisin farms in the Northern Cape in 2019 can be seen as the archetypal marginalised worker in South Africa.

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## Why are more women needed in agriculture?

Respondents were asked why they think more women are needed in agriculture. The feedback was diverse.



- Women are strong, patient and empathetic managers.
- Women offer a different perspective in leadership.
- Women are dedicated, responsible and hard workers.
- Women are underrepresented in agriculture.
- Women pay attention to detail and nuances, which makes them well suited for administrative and organisational management, as well as compliance and sustainability audits.
- Women are good communicators, team players and less aggressive in stressful situations than men.
- Women are good problem-solvers and strategic thinkers.
- Women are less prone to the accumulation and misuse of power.
- A higher percentage of female agricultural students complete their studies than male students. Women take training and guidance more seriously than men.
- The rapid growth of technology renders physical strength less important

Studies show that gender equality in top leadership and board positions strengthens financial performance and increases innovative approaches [23]. Furthermore, women are far more likely to follow safety, legal and ethical compliance benchmarks than men [24].





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## How can organisations contribute towards women's dignity in agriculture?

As important stakeholders in the agricultural industry, SIZA and similar organisations can use their influence to support, promote and evaluate women's dignity in South African agriculture. Respondents were asked how they think organisations can contribute towards women's dignity in agriculture.

1

### Education & training

The majority of respondents highlighted education and training as one of the major contributions organisations can make towards women's dignity in agriculture.

- Developing a bursary program for tertiary education and skills development.
- Improve the accessibility and diversity of training programs focused on women specifically. This includes practical training like pruning, tractor and forklift operation and other skills like audit and administrative, leadership, financial and business skills. Online programs and videos, accredited with training institutions, will offer women more opportunities.
- Mentor- and apprenticeship programs can offer valuable support to the industry at all levels.
- Training courses that focus on personal development, life skills, family management, dealing with discrimination and mental well-being should be developed.
- Training on how to earn and keep the respect of men.



## 2

### Family & parenting support

The availability of affordable and easy-to-access childcare will support women at all levels in the industry. Furthermore, raising the awareness of gender equality in the household among children, men and women could minimise gender inequality in the long term.



## 3

### Awareness

All respondents underscored the importance of raising awareness of gender equality. Based on the feedback, respondents agree that raising awareness is one of the most important contributions organisations can make towards women's dignity. Respondents highlighted a diverse range of issues.

- Raising awareness of gender equality among men, women and children in the industry at large. This also entails dealing with cultural differences and traditional values that may hinder gender equality.
- Raising awareness of training and employment opportunities for women.
- Raising awareness of success stories of women and their accomplishments in agriculture.
- Expose women to all levels and aspects of the industry.
- Roadshows and farm worker competitions that emphasises women's dignity.
- Increase the representation of women at all levels in the industry.
- Motivate women to take responsibility in the workplace.





## Other

# 4

Respondents also identified diverse contributions organisations can make towards women's dignity.

- Create forums to discuss gender equity in the industry, as well as safe channels through which to report discrimination and unfair labour practises.
- Make 'women employed as managers' part of audit requirements. This was, however, strongly discouraged by as many respondents. Nonetheless, monitoring and implementing 'Employment Equity' is important.
- Conduct regular interviews with women at all levels to gain a better understanding of their needs.
- Promote wage equality, specifically in senior positions.







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## Addressing systemic gender inequality

Working towards gender equality requires a multifaceted approach, because gender inequality is a systemic problem. Gender initiatives, focused on gender equality in the workplace, tend to focus on issues women face. While this is important, these initiatives also need to engage with the root causes of gender inequality. Making sure more women are employed in agriculture is important, but striving towards an employment system that offers men and women equal opportunities is paramount to sustain gender equality in the long run [25].

It is also important to analyse and understand the context of agriculture in South Africa [26]. The barriers to and contributions towards gender equality differ for each province, culture, business and farm.. Historical, political, economic and social factors shape the history and future of employees at all levels. Gender inequality manifests differently in Paarl (Western Cape) than in Tzaneen (Limpopo). That said, to address gender inequality requires collaboration and mutual understanding. Forums and channels that facilitate social dialogue internally, regionally, nationally and internationally is an important step towards addressing gender inequality at a systemic level.





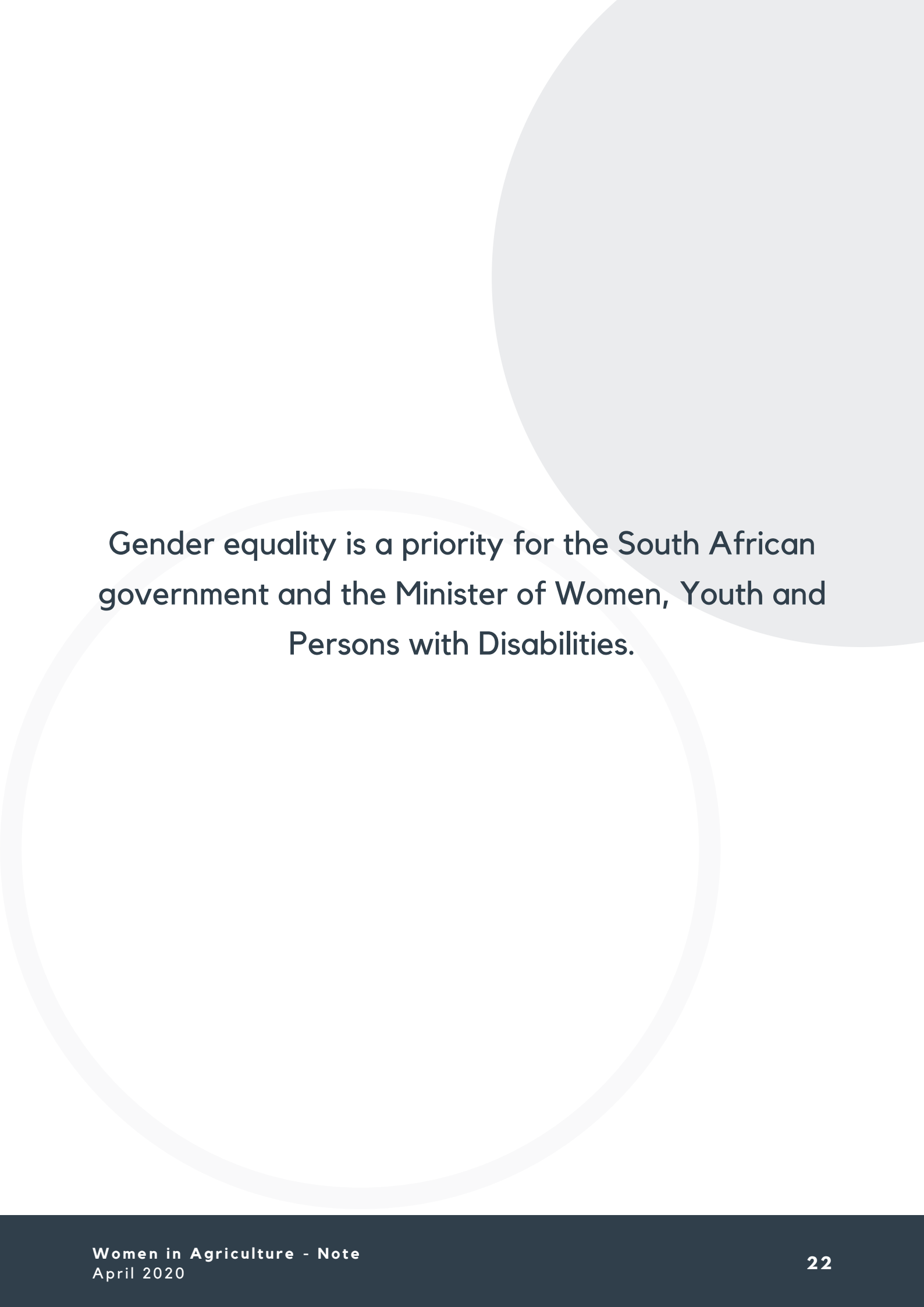


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## SUMMARY

Gender equality and women's dignity are valued and encouraged among respondents. Most respondents are of the opinion that men and women are treated equally and agree that more women are needed in the industry. Furthermore, among respondents there is a preference for female employees. Nonetheless, prejudice, sexism, self-confidence, childcare, training and experience were identified as barriers for women in agriculture.

To make a constructive contribution to women dignity in the industry, respondents suggested organisations focus on easy-to-access training, raising awareness of opportunities for women at all levels, affordable childcare, conducting interviews to get a better understanding of women's needs and creating a safe channel through which to report discrimination.



**Gender equality is a priority for the South African government and the Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities.**



# ADDENDUM

## SIZA Membership – Worker Summary

Information from the SIZA Annual Report 2019/2020:  
Quarterly Update Report – Q3 2019/2020 (SZ)  
Available: <https://siza.co.za/newsroom/me-reports/>

The following summary seeks to present information relating to farm workers involved with the SIZA program. Data was obtained from 'approved' SAQ's for the period 1 July 2019 – 30 June 2020



Total number of male workers per province from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020.

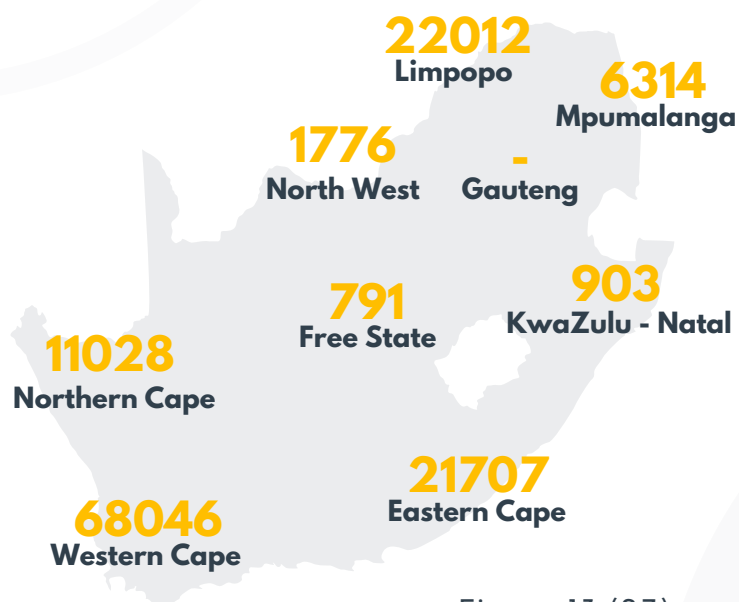


Figure 13 (SZ)





Total number of female workers per province from 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2020.

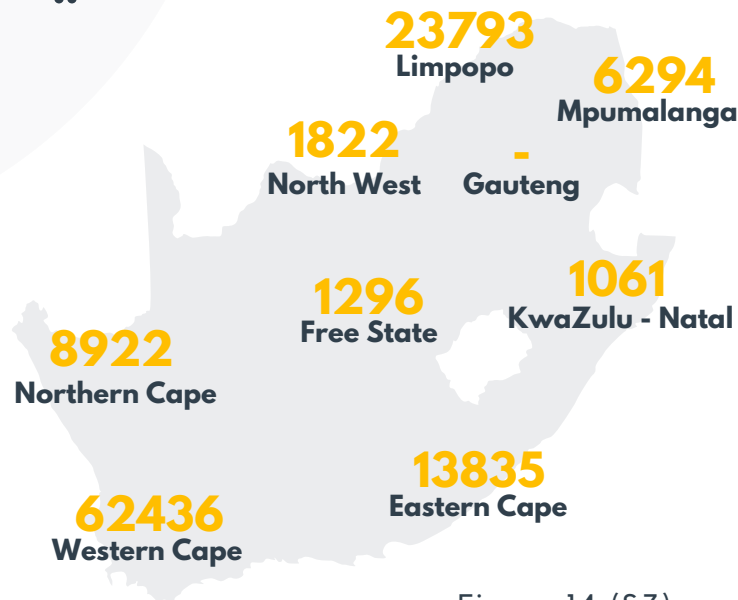


Figure 14 (SZ)



During the SAQ's, primary members are asked to complete a table and list the following:

- Permanent (Male and Female)
- Temporary (Male and Female)
- Migrant (Male and Female) – This worker type is a foreign national which do not hold South African passport and would need legal authorization to work in South Africa e.g. Lesotho or Zimbabwean workers.
- Agency (Male and female) – This worker type is recruited and paid via a 3rd party e.g. Labour Brokers, Labour Service Providers, Temporary Employment Service Provider or Sub Contractor.





The table below indicates the worker distribution per province and worker type.

	<b>Permanent</b>	<b>Temporary</b>	<b>Migrant</b>	<b>Agency</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Western Cape</b>	<b>39336</b>	<b>75980</b>	<b>10280</b>	<b>4886</b>	<b>130482</b>
<b>Eastern Cape</b>	<b>8056</b>	<b>24686</b>	<b>1964</b>	<b>836</b>	<b>35542</b>
<b>Northern Cape</b>	<b>2973</b>	<b>16416</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>19950</b>
<b>Free State</b>	<b>915</b>	<b>1106</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2087</b>
<b>KwaZulu-Natal</b>	<b>1078</b>	<b>874</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1964</b>
<b>North West</b>	<b>1072</b>	<b>1274</b>	<b>1176</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>3598</b>
<b>Gauteng</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>325</b>
<b>Mpumalanga</b>	<b>5519</b>	<b>5877</b>	<b>354</b>	<b>858</b>	<b>12608</b>
<b>Limpopo</b>	<b>15721</b>	<b>23763</b>	<b>4517</b>	<b>1804</b>	<b>45805</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>74800</b>	<b>150163</b>	<b>18854</b>	<b>8544</b>	<b>252361</b>

Figure 15 (SZ)



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