



**GROWING  
TO LEAD**

**Sierra Leonean Youth Tackle Gender Gaps in Agriculture**

As a young girl in Sierra Leone, Yeanoh Dumbuya wanted to know why so many people were malnourished. Her drive for answers led her to continue her studies to focus on nutrition at Njala University where she discovered more about how agricultural production can impact nutrition. She understands that “It is only when our farmers are ready to produce enough nutritious foods that people will be healthier in Sierra Leone.”

At a young age Yeanoh also began to think about gender inequalities in agriculture, specifically when it comes to the perception that men dominate farming in Sierra Leone. “When people think that agriculture here is for men, they need to really think about how involved women are - maybe more than the men.” These gender gaps, Yeanoh says, negatively affect access to nutritious foods. Women often have less decision-making power

concerning spending and food allocation within the household, which can lead to malnourishment.

In 2016, USAID boosted its efforts to level the playing field for women and men farmers in Sierra Leone when the Integrating Gender and Nutrition within Agricultural Extension Services (INGENAES) project partnered with WorldFish. Compared to men in the country, women still have less access to educational opportunities, and while women make up much of the farming workforce, they often struggle to access land. In rural households, males are commonly given the most protein while young girls receive very little. INGENAES and WorldFish are bringing youths and young women like Yeanoh to the forefront to tackle these gender gaps.

Today, Yeanoh is a field agent specializing in nutrition with WorldFish for the Scaling up Aquaculture Production Project funded by USAID and has become

involved in overlapping activities with the partnering project, Integrating Gender and Nutrition within Agricultural Extension Services (INGENAES). In her daily work, she promotes sustainable fish farming as a business for households to raise incomes and improve nutrition. Fish farming also increases access to animal protein to help reduce the prevalence of malnutrition in rural households.

Collaborating with schools, universities and in communities, INGENAES and WorldFish have worked with over 300 Sierra Leonean students and youths since 2016 to raise awareness in the country about gender gaps in agriculture and their impacts on nutrition. For one activity, students assessed an on-farm produced fish feed technology promoted by WorldFish to uncover its impacts on gender and nutrition outcomes. The assessment helped the project improve efforts to introduce the fish feed to women and men farmers as WorldFish scales it up the over the next two years.

Besides the technology assessment, Yeanoh has participated in activities with INGENAES at the field level working with fish farmers, she has spoken to a countrywide community of practice for gender and nutrition strengthening in agricultural extension, and she

has worked with primary school students on fish farming and vegetable production gender and nutrition learning activities. She claims she has learned to focus on building relationships with farmers in the field to involve both men and women. “You will even find that young men farmers respect you more, as a woman professional with knowledge of agriculture, and then they listen to you.”

Now Yeanoh wants to inspire other young women to enter the agriculture sector to continue closing gender gaps and improving agricultural productivity and nutrition for all farmers in Sierra Leone. “Young women avoid studying agriculture or consider it a field for men, but we are seeing successful women changing agriculture for the better all over the world. And we need women professionals in this field to bring together more people and help more farmers”

Based on her experiences, Yeanoh believes that INGENAES and WorldFish should continue empowering youths as gender and nutrition change makers. “Youth are interested and open to learning about this. They want to be involved and with them this work will continue.”



Yeanoh teaches students from Tonkolili district how to plant sweet potato vines.



Yeanoh shows an example of tilapia being harvested by a farmer group she advises.



Yeanoh leads a learning activity on vegetables and fish for improved nutrition.



Yeanoh receives a certificate for her completion of the 3-day Introductory INGENAES workshop in Sierra Leone in 2017

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