

**High Level side event to the 3rd AU-EU Agriculture Ministerial Conference**

**Concept note – Panel discussion**

**"Opportunities and benefits for women's engagement with the agri-business development"**

**FAO Rome, 21st June 2019, 13.00 h – 14.15 h**



**Background**

Women can become “Agents of Change” in the agricultural transformation in Africa. Evidence confirms that gender-smart solutions in agribusiness increases the sector’s productivity and profitability and that the positive social impact is widespread.

In agri-business, the missing middle between smallholder farmers (75% of whom are women) and large agricultural companies is often filled by multiple layers of cooperatives, aggregators, agro-dealers, buyers, traders, processors. Women agri-entrepreneurs play important roles in linking farmers to markets, providing agri-inputs, training, credit, logistics, producing quality local nutritious produce and exporting cash crops regionally and internationally. Recognising, strengthening and investing in women agri-entrepreneurs and their small and medium enterprises can enable them to become ‘Agents of Change’. Supporting them to grow their businesses also has a ‘Rising Tide’ effect bringing jobs, social development and upscaling of the capacity of the local value chain. Building on their proximity to primary producers, local ties and their capacity to provide access to markets, women agri-entrepreneurs also serve as social entrepreneurs working with an inclusive value chain approach. This is critical for the empowerment of rural women smallholders, women workers and the youth.

To realise these benefits, a paradigm shift is needed to value and make visible women’s economic contribution, promote their entrepreneurship capacity, and create an enabling and decent environment for them to work. They need timely and affordable access to resources - including land, advisory services, quality inputs, appropriate finance, equipment and technology - in order to consolidate and grow within agri-supply chains.

This requires a systemic approach between public, private, civil society organisations in the agri-food systems, farmers' organisations and the financial community. Women's priorities must be kept central and their needs addressed in agricultural reforms and transformation strategies of the local agri-business sector (mechanisation, development of agri-development poles, promotion of foreign investment, involvement of new international agri-players) as well as in trade partnership agreements. Women need to be actively engaged at the agricultural and trade policy level, public-private agri-business platforms, and in dialogues with the financial investment sector.

The EU's new partnership with Africa proposes to increase investment, further attract private-investors, support education and skills development for employability, as well as boost trade and improve the business climate. The priority goes to value-adding sectors with a high potential for sustainable job creation, notably for women. The EU considers that gender equality and women's empowerment is an essential element for successful and sustainable food and nutrition security and sustainable agriculture sector development in its current portfolio of more than EUR 8.8 billion in over 60 countries. It looks in particular at development challenges and opportunities through a gender lens by strengthening staff capacity, conducting gender analysis to establish the needs and priorities of rural women in specific contexts, engaging with women and men during implementation, and moving towards implementing a gender transformative agenda. As part of this work, support to remove the barriers to women's agri-entrepreneurship is one of the areas of EU assistance, which enables women to contribute significantly to economic growth, poverty reduction, job creation, trade and food security.

### **Outcome of panel discussion**

This panel will share lessons from businesses, donors, financial institutions and farmers' organizations to learn from each other's gender smart agri-development approaches and support to small- and medium-scale agri-businesses. Topics that will be explored include: Policies, gender-responsive approaches, challenges, solutions and additional measures to address some of the key underlying causes of gender inequality in the agricultural sector.

The discussion will identify opportunities for further connecting women agri-entrepreneurs with the private sector and market-led development. Experiences from Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and Togo will be showcased.

### **Panel members**

Amir Abdulla, Deputy Executive Director of the World Food Programme

Noel Bataka, Minister, Ministry of Agriculture Togo

Rahel Moges, Managing Director, EthioGreen Production and Industry Plc

Carla Montesi, Director Planet and Prosperity, Directorate General International Cooperation, European Union

Nicole Wendyam Ouedraogo, President, Asy Cooperative, Burkina Faso

Thouraya Triki, Director, Sustainable Production, Markets and Institutions Division, International Fund for Agricultural Development

**Moderator:** Annie Mutamba, Co-founder of Meridia Partners and Africa Communications Week