

CELEBRATING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN FOOD SYSTEMS



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



#InternationalWomensDay

CELEBRATING
WOMEN'S
LEADERSHIP IN
FOOD SYSTEMS



From The Executive Director's Office

Greetings from AWAN-Afrika,

In Africa, women are the pillars of their families. They endure hardships to sustain their families and face challenges at their work-places. It is in this light that the United Nations set aside the 8th of March every year to celebrate Women's rights.



This year's theme "Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 world" sought to celebrate the tremendous efforts made by women and girls around the world in shaping a more equal future and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

THEME

**Women in
Leadership:
Achieving an Equal
Future in a COVID-
19 World**

2020 was a very challenging season for Women in Agribusiness and it remains so, due to the adverse effects of COVID 19. Despite the difficulties, many African women have displayed resilience and are keeping their businesses afloat. These initiatives need to be strengthened to support women's transformative leadership in the Ag sector.

Let us build back better!

Beatrice Galuba

Executive Director | AWAN Afrika

AFRICA 'S VOICE PLATFORM FOR WOMEN AND YOUTH IN AGRIBUSINESS

CELEBRATING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN FOOD SYSTEMS

A Conversation on How to Promote Women's Leadership in Food Systems Transformation in Africa

At AWAN-Afrika, March is a special month for us women in agribusiness. On 8th March, we had a virtual conversation with women agri-preneurs around Africa. We discussed key challenges facing women in this pandemic era and how to overcome them.

Throughout the discussion, which was rich and educative, women showcased their resilience and leadership capacities by being innovative and courageous.

In Africa, women make up about 50% of the agricultural labor force and are key players in food systems and central to the social reproduction of households and communities.

Furthermore, about 80% of the midstream agricultural value chains comprises of Very Small, Small and Medium Enterprises (VSSMEs), with women dominating in the processing, distribution and marketing of food crops in many countries. These businesses, predominantly informal and small/ self-employed, especially for women, are critical for food security and poverty reduction. They contribute 30-40% of value addition and costs in food value chains, yet they are often ignored in policy debates and measures, including the response to COVID-19.

This is unfair and a tragedy for their countries and communities, since they are essential in the food system transformation agenda. They provide income for rural women and their families, as well as an important source of off-farm rural employment, especially for youth.



During the webinar, which was co-hosted by FAO and AU-DARBE, HE Ambassador Josefa Leonel Correia Sacko, Commissioner for Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy and Sustainable Environment, African Union, was present to give the keynote address.

In her speech, she mentioned that even though COVID-19 came as a big challenge to women in agribusiness, they performed extremely well in managing its effects. "We need a critical mass of women leaders to take advantage of the thriving agribusiness opportunities, set to be a trillion dollar industry by 2030." She affirmed.



Chief Guest H.E. Josefa Sacko
AU Commissioner

Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue
Economy and Sustainable
Environment

She also mentioned four important points on how we can take advantage of the various opportunities that are opening up. These include:

- COVID 19 - an opportunity for Africa to build resilience in the agri-food systems during the post Covid-era;
- The forthcoming Food Systems Summit in September this year is an opportunity to fix Africa's broken food system;
- We need to take advantage of the newly minted African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA);
- Digitalization is widely being adopted to curtail the pandemic.

During the pandemic, women agri-prenuers manifested their resilience by coming up with some solutions such as:

1. Networking:

Networking is vital for agricultural sustainability. Networks highlight the economic value of women. They help women in gathering necessary information for funding.

A network is a voice to market accessibility and financial inclusion. Many women are unaware of all the requirements needed to get funding or loans when starting their businesses. Through networks, they acquire crucial knowledge for easy access to loans. AWAN-Afrika, therefore, stands out as a leading African network, helping its members to access both local and global markets. AWAN Africa trains its members on the latest agricultural technology for efficient trade facilitation.



Solange Kwindja
DRC

Solange from **DRC** through her company, produces coffee and exports it raw. Due to the pandemic, exportation became impossible. Through AWAN-Afrika, Solange was introduced to new innovative ideas to overcome the challenges.

She came up with ideas of transforming and processing her coffee to gain new markets. Now she sells ready-made coffee powder, including coffee cups in offices. Recently, her company introduced a new soap called Kitoko Sabuni, made from coffee.

This stands out to show how networks are key for women agripreneurs.

2. Digitalization

Women farmers in rural areas need access and training in digitalization. Technology is one of the most important survival tools during this pandemic era. Women should be able to access digitalization and embrace digital platforms. Africa must not be left behind on this.

Eva from **Namibia** has a company selling sea food. Their major market was hotels and restaurants before COVID-19. During the pandemic, they lost most of their markets. However, they developed new ways of selling through their website and social media platforms. Since then, they gained more market and are now selling to rural areas.



Eva Ndamono Shitaatala
Namibia

3. Processing/ Value addition

One of the best ways to enhance the longevity of agricultural commodities is to transform them. Processing of crops, livestock, fishery and forest products is impactful. For instance:

- Improving food supplies, prevents quantitative and qualitative losses;
- Reducing imports, enhances self-reliance, thus assuring better market opportunities to the producer;
- Export of finished and semi-finished products, improves foreign exchange earnings, leading to increased opportunities for investment in rural and urban areas.



Lily Singelengele
Zambia



Virginie Touré
Guinea Conakry

Lily Singelengele from **Zambia** is concerned about women and youth in rural areas who had surplus production, but experienced losses due to lack of markets, as an after effect of the pandemic. These women and youth were uneducated on how to process their commodities.

Virginie Touré from **Conakry** and her company suffered huge losses during this pandemic, but later identified new ways of getting into the market. They now have banana, pineapple, moringa and chili plantations that, after harvesting, they dry and transform into powder. Moreover, they make soaps from moringa, ready for marketing.

Indeed, their resilience is unmatched. Women have the ability to sustain their businesses in aggressive times. Africa must NOW, stand up for WOMEN!



[@Awan_Afrika](#)



[@Awan_Africa](#)



[@Awan_Africa](#)



[@Awan_Afrika](#)



www.awanafrika.org



inquiries@awanafrica.org