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**It is true I walked out of a job in an air conditioned, oak paneled, revolving door and a salary secure job to one under the hot sun, in a dusty environment with no salary security. My driving force was the glaring disparity between men and women that I discovered when conducting feasibility studies during my time as agricultural loans officer at the bank. I learned that:**

- 97 % of loan applicants were men while only 3 % were women for lack of collateral**
- Loan repayment by men was poor, with a default rate of 12 % while women's default rate was only 1% because they remained focused on the objective.**
- The hands-on cultivators, harvesters, processors and marketers of food were women yet they were conspicuously absent or audibly silent at meetings.**
- Women and child headed households were living trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty. Being labour constrained, they had low productivity earned low income, made no investments and were unable to respond or recover from disaster in a disaster prone continent.**
- Women living in male headed households also struggled. While they had access to productive resources such as land, they did not have control or decision-making powers to support long term investment on the land.**

**The conception of Support for Women in Agriculture and the Environment was borne out of the need to respond to these mentioned disparities. Interestingly,**

while there was a proliferation of women NGOs in the 80s, very few had grassroots operations.

The Uganda government too had provided an enabling environment for women through:

1. **A Gender Sensitive Constitution that:**
  - a. **Guaranteed the protection and promotion of fundamental and other human rights and freedoms**
  - b. **Affirmative action in favour of marginalized groups**
2. **Commitment to the Beijing Platform of Action**
3. **Putting in place a national gender policy and ministry of gender.**

All this seemed like a mockery to the grassroot woman since we remained marginalized, overworked and down-trodden. SWAGEN therefore was created to:

- **Organize, mobilize, concentrate and amplify the voices of grassroots women calling for involvement and participatory development approaches. This is aimed at getting policies and organizations to take into consideration our identified priority needs, prevailing conditions and limitations rather than their perceived ones.**
- **Publicize and call attention to grassroots women's achievements, so that national planning will allocate resources specifically for our activities.**
- **Train women in organizational development, project planning and management in order to engage with profitable businesses so as to generate funds to purchase land on which women can have security of land tenure.**
- **Create awareness of government policy and constitutional rights regarding women. Resource centers are needed to improve the flow of information.**

- **Empower women with inputs they can own and control to sustainably utilize land, water and energy resources for food sovereignty and security.**
- **Conduct civic education to encourage women to vote and to run for office. I too have stood and been elected to the District Council. The message I would like to share with governments and other leaders at the CFS is that grassroots women in agriculture are ready, willing and have what it takes to own and steer the process. Invest in us, propel us into leadership positions to take control of policy formulation, tap into our indigenous knowledge that has fed the world for generations. Only then can we talk of attainment of food sovereignty and food security.**

**Thank you.**