



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



BIG ROLES, LITTLE POWERS

**The reality of women in
agriculture in ECOWAS region**

Contents

PAGES 3-4

Introduction

PAGES 5-6

Despite some progress, ECOWAS member countries remain slow in the race for gender equality and women's empowerment

PAGES 7-8

Where is the money for women in agriculture?

PAGES 9-10

National and Regional Agricultural Investment Plans should leave no rural woman behind

PAGES 11-12

Women's empowerment is paramount for achieving the Zero Hunger and Sustainable Development Goals

PAGES 13-14

ECOWAS member countries will produce more and import less if they provide more incentives to women in agribusiness

PAGES 15-16

Conclusion and recommendations



Key messages



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The success of ECOWAS member countries in fully achieving food and nutrition goals, import substitution and competitiveness of their agricultural products depends on key pillars of change such as:

- Their capacity to harness the **full productive potential of women, men and youth along agricultural value chains and in agro-industries**.
- The effective fulfillment of **women's rights to food, land and decent employment** as a pre-requisite for inclusive agricultural and economic growth.
- The extent to which the management of agricultural and food systems, and natural resources in the context of climate change takes **cognizance of women and men's different roles, constraints, priorities and incentives** they may respond to.

The following key messages are proposed to guide policies, programmes and investments in the agricultural and rural sectors:

- **Investing in women along agricultural value chains** is the right and smart thing to do for thriving agricultural and food systems in the ECOWAS region. For every dollar invested in women, the dividends are enormous in overcoming hunger, malnutrition and poverty, and creating wealth for rural communities.
- When women have full access to resources, assets, services and opportunities, they become so that it becomes **key driving force against rural poverty, hunger and malnutrition**. It is urgent to address women's right to land, finance and technology for a real agricultural growth and transformation in ECOWAS member countries.
- **Women's health, nutrition and education** are key to achieving zero hunger in the ECOWAS region. Evidence shows that healthy, educated and well-nourished women are more productive, they save more, invest more and have healthier children who perform better at school.
- We should create the conditions for women to exert greater **decision-making in agricultural and food systems and in the management of natural resources**, in the context of climate change.
- There is a consensus on the urgency to **empower women in agricultural production and value chains**. It is now time to "walk the talk" through national and regional agricultural investment plans that adequately respond to women's needs and priorities.

Introduction

WOMEN IN THE VILLAGES SHOULD FEEL THE DIRECT IMPACT OF POLICIES AND LEGISLATIONS ON GENDER EQUALITY

The ECOWAS region is rich with policy frameworks to empower women in the agricultural and rural sectors.

- Article 63 of the Revised ECOWAS Treaty calls on Member States **“to formulate, harmonize, coordinate and implement the appropriate policies and mechanisms to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of women”**.
- ECOWAS Vision 2020 adopted in June 2010 strives for **“an inclusive society achieved through human capital development and empowerment offering a peaceful and healthy environment where women, children and youth thrive and have equal opportunities to excel and have equitable access to resources for human and social development”**.
- The Regional Partnership Pact for the Implementation of the ECOWAP/CAADP 2025 adopted in 2015 during the international conference on “ECOWAP+10 and Prospects for 2025” made further commitments to improve the governance of agricultural policy by strengthening compliance with the principles of gender equality and equity, and accountability.

The political momentum for empowering women in agriculture is higher than ever in Africa! It is now time to step up the actions

- The **Malabo Declaration** on “Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods” adopted in June 2014 by the African Union Summit called for deliberate and targeted public support to women to participate and directly benefit from the growth and transformation opportunities to improve their lives and livelihoods.
- The **“Declaration on 2015 Year of women’s empowerment and development towards Africa’s Agenda 2063”** invites governments to increase mechanization, technological innovation, education and skills development for women. It also calls upon financial institutions to have a minimum quota of 50% to finance women to grow from micro to macro businesses.
- The declaration of 2016 on **“Africa Year of Human Rights, in particular, with focus on the Rights of Women”** specifically emphasizes the rights of poor



GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT ARE CENTRAL TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Women starting to plant seedlings FAO project GCP/INT/157/EC ©FAO/Giulio Napolitano

women to food, land and social protection as part and parcel of their human rights.

- The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development** addresses issues facing women in agriculture and calls upon States to: fulfill women's equal rights to economic resources, basic services, technology and financial services, land and other forms of property and natural resources; and double by 2030 the agricultural productivity and incomes of women small-scale food producers including

through markets and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment.

However women face important challenges to fully benefit from the agricultural growth and transformation in the region with regards to:

- Their **social empowerment** with low levels of literacy, lack of child care services and infrastructure in rural areas and prevailing social and cultural norms that deprive women from their mobility. In the majority of ECOWAS member countries, illiteracy is much higher among women than men, especially in rural areas.

- Their **economic empowerment** with lower access to productive assets, services, markets and decent employment.

- Their **political empowerment** with low levels of representation in governance at all levels, and therefore their lower participation in shaping laws, policies, programmes and investments.

WE MUST LOOK AT GENDER INEQUALITIES IN THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR AS A KEY CAPABILITY ISSUE WHICH UNDERMINES THE FULL GROWTH POTENTIAL OF THE SECTOR

Despite some progress, ECOWAS member countries remain slow in the race for gender equality and women's empowerment

The agricultural sector is one of the main contributors to economic growth and sustainable development in ECOWAS member countries. Women are driving forces for agricultural development, food security and nutrition in the region. They represent an important percentage of the agricultural labour force. They are the frontline nutrition care givers in the family, producing, storing, cleaning and cooking the food. They are also labour providers in agro-industries. However, they still face major challenges.

Land rights continue to discriminate against women

Land is the primary productive asset in most rural areas and probably the most important livelihood asset for many rural households. It is also an important collateral for accessing credit from formal banking institutions. Women's rights to own, inherit, buy, lease, use or transfer land often depend on complex social, cultural and legal frameworks. Even where legislation has removed gender barriers to land ownership, men and women do not have equal access to land.

For instance:

- **In Ghana:** women hold smaller farms compared to men. Men hold 3.2 times more of the total farms than women do, and 8.1 times more of the medium and large-sized farms of 5 acres or more (FAO, 2012).
- **In Mali:** men own 86% of agricultural plots compared to 14% for women. The average size of men owned plots is 1.7 hectares compared to 0.6 hectares for women (*Enquête Agricole de Conjoncture 2014-2015*).
- **In Niger:** men control 86.7 % of agricultural land compared to 13.3% for women (General agriculture and livestock census, 2005/2007). A recent study shows that the gender gap in productivity per hectare reaches 66% in Niger when comparing women and men with similar sized plots in a similar context due to women's lower access to productive resources (World Bank, 2014).
- **In Nigeria:** persisting gender inequalities exist in land ownership with men owning 93% of the land against 7% for women (Gender Audit, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2013).

Women have smaller livestock holding than men

Women usually keep fewer livestock, typically of smaller breeds, and earn less from the livestock they do own. In the Gambia, 52% of sheep owners and 67% of goat owners are women (FAO, 2009).

For instance in Ghana and Nigeria, male holdings are more than three times larger than those of female-headed households (FAO, 2011). Men are responsible for keeping and marketing large animals, such as cattle, horses and camels. These animals are more prestigious, have a higher monetary value and can be used for transport and animal labour.

Important gender gaps persist in extension service delivery

Women have lower access to technical knowledge on agriculture due to the following:

- High levels of illiteracy among rural women.
- The share of women among extension workers is low. For instance in Nigeria, the share of women among extension workers is 6%



A commercial chicken farmer, Sherifat Sheriff, showing her 5 000 chickens. She has successfully protected her flock from bird flu through good hygiene and good farming practices. FAO Project - TCP/RAF/3016 © FAO/Scott Nelson/WPN

compared to 94% for men. Due to cultural and gender barriers, women farmers may have more difficulties accessing services provided by male extension workers.

- Male-dominated communication channels that control the flow of information resulting in the failure to reach and mobilize women farmers.
- Women's lower self-confidence in areas and roles outside socially stereotyped gender roles.
- Women's limited access to means of transportation as they often depend on male members of the family.

The technology challenge: most women still have to grate cassava and beat the rice with their bare hands

Technologies and innovations matter for unleashing the full productive potential of women to contribute and benefit fully from agricultural growth and transformation. The African Union "**Campaign to confine the hand held hoe to the museum**" launched in 2015 is a strong reminder of the challenges women face in accessing modern technology for agricultural production, food processing and value addition.

Both women and men face challenges in accessing technologies, however the constraints for women are greater due their lower access to finance and economic opportunities.

Existing technologies for rural women tend to perpetuate the gender stereotypes. For instance in Togo, mills mostly operated by men are the most common equipment found in 81% of villages (national agricultural census, 2013), while government provision of tractors generally favors men.

Where is the money for women in agriculture?

Financial Inclusion of women in agriculture remains problematic

Important gender disparities exist with regards to access to finance hence there is the need for credit schemes with no collateral and low interest rates, guarantee funds, savings and insurance services.

Governments can play a key role in strengthening links between the formal banks and intermediary lending organizations providing credit to women in agriculture, including through legislative support and mobilizing capital for those institutions to increase the availability of credit.

Table 1: Gender disparities in access to finance in Nigeria

INDICATORS	MEN	WOMEN
Access to agricultural loans	70%	30%
Access to capital from formal financial services	99%	1%
Ownership of bank accounts	85%	15%

Source: Gender Audit Report of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Nigeria, 2013

IT IS ESSENTIAL TO BUILD SYSTEMS AND INSTITUTIONS THAT CAN DELIVER THE RANGE OF FINANCIAL SERVICES WOMEN NEED TO GROW THEIR AGRIBUSINESSES



The same trends are observed in Mali as shown below. Not only do women have less access to credit in general, but the amounts they can borrow are much smaller compared to men.

Table 2: Loan recipients by amount and sex in Mali

Amount borrowed in FCFA	2004-2005		2006-2007		2008-2009	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Less than 25,000	77.6	22.4	69.7	30.3	92.4	7.6
25,000 to 50,000	85.1	14.9	94.5	5.5	85.9	14.1
50,000 to 100,000	95.5	4.5	95.9	4.1	88.1	11.9
100,000 to 200,000	98.0	2.0	94.4	5.6	98.2	1.8
200,000 to 250,000	99.4	0.6	97.3	2.7	100.0	
250,000 and more	100.0		99.3	0.7	100.0	

Source : CPS/SDR -2010, Dimension genre du secteur agricole au Mali

Women need inclusive business models in value chain, agro-industries and markets

The modernization of agriculture in the ECOWAS region requires addressing the agriculture-trade-industry linkages through inclusive business models that equally benefit women, men and youth. This involves skills,

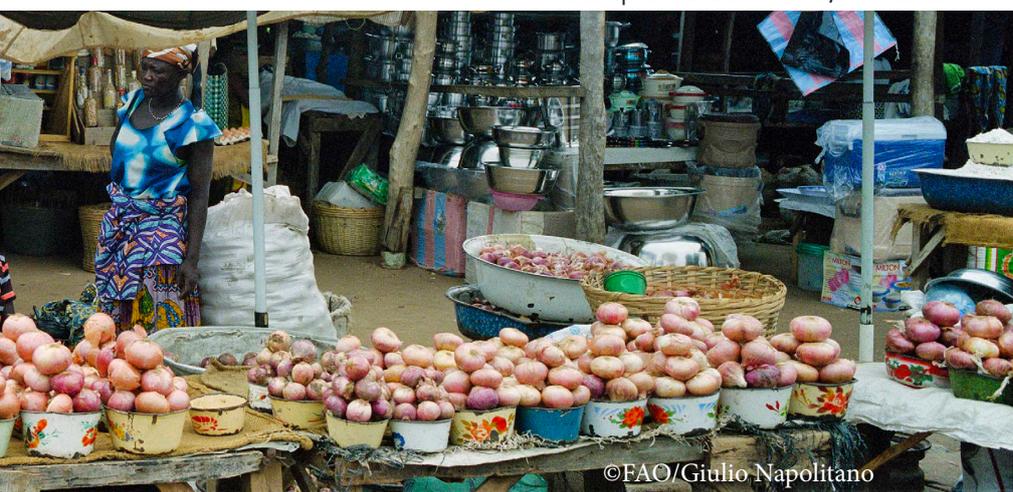
technology, finance, services, value addition and linkage of smallholder producers to input suppliers and markets. ECOWAS member countries should put special emphasis on de-risking lending to women in agribusiness.

Women are important labour providers in agriculture value chains and agro-industries. According to a review of sample value chains, the share

of female employees is 90% for French beans and 60% for cherry tomatoes in Senegal. However, in the cherries tomato sector in Senegal, only 2% of female workers and 28% of male workers have permanent contracts (FAO, IFAD and World Bank, 2009).

Men are often concentrated in higher status and more remunerative contract farming, while women are predominant in unskilled and lower paid labour without social safety nets.

The review also shows that Women workers in agricultural value chains are less likely to join labor unions than their male counterparts. This deprives them of a bargaining power to better negotiate better working conditions.



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National and Regional Agricultural Investment Plans should leave no rural woman behind

Financing is the missing link between policy commitment for gender equality and implementation

The ECOWAS Commission has strengthened its institutional and human capacities for gender mainstreaming and for agricultural development and food security in the region, while engaging its member states and diverse actors from farmers' networks, the ECOWAP Gender Group, civil society organizations, think tanks and technical and financial partners. However, the international conference on "ECOWAP+10 and Prospects for 2025" held in Dakar for the ten-year review of ECOWAP highlighted weak consideration of gender in the first generation of National and Regional Agricultural Investment Plans (NAIPs and RAIP). This must be rectified in the second generation of such plans currently under preparation.

The second generation of National Agriculture Investment Plans should aim at reducing existing gender disparities in agricultural and food systems

The recent gender assessment of NAIPs jointly conducted by the

ECOWAS Commission and FAO has identified the following gaps in the first generation of such plans:

- Lack of proper gender assessment to inform the NAIP formulation, either because of non-availability of sex disaggregated data and gender sensitive indicators in most countries, or failure to analyse and use such data when available. This has led to the lack of gender-specific targets such as percentage reduction in feminized poverty or reduction in proportion of women among the food insecure.
- Limited inclusion of gender-focused activities is a missed opportunity to apply gender responsive budgeting in all the components of the NAIPs.
- Most NAIPs failed to consider women as important actors in agricultural value chains. Women are often associated with small scale production and commercialization of agricultural products towards national and household food security.
- Support to women is evident mostly in food assistance to the poor, vulnerable women such as pregnant and lactating mother and



children's nutrition which often depends on the income and food availability for women. Most NAIPs did not adequately address women's diverse roles in food production, processing and marketing.

- The NAIPs did not challenge critical issues for gender equality in the agricultural sector: for instance, only two countries explicitly addressed the need to

Over the last decades, the ECOWAS region has made great strides in implementing the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme, CAADP with: the Regional Agricultural Policy, ECOWAP; its various sectoral policies including the Environmental Policy and the Water Resource Policy; Regional and National Agricultural Investment Plans; and several regional and national programmes and projects



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secure women's land rights; no country addressed women's unpaid work and provision of child care services for women workers, especially in rural areas; and only three countries specifically indicated plans to target women farmers for rural financial inclusion.

- Some NAIP programme components are likely to result in further gender

inequality, because they focus on modernizing female-dominated sub-sectors with higher technologies of production to formalize the activity, without any specific measure to secure the position of women in these sub-sectors.

- With regards to the resilience of agricultural systems in the context of climate change, important gaps were also identified:

no country included crop insurance either for men or women smallholder farmers; only one country referred to social protection against loss of income and natural disaster specific to women; and only two countries specifically mentioned women farmers in the promotion of sustainable and climate-resilient agriculture through special training in the farmer field schools.

Women's empowerment is paramount for achieving the Zero Hunger and Sustainable Development Goals

Zero Hunger is high on the agenda of ECOWAS member countries

The achievement of Zero Hunger is a high priority for ECOWAS member countries. The West Africa Zero Hunger Initiative implemented with FAO's support aims to eliminate hunger by 2025. It provides Governments, regional bodies, farmers' networks, development partners and civil society organizations with a common framework for allocating resources, monitoring progress and ensuring accountability towards zero hunger. It also focuses on nutrition sensitive agriculture and social protection, with the ultimate aim to graduate the beneficiaries of cash transfer and other programmes into the productive workforce.

Gender and nutrition are inseparable parts of the vicious cycle of poverty, especially in rural areas. Gender relations affect the equitable distribution of nutritious food to household members, and it is commonly said that in some communities, women and girls eat last and least after men and boys. Gender inequality can be a cause as well as an effect of hunger and malnutrition. Higher levels of gender inequality are associated with higher levels of under nutrition, especially among children and infants.

Significant progress has been made in reducing hunger, but children and women's malnutrition remain high.

ECOWAS member countries have been praised for having reduced the number of undernourished people by almost 13 million between 1990-92 and 2014-16, despite a significant population growth and recurrent droughts in Sahel countries. However, such progress is insufficient to reach the World Food Summit target of halving the number of undernourished people by 2015.

For instance, the adequate nutritional status of mothers during pre and post-delivery guarantees the nutritional well-being of their infants in particular during the first critical 1,000-days of life, from conception to 2-years of age. Iron deficiency anemia at childbirth is still a major cause of high maternal mortality in ECOWAS member countries, as the prevalence of anemia in reproductive women is very alarming: it is superior to 40 % for all ECOWAS member countries. In some communities, food taboos still deprive women from access to nutritious food. Stunting in children under five is also very high: the prevalence is superior to 40% for Benin, Liberia, Niger and Sierra Leone, and it is between 30 to 39.9%

in Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Guinea Conakry, Mali, Nigeria and Togo. Ghana has a medium prevalence (20 to 29.9%) while Gambia and Senegal have a prevalence rate inferior to 20% (Global nutrition report, estimate for 2014).

Women's low status has a detrimental impact on child nutrition

The educational level of mothers is an important determinant of children's nutritional status. The risk of chronic and severe malnutrition, underweight and anemia among infants and children decreases significantly with a higher educational level of mothers.

In 2012, the UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Mon launched the Zero Hunger Challenge that proclaimed that "hunger can be eliminated in our lifetimes". This requires comprehensive efforts to ensure that:

- Every man, woman and child enjoy their Right to Adequate Food
- Women are empowered
- Priority is given to family farming
- Food systems everywhere are sustainable



Farmers working in a green beans plot in the vast area of Koer Abundoy, where several vegetable gardens are farmed to provide to the community and to the local market. ©FAO/Marco Longari

Table 3: Effect of education level of mothers on children’s nutritional status in Togo

Indicators	No education	Primary	Secondary or superior
Chronic malnutrition in children less than 5 years old	33 %	25 %	18%
Severe malnutrition in children less than 5 years old	9 %	-	5%
Underweight in children less than 5 years	21 %	13 %	10 %
Anemia - 6-59 months old	74 %	73 %	61 %

Source: Data from the Demographic and Health Survey in Togo, EDST-III, 2014

Data from Niger show that women headed household are at a greater risk of food insecurity.

Table 4: Distribution of population in percentage according to the sex of head of household and levels of food insecurity in Niger

	Severe	Moderate	At risk	Secure
Sex of head of household				
Male	2.4	12.3	32.5	52.8
Female	3.4	20.4	39.4	36.8

Source : INS-Niger «Enquête Conjointe sur la Vulnérabilité des Ménages à l’Insécurité Alimentaire au Niger (décembre 2014-janvier 2015)», Niamey.

ECOWAS member countries will produce more and import less if they provide more incentives to women in agribusiness

Gender inequalities are a key capability issue which undermines the full growth potential of the agricultural sector in ECOWAS member countries. Empowering more women and youth and their cooperatives with secure land rights, inputs, services, finance, technologies, and value chain development is critical to the success of the agricultural transformation agenda in the ECOWAS region. For instance, in Gambia, women represent 90% of rice producers and field managers (DoA, NASS Report, 2013). Therefore, the success of the Rice Offensive in the country will depend on how it takes cognizance and supports the important contribution of women in rice production, processing and value chain.

Figure 1: Addressing gender in the narrative of agricultural growth and transformation in the ECOWAS region



Source: Adapted from the Gender Audit Report of the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FMARD), 2013



ECOWAS MEMBER COUNTRIES CAN SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE THEIR NET FOOD IMPORT IF THEY HARNESS THE FULL PRODUCTIVE POTENTIAL OF WOMEN, MEN AND YOUTH IN AGRIBUSINESS



Conclusion and recommendations

The Country Gender Assessments of the Agricultural and Rural Sectors and NAIPs conducted in all ECOWAS member countries have evidenced the following:

There are still important gaps between legislation and implementation of gender equality commitments

- **Gender inequalities remain socially accepted and tolerated** due to patriarchy, gender stereotypes and socio-cultural norms and practices. Mass education and awareness raising are needed to engage men in the communities to promote change towards women's empowerment in rural areas.
- The **inadequate levels of infrastructure and technology** in rural households have a direct impact on women's unpaid workload, because domestic and reproductive activities are linked with female gender roles. Rural women invest significant time in food preparation, cleaning, child care and other domestic activities, thus reducing their economic and educational opportunities. Lack of technologies also compounds their participation in value chains.
- Financing for gender equality

is still low and mainly tied to small scale and short term projects funded by development partners.

There is need to leverage public funding and institutional capacities for empowering women in agriculture and value chains.

- The policy commitment to mainstream gender in NAIPs does not match the policy conception, levels of activities planned, financing mechanisms, institutional capacities

MORE EFFORTS ARE NEEDED FOR EFFECTIVE FULFILLMENT OF WOMEN'S EQUAL RIGHTS TO FOOD, LAND, FINANCE, EDUCATION AND DECENT EMPLOYMENT

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and monitoring and evaluation frameworks

- The NAIPs did not always fundamentally address the factors fueling gender inequalities such as women's land rights, their low levels of literacy, and the lack of child care services and labour saving technologies in rural areas.
- The NAIPs lack a proper gender assessment of women, men and youth contribution in agricultural production and value



chains based on reliable data, as well as proper baselines and targets for gender equality.

- An over focus on modernizing female-dominated sub-sectors of agriculture without strengthening their capacities to take full benefits from the new opportunities would further jeopardize women's positions in these sub-sectors.

Recommendations on the way forward

The following recommendations are made to ECOWAS member countries to support their efforts to expand women's opportunities in inclusive agricultural growth and transformation:

- Fully integrate gender considerations in national budgets, NAIPs, green climate funds and public-private partnerships through gender responsive budgeting.
- Strengthen capacities of Governments and rural institutions in gender-responsive and inclusive policy and programme design, financing, implementation and monitoring in the agricultural and rural sectors. This includes improving the availability and use of sex disaggregated data and gender sensitive indicators to inform policies and programmes.
- Incentivise women and their cooperatives and organizations to grow their agribusinesses through enforcing their land tenure and decent employment rights, ensuring their access to and uptake of technologies and innovations for food production and agro-processing, and meeting their needs for extension, financial, information and marketing services. This includes capacity development in certification, labeling and packaging and linkage to markets, including opportunities in public procurement; while engaging the private sector to promote inclusive business models in agribusinesses and agro-industries.
- Improve financial inclusion of women in agribusiness through encouraging banking and financial institutions to use credit and savings methodologies that are effective in reaching women in agriculture, simplify banking practices, reduce transaction costs, and de-risk financing for women in agribusiness. This involves opening special windows for lending to women without a land title.
- Provide the space to ensure women's adequate participation in agricultural policy making, local governance and rural institutions.

Big roles, little powers

This policy brief was prepared with the framework of the ECOWAS-FAO technical cooperation project on “Gender Responsive Regional and National Agricultural Investment Plans for meeting the Zero Hunger Challenge in the ECOWAS region”. The overarching goal of this project is to ensure that agricultural transformation and inclusive agricultural growth fully benefit and empower women and youth farmers in ECOWAS Member countries.

It fully contributes to the implementation of the ECOWAS Common Agricultural Policy, ECOWAP/CAADP 2025, the ECOWAS Zero Hunger Initiative, and the ECOWAS Regional Agricultural Investment Plan. The project is fully aligned with the Malabo Declaration on “Accelerated Agricultural Growth and Transformation for Shared Prosperity and Improved Livelihoods”.

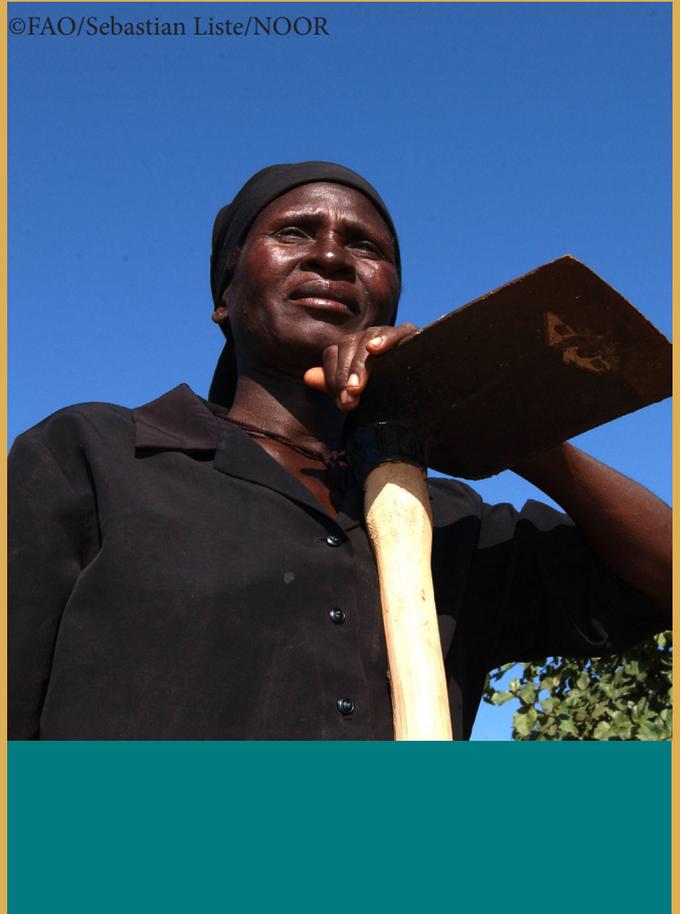




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BIG ROLES, LITTLE POWERS

The reality of women in agriculture in ECOWAS region



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