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FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR AFRICA

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Placing women, youth and the poor at the forefront of inclusive agrifood systems

Executive Summary

This Ministerial roundtable aims at providing an opportunity for Members to discuss innovative and gender-transformative approaches for more inclusive and equitable agrifood systems and exchange concrete policies, country experiences, good practices and investments to prioritize gender equality and empower women, youth and the poor.

FAO supports the achievement of the 2030 Agenda through the transformation to MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for *better production, better nutrition, a better environment* and a *better life*, leaving no one behind. Currently, inequality and power imbalances constrain the ability of agrifood systems to reduce poverty and deliver sustainable and equitable livelihoods and food security for all. Marginalized groups - including young women and men, poor rural people, small-scale producers, informal workers and agricultural wage workers, landless people, migrants and refugees, Indigenous Peoples, ethnic minorities, persons with disability, the elderly and other groups vulnerable to socio-economic, environmental and health risks - suffer more from unequal access to resources, services, employment opportunities and decision-making, and are disproportionately affected by climate extremes and disasters, conflict, economic slowdowns and downturns, and unaffordability of healthy diets. Their constraints are shaped and further reinforced by social and structural inequalities in agrifood systems.

While important challenges still remain, many countries in the region have accelerated actions to achieve gender equality, the empowerment of rural women and young people and the socio-economic inclusion of marginalized and at high-risk groups, as part of their agenda for sustainable agricultural and rural development and agrifood system transformation. For example, many countries have adopted multi-sectoral development policies, strategies and programmes that enhance socio-economic inclusion through efficient, inclusive, resilient, sustainable and gender-sensitive value chains, income diversification, creation of decent employment opportunities, expansion of gender-sensitive social protection and increased access to productive resources, including land, finance, advisory services, markets, information, digitalization and innovation, with targeted measures to support women and youth.

Documents can be consulted at www.fao.org

The Ministerial roundtable will disseminate relevant good practices and lessons learnt for innovative and transformative approaches for building inclusive and equitable agrifood systems. . The experience sharing will also help raising awareness and building the knowledge and skills of Members on how to develop and implement inclusive, gender-transformative and multi-sectoral policies, strategies, programmes, governance structures and investments that can support the economic inclusion of the vulnerable and marginalized groups in agrifood systems, including through leveraging the opportunities and accelerators highlighted above.

Matters to be brought to the attention of the Regional Conference

The Regional Conference is invited to:

- Recognize the centrality of gender equality, youth empowerment, social justice and socio-economic inclusion for the realization of more efficient, inclusive, resilient, equitable and sustainable agrifood systems.
- Increase efforts to address the root causes of rural poverty and inequalities, including the challenges and the unequal access to natural, productive and financial resources, decent job opportunities, gender and age inequality and social discrimination, and to create incentives for inclusive and gender-transformative policies, multi-sectoral coordination and partnerships in agrifood systems.
- Address the structural barriers, harmful gender norms and unbalanced power dynamics that keep women and girls behind, through the adoption of gender and age transformative approaches.
- Recognize the role of young women and men, including migrant and refugee youth as agents of change, resilience builders and innovators in agrifood system transformation, and accelerate investments taking into consideration the diversity of their constraints, needs and aspirations, and integrating them in planning and decision-making.
- Recognize and safeguard the role of Indigenous Peoples food systems to tackle emerging global challenges and contribute to the resilience and sustainability of other food systems.
- Prioritize the expansion of gender-sensitive social protection systems for the sustainable reduction of poverty and inequality and the promotion of inclusive and equitable economic development, taking action on the commitments taken at the 31st Session of the Regional Conference for Africa for more efficient, cost-effective and innovative social protection.
- Create more decent employment opportunities in agrifood systems, in particular for youth, women, the poor and vulnerable, with special attention to preventing child labour, as key to reduce poverty, eradicate hunger and improve food and nutrition security.
- Introduce appropriate, accessible and gender-responsive digital technologies, targeted to meet the needs and address the specific constraints of the poorest and most vulnerable, so they can benefit from and contribute to inclusive and gender-responsive transformation.
- Use and adopt profiling and targeting tools, complemented by robust intersectional gender, age and vulnerability analysis to support and sustain rural transformation processes in an efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable manner.
- Collect and use science-based data and information to produce gender- and age-sensitive evidence to guide the development of effective, gender responsive and inclusive policies and investments.
- Put in place specific and intentional action to ensure that the benefits of the AfCFTA are distributed fairly and contribute to reducing gender, age and other social inequalities and enhancing rural women and youth's empowerment.
- Invest in the technical capacity and leadership skills of women and youth, the most vulnerable and poor people to support gender equality and increase their engagement in negotiation tables and planning (for example as part of climate adaptation and resilience building).

- Invest in the development of gender-responsive agrifood value chains and support women-run businesses by establishing business-development services and agro-processing centers.

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I. Introduction

1. The FAO Strategic Framework 2022-31 seeks to support the 2030 Agenda through the transformation to MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems for *better production, better nutrition, a better environment and a better life*, leaving no one behind.
2. Currently, “inequality and power imbalances – at household, community, national and global levels – are consistently constraining the ability of agrifood systems to reduce poverty and deliver sustainable and equitable livelihoods.”¹ There is ample evidence that certain groups suffer more from the unequal access to resources, services, decent employment opportunities and decision-making, and are disproportionately affected by climate extremes and disasters, conflict, economic slowdowns and downturns, and unaffordability of healthy diets.² Their constraints are shaped and further reinforced by social and structural inequalities in agrifood systems. These groups include: young women and men, poor rural women and men, small-scale producers (including pastoralists, fisherfolk and forest dependent people), informal workers and agricultural wage workers, landless people, migrants, Indigenous Peoples, ethnic minorities, persons with disability, the elderly, and other vulnerable groups such as those living in areas of conflict or under humanitarian crisis conditions, and those marginalized based on their age, religion, sexual orientation or disabilities.
3. Systemic change and substantial investments are needed to transform the structural, economic, political and cultural factors that inhibit the realization of MORE efficient, inclusive, resilient, equitable and sustainable agrifood systems.³

II. The case for placing women, youth and the poor at the forefront of an inclusive and equitable agrifood system transformation in Africa

Multiple and intersecting inequalities affect the functioning and benefits of agrifood systems

4. Women are key actors in agrifood systems in Africa as producers, processors, traders, wage workers and consumers. Across the African continent, women represent on average almost 50 percent of the labour force in agriculture,⁴ and are also actively engaged in natural resource management and agrobiodiversity conservation. They also have the potential to be active agents of change and resilience builders. Despite being recognized as pillars of agrifood systems, women continue to face structural barriers and discriminatory social norms that constrain their access to and control over land and other productive natural resources, inputs, skills, advisory and financial services, markets, capital and technologies. For example, women own considerably less land than men across the continent, with an average share of owned agricultural land of 10 percent.⁵ Poor access to mechanization negatively impacts women’s work burden as well as value chain

¹ Lynnette M. Neufeld, Jikun Huang, Ousmane Badiane, Patrick Caron, Lisa Sennerby Forsse, 2021. “Advance Equitable Livelihoods – A paper on Action Track 4”. A paper from the Scientific Groups of the UN Food Systems Summit, March 2021, p. 4.

² FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2020. *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2021. Transforming food systems for food security, improved nutrition and affordable healthy diets for all*. Rome, FAO.

³ IFAD, 2021. *Transforming food systems for rural prosperity. Rural Development Report 2021*. Rome.

⁴ FAO. 2017. *The State of Food and Agriculture. Leveraging Food Systems for Inclusive Rural Transformation*. Rome.

⁵ 7% in West Africa, 10 % in Central Africa, 13% in South Africa and 14% in East Africa.

Doss, Cheryl; Kovarik, Chiara; Peterman, Amber; Quisumbing, Agnes; van den Bold, Mara (2015). Gender inequalities in ownership and control of land in Africa: myth and reality. *Agricultural Economics*, 46(3), 403–434.

performance.⁶ Women also have 25 percent less access to waged and salaried work, accounting for nearly 90 percent of informal labour.⁷ In addition, the wage earning gap between women and men in rural Africa is estimated to be between 15-60 percent.⁸ Only 27 percent of women in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) have access to the internet, and a mere 15 percent of them can afford to use it.⁹ Finally, women's decision-making power in rural households and communities and their political participation at all levels is lagging far behind that of men – less than 60 percent of women participated in major decisions regarding household purchases.¹⁰ Even when women participate in planning processes their voices are often not adequately considered in decision-making. Moreover, many women and girls are increasingly exposed to the risk of gender-based violence, especially after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

5. Young women and men also face similar structural barriers that constrain the development of their full human and productive potential. Over 75 percent of Africa's population is under the age of 35, and at least 70 percent of Africa's youth subsist on USD 2 per day or less.¹¹ Many rural youth in the region lack access to quality education and vocational training, essential services and social protection, land and other productive natural resources, markets and information, and decent employment opportunities with insufficient representation in policy dialogue and decision-making processes. Often rural jobs, especially in the agriculture sector, are informal and insecure and do not meet young people's needs or aspirations, contributing to outward migration and the ageing of the rural sector. Young women are especially affected, with a rate of participation in the labour market stalling at 44 percent compared to 52 percent for young men.¹² These challenges continue to hamper youth's productive, innovative, and meaningful engagement in agrifood systems.

6. Other groups that are often left behind include migrants, refugees and displaced persons who remain therefore more exposed and vulnerable to socio-economic risks. These groups tend to experience structural and cultural barriers to accessing basic human rights, including food and social protection and decent jobs. Youth in particular represent a significant share of internal and international migrants, with the average age of 31 amongst international migrants living in SSA. The region has over 25 million forcibly displaced people (internally displaced persons [IDPs] and refugees), with over 80 percent of international refugees in SSA hosted in rural areas. Women and girls represent a large portion of IDPs, and are exposed to increased risks and abuse,¹³ including, but not limited to, being a child bride or a teenaged mother, unaccompanied, separated, widowed, single head of household or a survivor of sexual and gender-based violence.

FAO and African Governments' action towards placing women, youth and the poor at the forefront of an inclusive agrifood system transformation in Africa

7. Notwithstanding the challenges highlighted above, in some cases with direct support from FAO, many countries in the region have accelerated actions to achieve gender equality, rural women

⁶ Only 2 percent of female-led households use mechanical equipment compared to 5 percent of male-led adult households.

FAO & AUC. 2018. *Sustainable Agricultural Mechanization: A Framework for Africa*. Addis Ababa.

⁷ FAO. 2021. *Seizing the opportunities of the African Continental Free Trade Area for the economic empowerment of women in agriculture*. Accra.

⁸ ILO. 2019. *Wages in Africa. Recent trends in average wages, gender pay gaps and wage disparities*. Egypt.

⁹ FAO. 2021. *Gender-responsive digitalization: A critical component of the COVID-19 response in Africa*. Accra.

¹⁰ FAO. AU. 2018. *Leaving no one behind. Empowering Africa's Rural Women for Zero Hunger and Shared Prosperity*. FAO.

¹¹ FAO. 2018. *FAO Regional Conference for Africa- Leveraging Youth Employment Opportunities in Agriculture in Rural Sectors in Africa*.

¹² IFAD. 2019. *Creating Opportunities for Rural Youth. 2019 Rural Development Report*. Rome.

¹³ IDMC. 2020. *Women and Girls in Internal Displacement*. Geneva.

and young people's empowerment and socio-economic inclusion of marginalized groups on the agenda of agricultural and rural development and agrifood system transformation.

Multi-sectoral/inclusive strategies

8. FAO supports countries in the design and implementation of multi-sectoral and gender-transformative strategies to enhance the inclusion of youth, women and the poor in agrifood system transformation. For example, FAO and partners implemented the multi-sectoral capacity development programme on strengthening the use of poverty analysis to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1 and 2 in Ghana and Zambia, with additional impact at regional level. Similarly, through the Hand-in-Hand Initiative, FAO uses integrated geospatial, bio-physical and socio-economic analysis and agrifood system lens to identify subnational territories where agricultural and rural transformation can have transformative impacts and support evidence-based decision-making. The programme objective is ultimately to eradicate poverty and hunger contributing to the achievement of SDG 1 (no poverty), SDG 2 (zero hunger), and SDG 10 (reduced inequality) while ensuring an inclusive, "do no harm" approach.

9. FAO is also supporting the African Union Commission (AUC) to strengthen the capacity and encourage the innovative design in the areas of school feeding, social protection and youth employment. Key activities include an innovative pilot working with producer organizations in Cote d'Ivoire to extend the coverage of the national health insurance scheme to rural producers, especially pertinent during the current pandemic, as well as a regional learning journey to promote successful models for Home Grown School Feeding. Additionally, FAO facilitates evidence-based policy making for gender-sensitive social protection such as the recent high-level dialogue co-organized with IFAD and the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM), *Promoting Inclusive Rural Transformation in Africa: Evidence in favour of improved coherence between social protection and rural development policy*.

Decent employment

10. FAO partners with governments and key stakeholders to help generate more inclusive and decent employment opportunities in agrifood systems. It promotes employment generation in the transition to environmentally sustainable production. It also addresses the main factors that undermine the well-being and productive potential of rural populations, including child labour, and targets disadvantaged groups of workers in its programmes and activities, particularly youth, women and migrant workers, through programmes such as the Opportunities for Youth in Africa (OYA), developed in partnership with the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and in close collaboration with the AUC. In addition, FAO invests in the design of practical tools such as the "Youth-sensitive value chain analysis and development – Guide for practitioners"; "Developing gender-sensitive value chains. Guidelines for practitioners" and the "Investment Guidelines for Youth in Agri-food Systems in Africa", the latter developed jointly by FAO and the AUC, which can lead to greater resilience and reduced socio-economic vulnerabilities. .

11. The Government of Uganda launched its [National Strategy for Youth Employment in Agriculture \(NSYEA\)](#). The Strategy has been developed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and Fisheries (MAAIF) with the support of FAO and partners, through the [FAO Integrated Country Approach for promoting decent rural employment](#) (ICA), funded by Sweden. The technical working group (TWG) behind the NSYEA design and implementation represents a successful example of multi-stakeholder and youth inclusive policy-making. As part of the NSYEA implementation, FAO supported MAAIF in the piloting, evaluating and scaling up of the [Youth Inspiring Youth in Agriculture \(YIYA\) initiative](#). The YIYA awards selected youth as role models and national champions to receive training and incubation, formalization support, as well as access to finance.

12. The Government of Senegal, through the Ministry of Youth and its *Agence Nationale pour la Promotion de l'Emploi des Jeunes (ANPEJ)*, and support from FAO, developed and piloted the *Modèle d'Insertion et d'installation des Jeunes Agripreneurs (MIJA model)* to provide effective training and rural services to youth agripreneurs. In 2021, the government-led *Fonds de financement de la formation professionnelle et technique (3FPT Fund)* under the Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training, Apprenticeship and Integration (*Ministère de l'emploi et de la formation professionnelle*) committed substantial resources (~3,5 M USD) for scaling-up the model from January 2022.

13. In Kenya, the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries and Irrigation developed and is implementing, with the support of partners including FAO, the "Kenya Youth Agribusiness Strategy (KYAS)" to promote sustainable and gainful employment for youth through participatory engagement in agriculture and associated value chains. Selected County Governments in Kenya are in the process of adapting the national KYAS to their specific needs and priority value chains, with the support of FAO and other development partners.

Gender equality and rural women's empowerment

Governments in the Africa region have strengthened efforts to create enabling legal and policy environments for gender equality and women's empowerment. For example, in Nigeria, a national gender policy was launched in 2020, which aims to reduce vulnerability and protect women's livelihoods. A key factor in its successful implementation has been the political will of the government, which promotes affirmative action, supports male gender champions and focuses on gender justice. In South Africa, the government introduced a successful targeted employment stimulus with a focus on women impacted by COVID-19. In Senegal, in the wake of the pandemic, the government built on ongoing efforts to support gender mainstreaming and budgeting in the agricultural sectors and devised a number of measures benefitting rural women, in collaboration with FAO, such as storage equipment for perishable goods and special permits for women engaged in processing agricultural produce for export markets. In Rwanda the government has introduced a gender-responsive budgeting and planning approach to ensure a strong commitment towards gender equality with adequate financial allocation.

15. To support evidence-based policy making and programming, in collaboration with governments and the Regional Economic Communities, FAO promotes the collection, use and analysis of sex and age disaggregated data and conducts systematic Gender Profiles of the Agriculture and Rural sectors. In 2021, national profiles were conducted in Somalia and Angola and subregional gender outlooks finalized with ECCAS and ECOWAS. Under a Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP) with the AUC, a mapping of available sex-disaggregated data was also conducted in the Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Senegal and Tanzania in order to develop a draft smart indicator protocol documenting gender gaps in agriculture and rural development. Increasing attention is also given to intersectionality issues as well as gender aspects.

16. FAO works with partners to develop programmes that advance women's gainful and meaningful engagement in value chain and agribusiness development including in the context of the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Together with the International Trade Center, FAO has launched a programme that strengthens the capacity of policy makers to formulate and implement gender-responsive agricultural and trade policies and empowers women's groups and women entrepreneurs to identify and seize the opportunities opened by the AfCFTA and increase their participation in regional value chains. In Cape Verde, Comoros and Sao Tome and Principe, FAO works with government counterparts and local groups to empower women to better sustain and improve their livelihoods in climate-resilient agrifood value chains.¹⁴

¹⁴ FAO Sub-Programme on Empowering women in food systems and strengthening the local capacities and resilience of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the agrifood sector under the Flexible Multi-Partner Mechanism (FMM) Resilient and Sustainable Food Systems Programme.

17. To promote long-term change, FAO supports the implementation of gender transformative approaches (GTA), which aim to address the root causes of discrimination and marginalization of women and other minorities groups. For example, the Dimitra Clubs approach has been impactful in addressing gender-based violence, food taboos and promoting women's secured access to land within communal land, among others. GTAs are being implemented in fisheries and aquaculture value chains in Ghana, Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda; and through the Dimitra Clubs approach to social mobilization and social dialogue in numerous countries including Burundi, Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Uganda.

Towards accelerated actions for inclusive agrifood system transformation in Africa

18. We must encourage the development of multi-sectoral and gender-transformative development policies, strategies and programmes that enhance socio-economic inclusion, such as efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable value chains, income diversification, decent employment, the expansion of gender-sensitive social protection, and access to productive resources, including land, finance, advisory services, markets, information, education, digitalization and innovation, in particular for women and youth. Strategies, programmes and budgets need to be realigned with the political commitments and policies in order to translate into concrete gender-transformative and inclusive actions and results.

19. Gender-sensitive social protection can play a critical role in ensuring that agrifood systems transformation is inclusive by supporting the economic inclusion of women, youth and the poor. Evidence shows that social assistance has one of the highest returns on investment, positively affecting poverty reduction, diversity of diets and food security, with benefits extending beyond the direct recipients and into the local economy. Contributory social insurance schemes increase opportunities for coverage of those who are vulnerable – but not poor – to ensure resilience to shocks and provide a sustainable source of financing for expanding social protection.

20. In order to accelerate action towards inclusive agrifood system transformation, the following are some critical opportunities and accelerators:

- a) The AfCFTA presents several potential benefits for smallholder farmers and value chain actors. At the same time, however, the AfCFTA could potentially marginalize and leave behind small producers and owners of small businesses in the agriculture sector, particularly women, youth and the poor, by introducing changes in trading practices and enforcement of standards. Specific and intentional action is needed to ensure that the benefits of the AfCFTA are distributed fairly and contribute to reducing gender, age and other social inequalities and supporting rural women and youth's empowerment.
- b) There is a clear business case for African governments to expand social protection systems for the sustainable reduction of poverty and inequality and promotion of inclusive and equitable economic development. Action is needed to take forward the commitments taken at the 31st Session of the Regional Conference for Africa for more efficient, cost-effective and innovative social protection, guided from within national social protection system frameworks that promote long-term household resilience.
- c) Digital technologies are driving forces for innovation and therefore well suited to contribute to transitioning towards more efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable agrifood systems. However, they may also risk exacerbation and deepening of existing socio-economic inequalities. It is critical to ensure digital technologies are appropriate, gender and age-responsive and targeted to meet the specific needs and address the constraints of the poorest and most vulnerable, for them to contribute to inclusive transformation.

- d) Profiling and targeting tools are needed to support and sustain rural transformation processes in an efficient, inclusive, resilient and sustainable manner. The use of tools such as the FAO Rural Poverty Analysis¹⁵ can help the efficiency of poverty reducing interventions. Similarly, the Guidelines for linking social and smallholder farmer and producer registries can support this process and enable the timely targeting and expansion of social protection responses.¹⁶ These should go hand in hand with robust intersectional gender and vulnerability analyses.
- e) Science-based data and gender and age-sensitive evidence is critical in establishing a clear and shared vision on sustainable and inclusive food systems in the region, and in translating it to effective, gender and age responsive and inclusive policies and investments, including for developing and deploying new technologies and food systems innovations that respond to the actual stakeholders needs, driving responsible investments of public funds.
- f) Gender and age-transformative approaches (GATAs) address the underlying social norms, attitudes and behaviours that perpetuate gender and age inequalities by challenging unequal power relations and traditional notions of gender and age roles and responsibilities. They are critical in promoting the long-term change and meaningfully empower women, young women and girls and marginalized groups as equal actors of development. The Dimitra Clubs approach, the Junior Farmer Field and Life Schools (JFFLS), and guidance and tools developed by FAO and other UN Agencies can support the implementation of GATAs.

III. Objective of the Roundtable

21. The Ministerial Roundtable aims to discuss concrete policies, country experiences and investments to prioritize gender equality and the empowerment of women, youth and the poor as core dimensions of inclusive and equitable agrifood system transformation.

IV. Expected Outcomes

22. The Ministerial Roundtable offers an opportunity for Members to share experiences and good practices on gender-transformative approaches to build more inclusive and equitable agrifood systems.

23. The experience sharing is expected to raise awareness and build the knowledge among Members on how to develop and implement inclusive, gender-transformative and multi-sectoral policies, strategies, programmes, governance structures and investments that support the economic inclusion of the vulnerable and marginalized groups in agrifood systems, including through leveraging the opportunities and accelerators highlighted above.

24. Participants will draw recommendations on priority actions, investments, policy and institutional change and partnerships needed to place women, youth and the poor at the forefront of an inclusive agrifood system transformation in Africa.

¹⁵ FAO. 2021. Rural poverty analysis – From measuring poverty to profiling and targeting the poor in rural areas. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb6873en>

¹⁶ Ibid.

V. Roundtable Organization

25. The Roundtable will be a moderated interactive session and will summarize the key messages and recommendations, which will be included in the final report of the Regional Conference for Africa (ARC).

The Roundtable will be preceded by the Launch of the “Investment Guidelines for Youth in Agri-food Systems in Africa” jointly developed by FAO and the African Union.

Agenda and participants

2 min	Chair: Minister (TBD)
10 min	Introductory remarks by FAO and African Union Commission
10 min	Presentation on <i>Placing gender equality, youth, the poor and marginalized populations at the forefront of the rural transformation agenda</i> (FAO)
40 min	Panel Discussion: Best practices that have been successful - Ministers - Representatives from IFIs, CSOs, Private Sector, Development Partner
25 min	Open discussion – continued experiences sharing on good practices from Members
3 min	Wrap Up and Closing Remarks – Moderator (TBD)