



Statement for H.E. Tumusiime Rhoda Peace
GIMAC Pre-Summit Consultative Meeting on Mainstreaming Gender
in the African Union
Panel-Session I: Empowering Women in Agriculture and Food Security
Thursday, 23 January 2014; from 11:05 am to 12:45 am
African Union Commission

Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Namibia

Excellences,

Distinguished Participants,

Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Panel Chair, Ms. Thokozile Ruzvidzo, I would like thank you for inviting me to lead off the discussion about Empowering Women in Agriculture and Food Security. The African Union appreciates this gesture and the great work you continue to do across the African continent. We value partnering with Gender is my Agenda Campaign (GIMAC).

I was happy to listen into the introductions of the participants that display a rich experience.

A. INTRODUCTION

The space of the intersection of empowering women in agriculture and food security is a higher priority today, than ever before. Previously, these issues have been addressed separately at country, regional and continental levels. While this has delivered varied results, what is clear is that when the reality of the need for higher growth rates and broad-based economic growth across Africa are aligned, targeting mechanisms to mainstream women and youth are what will take us beyond the tipping point where we are today. Research points to this strategy. What is exciting is that we are at the point of acting on the research results. The basket of levers – target points – that we are focused on simultaneously or at the same time, to deliver the transformation from inclusiveness are:

1. Improving access to production inputs;
2. Reducing post-harvest losses;
3. Strategic crops;
4. Market information;

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5. Access to finance;
6. Applied science education, entrepreneurship and innovation; as well as,
7. Accountability.

In the upcoming days, the African Union will launch 2014, declared in 2012 as the AU Year of Agriculture and Food Security. The launch will be calling on us all not only to reflect on successes registered and challenges encountered over the 10 years of the Comprehensive African Agricultural Development Program (CAADP), but also to identify and apply concrete ways in which we will bring to bear, the full capacity of Africa's women – and men, girl and boy children -- to actively build resilient households, dynamic communities, and robust economies, that foster innovations and sustained growth throughout our continent, in the context of Pan Africanism and African Renaissance. This has been the Theme of the 2013 year when we commemorated the 50th Anniversary of the founding of the OAU/AU.

I recall that at the High Level Forum of the initiative to Empower Women in Agriculture, held in November 2013, in Addis Ababa at the Africa Union Commission, the need for measurement tools to track the impact of agricultural interventions on women's empowerment; and, the need to add education of women in science, maths and business fields related to agriculture, were highlighted. These topics focus on the importance of accountability and 'how' the collective efforts of African governments, private sector and civil society – together, will achieve transformation in agriculture and related industrialisation in Africa, for the prosperity of its citizens and the stability of its nations.

Acknowledging the progress that has been made, even in the recent past, is good. However, our push with focusing on Agriculture and Food Security this year, is to mainstream factors that have previously been overlooked – including rural women, rural youth, the linkage between food, nutrition and health, innovation that meshes practices such as using all the components of plants or animals for different roles in the household or community, and investment along agriculture based value-chains. Developing sustained and inclusive agriculture systems for food, nutrition and renewable energy, that also reflect the innovation opportunities of greater use of domestically produced grains, livestock and fisheries, to more rapidly adapt to the threats from climate change, is instrumental.

B. AUC and MORE EFFECTIVE MAINSTREAMING OF GENDER

At the Africa Union, we are identifying ways to more effectively mainstream gender across the institution because it is appreciated in each department that empowering women, is instrumental to achieving Africa's food security. This ensures that the role and contribution of women – rural, peri-urban, and urban -- is integral to policy design and advocacy. We will support at the country and regional levels, more evidence-based agriculture planning and engage Ministers of Finance, Science and Technology, Trade and Industry, and Infrastructure and Energy – with a focus on moving from mass access to consistent connection, for more predictable, consistent, functioning of markets -- implementing an approach that brings resources to raise the platform of agriculture which, research has shown, is dominated by women as production factors but the benefits of income in amount and control, eludes them. This must change and together we can effect this change.

C. FARM PRODUCTION and PRODUCTIVITY

Continuing to focus on increasing production and productivity, at the farm level, is a must.

However, it is the added focus on strategic crops and increasing consistent availability of inputs – with inputs produced in Africa as a priority, and implementing warehouse receiving systems and commodity exchanges, that is integral to Africa including empowering women in the economic transformation agenda. Reducing post-harvest losses, child stunting, and loss of human life and livestock, by focusing on grain storage and investing in areas like the Partnership for Aflatoxin Control in Africa (PACA) is high on Africa's food security agenda. Constraints to this noble objective have been a stumbling block to increasing intra-Africa trade and expanding internal markets with harmonized policies. Empowering women with grain handling technologies – physical and processes – immediately addresses the scourge of losses after women farmers have invested in purchased inputs, toiled, and sweat to achieve greater volumes of output through productivity improvements.

D. ACCESS TO FINANCE

Over time, addressing the issue of women and access to finance for agriculture has pivoted on microfinance and agriculture targeted guarantees to commercial banks. To strengthen Africa's commercial banking industry, nations have increased the capital requirements for banks. That said, women and access to finance is a persistent challenge. Why does this matter?...because we know from research, that the household and community benefit greatest from the way women invest resources – be it time, money or networks. Group savings organizations are effective in catalyzing investments that build resilience. Although there has been renewed focus on marketing cooperative organizations, there is need to renew the focus on strengthening savings and credit cooperative organizations (SACCOs), where typically, women are more than 40% of the membership. As with

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many agriculture, food, and technology institutions, women are missing in leadership and governance – management and boards – of SACCOs. This is a challenge we have to address head-on, and, yes, we can!

E. LAND and OWNERSHIP BY WOMEN

The AU and UNECA have been collaborating on addressing land issues through the Land Policy Initiative -- a joint programme of the tripartite consortium consisting of the African Union Commission (AUC), the African Development Bank (AfDB) and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. A priority pressing issue regarding land on our continent, which very much concerns women as a stakeholder group, is the trend of large-scale land based initiatives. Empowering women through direct land ownership and control – as an individual, or in groups, is instrumental in building bridges into formal national and regional economies. An assessment has been undertaken, and Guiding Principles will be shared in the near future. This is more imperative in this Year of Agriculture and Food Security.

F. EDUCATION, INNOVATION and ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Raising the profile on education policy is critical. The much talked about “youth bulge” means that a sharp focus on including applied science in accrediting requirements of education institutions, is pivotal to building a knowledge and innovation, talent pipeline. African economies stand much to gain from focusing on including women in innovation development processes and putting extra focus on educating the girl child. Empowered with education, women’s input and leadership in building innovation and entrepreneurship in food processing, energy-saving or new, environmentally-friendly ways of generating energy, for example, will be second nature. School-based agriculture, livestock and fisheries, should form the basis of the applied science curriculum. Why?...because youth with integral knowledge of agriculture can contribute their energy to not only innovating, but also to develop start-up enterprises as entrepreneurs. Including a requirement of facilities for teen girls as they transition to womanhood, in the conditions of eligibility for accreditation, is pivotal to breaking the continued evidence of higher school dropout rates for girls, than for boys of the same cohort. Although progress continues on girl-child school attendance as indicated by annual data, focusing on girl absence especially during harvesting periods, is critical to having more girl children graduating within their cohort and progress to greater successes in 4-year and technical, tertiary education institutions.

G. EXAMPLE regarding PILOTS and SCALING-UP

I will close on the note about pilots and scaling-up, which gets to a critical dimension of the ‘how’ of filling in the common space of empowering women and food security. As we focus on continuing to build robust African economies by strengthening agriculture and agribusiness through inclusiveness of women and youth, there is a tremendous wealth of knowledge available from numerous pilot projects. At this stage, I encourage identifying the portfolio of pilot project, which can be the basis for a project of scale. Achieving scale in a continental approach can be framed by implementing similar projects at country level, in several Regional Economic Communities (RECs), at the same time. In this regard, the African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD) Program, stands out. Based on pilot with donor funding, the lessons learnt from the pilot – such as omitting an upper age limit for AWARD Program Fellows, so that the eligibility of top-notch candidates is not constrained by their having invested time away from career advancement for family building -- were included in designing the multi-country program that was launched in 2008, and this initial AWARD Program successfully attracted private sector partners. Expanded to a second five year phase in 2012 with the support of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), and the Agropolis Foundation, the AWARD Program is pushing the institution innovation program further. Country ownership, which has already been inaugurated by Nigeria, is a key next step, in mainstreaming education and strengthening of the talent pipeline of women in policy leadership, in Africa.

H. AUC COMMITTED TO AFRICA’S GROWTH and INCLUDING WOMEN IN BENEFITING FROM THE GROWTH

To be clear, the evidence is overwhelming, that focusing on rural women in agriculture and agribusiness, is insurance for African economies to continue to be global leaders, and economic growth to move forward, at the pace that is needed to realize a food and nutrition secure Africa, by 2025. As we reflect on our discussions, deliberations and actions, I encourage you to keep in mind that we at the Africa Union, are committed to Africa’s robust, integrated growth and benefits of that growth, being inclusive of Africa’s women.

I would thank you for your kind attention.