



**OPENING REMARKS BY H.E. AMB. JOSEFA LIONEL  
CORREIA SACKO COMMISSIONER FOR  
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, RURAL  
DEVELOPMENT, BLUE ECONOMY, AND  
SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT, AUC DELIVERED ON  
THE VIRTUAL EVENT ORGANIZED TO  
COMOMMORATE THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF  
RURAL WOMEN**

**HELD VIRTUALLY**

**THE 15<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2021**

- **Your Excellency, Sahle-work Zewde, President of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.**
- **Your Excellency, Angela Thokozile Didiza, Minister of**
- **Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development, South Africa and Chair of the Specialized Technical Committee on Agriculture, Rural Development Water and Environment.**
- **Your Excellency, Gérardine Mukeshimana, Minister of Agriculture and Animal Resources of the Republic of Rwanda,**
- **Excellences, Members of the Bureau of the AU STC on Agriculture, Rural Development Water and Environment,**
- **Excellences, African Female Ministers of Agriculture Present,**
- **Mme Bineta Diop, AUC Special Envoy on Women**
- **AUC Commissioners,**
- **Dr Beth Dunford, Vice President for Agriculture, Human and Social Development at African Development Bank,**
- **H. E. Maria de Fatima Monteria, Angolan Ambassador in Italy and other Esteemed Guests from Angola,**
- **Excellences Ambassadors and members of the Diplomatic Corp.,**
- **Dr. Victoria Maloka, Director, AU Gender Directorate,**
- **Distinguished Speakers and Guests,**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen.**
- **All Protocols Duly Observed**

I am extremely delighted to deliver the opening and welcome remarks at this important event as we converge to commemorate the International Day of Rural Women 2021. It is a special event, and the Department of Agriculture, Rural Development, Blue Economy, and Sustainable Environment of the African Union Commission warmly welcomes all of you this virtual event which we would have love to be physical (face-to-face) so that Rural Women can participate actively but for the COVID-19 which is still ravaging the world.

**I especially welcome our distinguished Guest, Her Excellency, Sahle-work Zewde, President of Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia for taking time off her extremely schedule to grace this occasion. Excellency, we are extremely grateful for your participation.**

As we commemorate the day, please allow me to convey greetings from H.E Moussa Faki Mahamat, Chairperson of the AU commission who has made achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women in the continent a priority since day one.

### **Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen**

Rural women play a critical role in the economies of all African Union Member States. They ensure the sustainability of rural households and communities, improve the livelihoods and overall wellbeing of the African continent. They participate in crop production and livestock care, provide food, water and fuel for their families, and engage in most of off-farm activities to diversify their families' income.

Rural women are the predominant labour providers in agriculture and agribusinesses. They represent about 50% of the labour force in the sector. It is, therefore, critical that their contributions to sustaining food-systems in the continent are recognized and celebrated.

However, it is also equally critical to recognize that, despite their major role in agriculture production and sustaining rural livelihood, women and girls in rural areas suffer from persisting gender inequalities and discriminatory socio-cultural norms and practices. They have less access to land, credit, agricultural inputs, markets, and extension services constraining their productivity, food security and nutrition contribution. Moreover, they are often excluded from decision-making within their households and communities.

There is an increasing evidence that if rural women had equal access to these productive resources, productivity gap between men and women in the rural areas would disappear and agricultural yields would rise substantially resulting in a significant reduction of hunger and food insecurity in the continent.

The vision of creating a prosperous, inclusive, and peaceful Africa cannot be achieved without addressing these challenges that are facing rural women who constitute a substantial proportion of our continent's population.

### **Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen**

The African Union (AU) recognizes that gender equality is a fundamental human right and an integral part of regional integration, economic growth

and social development. As such, it is strongly committed to gender equality through various protocols and policies that address the gender imbalances in the continent.

- Aspiration 6 of **Agenda 2063** requires that we live in a more inclusive society where all the citizens are actively involved in decision making in all aspects and where no child, woman or man is left behind or excluded, on the basis of gender, political affiliation, religion, ethnic affiliation, locality, age or other factors. It further calls for gender equality and women's empowerment, with a specific emphasis on ensuring that rural women have access to productive assets, such as land, credit, inputs and financial services.
- The **African Union strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (GEWE) 2018-2028** is a framework document that strengthen rural women's agency in Africa and ensure that their voices are amplified and their concerns are fully addressed through among others, effective implementation legislation and proper financing of gender equality work.
- **The 2014 Malabo Declaration** promotes women's participation in agribusiness and value chain. Its associated evaluation frameworks include a target of 20% of empowered rural women.
- **The Bobo-Dioulasso Declaration October 15, 2019** officially launched the African Union Campaign of "Reducing the drudgery of rural women" and the formation of the Platform for African Women in

Agriculture. The International Day of Rural Women on October 15, 2019 was celebrated by unveiling a statute “Retiring a hoe to the Museum” mark the continental agenda of promoting agriculture mechanization among women farmers to improve food production.

- The Declaration of “**2015, Year of Women’s Empowerment and Development towards Africa’s Agenda 2063**” promotes women’s access to productive resources; mechanization; technological innovation; education and skills development.

The signing of **the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement (AfCFTA) in 2018** was also a tremendous milestone in the pursuit of integrated and inclusive growth in Africa. It is expected that rural women will benefit from the agreement as it improves their access to cross-border trade opportunities and value chain integrations.

### **Excellences, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The African Union Commission understands developing such policies and protocols is a critical step forward, but not an end by itself. We need to make sure that these policies and protocols are effectively implemented and a wider array of opportunities are created for rural women in the continent including innovative financing mechanisms. Furthermore, there is an increasing need to develop policies and protocols that are specifically focused on rural women in agriculture.

As we celebrate the day, I use this opportunity to call for policy framework for women in agriculture.

I am confident that the commemoration of the day will allow us to:

- Strengthens the centrality of rural women in preserving culture and heritage in sustaining Africa's food systems and local diet in line with the AU theme of the year.
- Explore the possibility of setting up an innovative financing mechanism with regard to promoting rural women's ability to participate in agricultural development, especially in the context of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).
- Make concrete plans on how to take forward the platform on "Confining the Hand-Held Hoe to the Museum" including how different sub-regions will co-host the event annually; and
- Recommend practical and durable solutions to the challenges facing rural women in food systems and agricultural trade

As I come to the end of my Statement, permit me Excellences, to pay special tribute and homage to the Great African Rural Women that we are celebrating today.

I thank all of you for listening and I wish you fruitful deliberation.

Mercie, Asante, shukuran.