

SYNTHESIS REPORT

VALUE4HER

Leading Burkinabe women entrepreneurs, private sector actors, agricultural financial institutions, policy makers and development investors took part in a VALUE4HER networking event convened by the AGRA office in Burkina Faso on April 21, 2021. The meeting was designed to foster stronger networks, identify needs and opportunities to strengthen women's involvement in agribusiness and increase awareness of the VALUE4HER program. The hybrid event brought together a total of 73 (7M, 66 W) participants.



Background

Agriculture, livestock, and forestry provide a livelihood for 90% of Burkina Faso's population. Women play a major role in the production and processing of major food crops (sorghum, millet, rice, and maize) that account for 60% of agricultural output. The country is the largest cotton producer in Africa, with women providing about half of production labor for that crop.¹ Burkina Faso has a vibrant business sector and the Government has prioritized entrepreneurship development. Thirty eight percent of men and 30% of women aged 18-64 surveyed by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) in 2016 were either a nascent entrepreneur or owner-manager of a new business². Yet, women lag behind men in business ownership and performance. According to a World Bank study, just under 10% of businesses in Burkina Faso were majority female owned, female majority owned firms make up about 10% of firm with up to 10 employees and about 7% of businesses with 101-500 employees. Despite the importance of the agricultural sector, the government of Burkina Faso considers agricultural entrepreneurship to be at an "embryonic" stage. Rising climate hazards, challenges in accessing productive resources (land, labor, technologies), finances, markets, information, technical and business support are among the constraints and barriers both men and women face in the agribusiness sector. However, information and statistics on gender differences in agribusiness are scarce.

Recognizing that women agri-preneurs face different challenges than men, the Government of Burkina Faso has put in place a number of policies, strategies and interventions to encourage women to engage in agri-enterprise. These include policies to improve women's access to land, special provisions to improve women's access to agricultural mechanization, tools, livestock and seed of modern crop varieties, projects to support female owned agri-enterprises like in the rice value chain and partnerships with financial institutions to provide women friendly credit facilities. These interventions, however, do not address underlying gender related constraints and barriers some of which are rooted in how women are socialized and how society perceives them, which restrict their opportunities and business performance.

¹ African Development Bank, 2015. Economic empowerment of African women through equitable participation in agricultural value chains. Abidjan.

² Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2017. L'entrepreneuriat: un phénomène en pleine progression au Burkina Faso. Rapport GEM 2016 du Burkina Faso.

Underlying constraints and barriers to women's involvement in agribusiness

Low business aspirations and socio-cultural barriers: Cultural stereotypes such as the notion that Burkinabe women “help” their husbands in farming, contribute to women's low business aspirations and to women not seeing themselves as business actors. There was a call for open discussion and interventions to remove socio-cultural barriers that prevent women from attaining their ambitions generally and specifically in the business arena. They identified women's lack of agency and decision-making power in households generally and in economic activities, as key barriers. Responsibility for unpaid reproductive tasks, limited physical mobility, gender-based violence and gender discrimination are other impediments that women agripreneurs struggle with which relegate them to informal and low value businesses.

Low levels of formal education and limited technical skills: Low female literacy (in 2018, 33% of adult women were literate) contributes to low agricultural productivity, limited knowledge and skills on production and post-production practices and business practices. Poor access to information and training means that many women (and men) smallholder maize producers for instance are not aware of aflatoxins and how to control this problem, which affects the quality of their produce. There was a call for smallholder out-growers to be sensitized on respecting their obligations to contractors to discourage them from selling to other buyers when the price in the open market is more favorable than the agreed upon price. Women's lack of time due to heavy workloads and low literacy also mean that women are less likely than men to benefit from extension and advisory services.

Lack of access to assets and resources: Agricultural productivity is lower among Burkinabe women producers compared to men and they have fewer opportunities to engage in agribusiness due to land tenure insecurity and limited control and access to livestock, quality inputs and other productive resources. While some female agripreneurs have achieved business success despite these constraints, this group constitutes a tiny minority. Again, despite the many projects supporting women agripreneurs in the country, the majority of rural women are unable to fully take advantage of the services and products on offer.

Limited access to finance: In Burkina Faso, most financial institutions offer short term rather than medium- or longer-term loans needed for agricultural enterprises and are biased toward providing loans for cash crop production. A number of programs provide credit to women owned agribusinesses, but most women are not aware of them or cannot meet the stringent requirements like collateral and business plans and would therefore exclude themselves from formal financing institutions due to further, only a small proportion of women in the country have a bank account (34% at the national level in 2017³).

Limited access to networks and information: Burkina Faso, like other West African Francophone countries, has a long history of cooperatives and associations supporting women's production and processing of agricultural commodities for instance shea butter for local and international markets. But women's low capacity and limited networks, coupled with weak governance structures and capacities of many cooperatives prevent them from playing a strong role in stimulating the growth of their agri-enterprises.

Digital tools and services are being used increasingly in Burkina Faso to address constraints facing agribusinesses such as access to information and markets. An example is the effort by the Ministry of Agriculture to use applications for market prices, extension, and inputs⁴. Specific efforts are however needed to address the digital gender gap. A 2016-18 study found that at the national level, only 8% of Burkinabe women compared with 16% of men regularly accessed the internet⁵.

³ Demirgüç-Kunt A, Klapper L, Singer D, Ansar S, Hess J. Global Findex database 2017: Measuring financial inclusion and the Fintech revolution. Washington, DC: World Bank; 2018 <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/29510>

⁴ Feed the Future, 2019. Digital tools for food security and resilience: findings and recommendations for Burkina Faso. USAID, Ougadougou. <https://www.usaid.gov/documents/1867/digitaltools-food-security-and-resilience-findings-and-recommendations-burkina-faso>

⁵ Afrobarometer, 2020. African women have less access to the Internet than men do: that's a problem <https://afrobarometer.org/blogs/african-women-have-less-access-internet-african-men-do-thats-problem>.

Opportunities

A range of projects, programs and interventions were identified in the country that support women agricultural producers and agri-entrepreneurs. Areas of opportunities identified include:

- Strong political commitment to boosting commercial and climate resilient agriculture and improving the situation of women entrepreneurs.
- Greater awareness about the business case for involving women in agribusiness opens the door for increased private sector engagement with women-owned agribusinesses.
- Market linkages between local agribusinesses like in cassava value chain and school feeding programs.
- Government commitment to digital development.

What needs to be done?

Gender-responsive financial and business support services: Conduct a review of approaches currently being used by financial institutions in the country to provide credit to micro and small-scale agribusinesses and identify good practices for providing financial and business support services to women agripreneurs.

Develop the capacity of financial institutions to assess and understand the specific needs of agriculture, agri-enterprise, women agripreneurs and devise financial packages, products, and financing mechanisms to meet those needs.

Capacity development: Develop the capacity of women agripreneurs in technical (production and post-production), business management, and “soft” skills through formal training and mentoring.

Networking platform: Set up a platform for stakeholders engaged with agricultural value chains and women agripreneurs to encourage networking, learning about opportunities and successful approaches and good practices.

#VALUE4HER

VALUE4HER is AGRA's continental initiative, aimed at strengthening women's agribusinesses enterprises and enhancing voice and advocacy across Africa. The initiative is powered by [VALUE4HERConnect](#), Africa's first Women in Agribusiness digital marketplace, offering integrated business solutions to women companies, to enable them to build visibility, business networks, and collective capital across the continent while facilitating easier connections with buyers, financiers, and other service providers. To join this growing community of women agribusinesses, CLICK on the link <https://value4her.hivebrite.com/signup>

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