

## SYNTHESIS REPORT

# VALUE4HER

A networking event organized by AGRA on March 2, 2021 in Nairobi, Kenya brought together 79 participants (71W, 8M) with the purpose of strengthening networks, identifying needs and opportunities to strengthen women's involvement in agribusiness and increasing awareness of the VALUE4HER program. Participants at the hybrid event included leading Kenyan women entrepreneurs, private sector actors, agricultural financial institutions, policy makers and development investors. The following were the outcomes of the event:



## Background

Agriculture is the backbone of the Kenyan economy and provides employment for more than 40% of the country's total population and 70% of the rural population. Women play a dominant role in the agricultural sector as producers, processors, and traders, contributing an estimated 54% of agricultural labor<sup>1</sup>. Kenya boasts well developed business and agribusiness sectors, the latter centered around tea, coffee, horticulture, and dairy products. However, women lag behind men in entrepreneurship, with female majority owned firms making up about 10% of large firms (101-500 employees) and 26% of businesses with up to 10 employees<sup>2</sup>. In Kenya, as in most parts of Africa, most women entrepreneurs are engaged in subsistence enterprises, micro, informal businesses, mainly in the fashion and beauty, agriculture, food manufacturing and retail sectors<sup>3</sup>. Despite women's important role in agriculture, they face constraints and barriers in starting and growing agribusinesses that do not affect men. Not only do Kenyan women Agripreneurs struggle to access productive resources (land, labor, technologies), finances, markets, information, technical and business support, but they are held back in business by how they are socialized, the roles they are expected to play and how society perceives them.

## Underlying constraints and barriers to women's involvement in agribusiness

**Low business aspiration and confidence:** Kenyan women's business aspirations, their confidence levels and willingness to take risks in business activities tend to be negatively influenced by their socialization as are the ability to negotiate and communicate in the business arena. Further, women's responsibilities for domestic and care activities, gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the business environment limit their ability to take advantage of business opportunities and constrain their business performance.

<sup>1</sup> World Bank, 2019. Labor force participation rate, female. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS>

<sup>2</sup> World Bank, 2019. Profiting from parity: Unlocking the potential of women's business in Africa. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/31421/135420-ProfitfromParityFullReport.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

<sup>3</sup> Maheshwari, P., A. Gokhale, P. Seth, N. Agarwal and A. Makena, 2020. An assessment of women owned enterprises in developing countries. Intellectcap and IDRC. <https://www.intellecap.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Intellectcap-Report-Design-Final-Online-Low-Res.pdf>

**Low education and limited technical skills:** Low educational attainment and heavy domestic workloads prevent many women Agripreneurs from participating in training and accessing new technologies and information on modern farming production, post-harvest practices and marketing. This marginalization contributes to women's low agricultural productivity and the production of poor-quality products that cannot compete in high value markets.

**Limited access to productive assets and resources:** Kenyan women face difficulties owning and controlling agricultural land and accessing productive resources, especially machinery and tools for agribusiness. As agricultural machinery and tools are typically designed to be operated by men, unsurprisingly women shy away from using them, are often not aware of machinery services and cannot afford to purchase them.

**Limited access to finance:** Participants observed that most formal financing for agribusinesses in Kenya still requires collateral, and that most women owner enterprises are unable to meet the requirements to obtain financing. As a result, many female Agripreneurs rely on savings-led microfinance approaches such as "table banking" (also known as "merry-go-round" or susu) which only provide small amounts of capital.

**Limited access to networks and information:** Significant efforts and investment have been made to strengthen the large number of women's collectives in Kenya as a way of improving access to inputs, information, and markets. It was observed however that many associations are ineffective in helping women grow their businesses and develop linkages with regional and international markets due to weak governance structures and limited contacts with high level networks. Widespread use of digital services in Kenya to access finances, banking, market information and technical information on agriculture has resulted in a gender digital divide whereby many women business owners who lack digital literacy skills and are unable to access the internet are marginalized. While the proportion of men and women who owned a mobile phone in 2019 was nearly equal (86% of women compared to 91% of men), a third of women (32%) compared to about half (49%) of men regularly used the Internet<sup>4</sup>.

## Opportunities

Public and private institutions in Kenya are implementing an impressive number and diversity of initiatives in support of women led agribusinesses. Opportunities identified by participants include:

- The need for synergies between private and government led efforts at different levels (county, national and regional)
- The existence of multiple platforms that support and advocate for the agribusiness sector in Kenya (e.g. Kenya Private Sector Alliance, Association of Women in Agriculture, Kenya) and the commitment of various initiatives to support women and youth led enterprises.
- Efforts to target children through a policy to revive 4k clubs as part of a strategy to change the negative perception of agriculture in future generations

## What needs to be done?

**Beyond production niches:** Promote and invest in promising new areas in agricultural value chains for women such as involving traders in waste management, converting waste into animal feed, using waste as a medium for rearing black soldier flies.

<sup>4</sup> GSMA, 2020. Connected women: the mobile gender gap report, 2020. <https://www.gsma.com/mobilefordevelopment/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/GSMA-The-Mobile-Gender-Gap-Report-2020.pdf>

**Gender responsive extension and advisory services:** Use multiple advisory approaches (e.g. community radio, mobile phones, learning events etc.) to reach women Agripreneurs more effectively. Emphasize topics such as quality, packaging, branding, and certification.

**Improved access to ICTs:** Devise innovative approaches to Increase women's access to digital technologies and strengthen digital literacy among women.

**Gender sensitive machinery design:** Work with private sector actors to ensure that machinery and tools needed by agribusinesses consider gender differences and adopt a gender sensitive approach to design, marketing and selling their products.

**Gender-responsive financial and business support services:** Encourage financial institutions and business support services to provide packages and products that meet the specific needs of agribusinesses and women entrepreneurs.

**Research to identify good practices and approaches for scaling:** Conduct research to assess approaches being used in Kenya to support women led agribusinesses (financial services, agricultural insurance etc), identify good practices and develop strategies for taking successful approaches to scale.

## #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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