

“Actions in Support of Rural Women and Sustainable Development”

Tuesday 18 March 2025 @ 10:00am - 11:15am, Conference Room 9

Side-Event Concept Note CSW69

BACKGROUND

“We must create food systems that feed the planet without wrecking the planet. That means aligning climate action and food systems transformation to help secure sustainable development, good livelihoods, and healthy people on a healthy planet.” These were the words of the UN Secretary General before the Security Council on February 13, 2024. Addressing this challenge is even more urgent today than it was a year ago.

In this context, Africa faces significant challenges, including rapid population growth, soil degradation, low agricultural yields, a heavy dependence on food imports and high vulnerability to climate change. Despite employing over 60% of the workforce, African agriculture struggles to feed the continent, with food imports projected to double by 2030.

But Africa also holds immense potential, with 60% of the world's unused arable land and a young, growing population. By closing the yield gap, boosting crop productivity, and developing homegrown industries, Africa can drive economic diversification and create skilled jobs.

Smallholder farmers, particularly women, form the backbone of Africa's food production and hold the future of its food and climate security. An essential starting point for effectively supporting women is equipping them with sustainable agricultural practices.

At the heart of this sustainable transformation is the need for farmer-centric strategies that prioritize women, ensuring they are not only included but empowered to lead the charge in shaping a future of sustainable agricultural development. Hence, this is an opportunity to showcase practical examples of how these positive changes are not only feasible, but **are** actually being carried out on the ground.

Against this backdrop, this side event will explore the critical role of women's empowerment (SDG 5) in building sustainable food systems and advancing climate action, a key to realize the ambition of SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and to propel climate action (SDG 13) forward. Perspectives of diverse policymakers and private sector operators will showcase their experiences, to help identify the policies and practices that will deliver practical progress.

INTRODUCTION ON THE TOPIC

Humanity's future depends on a just and rapid agricultural transition in Africa that ensures food security while combating climate change. With the fastest-growing population, a diverse agricultural footprint, historic under-application of plant nutrients, the highest agricultural yield gap, and significant vulnerability to climate change, Africa holds both the need and the potential to kickstart and drive this transition.

Women are key to unleashing this potential. They account for up to 80% of food production in rural areas of Africa. But despite their vital contributions, their work remains often unpaid, undervalued, and unrecognized. Women face significant barriers in land access, financial services, and agricultural decision-making. This affects not only individual women but also the overall productivity and food security of entire communities by limiting their ability to scale and sustain their farming operations.

Recognizing these challenges, many African governments and companies have made the empowerment of women in agriculture central to their sustainable development strategies. They are prioritizing targeted initiatives that foster women's leadership, entrepreneurship, diversity, inclusivity, and socio-economic empowerment across the continent.

WHY IS THIS TOPIC IMPORTANT

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action has called for governments to adapt environmental and agricultural policies and mechanisms, when necessary, to incorporate a gender perspective, and in cooperation with civil society, support farmers, particularly women farmers and those living in rural areas, with education and training programmes. Furthermore, Gender equality cuts across all the **UN SDGs**, underlining the interconnectedness between women's empowerment and a better future for all. To this end, gender equality policies provide for an increase in household incomes, and in the improvement of food security, whilst protecting the environment.

Overall Objectives

- **Leadership and community impact:** Empowered women are more likely to become leaders in their communities, creating a ripple effect of socio-economic growth that benefits their families and neighbors.
- **Long-term sustainability:** By focusing on capacity building and entrepreneurship, policies can ensure that programs have lasting impacts, creating a sustainable agricultural ecosystem that supports future generations.
- **Climate-smart agriculture:** Strengthening the capacity of women in leading climate change adaptation, mitigation, and response, and build a more sustainable future through the adoption of responsible agricultural practices that not only increase crop yields but also decarbonize agriculture by contributing to the sequestration of carbon in soils. These agricultural practices have the potential to create a virtuous cycle between two SDGs (No.2 “zero hunger” and No.13 “climate action”) that are traditionally pitted against each other.