



COLEAD

GENDER EQUALITY PLAN

GROWING PEOPLE





Produced by the Committee Linking Entrepreneurship-Agriculture-Development (COLEAD)

For additional information about COLEAD's programmes, activities and operations supporting gender equality, please visit our Website at the following address: <https://www.colead.link/>

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FOREWORD

Gender equality is intrinsically linked to sustainable development, and a key component of COLEAD's mission. Women's empowerment is not only a key part of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) but also a driving force towards sustainable agriculture.

The data is clear and speaks loudly. Women make significant contributions to agriculture and the rural economy in all regions of the world, particularly in those where COLEAD operates. However, they continue to face challenges that limit their economic participation. For instance, they are paid nearly 20% less than their male counterparts and have less access to knowledge, digital technology and resources, such as agricultural credit and loans.

The impact of Covid-19 and climate shocks have further exacerbated these inequalities. The COVID-19 pandemic disruptions not only impacted the trade landscape but also brought attention to other challenges faced by women, such as the lack of access to digital upskilling opportunities.

Research shows that if women farmers had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields by 20 to 30%, and total agricultural output by 2.5 to 4% (FAO, 2014). According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), increasing the employability of women can be one of the most important factors in reducing poverty, and ensuring the population shares the benefits of economic growth. OECD studies go further, indicating that when the participation of women in the labor force increases, economies grow faster.

There is no better time to work towards making agri-foods work for women and reflect this intention in our operations. Our commitment to advancing women's economic empowerment will contribute to fostering inclusive growth, helping narrow the gap in economic development and supporting efforts to increase the contribution of the agricultural sector, and horticulture in particular, to the achievement of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Stephen Mintah
COLEAD's Chairman

Jeremy Knops
General Delegate of COLEAD



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I. BACKGROUND: women are key drivers of the agri-food sector

Women make significant contributions to agriculture and the rural economy in all regions of the world and are key to food and nutrition security through their work in the value chain and at household level. **Globally women comprise over 37% of the world's rural agricultural workforce, a ratio that rises to 48% in low-income countries**, and their contribution is prominent in all agricultural subsectors.¹ They represent close to 50% of the world's 600 million small-scale livestock managers and about half of the labour force in small-scale fisheries. Moreover, these percentages underestimate women's full contribution to agriculture as their work, often unpaid, is not captured in official statistics.²

Women are a **significant entrepreneurial force as owners of farms, input supply stores, service delivery businesses, and export firms** whose contributions to local, national, and global economies are far reaching. Their contribution to agricultural work varies even more widely depending on the specific crop and activity. Women entrepreneurs running small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) play a significant role in contributing to economic development by creating jobs, boosting economic growth, and harnessing the productive capacity of women. It is estimated that globally there are roughly 9.34 formal million women-owned SME in over 140 assessed countries, which is approximately one third of all formal SMEs.³

Despite the key role women play in the agri-food sector, they face barriers in accessing productive resources, inputs, tools, equipment, technologies, agricultural services, training, as well as finance. The COVID-19 pandemic had an important impact on women entrepreneurs due to their smaller-than average business size, being in vulnerable industry sectors, and their higher burden of family demands. However, despite those challenges, many women entrepreneurs have successfully adapted to the disruptions and new market realities caused by the pandemic.⁴

Many studies show that ensuring that women have improved access and control over assets and resources increases agricultural productivity and production which benefits households and the entire society. **When women have increased income, they spend more on food, health, clothing and education for their children.** This has positive implications for immediate well-being as well as long-run human capital formation and economic growth. Therefore, closing the gender gap in agriculture would generate significant gains for the agricultural sector and for society at large.

Improving women's status yields has benefits for the whole community. Therefore, ensuring that women have equal access to key agricultural resources, such as land, water, livestock, equipment, seeds and fertilizers, is pivotal to enhancing their productive and entrepreneurial capacity. Guaranteeing access to knowledge, capacity and vocational training is also key to support women developing their agricultural and business activities.

The **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, adopted by all United Nations (UN) Member States in 2015, which provides the international community with a comprehensive framework to tackle global challenges, aiming to eradicate poverty, hunger and malnutrition, reduce multiple and intersecting inequalities, address climate change, promotes a transformative agenda for gender equality and the empowerment of women in agriculture and value chains, food and nutrition security, and in the

¹ FAO. 2020. [FAO Policy on Gender Equality 2020–2030](#). Rome.

² *ibid*

³ IFC. [Women-owned SMEs: A business opportunity for financial institutions](#). 2021. International Finance Corporation. [Women-Owned SMEs: a business opportunity for financial institutions](#). 2014.

⁴ Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2020/21. [Women's Entrepreneurship: Thriving Through Crisis report](#).



management of natural resources in the context of climate change. Gender equality is very prominent throughout the 2030 Agenda, both in the form of a stand-alone goal, referred as Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) (SDG 5) and as a cross-cutting theme, with more than 30 gender-related targets across the other SDGs.⁵ The fundamental pledge to **‘leave no one behind’, which is at the heart of the implementation of the SDGs, urges all partners to address the underlying causes of gender inequality** and to work in a way that ensures equal opportunities through integrated and transformative approaches.

II. COLEAD’S COMMITMENT TO GENDER EQUALITY: Addressing challenges for women in the agri-food sector

Historically, the core of COLEAD’s work has been to provide technical assistance and trainings to agri-food stakeholder’s, tackling the three pillars of sustainability (economic, social, environmental). As an association of private sector operators active in the agri-food sector, COLEAD **recognises the significant contribution of women across value chains, from farm to fork.**

The organisation brings support services to women entrepreneurs, women-led agribusinesses and organisations which employ women or/and have a positive impact on women lives through increased visibility, economic development and access to more profitable markets and innovations.

The latest Fit For Market Plus (FFM+) programme is designed to contribute to poverty reduction and improved food security and nutrition, by supporting the building of a fairer, safer and sustainable agri-food sector in member countries of the OACPS. The programme – that adopts a **transversal focus on youth and gender** – seeks to improve the capacities of smallholders, farmer groups and horticultural MSMEs to access domestic, regional, and international markets by complying with regulatory and market requirements in a sustainable framework while adapting to changes in their operating environment due to COVID-19.

Through programmes such as FFM+, COLEAD supports the transition to more ‘sustainable agri-food systems’ by facilitating and promoting good practices, including through implementing and guaranteeing decent and fair working conditions, as well as social standards, all of which include strong requirements on gender inclusion and equality.

As an illustration, between 2016 and 2021, COLEAD has provided support to a total of 51 MSMEs (partner-beneficiaries under the Fit For Market (FFM) and/or FFM-SPS programme(s)) specifically on social certification such as BSCI, SMETA, ETI, Fair For Life, Fairtrade, GRASP.

Efforts have already been made to apply a **gender balance** in face-to-face and online events, encourage women to participate in COLEAD trainings, to submit applications for support and to bid

⁵ Although all SDGs are critical to women, gender-related SDGs targets are specifically mentioned under 5.1: End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere ; 5.5: Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life ; 5.C: Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels ; 10.2: By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status.



for tenders issued by COLEAD. **Bonus points** are awarded during the analysis of the applications⁶ and bids⁷.

COLEAD's work on ensuring fair and inclusive value chains also includes supporting women-led and -supportive entities. COLEAD has and will increasingly be supporting the activities of partner-beneficiaries specifically targeting women through development projects. As an example, the following organisations have been supported under the FFM and FFM SPS programmes: Women in Agribusiness in Sub-Saharan Africa Alliance (WASAA); Women Agricultural Promotion – Benin; Association des femmes dynamiques pour le développement durable (AFDYDD) – Cameroon ; Women in Agriculture Union (WAU)– Zimbabwe.

EXAMPLE: MARKET PROFILE

Processed Pineapples in Guinea (October, 2021)

The main objective of this market profile was to determine the market opportunities for a selection of three processed pineapple products (dried pineapple, juices and syrups) in the Guinean, West African and European markets.

Ranked among the top ten products in Guinea's 2019 National Export Promotion Strategy (NES), pineapple is one of the priority commodities in the agricultural sector recovery program, for which significant efforts have been made by the Guinean government in recent years. Among other findings, the study found that dried pineapple (for local, regional and international markets), juices (mainly for the local and regional market); and syrups (mainly for the local and regional market) are slowly developing in the Guinean agri-food sector, **particularly with women's associations, SMEs and industrial enterprises.**

The existence of a significant fruit potential and the enthusiasm of stakeholders, **particularly women, who have received good training thanks to the support of programmes and projects financed by the government and its partners, are noteworthy.** Training in improved drying and storage/preservation techniques and initiation in the manufacture of dryers are therefore major assets for the sustainable development of this sub-sector.

⁶ Criteria include among other existence of a gender policy, ownership by women, % of women in the workforce, % of women in the suppliers/farmer groups, % of women in management positions.

⁷ Bonus points are awarded to consultancies that include gender in the experts proposed in their bids and/or that send us their gender equality policy within their organisations.



III. GOAL AND OBJECTIVES: Gender mainstreaming through COLEAD's work

COLEAD'S Gender Equality Plan overarching goal is to contribute to the **achievement of equality between women and men** as an essential component for the attainment of the sustainable development goals.

To this end, the following objectives have been identified:

- Contribute to overcome the inequalities that affect women's participation in agricultural markets and their capacity to access decent employment and business opportunities along agri-food value chains.
- Strengthen women's entrepreneurial potential through improved access to training and up-to-date information and exposure to innovative practices and technologies.
- Integrate a gender perspective in processes, programme development and training as well as in the delivery of activities, including the monitoring and evaluation of projects.

This Plan is intended to serve as an internal guidance document outlining broad strategic orientations for implementation on how to advance gender equality throughout all areas of COLEAD's operations and partnerships.

This Plan applies to all COLEAD's staff Members at the Head Office, at the Programme Management and Delivery Unit, and the Regional Programme Management and Delivery Units in East and West Africa.

This Plan may be complemented and/or substituted by a detailed Strategy and other tools of a similar nature, both of which may be developed in the future with broad organisational input.

IV. PRINCIPLES

COLEAD'S Plan on gender equality is rooted in the following principles⁸:

- Non-discrimination and equality between women and men are central principles of human rights law.
- Participation and empowerment of women and girls are essential to ensuring gender equality and to enhancing their protection.
- Social and cultural beliefs, including those about the roles of women and girls, are not homogenous.
- Equality and non-discrimination in the workplace are critical to ensure that women and men benefit equally from its policies, programmes and activities.

⁸ Adapted from UNHCR Principles and Practices for Gender Equality.



V. STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS: Bringing a gender-lens to COLEAD's work

The following strategies and actions are designed to support the achievement of COLEAD Gender Equality Plan's main goal and objectives:

1. Gender equality in human and financial resource management

- a. Ensure gender-responsive planning and budgeting: gender considerations should be integrated into all stages of planning and budgeting, from needs assessments to project implementation and monitoring.

2. Gender-responsive support for training and capacity building

- a. Tailor training and capacity building to the specific needs and constraints of women in agricultural value chains. For example, women face specific constraints related to access to land, credit, and technology.
- b. Ensure that all trainings and capacity building activities are accessible to both women and men.

3. Gender sensitive monitoring and evaluation systems

- a. Monitor and evaluate gender outcomes of interventions and use the findings to improve support effectiveness and accountability, including communicating transparently about COLEAD's gender strategy objectives and achievements.
- b. Collect data and disaggregate it by sex, and, when possible, on specific gender differences and inequalities in resources, access, needs and opportunities, among other factors.

4. Promoting gender equality at the regional and country level

- a. Recognise gender inequalities by identifying the root causes of gender inequalities in access to and control over resources, services, and decision-making (including gender roles, norms, and power relations) ; and understanding how and to what extent these root causes affect agricultural value chains in which COLEAD is active.
- b. Promote the role and importance of women in increasing the contribution of agricultural value chains to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

5. Organisational strengthening and Capacity development

- a. Provide training sessions - at different levels - on gender awareness to strengthen COLEAD's commitment to manage its operations in a gender-sensitive manner.
- b. Address gender stereotypes and biases in training and capacity building.

6. Organisational arrangements

- a. Ensure non-discrimination on the basis of sex, age, disability, gender, race, nationality and/or ethnicity in the recruitment (recruitment and selection policy), placement, promotion (internal performance management process) or working conditions of employees, consultants, self-employed contractors, volunteers and interns.



- b. Provision of flexible working arrangements (flexible working hours, remote work, and part-time opportunities), parental and sick leave.
- c. Strive to ensure gender balance in leadership and decision-making positions within COLEAD
- d. Development of COLEAD's Code of Conduct and Ethics Policy
- e. Training options (via LinkedIn Learning) to raise awareness about gender biases, harassment, and the importance of creating an inclusive workplace.
- f. Ensuring non-discrimination in regard to employee wellbeing, by providing all employees access to: mental health resources and support (LinkedIn Learning courses; Persons of Trust; external provider in the case of Belgian employees); Health Insurance Plans (employee and immediate family members coverage); Social Activities (team buildings; online social events)
- g. Employee Feedback: monitoring of employees perceptions by gathering real-time feedback on how employees perceive the workplace, the effectiveness of COLEAD initiatives, and any areas that need improvement (Pulse Surveys; Management Meetings; 1-2-1's...)

7. Strengthening collaborations and partnerships

- a. Foster partnerships and collaborations with local organizations and stakeholders to ensure that gender considerations are integrated into all aspects of agricultural value chain development.

VI. Monitoring and compliance: Review Mechanisms

The Technical Assistance Department will be responsible for the implementation of the Gender Equality Plan, including monitoring and providing operational guidance.

To this end, a Gender Working Group has been set up which will meet within the framework of the Plan (on a monthly basis) and support its continued development, working in collaboration with other departments to facilitate the exchange of information, and recommend additional actions.

This group shall monitor the achievement of the expected outcomes and report annually to the Board of Members for remedial actions when necessary.



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