



Hybrid session organised at the 10th TAP Partners Assembly

Gender-responsive mechanisms or incentives for locally based private sector engagement in strengthening capacity of seed systems in Africa

Organised by CAADP-XP4 Gender Group and DeSIRA LIFT

Thursday 23 November 2023

1. Context

Seed production, processing and trade have an important role to play in the economic growth of the African continent. Farmers' access to good quality seed through formal and informal systems is key to productive and sustainable farming and food systems in the continent. The role of women in the seed sector in Africa is very important, as they are involved in various aspects of seed production, processing, distribution, and conservation. Women and youth seed entrepreneurs are fundamental to tackling food insecurity and establishing resilient food systems.

However, there are major gender inequalities which profoundly influence: a) the nature of, and access, to assets, technologies and innovations, inputs, services, infrastructure, credit and training b) their capacity to participate in and benefit from agricultural production, and c) their empowerment in farming and food systems.

Women and youth face particular challenges in accessing seeds and other planting materials of the preferred type, in the right quantity, at the appropriate time and at an affordable price. The seed sector has enormous potential in terms of job creation and wealth for women and youth, who can make a real contribution to strengthening systems and improving access to quality seeds. Therefore, strengthening the individual and organizational capacity of local, national and regional stakeholders (including private enterprises, farmers' organizations, higher education institutions, research organizations, policy makers) involved in the seed sector in ways which are inclusive could bring enormous gains for women and youth.

DeSIRA LIFT and the CAADP-XP4 gender group organised an online session at the TAP Partners Assembly on gender-responsive mechanisms or incentives for locally based private sector engagement in strengthening capacity of seed systems in Africa. Thirty organisations members of the TAP network participated in the hybrid session held on 23rd November 2023. The objectives were to a) highlight the key work of women in seed systems, with a focus on West Africa b) discuss the drivers enabling innovation processes which are inclusive and benefiting women and c) identify lessons learned on how to support women-led innovation processes and equitable seed systems.

Panelists representing RREOs (CORAF, FARA), private sector operators in the seed industry (FASO KABA, based in Mali and AMBALOSSO, based in Burkina Faso) shared their experiences and lessons in setting up and strengthening a women-led seed industry network at regional and national level. The session was facilitated by Isolina Boto COLEAD/DeSIRA-LIFT, Richard Lamboll (NRI, AGRINATURA), and Renaud Guillonnet - DeSIRA-LIFT.

2. Summary of presentations by RRREOs and operators

Mariame Maïga, Gender Lead for CAADP-XP4 and CORAF Regional Gender and Social Development Adviser provided the background of the work on the seed sector in West Africa.

CORAF is supporting innovation processes to enable sustainable, resilient, healthy and productive agriculture and food systems transformation in West Africa. 80% of the seeds planted by farmers in WCA come from the informal sector. In the context of a changing climate, it facilitates the development of solutions and seeds that are drought resistant to enhance food and nutrition security working closely with the private sector and smallholders, promoting entrepreneurship and supporting policy and advocacy. CORAF supports a regional network of women leaders in seed entrepreneurship in West Africa, contributing to women's empowerment in the seed sector and the growth of women-led seed companies for sustainable scaling of drought resistant seeds to meet demand in the West and Central region. The network enables capacity building of members on quality seed supply chains, seed business development, seed policy regulations, and quality control.

The network supports the formalization of women-led enterprises operating at production, processing and marketing levels and has developed a platform to conduct trainings and to upscale good practices.

Zalissa Sawadogo as Head of AnBaloso and General Secretary of women led seed companies' network in West and Central Africa, shared some of the activities of her business and of the network. AnBaloso is a seed cooperative based in Burkina Faso, involved in gardening and fodder seeds and selling seeds online partnering with women-led enterprises in Mali and Chad. AnBaloso cooperative is contributing to the Government of Burkina Faso effort to provide internal displaced people with food by furnishing cereal-crops.

The objectives of the network are: (i) to build capacity of members to enhance their knowledge and skills on quality seed production and regulatory aspects, and seed business development and management; to facilitate experience sharing among its members to promote gender inclusion and women leadership in seed industry; (iii) to contribute to policy formulation at country and regional level to foster women participation and contributions in sustainable seed sector development and to facilitate access to finance and market for women in seed business to bridge gender gap in seed sector.

The creation of the network is an initiative of CORAF to contribute to women's empowerment in the seed sector. The network enables capacity building of members on quality seeds VC, seed business development, seed policy regulations, and quality control. A training to strengthen the capacity of women seed entrepreneurs to ensure sufficient contribution of women in seed industry to bridge the gender gap was held from 11-15 April 2022 bringing together 25 entrepreneurs from WCA (Mali, Nigeria, Ghana, Niger, Togo, Mauritania, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Benin and Chad).

Current and future developments include:

- supporting the membership extension of the network to new members, especially women and youth to foster inclusive job creation in seed business.
- to facilitate capacity building of members to increase their knowledge and skills about quality seed production, scaling process, seed policy and regulations.
- to develop funding proposals and resource mobilization plans to implement the action plan agreed by the network members.
- to facilitate contributions of the members in dissemination of new technologies and agricultural best practices in seed value chain, and participation in demonstration plots, field days, experience sharing trips amongst the network's members.

- to strengthen the development of partnerships with Ministries of agriculture and research system in countries.
- to formalize the regional network and some national networks with the support of CORAF (an expert has been recruited and a board committee supports the process). Some of the national networks have started the formalisation process (Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso).

Maimouna Coulibaly Sidibe, Founder and owner, Faso Kaba, Mali shared the business model of the company. Faso Kaba was created based on a high demand for certified seeds, insufficient information of where to source the seeds, the absence of a positive seed delivery system and the need to support women-led businesses.

The company is part of a network of 20 Malian seed companies and member of the regional network, Faso Kaba focuses its work on seed production and distribution to ensure the availability of quality certified seed to producers on time at affordable prices. Targeted crops are maize, sorghum, millet, cowpea, groundnut, rice and vegetables. The company works with research and NGOs, conducts demonstration trials using new crop varieties, supplies seeds from research, organises training sessions for producers, women and youth in seed business and in the seed value chains and do joint field inspection of seed production plots with seed laboratories or extensionists. Working with over 200 seeds producers' groups organised in 26 cooperatives, Faso Kaba has trained more than 3 000 women and youth with technical and financial support of many organisations.

Seed production, processing and marketing are critical for the agricultural sector in Africa. However, women face gender disparities in access to technologies and innovations, inputs and finance, entrepreneurship and skills development. This reduces their capacity for agricultural production, and their socio-economic empowerment in the sector.

Munoko Karen Musikoyo-Nguru, Agribusiness Expert at FARA advocated for a multi-faceted approach, which includes infrastructure investment, training programs for women in seed business, technology transfer, stronger involvement with private sector, supportive policies, and global cooperation to overcome challenges faced by women in Africa on access to productive resources. FARA supports mainstreaming of agribusiness learning alliances, a mechanism that aims to strengthen partnerships with the private sector to increase access to markets for women and youth-led innovations. This is currently being rolled out within innovation platforms in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Liberia, DRC. FARA conducts Individual and institutional capacity-building for gender mainstreaming through various partners and forums where relevant information and knowledge in support of women entrepreneurs are shared. A diverse and inclusive seed industry leads to better innovation and resilience, including biodiversity conservation. Supporting women in the seed business is even more crucial now than ever, given the opening of borders for trading under the Africa Continent Free Trade Agreement (reference was made to the opportunities to trade across borders under the AUC's initiative - Common Africa Agro Parks).

3. Conclusions and Takeaways

There is a need for increased work by TAP on gender, and women-led businesses contributing to innovation systems in the context of sustainable, resilient, healthy and just farming and food systems transformation. Women networks can benefit from linking with policy and research members of TAP and TAP should consolidate the work of members focusing on women-led innovations and gender equity.

TAP members suggested that the TAP ToC would need to include gender, taking into account what partners do to better identify synergies.

Takeaways from the West and Central Africa women-led seed network:

- Importance of multi-actor approaches (policy, research, locally based private sector and others) in supporting women-led innovations (to attract investments and facilitate market access) and enabling more equitable innovation systems and outcomes.
- Capacity development for AIS which involves and benefits women entrepreneurs as their role is central to value creation in the agricultural and food economy. Support is needed to strengthen women's network core functions to facilitate CD for AIS and to seize the opportunities of formal economic sectors.
- TAP can support regional cooperation and alignment of financial, human and technical resources in support of CD for AIS benefiting women innovators.
- Functional capacities of TAP can be used and disseminated by women entrepreneurs working closely with researchers, policy makers and other key actors.