

Women want greater inclusion in agribusiness

Women farmers in southern Africa want to move beyond generic empowerment slogans and focus on targeted and transformative solutions. There is also a strong resolve among women to take responsibility of their development and define the kind of empowerment they need in order to prosper.

Moving agriculture forward



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In a high-energy two-day gathering at the second SACAU Regional Women Farmers' Conference held on 23 and 24 May 2015 in Mahe, Seychelles, delegates debated the true meaning of women empowerment, and considered cultural, social, financial and political limitations that still inhibit African women farmers from reaching their full potential in agriculture. Conference delegates pointed out that focusing on women, who make up the bulk of the continent's farmers, could be a better way of tackling under-development to effect change within a generation.

In his opening address of the conference, SACAU President, Dr Theo de Jager, flagged that Africa will not move forward in agriculture without the meaningful participation of women in the sector. "When you take a woman out of the house, you don't have a home. We believe that today's farmers are the generation which will lift the region out of poverty and move agriculture forward - not so much because of good policies or programmes, but due to their resilience and new technologies. Africa's dream lie with you," he emphasised.

Women farmers can reduce hunger

Mrs. Linda William-Melanie, Principal Secretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs in Seychelles, in her address warned that without the contribution of the continent's women, Africa will starve. "We need to ensure that in agriculture, both female and male farmers have the opportunity to play an active role in the agricultural supply chain especially in production, processing and marketing. Gender integration in agriculture makes good business sense," she said.

Delegates also heard that, if women had the same access to information and credit as their male counterparts, there would be up to a 150 million fewer hungry people on the continent. Women farmers reportedly being among the poorest people in the world and only consigned to primary agriculture also raised immense concern among delegates. It was noted that having women mostly in primary production and not along value-chains, results in limited revenue generation from agriculture.

Through support from SACAU, women urged the organisation to among others focus on agribusiness development and interventions that are value-chain based for meaningful women development.

The Regional Women Farmers' Conference was organised against the backdrop of The African Union declaration of 2015 as the "Year of Women Empowerment and Development," with support from the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD), Southern African Trust (SAT) and We Effect. Participants at the conference were drawn from members of SACAU in Botswana, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe.