

RURAL WOMEN'S FORUM

PAN AFRICAN FARMERS ORGANISATION (PAFO)

23-24 October 2023





In Africa, women comprise over half of the population, with the majority living in rural areas. Women make up the majority of the agricultural labor force and are primarily responsible for household nutrition and food security. In some cases, they are even the sole providers for their families. The Pan-African Farmers' Organization (PAFO) recognizes the vital role of women in agricultural socio-economic development and considers their promotion to be a top priority in its programs.

The PAFO organizes rural women forum each two years. The forum brings together rural women representatives from PAFO members to discuss issues affecting them and to position their expectations within PAFO's programs.

On 23 and 24 October 2023, PAFO held its 4th African Rural Women, members of National Farmers' Organizations (NFOs) affiliated to PAFO's Regional Member Organizations: EAFF, PROPAC, ROPPA, SACAU and UMAGRI, in consecutive with the PAFO 6th General Assembly and other side events.

The forum is being organized by PAFO each two year, and it brings together rural women representatives from PAFO members to discuss on issues affecting them and to bring in other elements to position their expectations under the PAFO programs.

The main objective of this forum is to provide a space for rural women to share their experiences and define their strategic interventions towards PAFO's vision and objectives.

The forum was held for two days; The first day, was the hybrid Intramural meeting at the Remada Plaza Hotel, Tunis, while the second was the field visit to the two cooperatives, in Tunisia.

I. INTRAMURAL MEETING

1.1. Opening ceremony



The 4th Rural Women's Forum was launched with a welcome remarks by Mr Nourredine BEN AYED, President of UTAP and Vice-President of UMNAGRI. In his speech, Mr BEN AYED began by welcoming the participants to the 4th Rural Women's Forum and wishing them a good stay. He reminded the audience that the support and capacity-building of women farmers is an integrated part of the main orientations of the Farmers' Organizations, in view of their crucial role in agricultural and socio-economic development.

He also called on African women to become more active and involved in economic, social and political life. Now more than ever, they need support and capacity-building to cope with the shocks of climate change, water scarcity and other challenges.....

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In his speech, the President of PAFO, Mr Kolyang Palebele, expressed his gratitude to the Tunisian Government for the warm welcome extended to the participants in the Rural Women's Forum, and to the participants in the 6th PAFO GA Side Events. He also expressed his appreciation to the women who had traveled from far and wide to take part in the event, as well as to PAFO's partners who had supported this initiative because they believed in the struggle of women, in particular, IFAD, through the FO4ACP program, FAO, Agricord and AHA.



In her speech, Ms. Nicole Bolomey, AHA International Director, stressed that women play a vital role in ensuring food security. However, Ms Bolomey also stressed the need for men to recognize women's efforts by integrating them more into key positions, and to promote greater representation of women to create a dynamic conducive to more active participation. Ms Bolomey also mentioned the women's leadership program implemented by PAFO in partnership with AHA. This program has brought together 15 women from Africa and 5 women from Germany who share similar issues, with the aim of creating a solid network for mutual support.



In her speech, Ms Elizabeth Nsimadala, EAFF President and Board Member in charge of Women's Affairs, thanked all the delegates representing PAFO rural women, PAFO Board Members and partners who attended the PAFO Rural Women's Forum.

She appreciated the partners who had contributed to the success of the forum, and also stressed that women play a key role in the socio-economic development of society, and are the most accountable for nutrition and food security within the family household, and in some cases the only provider.

Ms Nismadala also acknowledged Ms Elizabeth Atangana, a key figure in the history of PAFO, who initiated the forum and was PAFO's first president, underlining her role as a leader in the creation of this forum, where women's issues in agriculture are discussed today. She expressed her gratitude to the Tunisian government for facilitating entry procedures into

the country, and to UMNAGRI and UTAP for their warm welcome and their role in organizing this event.

Finally, she thanked PAFO's leaders for their ongoing commitment to the promotion of women, a central mission of the organization.

Increased awareness and understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing women

farmers, and the role of PAFO and its partners in supporting them.

1.2. Work Progress



The forum was structured into five sessions, each focusing on one of the key themes: (i) Strengthening the role of women in agriculture (ii) Resilient agricultural practices and food security (iii) Capacity building, knowledge management (iv) Facilitate rural women's transition from the informal to the formal sector through access to finance, (v) Women's influence in decision-making.

The participants reflected on the different topics proposed for discussion, which took place in panels and in groups, both French-speaking and English-speaking.

1.2.1. Strengthening the role of women in agriculture



The panel focused on the role of women in agricultural value chains, in EAFF, PROPAC, and ROPPA regions.

- **EAFF**

Women play a key role along the agricultural value chain, but face constraints such as access to land, inputs, finance, and training, excluding them from high-value-added markets. In agricultural value chains with high employability, women are frequently employed in precarious, labor-

intensive manual jobs, while men hold coordinating positions, making them vulnerable to economic restructuring. Some women, with more self-confidence, have opted for entrepreneurship. And there are many success stories here that could be an inspiration to many women.



- **PROPAC**

The region's economy, which is mainly centered on agriculture, has made significant progress in reducing poverty. However, it is essential to note that women remain largely marginalized within this dynamic. Although it is often women who play the leading role in the production of agricultural products, their contribution is often underestimated. Society seems to be heavily influenced by traditional norms, with men often taking the lead. This gender imbalance is exacerbated by persistent problems of access to land and finance for women, as well as discriminatory practices against

them. These obstacles hamper women's economic potential and reinforce gender inequality in the agricultural sector, creating an urgent need for reforms and measures to promote gender equality in the economy.

- **ROPPA**



Women play a crucial role in family farming in West Africa, making a significant contribution to the rural economy, both in the production and processing as well as the marketing of agricultural products. They represent a predominant share in agri-food processing (80%), agricultural marketing (70%), and the sale of ready-to-consume products (90%). Their role in cross-border local trade is indispensable, thereby fostering connections between agricultural supply and urban food demand, with economic benefits for rural households.

However, the region faces major challenges, including insecurity due to conflicts and terrorist activities, which lead rural populations to abandon their lands. Adapting to climate change and mastering suitable technologies remain critical issues to meet the growing food demand due to demographic growth. Additionally, post-harvest management and the processing of agricultural products present significant challenges, as does the effective implementation of policies.

The representative of the ROPPA Women's College provided an overview of the institution and also presented the actions taken by the college to address the challenges encountered and provide support to women

1.2.2. Resilient Agricultural Practices and Food Security: Challenge and Recommendations



A working group of Anglophone rural women was set up to reflect on this issue.

A- CHALLENGES.

Resilience in the social, environmental, and economic aspects:

- Post-harvest losses due to poor harvest handling
- Issues of land tenure (tenure not protected)
- Land degradation (soil)
- Encroachment on Agricultural (eg Real estate business)

- High cost and access to farm inputs (lack of access to information and certified products.
- Lack of financing
- Lack of extension services
- Poor storage infrastructure
- Unstructured/ unbalanced market
- Climate change
- Overuse of pesticides.

B- RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Creation of Awareness of different land rights/tenure
2. Use of compost/manure + soil testing
3. Land use policies to protect agr. land.
4. Bulk purchases through organized structure. Improve village seed production systems. Eg. Coops/FA'S etc.
5. Innovative financing models for women eg rural banks, VSLA'S, SACCO'S, and financial literacy.
6. Farmer to Farmer extension
7. Digitalization of extension
8. Farmer field schools
9. Producer organization.
10. Training in post-harvest management by FA'S, private sector and government
11. Warehouse, receipt system.
12. Collective marketing and contract farming practices.
13. Production planning based on market analysis/demand
14. Climate adaptation
15. Irrigation
16. Crop rotation/diversification
17. Planting early mature crops
18. Drought resilience crops(plant)
19. Cover crops
20. Regenerate agriculture Agroecology.

1.2.3. Women's influence in decision-making



The reflection was initiated within a working group composed of French-speaking rural women."

A- CHALLENGES

- Structuring: Insufficiency of laws and legislation promoting women's access to decision-making bodies.
- Social constraints: Family commitments that hinder women from accessing positions of responsibility.
- Difficulties in accessing resources: Access to land, access to financing, access to water, access to training, etc.



B- PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- Encouragement of women to create their own projects.
- Access to financing, grants, etc.
- Encouragement of women to join professional structures such as cooperatives and associations.
- Promote female leadership.
- Strengthen basic education to reduce the high illiteracy rate.

1.2.4. Capacity building, knowledge management

A- Capacity building

- Harmonizing understanding of the concept
- Upgrading of women in relation to identified weaknesses linked to the activities carried out or the function;
- All the training and know-how generated, available and to be used for capacity-building purposes.

B- Capacity building areas

- ❖ Women's leadership
- ❖ Negotiation
- ❖ Advocacy
- ❖ Planning, monitoring & evaluation
- ❖ Technical skills
- ❖ Communication

C- Challenges

- ❖ Limited awareness of the importance of knowledge management.
- ❖ Lack of technical and financial capacity to identify and capitalize on available knowledge.
- ❖ Weak adaptation of training to real needs

1.2.5. Facilitate rural women's transition from the informal to the formal sector through access to finance

A- Major problems

- ❖ Activities Calendar
- ❖ Fund duration
- ❖ interest rate
- ❖ Guarantee
- ❖ Heritage and lack of co-financing

B- Proposed Solutions

- ❖ Alternative financial institutions
- ❖ Public and private guarantee funds
- ❖ Capacity building for women
- ❖ Creation of cooperatives
- ❖ Advocacy with traditional chiefs for the application of the law on access to land
- ❖ Training of trainers and availability of the resources needed to replicate training in the field
- ❖ Capacity building must take account of the local context and realities.

C- Recommendations

- ❖ Involve those concerned in the analysis of capacity-building needs
- ❖ Select a good sample of people to be strengthened, according to needs and roles
- ❖ Mobilize more resources for capacity building
- ❖ Promote farmers' institutions that have the infrastructure and human resources to better manage available resources
- ❖ Raising awareness of the importance of knowledge management
- ❖ Greater involvement of women in decision-making.
- ❖ Empowering women by strengthening their institutional, economic, and technical skills
- ❖ Greater ownership of projects and programs aimed at women.
- ❖ Capacity building in knowledge management in terms of:
 - Analysis
 - Methodology
 - Appropriate Tools
 - Communication

II. FIELD VISIT



The PAFO delegation was made up of 32 women participants, including representatives of rural women from 5 regional networks of farmers' organizations, the President of EAFF, members of the PAFO secretariat, the Agricord delegate, the International Director of AHA and the UTAP delegation.

The delegation visited two cooperatives: "Lella kmar el Baya SMAC des PAM & T.P.A" and "INTESA", (innovation in technologies to support sustainable development of the agro-industry), in the Manouba region, Tunisia.

The visit began with an information session at the headquarters of Lella kmar el Baya SMAC des PAM & T.P.A, during which participants were introduced to the Cooperative's activities and programs. Lella Kmar El Baya is a mutual agricultural cooperative. It multiplies, grows and processes

ancient Tunisian plants such as "Mahmoudi" wheat. It produces natural, healthy, traditional Tunisian food products. It started with just 25 people in 2020 and now has 200 members, including 160 women.



One of the cooperative's main activities is the multiplication of these ancient plants, including Mahmoudi wheat. Using sustainable and environmentally friendly farming practices, the cooperative ensures that these special varieties continue to thrive in Tunisian soil. These plants are grown with care, following traditional methods and using modern techniques to guarantee superior quality. The aim is to preserve agricultural biodiversity and produce harvests of the highest quality. Once the crops have been harvested, the cooperative engages in the artisanal processing of these plants into natural, healthy food products. This includes the production of flour, pasta, bread and other products derived from Mahmoudi wheat and other ancient plants. Every stage of the process is

carried out with the utmost care to guarantee products of the highest quality.



The PAFO delegation exchange with the women members their experiences in the cooperative and the challenges they faced. The main obstacle was insufficient management of production costs. However, the women in the cooperative have overcome this problem by organizing training sessions for their members. They have also developed their business by creating packaging and certifying their products. What's more, their strategy is based first and foremost on finding markets before developing products, thus ensuring that they can be marketed.

The second cooperative visited was INTESA (innovation in technologies to support sustainable development in the agro-industry), which works in hydroponic agriculture. Hydroponics is a method of growing plants without

soil. Instead of growing in soil, hydroponically-grown plants are placed in a growing medium made up of water, mineral nutrients and oxygen. This technique allows precise control of the plant growth environment, including nutrition, humidity and temperature. Hydroponics maximizes plant growth by minimizing nutrient losses and reducing water requirements compared with soil-based cultivation. It is an alternative growing method that can be adapted to farms of all sizes. Hydroponics has found applications in horticulture and greenhouse growing for certain vegetables. It accelerates fruit ripening thanks to a faster light cycle, enabling multiple harvests each year. This technique is also used in urban agriculture for local production and to green urban environments. Derivatives of this method, such as aeroponics and aquaponics, have also emerged. It also seems to offer solutions to problems linked to water, pollution and the lack of arable land. Researchers are also using it to study plants, particularly medicinal plants, and micro-organisms.

The visit began with a detailed presentation of hydroponics technology. Members of the delegation learned how plants are grown without soil, receiving nutrients and water directly from sophisticated systems.



The delegation was then taken into the hydroponic greenhouse, where rows of lush green plants were suspended in a controlled environment. They

asked questions about the types of plants grown, the challenges encountered and the advantages of hydroponics over traditional cultivation.



The site visit closed at 5pm with the return of the delegates to the hotel.

III. Rural Women Declaration



At the end of the two-day Rural Women's Forum, the participants had the opportunity to provide recommendations aimed at enhancing the PAFO's contribution to the empowerment of African rural women and the development of sustainable, ecological, and resilient agricultural systems.

With a view to improving PAFO's contribution to the empowerment of African rural women and the development of sustainable, ecological and resilient agricultural systems, African rural women invite the governments of African States, African and international intergovernmental institutions, technical and financial partners in the rural world and Pan-African and international solidarity NGOs to focus on ten (10) recommendations.

[Read The Declaration and Recommendations](#)

