



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



WOMEN AS KEY PLAYERS IN GREENING MEDITERRANEAN FOOD SYSTEMS: DRIVERS AND CHALLENGES

WEBINAR OUTCOMES

KEY MESSAGES

- In the Mediterranean region, women contribute to food systems in diverse roles, such as producers, innovators, researchers, consumers, and decision-makers, which also make them key players in the green transition of Mediterranean food systems. Nevertheless, **women and girls still face marginalization due to structural barriers and deeply ingrained gender inequalities**, which also leads them to experience climate change in uniquely different ways.
- Equal **access to education, training, and financial services are essential** for overcoming the challenges posed by gender inequality, which are deeply rooted in culture. Moreover, there is a need to formalize and acknowledge the impact of the demanding and time-consuming informal work done by women, which is often underestimated.
- Progress has been slow in including women in green transition policy and decision-making processes at national and international levels: there is a need to move beyond a checkbox approach to gender representation, and instead focus on **integrating gender-sensitive planning into the main policies for green agrifood transition**, adequately supported by gender-sensitive budgeting to ensure implementation of strategies. Building **multi-stakeholder coalitions can also help increasing women's participation in decision-making processes**, benefiting from their expertise, and prioritizing their needs. Finally, the role of civil society organizations is necessary to amplify representation and ensure that the voices of those most affected are genuinely heard.
- To simultaneously eradicate gender inequalities and **promote women's participation and leadership in the green transition of agrifood systems, requires adopting a systematic approach** that encompasses various agrifood-related sectors and engages diverse stakeholders. It also requires stronger women's agency by increasing their access to information, resources, finances, and collective action.
- Climate finance accessibility for women should be improved through national commitments, budget earmarking, and new forms of public-private investment that have the capacity to **bridge the gender gap in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields by fostering green entrepreneurship and career opportunities** in the region.

SPEAKERS



Moderator:
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Frida Krifca

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Octavi Quintana Trias

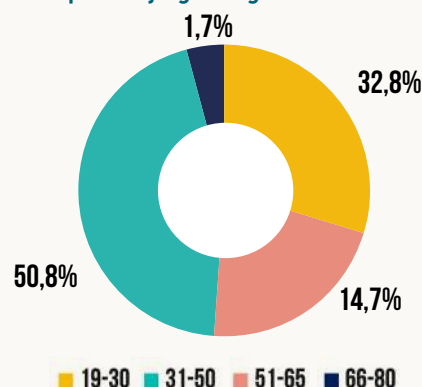
Director, [PRIMA Foundation](#)

Participation statistics | 177 participants from 38 countries. Of which, 138 participants from 16 Mediterranean countries.

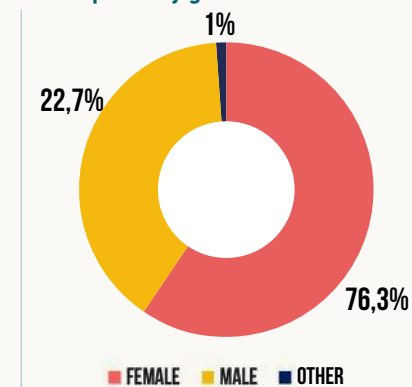
Number of participants by stakeholder group



Participants by age range



Participants by gender



STATUS OF WOMEN IN AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS: PERSPECTIVE OF MEDITERRANEAN COUNTRIES

Opening remarks were provided by:



Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Republic of Albania

represented by H.E. Frida Krifca, Minister.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is in charge of regulation of the economic activity in the agricultural sector of Albania with a purpose of increasing the sector's production capacity. The ministry is responsible for agriculture, rural development, food safety and consumer protection, fisheries and aquaculture, and waters administration. The ministry is responsible for the implementation of the EU pre-accession assistance for rural development programme (IPARD), making available 94 million euros to Albanian farmers supporting in-farm investments, investments in agro-processing and rural development.



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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

represented by Ms Lauren Phillips, Deputy Director of the
Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division

FAO Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division coordinates the work on various social dimensions including on rural institutions, services, social protection, gender equality, decent rural employment, tenure rights and the right to food. It works with member countries and other partners through a rights-based approach, to empower people by enhancing social protection systems and extending their coverage to rural areas, diversifying rural employment opportunities, reducing gender gaps and other social inequalities, strengthening producers' organizations and improving governance of tenure and the rural poor's access to natural and productive resources and financial services.

The opening remarks provided the technical background for this webinar through an overview of the status of women in Mediterranean agrifood systems.

According to FAO's recently published report [*The status of women in agrifood systems*](#),¹ 36 percent of working women globally were employed in agrifood systems in 2019. In the Mediterranean region, women contribute to food systems in diverse roles, such as producers, innovators, researchers, consumers, and decision-makers. However, the demanding and time-consuming tasks undertaken by women, including food production, storage, processing, harvesting, and animal husbandry, are often underestimated. This situation varies significantly among countries due to differing socioeconomic, political, and other characteristics. For instance, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), women's employment in agrifood systems does not exceed 20 percent. Yet, in countries like Morocco, female agricultural employment surpasses 50 percent.² In the Western Balkans and Türkiye, rural women face considerable gender gaps in labor force participation, often engaging in informal and unpaid farm work.

As key actors in agrifood systems, **women can play a crucial role in the "green transition" of Mediterranean food systems**, which aims at achieving a neutral or positive impact on the environment, increasing the food system's resilience to the impact of climate change, and promoting a more sustainable management of natural resources. Nevertheless, women and girls still face marginalization due to structural barriers and deeply ingrained gender inequalities. For example, if men and women had equal access to agricultural inputs, yields could be increased to feed an additional 150 million hungry people worldwide.³ Considerable challenges persist in accessing productive resources, specialized education and training, agricultural and financial services, green job opportunities, and innovative climate-smart technologies and practices, which are often male-dominated.

Owing to these persisting gender inequalities, **women and girls experience climate change in different and uniquely gendered ways**. Their resilience and adaptive capacities are often undermined by limited control over key assets like land⁴ and water, and reduced mobility, which heightens risks related to catastrophic events. A case in point is **water security**, which is a major concern in the Mediterranean region, with implications beyond borders, affecting migration patterns, socioeconomic dynamics, and geopolitical crises. To accelerate the green transition and enhance resilience to climate change and water scarcity, **women need improved access and capacities for water-related technologies and practices**. Women's roles in irrigation and water management are underestimated. One of the reasons for this is the fact that membership in water users' associations is often restricted to landowners, significantly limiting women's participation, especially considering that women in the Near East and North Africa (NENA) region own a mere 7 percent of agricultural land⁵ (women owning real estate are only 6.4 percent in Tunisia, 4.4 percent in Morocco, 4.1 percent in Algeria, 4 percent in Egypt and 3 percent in Jordan; this consists of very small-scale farms in 75 percent of the cases⁶).

To simultaneously eradicate gender inequalities and promote women's participation and leadership in the green transition of agrifood systems, requires adopting a systematic approach that encompasses various agrifood-related sectors and engages diverse stakeholders. Successful practices identified in the FAO report [*The status of women in agrifood systems*](#) include **working with rural organizations to leverage collective action** and enable women's adoption of climate-smart practices and water-saving technologies. Institutional support, training, and access to irrigation were key factors enabling meaningful participation of women in public institutions like water users' associations in Egypt.⁷ Other examples of best practices adopted by the Government of Albania to tackle gender gaps in the agricultural sector are provided in detail in the boxes below.

Empowered women are better equipped to withstand the shocks posed by climate change. Supporting women's agency by **increasing their access to information, resources, finances, and collective action** is crucial. By implementing empowering approaches in half of the smallholder family households, it is possible to increase the incomes of 58 million people and enhance the resilience of an additional 235 million people.⁸

Women's leadership in climate change policymaking also needs to be strengthened, since national strategies related to agriculture, climate change and natural resource management often do not integrate gender-responsive considerations adequately. It is the case for example in Bosnia and Herzegovina,⁹ Egypt¹⁰ and Lebanon.¹¹ Group-based approaches can incentivize collective action on climate-related policy, and **involving women in poli-**

cy consultations for programmes and adaptation plans **ensures that their challenges and opportunities are adequately represented.** Together with climate and environmental policy-making, **gender-responsive public budgeting** and investment strategies are essential to create an enabling environment fostering resilience, reducing inequalities, and empowering women in agri-food systems.

From a market perspective, investing in upskilling and reskilling women in green sectors, addressing digital gender divides, and promoting equal childcare responsibility can facilitate a green and equal transition in the agri-food labor market. The potential of the green economy sectors to provide new career opportunities and higher wages should be utilized to tackle high unemployment rates among Mediterranean youth.¹²

NORMATIVE WORK ON GENDER EQUALITY IN ALBANIA

EXPERIENCE /  ALBANIA

Gender equality and women's empowerment are highlighted as a priority in a number of national policy documents in Albania, including the latest National Strategy and Action Plan on Gender Equality 2022-2030, and reinforced by Albania's ambition to join the European Union. Following the adoption of the *Law on Gender Equality* in 2008, Albania passed several legal reforms to implement international human rights and gender equality standards. These include the *Law on Protection from Discrimination*, the *Law against Domestic Violence*, the *Organic Budget Law*, the *Albanian Electoral Code*, the *Law on Local Self-Government Financing*, *Law on the Rights and Protection of the Child* and the *Law on Legal Aid*. This set of laws was developed to promote, enforce, and monitor non-discrimination on the basis of sex and gender identity.

In line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development has engendered its [2021-2027 sector strategy](#), giving a particular focus on gender transformative approaches in agri-food systems, intending to address gender inequalities as well as gaps. Examples of successful initiatives in Albania include positive discrimination to increase women's involvement in entrepreneurial activities and projects promoting rural women's empowerment through women-led agribusiness incubators, showing an unprecedented success rate (nearly one out of three successful applications as a result of the [IPARD II programme](#)).

GENDER RURAL EQUALITY AND TOURISM (GREAT) PROJECT

EXPERIENCE /  ALBANIA

Since 2021, the [GREAT](#) project, funded by the Government of Italy and implemented by UN Women and FAO in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, contributes to the sustainable economic development of rural women and their communities by increasing their income and ability to obtain work. The project aims to increase the capacities of rural women to develop their own business, to self-organize and register as local groups and to improve their access to finance. Simultaneously, it supports targeted municipalities to prioritize and promote rural women's businesses, rural tourism and value chain development through women-led agribusiness incubators. A key component of the project is awareness raising on the key role and contribution of rural women and girls in the local economic and social life.

OUTCOMES OF THE PANEL DISCUSSION

The webinar aimed to address the following key questions:

- **How can the greening of Mediterranean food systems be a driver rather than a challenge for women's equal participation, and what are the risks that a gender-blind green transition would entail?**
- **Are there any specific policies, programmes, or technological or scientific advancements that have proven to be effective in overcoming the barriers that women face to participate in the green transition?**
- **What needs to change to ensure that food systems become both green and inclusive of women's participation and leadership, and who should be involved in / who is responsible for this transformation?**

The panel discussion allowed to exchange experiences of several groups of stakeholders.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES: BUILDING COALITIONS FOR A JUST GREEN TRANSITION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

An overview of the current policy framework in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean was presented by:



Arab Reform Initiative (ARI)

represented by Ms Sarine Karajerjian, Programme Director of the Environmental Politics Programme.

The Arab Reform Initiative is an independent think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change and social justice. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality, and gender equality.

The way natural resources are managed, the presence of food on our tables, and the handling of waste all carry political implications. Throughout history, the MENA region has served as a significant food supplier to neighboring countries. However, ongoing conflicts, complex crises and outdated systems have made resource use unsustainable. The current state of affairs prompts to question current practices for natural resource management and the political systems that allow short-sighted decisions on the environment.

During a conference organized by ARI (see box below), discussions with scholars and practitioners from the region have primarily centered around redefining the concept of “just transition”. A just green transition seeks to ensure that the benefits of a transition to a greener and more sustainable economy are shared widely and inclusively, also with those populations who have been left out by the current economic system (such as communities suffering from environmental degradation, food insecurity, water shortages or those with little support for adapting or mitigating the impact of climate change). However, there still are several **significant obstacles to achieving a just green transition**. Militarization and conflicts prevalent in the MENA region pose a substantial barrier, affecting Sudan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Libya, and other parts of the Arab region, as well as parts of the Balkans. Additionally, the heavy dependence on fossil fuels and the accompanying economic and political crises further hinder progress. Third, a distinction must be made between food sovereignty and food security. **Being food secure does not guarantee ownership and control over resources.** Access to resources and means of production, such as seeds, land, water, and financial

autonomy, are key components of food sovereignty, necessary for self-determination of agrifood systems stakeholders. Finally, it is impossible to embark on a successful transition without a solid foundation of democratic processes in the Arab region. Unfortunately, the shrinking spaces for dialogue and participation pose challenges in convening meetings and ensuring representation for civil society actors who can shape the future of the region and its resources.

The role of civil society organizations (CSOs) who actively address environmental issues and have been present in the region since the 1980s and 1990s must be acknowledged. These movements have evolved from focusing purely on environmental concerns, to encompassing issues of equity, dignity, and livelihood. Building coalitions among those CSOs is necessary to amplify representation of women and youth and ensure

that the voices of those most affected by environmental technologies are genuinely heard. Numerous projects originating from the global south, such as the construction of large-scale solar panels, highlight the tendency for the MENA region to be perceived merely as a recipient of environmental technologies. The transition in areas such as energy, food, and water necessitate a careful examination of the desired outcome and potential consequences affecting local communities.

Placing local communities at the heart of the conversations and understanding their needs and aspirations is essential. The communities themselves are the true experts, as they intimately understand the challenges they face. Technological solutions should not overshadow their experiences or disregard the adaptive measures they have already taken. It is crucial to provide com-

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munities with platforms to voice their concerns and perspectives and to ensure their active participation in decision-making processes. Additionally, it is equally urgent to ensure women are informed and have their voices represented in political systems and policy processes to shape future societies. It should be **avoided to impose a one-size-fits-all approach borrowed from external contexts** and instead embrace the unique challenges and aspirations of the Mediterranean region. **Stakeholders must work together, avoiding silos and acknowledging intersectionality.** Movements and coalitions such as ARI with its regional working groups on water, food, and energy can support the generation of knowledge for local communities and stakeholders, and help representing their voices in international fora.

Being ARI a network of research and policy institutes, it should also be noted that both men and women are leaving the research field of agriculture, food and rural development. The main challenges faced by researchers in these fields include limited access to resources and funding, gender biases and discrimination, work-life balance issues, lack of support networks, and

limited representation in leadership roles. To overcome these challenges, and make the research field more inclusive for women, several incentives and policies can be implemented. These include establishing mentorship programs and support networks, promoting gender diversity in leadership positions, creating flexible work arrangements, ensuring equal access to funding and resources, offering targeted training and professional development opportunities, raising awareness about unconscious biases and addressing discrimination, promoting role models and fostering a supportive work culture.

Senior women researcher can play a crucial role in encouraging and attracting younger women to work in the agriculture field by acting as mentors and advocates for equal opportunities. Their guidance, support, and sharing of experiences can help younger researchers navigate challenges and advance in their careers. However, creating a more inclusive research field requires a collaborative effort from institutions, policymakers, and male researchers.

"JUST TRANSITION GREEN BRIDGE" PROJECT

COLLABORATION / MENA REGION

Under the [Environmental Politics Programme](#) of the Arab Reform Initiative (ARI) and funded by the European Commission, this [project](#) links and empowers CSOs and locally-led initiatives to be able to meaningfully participate in public policies and to influence policy dialogues in and about the region. It also ensures that efforts to tackle climate change and environmental degradation include inputs from impacted communities, address long-standing inequalities and ultimately support the emergence of accountable and democratic governance structures. It focuses on three central themes: food sovereignty, energetic transition, and water access/injustice. As part of this project, ARI, in partnership with Alternative Policy Solution (APS) at the American University of Cairo (AUC), and the Moroccan Institute for Policy Analysis (MIPA), organized the conference: "[Civil society organizations and just transition in the Middle East and North Africa: challenges and opportunities](#)". Funded by the European commission, the conference was held in Beirut from 29 to 31 May 2023, bringing together leading experts, activists, and policymakers, to explore the critical issues facing the region in the context of climate change and social justice. The diverse group of panelists discussed topics such as climate finance, youth movements, gender and social justice, community resilience, and more. The conference aimed to foster dialogue, build partnerships, and inspire action towards a more just and sustainable future for the MENA region.

STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY SUPPORT FOR A GENDER-INCLUSIVE GREEN TRANSITION

The perspectives on the importance of greening agrifood systems to address social issues were presented by:



Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Banja Luka

represented by Ms Gordana Rokvić, Associate professor.



represented by Ms Shada El Sharif, Senior Advisor, Green Economy, Climate Change & Sustainability, and Founder.

The Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Banja Luka's mission is to educate young and high-quality experts in the field of agricultural profession and science with teaching content and the application of modern methods of education connected with the scientific and research process, who will be able to use their knowledge and work to help the development of agriculture in accordance with modern European trends of sustainable development. The Faculty is permanently committed to improving the quality of higher education through scientific and research work, technological development and the development of an innovative approach.

SustainMENA is an advisory and awareness raising platform on climate change, sustainability and green economy. It is based in Jordan and operates throughout the MENA region. On behalf of a range of clients in the public, private and international development sectors, SustainMENA delivers advisory support to advance policies, projects and partnerships in line with global, regional and national sustainable development frameworks. It also contributes to thought leadership on these topics through policy papers, social media content, conference participation, and engagement with national and international media platforms.

A just transition in the Mediterranean should not only focus on a carbon-free future but also encompass social transformation, leaving no one behind. Throughout this transition, rural women have often been negatively affected because they are primarily involved in small-scale production with lower productivity. Additionally, their activities are closely tied to traditional knowledge and skills.

The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina is important to understand why the green transition must be just and inclusive. The green transition has become mandatory and binding for all candidate countries seeking entry into the European Union. However, implementation of the green transition envisaged in strategic documents is still lagging behind. At the same time, the agricultural sector in Bosnia and Herzegovina is pulled towards an opposite type of transition to market-oriented production to compete in the demanding European market. Historically, market-oriented production has entailed disregarding or neglecting traditional, extensive, less productive, small-scale, and low-yielding practices in favor of intensive production systems that are often environmentally unfriendly. It is estimated that 80 percent of the agricultural budget in Bosnia and Herzegovina is allocated to supporting intensive food systems practices, and that pre-accession funds provided by the EU are primarily accessible to large farms, which are associated with intensive production systems.¹³ **The only way to successfully implement a green transition is to penalize and de-incentivize intensive unsustainable production systems, while rewarding sustainable producers and recognizing their efforts to preserve resources.** Environmentally friendly agricultural production should be established as a standard, incentivizing producers who adopt sustainable practices and acknowledging that in the market, for example through labeling or other means of informing consumers about the sustainability of products). Organic production is not enough to meet all the demand; it is crucial to also recognize whether conventional products are produced sustainably or not. Food production practices that aim to conserve genetic resources, protect indigenous knowledge, and preserve local values, can contribute to a transformative green transition towards more sustainable food systems.

The green transition presents an opportunity for rural women as it promotes a return to environmentally friendly production and activities in rural areas. If policies for rural agricultural development prioritize environmentally friendly production systems, rural women could benefit from this transition and from the funds linked to it (such as those made available in the pre-accession process to the EU). Nonetheless, the challenge lies in ensuring that such systems are equally valued in the market. While certain measures have been implemented in some Mediterranean countries to introduce support for organic production, on-farm processing, and the production of geographically spe-

cific products, green policies still lack gender-sensitive budgets, contrary to what is promoted in regional agendas, such as the [Green Agenda for the Western Balkans](#) or UfM's [GreenerMed Agenda](#).

To foster and bring about a green transition there is a need for strong **political and institutional support to more inclusive processes**. In many Mediterranean countries, measures to provide greater co-financing for investments related to green transition and sustainable food systems are still lacking. There is still a gap in the implementation of bottom-up and participatory methods in strategic planning at the local level, due to power dynamics often causing rural women to be marginalized and excluded from strategic planning processes. This leads to the development and implementation of measures that are not adequately targeted and tailored. In conclusion, **as long as measures contributing to green transition are not integrating gender-sensitive planning and budgeting into the main policies for agricultural development in rural areas, the interests of rural women will remain less visible.**

In Jordan, and in the MENA region at large, there is a marked contrast between the high literacy rate among women and their low representation in the labor force, referred to as the "MENA paradox". Despite the literacy rate of over 90% for women in Jordan,¹⁴ female labor participation remains one of the lowest globally. Several factors are contributing to this disparity, such as challenges related to childcare, lack of supportive policies, structural issues, social norms, wage gaps, and legislation.

The poverty rate among women in Jordan is particularly high, reaching 51 percent compared to 48.6 percent for men. Informal employment is a

persistent challenge, with women constituting 56.8 percent of the overall informal workforce.¹⁵ Despite these challenges, women in Jordan have achieved high levels of education, making their economic exclusion all the more concerning.

On the positive side, there is a **growing recognition of climate change risks in Jordan** and of the need to incorporate climate action into economic development, acknowledging such risks and trying to turn them into levers for development and resilience. To this effect, the country's [Economic Modernization Vision](#) includes a growth driver focused on the green economy and sustainable resources. The development of Jordan's [Green Growth National Action Plans](#) rolled out as a dialogue, involving many different stakeholders, including the private sector and the civil society. As a key actor of economic development, women were also engaged in the development of the plans: this emphasizes how not only is it important to mainstream consideration of opportunities for women in the vision, but women must be involved in the development of these policies themselves. **Women need to be included in policy and decision-making processes at all levels:** to this effect, an annex specifically addresses engendering and mainstreaming women across all pillars of the plans. The

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vision aims to create one million jobs over the next decade, with a third of these opportunities specifically targeting women. To achieve this goal, an analysis has been conducted to identify sectors where women have a competitive advantage, such as education, health, vocational and technical services, and home-based businesses.

While Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) have emphasized the importance of women's leadership in climate change policymaking across several key decisions, progress remains uneven and slow. According to UN figures,^{16,17} only 13 percent of country delegations were led by women during COP26, which highlights the lack of visibility for women leaders on the international stage. Moreover, women were only 40 percent of active speakers in the plenary

and a mere 36 percent of focal points on climate change globally. The scarcity of women in international arenas, be it in negotiation teams or policy design, implies that women's voices go unheard, and their needs are not adequately taken into account. Additionally, when we examine nationally determined contributions (NDCs) that outline objectives in fighting climate change, only half of them mention gender inequalities and the role women can play. **Women in these NDCs are often categorized as vulnerable groups rather than recognized as significant actors in combating climate change.** This situation persists at both the country and international levels, with very few organizations possessing data on women and their vulnerability. There is a need to **move beyond a checkbox approach to gender representation and instead focus on inclusive and informed policymaking.**

EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

EXPERIENCE /  BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

A collaboration between the Ministry of Agriculture in Bosnia and Herzegovina and UN Women introduced measures aimed to address gender-specific issues and to support women in rural areas. Key measures promoted self-organization through the establishment of rural women's associations (e.g. associations of women producing traditional milk cream or traditional whipped Cornelian cherry jams), initially through non-governmental forms, later evolved in market-oriented productive forms of organization. Women are also encouraged to engage in agricultural and non-agricultural activities like agritourism, handicraft production, and catering. These measures have proven effective in encouraging women to enroll in the Farm Register, leading to an increase in the number of women registered as farm owners or farm heads. This number has grown from 4 percent of women's participation 10 years ago to 22 percent of women-headed households currently registered. This increase is significant because farm registration obliges women to contribute to pension and health insurance, providing them with social security in their elderly years through agriculture pension schemes.

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER COLLABORATION ADDRESSING GENDER AND CLIMATE ISSUES

EXPERIENCE /  JORDAN

Jordan features many examples of collaboration among different stakeholders, including the private sector and public institutions, that contribute to include women in the implementation of green development strategies:

- [The Sahara Forest Project](#), implemented in Aqaba, Jordan through an agreement with the Embassy of Norway, is a collaboration between the private sector and public institutions that promotes innovative solutions founded on the premises of a more holistic approach towards tackling challenges related to energy, food and water security. The project features an extension programme in collaboration with local universities, which trains women on the different clean technologies such as solar power, desalinization, hydro- and aquaponics, etc. It is a combination of environmental technologies to enable restorative growth, defined as revegetation and creation of green jobs through profitable production of food, freshwater, biofuels and electricity.
- The project "[Building resilience to cope with climate change in Jordan through improving water use efficiency in the agriculture sector \(BRCCJ\)](#)", is designed to increase the resilience to climate change of water management systems and of the farming community building on the idea of women as change agents for climate adaptation. The project is being implemented by FAO, UNDP and several ministries of the Government of Jordan. It is co-financed by the Green Climate Fund (GCF), the Government of Jordan, FAO and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for over USD 30 million.
- The [Smart Desert](#) project, funded by the French Agency for Development (AFD) and implemented by a public-private partnership coordinated by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), aims at providing about 15 000 farmers and young entrepreneurs (including Syrian refugees) in the northern part of Jordan with capacity building on diversification of production, better farming practices, technical skills, technical equipment for sustainable agriculture, as well as support for employment (business incubator).

The *WeCaN Nurturing Community of Knowledge Practice for Women in dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral systems* was established by the [FAO Forestry Division](#) and the [FAO South-South Triangular Cooperation Division](#). It provides a platform to empower women to raise their voices and join together to tackle discrimination and structural social barriers. It offers a mutual learning space for women leaders to share experiences, good practices and lessons learned, through knowledge exchanges, partnership building and capacity development opportunities between South-South countries.

The *WeCaN Advocacy Training Journey* is designed to increase women's access and contributions to planning and decision-making in dryland forests and agrosilvopastoral management. This includes deepening members' understanding of gender issues associated with climate change, drought, and desertification, highlighting specific gender-based inequities, and strengthening the leadership, speaking and negotiations skills of *WeCaN* focal points to influence the current policy dialogue. The training series comprises of several sessions, with eight focused on advocacy design and strategies to influence powerholders, two focusing on Gender in UNCCD COPs: Findings, advocacy spaces and opportunities, and a further two on UNFCCC policy framework and civil society organizations' inclusion at UNFCCC COPs: Advocacy opportunities for youth and women led organizations.

MAINSTREAMING GENDER EQUALITY IN GREEN AND CLIMATE FINANCE

The perspectives on how women's access to finance can be improved leveraging climate finance were provided by:



[LUXEED Robotics](#)

represented by Ms Guadaluna Chaer, Co-founder.

LUXEED Robotics is an early-stage ag-tech startup, building a smart agricultural machine that uses lasers and AI to identify and eliminate weeds with high precision, eliminating with them the need for herbicides and improving soil health. The machine has the potential to nearly double the yield of the farmer and promote organic and sustainable farming. LUXEED Robotics was founded in Beirut by young entrepreneurs through the support of Berytech's [Agrytech Programme](#), an incubator programme that gave them the opportunity to learn entrepreneurship alongside their academic pursuits and obtain funds to develop the robot.



[Climate Change Competence Centre of Morocco \(4C Maroc\)](#)

represented by Ms Rajae Chafil, Director.

4C Maroc is a national platform for dialogue and capacity building for the various actors and a hub for climate change information open to its regional, African and international environment. The Centre, established in 2016 during COP22, is engaged in international cooperation in Africa and features a Public Interest Group that brings together institutional actors from diverse backgrounds involved in the fight against the adverse effects of climate change. The four pillars of 4C Maroc are: contributing to building the capacity of national actors in climate change; capitalizing on information/knowledge/know-how on vulnerability, adaptation, mitigation and finance related to climate change; developing support tools for decision making in matters related to climate change; contributing to global efforts on climate change by networking, sharing experiences and establishing a technological and scientific watch.

Climate finance is in the position to support women's economic empowerment. Nonetheless, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states that just 0.05 percent of climate-related international development assistance (IDA) is allocated to women. Such a negligible amount cannot ensure gender equality or the climate and food security of women. Countries should leverage their national resources and engage international financial agencies, private sector investors, concessional finance, and development partners. **By aligning national strategies with climate and gender priorities, countries can develop a pipeline of bankable projects that clearly demonstrate the impact on the environment and society to attract specialized funds that specifically target women.** Examples of how climate-responsive funds can contribute to greening strategies in the MENA region are presented in the boxes below.

To further enhance opportunities for women's economic empowerment and improve their situation in rural communities,

there is a need for **knowledge transfer and exchange of experiences between countries** in the whole MENA region. It is paramount to continue efforts to overcome barriers and create an enabling environment for women to actively participate in the economy while addressing climate change challenges. This can be done through collaboration among different type of stakeholders, both public and private, including in terms of finance.

As new policies incentivize the green transition, the market demand for "green skills" is expected to increase. The green economy sectors have the potential to provide solutions to the high unemployment levels affecting Mediterranean youth, by providing new career and training opportunities and fostering jobs with higher wages.¹⁸ However, it may also further deepen pre-existing barriers to young women's full inclusion in the economic space and the labour market, such as the digital gender divide and the employment gap in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) sectors. Women represent

57.7 percent of tertiary graduates in the European Union (EU); proportions of female students in STEM programs represent 34-57 percent in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. However, the rate of women working in STEM fields is significantly lower than men throughout the Mediterranean.¹⁹ **To realize a green and equal transition of the agrifood labour market, hence contributing to more inclusive and resilient Mediterranean food systems, investments are needed in upskilling and reskilling women in green sectors and supporting the STEM school-to-work transition.** At the same time, working conditions must reduce unconscious biases against women's scientific and digital abilities, while promoting equal childcare responsibilities.

The case of Lebanon presented by the co-founder of LUXEED Robotics illustrates how adequate financial support can foster the green transition by facilitating the development of green startups co-led by young women graduates. In Lebanon, various programmes and ecosystems such as Berytech, the Asher Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (ACIE), and the Business Incubation Association in Tripoli (BIAT), actively support local startups by providing them with funding opportunities, and foreign institutions contribute to the startup ecosystem by offering grants. These grants play a vital role in the initial stages of startups, enabling them to develop prototypes, validate their market, and refine their business ideas. Moreover, incubator programmes or competition programs are in place, offering prizes as incentives and supporting startups with training. However, there is room for improvements in green financing ecosystem. Green institutions need expertise, including specialists, engineers, and patent counselors, to effectively assist startups and SMEs in completing their sustainable projects.

Learning from her expertise with the green startup journey of

LUXEED Robotics, the co-founder shared how there is a **need to bridge the gap between industry and academia, fostering efficiency and effectiveness in the utilization of granted funds.** Moreover, existing programmes often suffer from being sector agnostic or stage agnostic, which limits their potential impact. It is crucial for green institutions to focus on specific sectors such as clean tech, energy, or agri-tech and cater to distinct stages of business development. By doing so, early-stage startups and SMEs can progress from the prototype stage to a market-ready product, backed by tailored support and guidance.

Agri-tech startups seek to expand their operations to Europe to ensure long-term sustainability. **Collaborations with EU countries provide opportunities for market connections** and can help understanding the certification standards necessary for exporting or designing products, but access to specialized knowledge and resources remains vital for their success. Grants themselves should be structured: instead of offering fixed amounts, a range-based funding approach allows startups to express their needs more transparently. In comparison to Lebanon, some countries adopt a more favorable approach where a substantial sum is allocated and distributed based on individual startup needs. This approach promotes a fair distribution of resources and maximizes the impact of grants. In summary, **to enhance the green financing landscape, it is crucial to address the gaps in sector focus, stage differentiation, integration into the ecosystem, reputation assessment, and grant structuring.** By implementing these recommendations, based on the direct experience of a young woman ag-tech entrepreneur, the support provided to startups and SMEs will become more effective, resulting in sustainable growth and innovation within the Lebanese scene and in the Mediterranean at large.

FINANCING GREEN AND INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT IN JORDAN

COLLABORATION / JORDAN

Several financial initiatives are being implemented in Jordan to mobilise resources for the country's green growth:

- *The Green Economy Financing Facility (GEFF)* programme supports businesses and homeowners wishing to invest in green technologies through a network of more than 190 local financial institutions across 29 countries supported by more than EUR 46.3 billion of European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) finance. In Jordan, EBRD and the Microfund for Women (MFW) signed a [USD 2 million GEFF](#) in August 2022: the funds are on-lend to micro, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and support the expansion of green lending to local businesses, promoting climate action.
- [Amam Ventures](#) is an impact investment fund that provides simultaneous risk capital and technical assistance to support the sustainability and growth of SMEs that are committed to diversity and inclusion. The company invests via quasi-equity instruments which are entrepreneurial friendly and adopt a gender lens.

Weeds pose a persistent global challenge in agriculture, causing crop losses by depleting nutrients and water intended for crops. Despite existing solutions such as herbicide spraying machines, manual labour, and mechanical weeders, farmers still experience up to 50 percent profit losses. Additionally, herbicides have negative impacts on human health, the environment, and soil quality. [LUXEED Robotics](#) is developing “*Ultron*”, an agricultural robot that utilizes lasers and machine learning artificial intelligence to effectively eliminate weeds without the need for herbicides. Unlike other methods, it prevents the weed from growing back since the laser hits it at its growth centre. *Ultron* offers farmers the opportunity to improve their crop yield and maintain high-quality produce. With this innovation, Lebanese farmers can potentially increase their exports due to reduced soil residue.

LUXEED Robotics is a Beirut-based start-up founded by young entrepreneurs thanks to the support of Berytech’s [Agrytech Programme](#), an incubator programme that gave them the opportunity to learn entrepreneurship alongside their academic pursuits and obtain funds to develop the robot. Despite the numerous challenges encountered, including the COVID-19 pandemic, hyperinflation, and other issues in Lebanon, the company has progressed from the prototype stage to preparing for product development. A pilot project was successfully conducted with a large farmer in Lebanon, and the aim is to offer weeding services to more farmers in the upcoming onion season in Akkar, starting in 2023.

4C MOROCCO’S INITIATIVES TO BUILD WOMEN’S CAPACITY ON FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE

The *Centre de Compétences en Changement Climatique (“Climate Change Competence Centre”)* - [4C-Maroc](#) established in March 2023 a *Women and Climate Change Club* to actively involve women in the decision-making process concerning climate change and food security. The club includes women holding high-ranking positions in various sectors such as fisheries, agriculture, forestry, environment, transportation, and energy. The club provides a forum for exchange, dialogue, and a platform for potential collaboration for new initiatives. Women politicians elected in significant regions of Morocco, including Casablanca and Rabat, were also invited in the club to listen to other women and decision-makers, fostering connections between different groups. Women working for NGOs have been invited to share their experiences and discuss overcoming obstacles in sectors like agriculture. National organizations and international organizations such as FAO and UNDP have also been invited to listen to these women, understand their needs, and pave the way for project development, cooperation, and partnerships centered around climate change. The goal is to better incorporate women in all of the club’s endeavors. 4C intends to establish a work plan for the club and emphasize that it remains open, welcoming women from Africa, the MENA region, and even other countries beyond the Mediterranean area.

In response to the lack of African experts in the field of climate change in the labour market, 4C Maroc launched the *Africa Academy*, an initiative that aims to enhance the negotiation skills and capacities of both women and men from Morocco and Africa. The master class programme of the academy is designed for young under-35 experts who already possess a master’s degree. Approximately 300 young Africans are selected each year to participate in the program. The training is conducted online, live and led by teachers, free of charge, and spans over six months. The academy has successfully trained 1 200 individuals so far, specifically focusing on encouraging female participation, as there is a global shortage of female experts in climate change: 55 percent of the participants are women. A condensed version of the training programme in only a few weeks is foreseen to be launched in 2023. This programme is intended to provide participants with job opportunities related to climate preservation, including the launch of agrifood startups. The training equips participants with the ability to comprehend the relationship between climate change and their work and builds capacity on how to access climate funding and develop bankable projects.

SFS-MED FOSTERING DIALOGUE FOR MORE SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE AGRIFOOD SYSTEMS



[Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area \(PRIMA\)](#)

represented by Mr Octavi Quintana Trias, Director.

PRIMA Foundation implements a joint programme, promoted and cofounded by the European Commission and 19 Euro-Mediterranean States to build research and innovation capacities and to develop knowledge and innovation solutions for water, agriculture and food systems in the Mediterranean area. PRIMA research and innovation activities are underpinned by a strong commitment to national, regional, and international networking, and are open to collaboration and synergies among researchers, governmental agencies and private stakeholders. The strategic goal is strengthening innovation capacity, aligning national programmes and building a critical mass of actors in the MED region. PRIMA, entrusted with a total budget of almost 500 million, has already funded in its initial five years 200 projects amounting to a budget of about EUR 290 million in favour of around 2000 beneficiaries, connecting more than 10 000 researchers in the whole Mediterranean area.

Gender issues in agrifood systems are not limited to women alone but are also a concern for men: these issues can be effectively addressed across all sectors by involving both men and women in inclusive efforts.

Equal access to education, training, and financial services are essential for overcoming the challenges posed by gender inequality, which are deeply rooted in culture. Moreover, there is a need to formalize and acknowledge the impact of women's informal work, as it plays a significant role in shaping gender dynamics. By bringing these issues of informality to light, society can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges embedded within cultures and societies. Furthermore, **data is key to understanding the current state of gender issues and evaluating progress, informing ongoing discussions and debates surrounding gender equality.** Without data, it becomes challenging to assess where improvements have been made or whether society is regressing in terms of gender equality. Additionally, the need to address gender issues is tightly connected to the greening of agriculture and food production: the green transition to more sustainable food systems should encompass various aspects, such as capa-

city building, access to more inclusive financial services, and the recognition of informality. Cultural perspectives should be taken into account for shaping adaptation and mitigation policies related to sustainability.

Mediterranean stakeholders engaged in [national and independent UN Food Systems Summit Dialogues during 2021](#) emphasized that food systems transformation requires inclusive and equitable governance, which recognizes the key role women play in this interface.

The SFS-MED Platform is committed to fostering dialogue and collaboration among governments, agri-food enterprises, researchers, international organizations, and civil society representatives to address gender equality and women's empowerment in agrifood systems. Sharing knowledge, experiences, and successful approaches can lead to tailored solutions that empower women in all aspects of the green transition. By working together, a more sustainable, inclusive, and gender-responsive future can be built for Mediterranean food systems, ensuring women's active participation in making the region greener and healthier.

SFS-MED PLATFORM

COLLABORATION /  MEDITERRANEAN

The [SFS-MED Platform](#) is a multi-stakeholder initiative co-led by FAO, CIHEAM, UfM and PRIMA as an affiliated project of the One Planet Network's SFS Programme. The Platform is a **forum** for multi-stakeholder dialogue and collaboration, a **network** for strengthening knowledge sharing and capacity building, and a **catalyst** for regional cooperation on priority themes for sustainable food systems transformation in the Mediterranean. The SFS-MED Platform is open to all food systems stakeholders in the Mediterranean region and aims to create a community to leverage and share the knowledge, experience and skills of food systems actors across the Mediterranean region towards concerted action for the sustainable transformation of food systems.

Contact the [SFS-MED Platform's Coordination Desk](#) for further information about the modalities of engagement.

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The recording of the webinar is available at this [link](#) and the agenda of the webinar is available at this [link](#).

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