



# ACCELERATING RURAL WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

The agricultural sector is underperforming in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, partly because rural women do not have the same access as men to the critical resources, inputs, services, information and infrastructure they need to be more productive. Against this background, many countries in the region, together with development partners such as FAO, are increasingly committed to supporting the acceleration of rural women's economic empowerment through targeted interventions. This project focused on advancing the economic empowerment of rural women in three countries, namely the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Gambia and Eswatini, as a means of reducing rural poverty, improving gender equality and enhancing the performance of the agricultural sector. In each of the countries, the project activities built on and contributed to existing rural development strategies and programmes.



## WHAT DID THE PROJECT DO?

Activities implemented by the project, such as the formation of new Dimitra Clubs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the provision of training for their members, strengthened rural women's organizational capacities and agency, and improved their participation and leadership in formal and informal organizations and at community level. In addition, specific training sessions were provided on agricultural techniques for vegetable and fish farming, as well as on pest and diseases control using biopesticides, to enhance food security and nutrition; and Village Savings and Loan Association schemes were set up for the financial inclusion of women producers. In the Gambia, the project strengthened the capacities of over 450 family poultry farms, enabling them to produce quality poultry feed at village level and to improve the profitability of their poultry farms, through the establishment of five feed mills and feed production units, and small and medium-sized enterprises at the identified beneficiary villages. In Eswatini, capacity-building activities were conducted on sweet potato processing and preservation methods, to diversify the use of sweet potatoes at household level and improve household nutrition. Entrepreneurial and business skills were also strengthened, enabling beneficiaries to play a role in the sweet potato value chain. In Eswatini and the Gambia, training workshops enhanced gender analytical skills for the elaboration of policies and programmes, and addressed the linkages between women's economic empowerment in agrifood systems and the achievement of zero hunger, inclusive agricultural growth and sustainable development.

## KEY FACTS

### Contribution

USD 1 000 000

### Duration

May 2016 – February 2020

### Resource Partner

Africa Solidarity Trust Fund (ASTF)

### Partners

*Democratic Republic of the Congo:* Ministry of Agriculture, National Extension Service and General Secretariat, Groupe d'Appui aux Projets (GAP). *Gambia:* Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Women's Affairs. *Eswatini:* Ministry of Economic Planning and Development (MEPD), Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA), Luhlelo Lolunotsisa Temabhisini Business Management Extension Programme (LULOTE BMEP).

### Beneficiaries

Poor rural women and girls

# IMPACT

The project contributed to increasing rural women’s incomes and improving food and nutrition security, while improving agricultural practices, diversifying sources of income and developing rural women-led enterprises, among other activities. The project also enhanced women’s participation and voice within institutions and in decision-making processes, leading to greater socio-economic empowerment.

# ACTIVITIES

- In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, 23 new Dimitra Clubs were formed, comprising 496 members (310 women and 186 men).
- The capacities of agriculture governmental services, including extension services, were strengthened in terms of gender-specific and women's empowerment approaches.
- Training was provided to 46 club leaders (50% of whom were women) on gender issues in development, participatory communication and the functioning and principles of the Dimitra Clubs. They replicated the training for their own clubs, reaching around 700 club members.
- 23 Dimitra Clubs created their own Solidarity Fund and Village Savings and Loans Association.
- 243 women benefited from training in vegetable gardening and 87 women received training in fish farming.
- 14 treadle water pumps were distributed to 14 Dimitra Clubs engaged in vegetable gardening, thereby increasing productivity and reducing women’s workload.
- In Eswatini, capacity-building activities were conducted for 603 beneficiaries on sweet potato processing and preservation methods, including the distribution of agricultural inputs, and provision of processing equipment for baking secondary products of sweet potato flour.
- An Africa-wide consultative meeting was jointly organized by FAO and the African Union Commission in Accra in October 2017, with the participation of leaders of 70 rural women’s organizations and networks.
- National gender profiles were produced of agriculture and rural livelihoods in the three countries, analysing gender-related disparities in the different sectors related to agriculture, food and nutrition security and natural resource management in the context of climate change.
- A document on the regional outlook regarding “gender” in agrifood systems was prepared jointly with the African Union Commission.

### Project Code

FAO: GCP/RAF/504/MUL

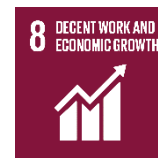
### Project Title

Rural Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Programme (RWEAP)

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