I. BACKGROUND

The African Development Bank in its vision for Africa, commits to supporting Africa’s transformation into a competitive, diversified, integrated, and prosperous continent with opportunities for all — including women and youth. This is elucidated in its Ten Year Strategy (TYS) 2013 – 2022 which focuses on two overarching objectives: inclusive growth, and the transition to green growth. The agenda for inclusive growth promises to broaden the economic opportunities for women both as a right and as a driver of economic competitiveness. Studies show that a level playing field for women can boost productivity, particularly in agriculture, and reduce inequalities. To this end the Bank Ten Year Strategy designates both Gender and Agriculture as areas of special emphasis. In recognition of the connection between gender equality and agriculture, the Bank’s Gender Strategy (2014-2018) commits to enhance the skills and productivity of female farmers as a strategy for women’s empowerment and food security.

African women represent 52% of the total population in agriculture, and are responsible for approximately 75% of the agricultural labour force, and produce 60% to 80% of the food, yet women’s productivity is 30% lower than men’s because women lack access to vital inputs. African women are the guardians of food security and nutrition and a crucial force within the agricultural sector, however they are often excluded from the business side of agriculture, and furthermore are excluded from the most profitable nodes of agricultural value chains. Their minimal access to resources such as land, credit and technology hampers their capacity to leverage agricultural production into business opportunities, hence they have remained within the realm of subsistence.

II. THE OPPORTUNITY

The Africa Economic Outlook (2014), shows that Africa’s participation in global value chains is growing, with a promise of boosting employment and structural transformation on the continent. However global value chains as other spheres of development and trade, reflect gender inequalities and discriminatory social norms. Gender inequalities shape the totality of production, distribution, and consumption within an economy and the gendered division of labour, limits women’s presence in global value chains to low-skill and low-wage employment, as informal or seasonal workers (World Bank, 2013). Yet, it has been proven that gender equality can increase global value chains productivity and sustainability.
For instance in Ghana support to the shea butter industry increased women’s control of of resources, skills and presence in decision-making sections of the chain, demonstrating the mutual benefits for women’s economic empowerment and the quality and productivity of a global value chain (Laven and Verhart, 2011)2, while in Peru the Café Femenino3, a successful female coffee brand, benefits from consumer interest to buy a product which was produced, processed and sold only by women in the context of “fair trade” (FAO, 2011)4.

Research shows that Africa’s urban food market will increase fourfold by 2030, and small and unlisted companies setting out to supply them hold great potential5. Greater support is required for women in high-value agricultural commodities and export-oriented agro-industries in order to equitably participate in related business opportunities, and the opportunities exist. For instance the growing interest in Private Funds targeting African agriculture presents significant opportunities for agribusiness industry. There are presently 53 African private equity funds in the process of raising funds – 27 of them are focused solely on agriculture6.

III. THE BANK’S RESPONSE

To respond to these challenges and opportunities, the African Development Bank, seeks to scale-up support for women’s participation in agriculture and agricultural trade through impactful interventions in agro-industry, global and regional value chains and trade. To this end, the Bank has launched a Selection and Prioritization Value Chain Development study. This study, which is the first step to value chain development, will assess the competiveness of agricultural industries and subsectors in regional and global value chains, and prioritize those with the greatest potential to impact women’s economic empowerment. The study will identify the challenges affecting women’s participation in regional and global value chains, and propose corrective measures and/or support projects which aim at improving and/or eliminating the root causes of lack or limited participation by women.

IV. THE SIDE EVENT

In order to obtain broad stakeholder input into the study, the African Development Bank (AFDB) will convene a panel discussion on Women in Agricultural Global Value Chains (GVCs) on the side lines of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) conference in New York City, on the 11 March 2015.

The overarching objective of the round table, is to solicit stakeholder input for a greater understanding of agricultural market access supply-side constraints, that impact African women disproportionately, and exchange and review global best practices, on how best to sustainably support and integrate women in High Value Agricultural Value Chains (HVAVCs).

V. TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience for this event includes, but not limited to: regional and international women agribusiness producers and exporters, women entrepreneurs, women entrepreneurship associations, lead firms in HVAVCs, political and business leaders, agricultural standards institutions, customs bodies, RECs, governments, and agricultural value chain financing institutions etc.

VI. DATE AND VENUE

Date: Wednesday, March 11, 2015; 6:30 PM - 7:45 PM
Venue: Conference Room 11 – GA Building

For more information, please contact: l.miriti@afdb.org

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3 Café Femenino is a brand of organic coffee created, grown, processed and owned by women in Northern Peru, and sold in the US and Canada as fair trade.
5 The Africa Trade Report – July 2014
6 Africa-focused Future Agriculture Consortium – June 2013