



Empowering Women Entrepreneurs in the MENA Agro-Food Sector through Social and Technological Innovation

21 & 22 October 2025

Steigenberger Hotel El Tahrir, Cairo, Egypt

Context & Rationale:

Women across the MENA region are integral to food systems—serving as producers, processors, retailers, innovators, and knowledge holders. However, they face **entrenched structural barriers** that prevent their full participation in agro-food value chains. These include:

- Discriminatory access to land and financial services
- Poor representation in cooperative and decision-making structures
- Limited access to innovation ecosystems and agri-tech solutions
- Low integration into formal entrepreneurial support networks
- Gender-blind agricultural and food security policies

As Mediterranean countries face converging crises—climate volatility, food insecurity, youth unemployment—there is an urgent need to **recognize and unleash the potential of women-led innovation** to drive a sustainable transformation of agro-food systems.

Despite progress in national strategies and scattered regional initiatives, a coordinated and strategic policy framework that places women-led innovation at the heart of agro-food transformation remains absent.

The AECID-supported UfM Regional Agenda on Gender and Food Security aims to fill this gap by fostering inclusive policy development, building institutional capacity, and amplifying women's leadership. Within this framework, this Stakeholder Dialogue will convene diverse regional actors



to co-create a Regional Agenda on Innovation for Women Entrepreneurs in the Agro-Food Value Chain.

This agenda will serve as a policy and action-oriented roadmap that elevates women's contributions to innovation, improves their access to enabling ecosystems, and ensures they are fully integrated into efforts to build resilient, sustainable, and inclusive food systems across the Mediterranean.

This event, organized with the financial support of **AECID** and in collaboration with **CIHEAM, FAO-NENA Regional Office and American University in Cairo (AUC) Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CEI)** represents a key milestone in this process, strengthening both **capacity** (1,5 day training) and **regional dialogue** (half-day event) to co-create solutions for a more equitable agro-food future.

2. Training's objectives

Overall Objective

To empower women entrepreneurs with the tools, knowledge, and networks to innovate in agro-food systems and influence policy transformation.

Specific Objectives

- Strengthen entrepreneurial and innovation skills tailored to women in agri-food value chains.
- Share gender-sensitive technologies and climate-smart solutions applicable to small and medium enterprises.
- Build a network of change-makers across MENA focused on inclusive food systems.
- Launch a participatory stakeholder dialogue to shape a **Regional Innovation Agenda** for women in agro-food.

3. Participants



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- 50 Women entrepreneurs and cooperative leaders from 7 UfM-Masar countries (Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia)
- Incubators, researchers, civil society leaders
- Donor agencies and UN partners (FAO, UN Women, IFAD, etc.)
- Financial institutions and innovation hubs

Expected Outcomes:

- 50 women entrepreneurs trained in innovation-driven approaches in agro-food systems.
- Strengthened networks among regional actors supporting women's agri-entrepreneurship.
- Draft commitments and priorities for a Regional Innovation Agenda for Women Entrepreneurs.



Draft AGENDA

DAY 1 – CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP

08:30 – 09:00	Arrival and Registration
09:00 – 09:30	Opening Session Welcome remarks & Framing the agenda: Dr. Abdulhakim Elwaer, Assistant Director General/Regional Representative, FAO Near East and North Africa Region (RNE) Omar Amawi, Deputy Director, PRIMA Hala Barakat, Director, Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, The American University in Cairo AUC CEI Anna Dorangricchia, Project Manager, Social and Civil Affairs Division, Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) Maître de Cérémonie : Giulia Maria Ferraresi, Project Analyst, Social and Civil Affairs Division, UfM
09:30 – 10:30	Plenary Session The Power of Innovation: Social and Technological Drivers in the Agro-Food Chain - Case studies from the region: Roua Adel, CEO of Aquayate, Algeria Nouha Benzbir, Founder <i>Velours Lactés</i>, Tunisia Salam Al-Nukta, Founder of Warsha, Egypt - Q&A and discussion Facilitator: Yasmine Seghirate, Administrator at the General Secretariat, CIHEAM
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee Break



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11:00 – 13:00	Workshop 1 - Tech for Innovation in Agribusiness - Interactive demos of digital tools and low-cost agri-tech (e.g. e-commerce, farm mapping, cold chains, food processing) - Mapping technology to your business: accessibility, usability, gender lens - Small group work: What tech do I need? Barriers and enablers Facilitator: Noura Abdelwahab, Lead Gender and Social Inclusion Consultant, Egypt Moderator : Maggie Refaat, Gender Officer, FAO
13:00 – 14:00	Networking Lunch
14:00 – 15:30	Workshop 2 - Entrepreneurship & Business Modelling in Agro-Food Systems <i>Market Gaps, Innovation Opportunities & Green Business Models</i> - Explore the agro-food value chain through a sustainability lens (Triple Bottom Line). - Identify innovation opportunities for women-led ventures. - Apply the Business Model Canvas with a circular economy approach. - Case study: Mozare3 – a mission-driven agri-fintech transforming smallholder farming in Egypt. Facilitator: Irene Boghdady, Head of Entrepreneurship and MSMEs, Chemonics Egypt



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15:30 – 17:00	Peer Coaching Circle – Challenges & Ideas Exchange <i>Challenges & Ideas Exchange</i> Rotating peer-to-peer coaching on four themes: scaling, distribution & market access, access to funding, and partnerships. Facilitator : Rawiah Ismail Abdallah, Management Consultant and Coach Moderators: Women Entrepreneurs Network (WEN)
17:00-17:30	Wrap-Up and Reflections - Daily check-out: 3 takeaways, 1 commitment - Visual wall (post-its): “What innovation means to me...”

DAY 2 – TRAINING

09:00 – 09:15	Welcome Back & Icebreaker Energizer activity: “My Agri-Innovation Elevator Pitch”
09:15 – 10:30	Workshop 3 - Access to Finance and Investment Readiness - Overview of financing options: microfinance, impact funds, gender-lens investors - Tools: pitch decks, business KPIs, grant vs. loan - Group exercise: draft 1-minute funding ask (peer feedback) Facilitator: Christine Sedky, Investor&Advisor
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee Break
11:00 – 12:30	Workshop 4 – Leadership, Policy Engagement & Collective Voice - Introduction to women’s leadership frameworks in agro-food - How to influence policy as entrepreneurs (local to regional level)



	Mapping your ecosystem: Who are your allies, funders, regulators? Facilitator: Ayah El-Arief, Managing Director, MENA Women Business Club (MWBC), Egypt Group Work Moderator: Sophia Ngugi, Gender Officer, FAORNE
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch Break

Stakeholder Dialogue:

Shaping a Regional Agenda on Innovation for Women Entrepreneurs in the Agro-Food Value Chain

1. Objectives of the Dialogue

Overall Objective:

To initiate a multi-stakeholder consultation process that informs the development and adoption of a Regional Agenda on Innovation for Women in Agro-Food Systems.

Specific Objectives:

- Identify priority areas and policy gaps affecting women entrepreneurs in agro-food innovation across the MENA region.
- Facilitate the exchange of experiences, good practices, and institutional commitments from countries and stakeholders.
- Co-create a draft set of regional priorities, guiding principles, and action tracks.
- Strengthen collaboration and policy coherence among regional actors, including governments, donors, private sector, academia, and civil society.



2. Key Themes for Dialogue

The dialogue will be structured around four thematic pillars:

1. **Inclusive Innovation Ecosystems:** Strengthening the participation of women in research, technology design, and adoption, including digital agriculture and climate-smart practices.
2. **Access to Finance and Infrastructure:** Addressing constraints related to gender-responsive financing, rural infrastructure, and scalable business support services.
3. **Enabling Policies and Institutions:** Improving policy coherence, regulatory frameworks, and institutional capacity to promote gender equality in food systems.
4. **Leadership and Collective Action:** Enhancing women's voice in governance, cooperatives, chambers of commerce, and regional innovation platforms.

3. Format and Structure

Duration: Half-day (approximately 4 hours)

Participants: ~80 key stakeholders, including:

- Women entrepreneurs and cooperative leaders
- Donor agencies and international organizations (AECID, FAO, IFAD, UfM, CIHEAM)
- Private sector actors (agribusinesses, incubators, financial institutions)
- Civil society and women's networks
- Academic institutions and think tanks

4. Expected Outputs

- A draft framework for a Regional Agenda on Innovation for Women in Agro-Food Value Chains.



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- A summary report capturing stakeholder inputs, priorities, and commitments.
- Strengthened collaboration among stakeholders toward implementation of the UfM Gender and Food Security Agenda.



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13:30 – 17:00 | REGIONAL STAKEHOLDER DIALOGUE

13:30 – 14:00	Welcome & Introduction • Anna Dorangricchia, Project Manager, Social and Civil Affairs Division UfM and Raúl Compés López, Director, CIHEAM Zaragoza: From Zaragoza to Cairo (Declaration) • Dr. Abdulhakim Elwaer, Assistant Director General/Regional Representative, FAO Near East and North Africa Region (RNE) • Angy Elyamany, Executive Director, Rural & Environmental Industries Support Fund (REIS), Ministry of Social Solidarity, Egypt • Eva Suárez Leonardo, Head of Cooperation, Spanish Cooperation Office in Egypt Maître de Cérémonie : Giulia Maria Ferraresi, Project Analyst, Social and Civil Affairs Division, UfM
14:00 – 15:00	Roundtable Discussions Framing the dialogue: Toward a Regional Innovation Agenda <i>Inclusive Innovation Ecosystems, Access to Finance and Infrastructure, Enabling Policies and Institution, Leadership and Collective Action</i> • Sophia Ngugi, Gender Officer, FAORNE • Aya El Desouky, Co-Founder, Pend Tokenization • Sarah Ibrahim, Chief Officer, Attijariwafa Bank Egypt • Soukaina Bouraoui, Director Center of Arab Women for Training and Research, CAWTAR (online) Moderator: Hala Barakat, Director, Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, The American University in Cairo



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15:00: 16:00	Co-creating Solutions: What Do Women Entrepreneurs Need? <i>Policy, finance, technology, knowledge</i> • Noha Abdelhamid, Secretary General, Women Entrepreneurs Network Egypt (online) • Ahmed Bastawy, Managing Director, ICE Alex • Menna Magdy, Project Manager, Finance in Motion GmbH • Noura Abdelwahab, Lead Gender and Social Inclusion Consultant, Egypt • Salma Amayri, AgriTech Entrepreneur, Jordan Moderator: Iman El Wasifi, CEO, Muqbis
16:00 – 17:00	Plenary Session: Commitments & Roadmap <i>Reflections from donors, government, regional platforms on strategies and priorities for a Regional Agenda on Innovation for Women in Agro-Food Value Chains</i> • Gender Expert Lead, Delegation of the European Union to Egypt • Raúl Compés López, Director, CIHEAM Zaragoza • Dana Dudokh, Business Development Lead/Project Manager Business and Professional Women Association (BPWA), Jordan • Heba Zaki, Director, Egypt Entrepreneurship and Innovation Center (EEIC) • Gloria Abouzeid, Director General of Cooperatives, Ministry of Agriculture, Lebanon Moderator: Anna Dorangricchia, Project Manager, Social and Civil Affairs Division, UfM
17:00:17:30	Closing Remarks