



Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 22nd November 2021

Regional Agency for Agriculture and Food

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#Press Release No6#

Strengthening Livelihoods and Gender Mainstreaming in Social Protection Programs

Despite various efforts towards mainstreaming gender into social protection programs, gender inequality is still a serious challenge to the fight against poverty in West Africa. In rural areas, for example, the weight of tradition and the limited access of women to material and financial resources and knowledge make them particularly vulnerable to food and nutrition shocks, which compromises their ability to develop resilient initiatives to adequately address poverty.

1. ECOWAS Response and Leadership

To reverse the trend and promote women's empowerment, the ECOWAS Commission, with the support of its technical and financial partners, specifically the Spanish Cooperation, with a grant of five million Euros, has enabled the ECOWAS Commission, over the past six years, to give priority to women, children, and youth in the implementation of its support program for national social safety nets.

2. Lessons Learned

Building on the lessons learned from the 19 field pilot projects of the regional program to support national social safety nets in West Africa, co-funded by the Spanish Cooperation and the ECOWAS Commission and implemented across the 15 Member States, it comes out that involving women in productive social safety net programs expands sources of income and contributes to household development.

This is achieved through various instruments, such as the distribution of agricultural inputs to male and female producers, technical support and capacity building for male and female producers, and the design and adaptation of social safety nets to the pastoral realities of the fragile zones of the Sahel, through for instance, the distribution of animal kits.

The field actions have highlighted two major facts.

- One: social transfers targeting women with supporting measures strengthen their production capacity and their sense of contributing to the needs of their families and to the development of their communities.
- Two: women's access to physical and financial capital, modest or not, can strengthen their livelihoods and support their income-generating activities.



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3. Way Forward

Going forward, it has clearly been established that mainstreaming gender in the targeting of vulnerable groups makes it possible to respond effectively to household food and nutrition problems. The ECOWAS Commission will therefore continue to support women's income-generating activities and to enhance their crucial role in food and nutrition security. This will be done through three key actions.

- The first one will provide more support and guidance to women, especially through training activities,
- The second action will focus on the promotion of the know-how or simple innovations adapted to income-generating activities and,
- The third action will be geared towards sensitizing men and community leaders on the need to facilitate development work teaming up with women.

In this context, the Spanish cooperation wishes to continue its collaboration with ECOWAS in supporting the most vulnerable households in West Africa. Other technical and financial partners are also called upon.

As a reminder and for information purposes, here is the link to the video on Strengthening Livelihoods and Gender Mainstreaming in Social Protection Programs: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1bF3EevBMpMLyyvjs7DHR91LV8hgv-9wB>

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For further information, kindly contact or visit:

Email: fdabire@araa.org, Website: www.araa.org

Facebook: araaraaf, ecowas.agriculture, Twitter: ARAA_CEDAO, Ecowas_agric

Or

Directorate of Communication, ECOWAS Commission

Telephone: +234 8102507938 - Email: soulate@ecowas.int

Twitter: [@ecowas_cedeao](https://twitter.com/ecowas_cedeao) - Facebook: [Ecowas_Cedeao](https://www.facebook.com/Ecowas_Cedeao)

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