Women’s role in food production and provision cannot be over-emphasized. Women produce between 60 to 80% of food in most developing countries and are responsible for half of the world’s total food production. They play a central role as producers of food, managers of natural resources, income earners, and caretakers of household provisions, as well as nutrition security.

UNIDO conducts capacity-development projects for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in agro-processing, where women are clearly identified as both beneficiaries and contributors simultaneously. Within these initiatives, increased production is encouraged, competitiveness upgraded, and incomes increased. For example, UNIDO’s Agribusiness Development Unit managed a four-year-long project (ending in December 2012) supporting the valorization of agro-pastoral products in the northern and southern regions of Mali. The project supported craftswomen by improving the quality of their products (Shea butter, in particular), developing their capacity for the production and marketing of products, facilitating their access to credit, markets and equipment, and increasing their income. For the women of sub-Saharan Africa who harvest the nut of the Karite or Shea tree, Shea butter has a significantly different meaning to that of Shea butter-based cosmetic products in Western countries; it is deemed “Women’s Gold” due to the large number of women employed in Shea butter production.

The overriding objective of this project was to aid women’s groups by making them more productive, competitive, decision-making agents that participate in trade, and add value to unique local resources, contributing ultimately to local development. UNIDO facilitated the creation of three pilot center’s in the Dioila, Sikasso, and Segou regions of Mali. In addition to this, a partnership with French cosmetic giant, Chimitex, was achieved by close cooperation between the UNIDO Agro-industries branch and the Investment and Technology Promotion Office (ITPO) in
As higher productivity translates into higher incomes for workers, women are able to invest more of their resources where it matters most. For example by improving their financial and social standards; sending their children to schools to have a good education, and creating healthier, more sustainable living conditions for their families.

At the local school in Dioila, the classes are now full as children are able to attend because mothers are able to pay the required fees, and do not need to call on the young to work and assist the family. The partnership with Chimitex has improved the lives of around 300 women who derive 80% of their income as a result of this involvement.

The project actively contributes to the Millennium Development Goals, Eradicating extreme poverty, by providing a stable source of income to vulnerable populations (especially women), promoting gender equality and empowering women - through skills development and supporting their productive capacities, as well as developing global partnerships.

“The overall achievements of the agribusiness project in Mali can be highlighted by the fact that now 156 women’s groups are engaged in Shea processing as a direct result, selling an additional 30 tons of Shea nuts to processing centers. Forty-five women’s groups have been trained in the business, meaning that a total of 1,200 women were reached. UNIDO facilitated this achievement by providing technology, production management, information technologies as well as already mentioned - international market access.

In addition to the aforementioned benefits, product quality has also significantly developed, Dr. Konare Mariam Kalapo, Minister of Women, Children and Family, states: “Women work with Shea in all forms, from the north to the south and from the east to the west. Nowadays, there’s a question of quality with Shea that we are trying to improve with the new techniques offered to us by UNIDO.” Furthermore, the President of the Dioila Centre, Diarra Diahara Dembele, says: “The soap has changed greatly. Before, we didn’t know what was in it. Now, we make soap that is purely natural, and we know that it is good for our health, so

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Success was demonstrated by the large interest expressed in the products by a number of international companies when the women from the Dioila, with the help of UNIDO, and the strong support of the Government of Mali, attended the “Beyond Beauty” cosmetic exhibition in Paris in 2010. Not only this, the Shea butter produced under the project by the women in the Malian village Dioila, and branded “Kalojé”, has been certified under the US National Organic Program, making it more attractive and marketable internationally.

Ultimately, this project can be seen as a tremendous success for women’s empowerment, increased production has been achieved – exemplified by the surpassing of the 2011 target of 15,000kg to double this amount of 30,000kg within the year. Competitiveness has been upgraded too, as commercial partnerships have been established, and overall incomes for the women boomed. Furthermore, higher productivity has been achieved through utilizing the training and improved production techniques out forward by UNIDO. Consequently women have more money, they invest more of their resources where it matters most: in improving their own lives and that of their children’s.

Closing the Gender Gap between Men and Women in Agriculture

We cannot eliminate hunger without closing the gender gap between men and women in agriculture. This means allowing women equal access to land, agricultural training, water, tools and technology. If women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20 to 30 percent, thereby lifting 150 million people out of hunger!

To learn more, have a look at this inspiring video from FAO.
Bees for Poverty Reduction

After working as a development professional with the World Bank, KFW, European Commission, DFID, and the Aga Khan Foundation, Vijaya Pastala decided to use her extensive experience in livelihood and natural resource management to create her own social enterprise. Upon returning to India, Vijaya observed that the key problem facing farmers in India was the lack of market access. She also recognized that the value chain for agricultural commodities was long and tedious due to the involvement of many intermediaries. With a passion for developing communities and enhancing environmentally sustainable economic development in India, Pastala established the honey manufacturing company, Under The Mango Tree (UTMT), in 2007.

Core to UTMT’s work is a strategy aptly termed as “Bees for Poverty Reduction” in which they address rural poverty through utilizing natural resources in a non-destructive way for income generation. The company partners with local farmers and suppliers to source honey that is tested, certified, packaged and labeled in a production plant in an industrial area in Mumbai. To enable access to a wider market, the pack-aged products are sold online and delivered to over a hundred shops in Mumbai and Bangalore, as well as to business-to-business partners like Taj Hotels. In addition to establishing a fair-trade market for locally produced honey that is natural, organic and sustainable, including women. As a result, productivity increased and income has grown by Rs. 10,000 - 12,000/annually (USD 160-195).

To date, the company has provided market access to nearly 3000 farmers across six states in India impacting more than 15,000 rural families improving their livelihoods as well as overall quality of life.

To read more on the stories from individual farmers or the work of UTMT in general please visit UTMT’s webpage.

UTMT also trains and equips smallholder farmers to use bees to increase income. Since 2009, 1,432 farmers have been trained in beekeeping.
Promoting a Gender Equal Value Chain

Kosi Yankey is the founder of Nuba Foods and Commodities, a Ghanaian-based agribusiness that sources commodities from regional farmers and supplies them to industries in West Africa. Kosi, born in Ghana, lived in London and New York, where she worked at financial institutions such as UBS, Citigroup, Merrill Lynch and Deutsche Bank. Upon her return to Ghana, she started a microfinance organization and then formed Nuba after identifying the underlying challenges that her agribusiness clients faced. These challenges included lack of access to larger markets, poor packaging, and inadequate storage facilities to name a few. Alongside this, Kosi observed how the lack of mentors and support available to women, inadequate access to capital, and a lack of availability of technical support and training greatly reduced the capabilities of women to develop their businesses. As a result, Nuba aims to address the challenges related to post-harvest waste, access to markets for agricultural produce, and the overall sustainability of the African agricultural economy, while ensuring the equal participation of men and women in its operations.

Working with over 100 local women and farmers, Nuba Foods processes and markets a range of specialty foods and products such as maize, rock salt, shrimp powder and red chili powder. The agricultural produce is mainly sourced from farmers in Ghana and the Ivory Coast, however, Nuba is looking to expand its operations with farmers in Burkina Faso. To ensure that wealth is evenly distributed and communities are better developed, Kosi works with the entire value chain -- from women in processing to men in transportation in rural communities. Further, Nuba reinvests 10% of its profit into the communities it works in, focusing on education and health. Kosi says Nuba is a socially responsible enterprise that gives back to all stakeholders involved in its value chain, from producers and suppliers, to communities.

To learn more about Kosi’s commitment to a gender equal value chain visit her website!
Women – the Backbone of Vanuatu’s Fisheries

In the Western Pacific state of Vanuatu, fish resources are exploited at the subsistence, artisanal and industrial level. Although their contribution to the fishing industry is not acknowledged by the male community (men only consider activities where selling marine resources as “fishing”), women play a significant role: they gather fish and shellfish for home consumption, and are additionally responsible for the preservation, marketing and distribution of fish catches. Furthermore, throughout the island, Vanuatu women engage in many kinds of fishing, including those perceived as men’s tasks: Atchin, north Pentecost and north Efate women go in canoes to drop lines or troll; Litslots women dive; and Mere Lava women fish almost every day from their canoes. The main problem for women is that they are not involved in export activities, which are dominated by men. Women also suffer from wide discrimination when it comes to access to export-related resources.

While the contribution of women to the fisheries sector cannot be ignored from the subsistence point of view, it is also important to recognize the immense contribution that the women in these islands make to the preservation of marine resources and the development of the export prospects.

These issues need to be addressed when formulating policies and program’s to improve fisheries and to benefit women, and by extension the rest of the population. To date, there has not been much progress on the status of women in fisheries in Vanuatu, however much can be learned from support interventions in similar regions and of similar contexts. Some best practices include:

- providing equal opportunities for women to participate in training in business and, particularly, technical skills such as modern techniques of fish drying, preparation of value-added fishery products, packaging and storage techniques and the repair and maintenance of fishing nets
- ensuring women’s access to business support services
- promoting the use of fuel-efficient ovens to smoke fish, thus increasing processing capacity, while decreasing the use of biomass fuel and reducing health risks
- involving women in pre- and post harvest fisheries activities by developing safe transportation systems
- ensuring equal distribution of fisheries extensions

More information on women in Vanuatu’s fisheries can be found here!
Did You Know?

1. In developing countries, 79% of economically active women spend their working hours producing food, working in agriculture. **Women represent 43% of the farming work force.** (FAO)

2. Yields for women farmers are 20 to 30 percent lower than for men, as they have **less access** to improved seeds, fertilizers and equipment. (FAO)

3. **Given equal access** to resources as men, women would achieve the same yield levels, **boosting total agricultural output** in developing countries by 2.5 to 4%. (FAO)

4. **Giving women farmers more resources** could reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 100 to 150 million. (WFP)

5. **Only 10%** of total aid for agriculture, forestry and fishing goes to women. (FAO)

6. Female farmers receive only **5%** of all agricultural extension services from 97 countries. (FAO)

7. **Women provide between 60 and 80 per cent of the food** for household consumption in most developing countries, mainly as unpaid laborers on family plots. (ActionAid International)

Recommended Links

Info graphics from FAO on “The Female Face of Farming”

Video on “Hunger: The World’s Greatest Solvable Problem” by WFP
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qyo1lnFlFfuc

The Guardian on “Empowering Women to Improve Food Security – What Works and Why”
http://www.guardian.co.uk/global-development-professionals-network/2013/mar/12/empowering-women-food-security

“Gender Equality and Food Security” By Asian Development Bank and UN FAO

Rachel Kyte, Vice President of Sustainable Development for the World Bank, on “Advancing Gender Equity for Food Security”

For any comments, further information or contributions, please contact: gender@unido.org